

command them, and, after twenty minutes' frenzied work with axes and crowbars, a yawning gulf, too wide for the flames to bridge, had been carved in the side of the street. At the head of his volunteers Lancing ran back and drove a dazed crowd at the point of a crowbar westward out of the town and into safety. All night long the fire roared in the great grain repositories, but its path to the west was barred, and a saving line of wharf-frontage and canal checked its progress to the south.

At day-break the heat had abated its fury enough to allow the townsfolk to venture back. Of the business half of the town there remained a flaky stretch of grey ashes; the Indian quarter was largely untouched, and perhaps a third of the modern extension to the west had escaped. As a commercial centre Lancing saw that Charleston had ceased to exist.

"But it won't take long to rebuild," he said deliberately, looking from the flimsy wooden shanties to a grey-faced man who was staring stonily at the charred and smouldering barge which represented the salvage of his fortunes.

"What kind of fool's going to rebuild it?" was the answer. "Guess I'm going to make tracks for Minneapolis or Grantstown before the crowd gets started. Rebuild! This township's burnt out of the map."

Lancing looked at the man in surprise. He was wrong; the fire and his own losses had unsteadied his nerve; geographically and for a dozen other reasons the city would have to be rebuilt. No one shared his opinion, however, and, when he engaged in similar discussions with other men that day, the upshot was always the same; Charleston was off the map, out of the Union, derelict and damned; her citizens were migrating in a body, and he could pay his hotel bill and quit or buy the hotel at a knock-out price and run it himself. The hotel-keeper spoke with the hyperbole of bitterness, for, whereas the grain and its repositories were insured, no policy would cover the destruction of the city as a place of business. Within a month it would rank with the tumble-down, deserted towns of the Far West, a