

THE GREAT FIRES OF HISTORY.

An exchange remarks that the four great fires of history were those of the City of Rome in the tenth year of the Emperor Nero, or about 65 years A. D., London in 1666, Moscow in 1812 and Chicago in 1871. Of these the latter was by far the greatest and most disastrous, though statistical details are not obtainable so closely for either of the three preceding. Those for Rome are especially meager, the historian Tacitus neglecting to state how many houses and insulae were destroyed, and he notes but briefly the famous fanes and monuments which were swept away. The fire lasted for six days, and just as the wretched people were beginning to take breath and sit the ruins of their former homes, a second fire broke out which lasted three days. In that respect the conflagration of Rome paralleled that of Chicago, as that city, which began Sunday night, was preceded by an extensive one Saturday evening. Of the fourteen regions of Rome three were entirely destroyed, seven others were more or less severely injured and only four escaped unhurt. Whether it be true that the emperor played on his fiddle when the city was burning, there is no reason to doubt that the people were so thoroughly exasperated with him that he judged it necessary to divert their suspicions that he had deliberately set the city on fire in order to rebuild it to his own glory. So he "saved himself at last by sacrificing the little and of alien sectaries, already the objects of their hatred and revilings, to whom the vulgar gave the name of Christians."

The great fire of London lasted four days and nights, reducing to ashes five-sixths of the whole city within the walls, the population of which was estimated to be about 200,000. It had been much reduced by the great plague of 1665. The area burned over was about 436 acres, being about one-third of that laid waste by the fire in Rome. London was rebuilt within the next few years on a much improved plan. The destruction of Moscow appears to have been complete except the Kremlin, the city having been set fire to by its own inhabitants the night of September 14, after which they abandoned it to the French troops, who looted it and probably took little thought for the 11,000 wounded men who were left behind when the Russian army evacuated the place. A few years earlier Moscow had contained about 9,000 houses, of which one-sixth were stone, 314 manufactories and workshops, and nearly as many churches. The Chicago fire devastated an area of 100 acres, or nearly three and a third square miles, destroyed 17,450 buildings, and rendered homeless 98,500 persons. The number of killed was estimated at about 200. The value of the property burned up was ascertained to have been about \$192,000,000 the day preceding the fire, and the deduction from this for salvage was variously estimated at from \$1,000,000 to \$10,000,000. The loss was not from one-third of the whole value of property in the city, and only \$44,000,000 was received in insurance, much of the property having been insured in home companies, the assets of which were reduced to zero by the calamity. In a year after the fire a large part of the burned district had been rebuilt; and the volume of business was much larger than before the event.

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