

NEWFOUNDLAND.

Enclosure 7, in No. 1.

Encl. 7, in No. 1. EXTRACT from a Report made by Major *Robt*, commanding Royal Engineers, St. John's, Newfoundland, to the Inspector-General of Fortifications.

St. John's, Newfoundland,
Wednesday, 10 June 1846.

It is my painful duty to report to you that this town was visited yesterday by one of the most calamitous fires that has ever come within my knowledge. It broke out in the heart of the town soon after eight o'clock in the morning, raged furiously for the whole of the day and night, and is still at this time, 10 A.M., unextinguished, though, I trust in God, its fury is now nearly exhausted; but from the mass of heated ruins and burning embers much danger is still to be apprehended, especially should the wind, which has continued to blow from the same quarter since the commencement of the fire, W. N. W., change the direction more to the southward, and thus carry the sparks over that part of the town which has yet escaped. It is impossible to describe or imagine the state of distress which must ensue to the inhabitants generally, both rich and poor, before any effective relief can be obtained, as every merchant's and nearly every tradesman's and shopkeeper's premises, including wharves, stores, and in most instances dwelling-houses, have been entirely consumed, with the exception of Messrs. Newman and Company, which were situated further west than the point to which the flames extended.

The church of St. John's, the Court-house, the Roman Catholic convent and school (two beautiful new buildings), the Custom-house, the Ordnance and Commissariat Store on the Ordnance Wharf, the Bank, and other public buildings have been destroyed, together with the whole range of water-side premises from one end of the town to the other; the shipping having been compelled to cut adrift, some of them having been obliged to be scuttled to save the rest, and they are all either now anchored in the Narrows or close to the opposite or south side of the harbour. Flashes of fire were carried across the harbour, and up to the very top of Signal Hill, setting fire to the brushwood in various places, making it necessary to send the detachment stationed there back again to protect the new barracks and Government property on the summit. The merchants' powder magazine, situated half way up the hill, caught fire, and the whole of the roof, which was shingled, was entirely burnt, without igniting the powder in the bomb-proof beneath. With the exception of the Ordnance Wharf, all the property in charge of the Ordnance Department has providentially escaped, though great fears were at one time entertained for the barracks at Fort Townshend, when the convent was in flames, and the surrounding fences of the fort ignited. Subsequently the Ordnance-yard was in imminent danger, and nothing but the unwearying efforts of the troops and civil workmen employed in my department could possibly have saved it; had the buildings in that yard been burnt, the barracks in Fort William would in all probability have followed. The Governor's residence, being situated on an isolated spot to windward of the fire, has most providentially escaped, together with St. Thomas's Church (used as a garrison chapel), the Bishop's, Chief Justice's, Attorney-general's and Collector's houses.

I regret that I have to report the occurrence of a melancholy accident in the death of a gunner and severe wounding of a serjeant of the Royal Artillery, in an attempt to make a fire-break by means of gunpowder. The powder was placed in two tin canisters, containing about 30 lbs. each, against the chimney shaft in the centre of a wooden house, for the purpose of throwing it down and loosening the framework. In consequence of my directions for firing the charge not being exactly complied with, these men had not time to escape before the explosion took place. Lieutenants Brettingham, Royal Artillery, and Binney, Royal Engineers, narrowly escaped injury; the latter officer was struck in the knee with a splinter at the moment he discovered the mistake, and was springing forward to endeavour to withdraw the unfortunate men. The Serjeant Handyside has, I am happy to say, every prospect of recovering without permanent injury.

It is impossible to say to what state of destitution and distress the whole town will be reduced before any effectual relief can arrive. I am almost afraid to think to what state of desperation the people may be driven when starvation stares them in the face, from which calamity we may not ourselves be exempt; and it is to be hoped that the Government at home, together with the public at large, will take some immediate steps to send us relief, which will be most acceptable in any form, whether provision, clothing, bedding, or materials for building and other purposes. At this moment the mass of the people are houseless, and are spread about the open fields, protecting what little property they were enabled to save from the conflagration. The quantity of bedding and other stores now in charge of the Ordnance Storekeeper will go but little way towards relieving the distressed; and the provision in the Commissariat store would also be of very little service among so many, after the wants of the troops have been provided for.

To the Inspector-General of Fortifications,
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