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FIRE AT HATFIELD HOUSE

(From the Times.)

DEATH OF THE MARCHIONESS OF SALISBURY. Further Particulars.

From the information which we collected yesterday on the spot, we ascertained that, in pursuance of her usual custom of passing the Christmas with her son, the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury had on Thursday last come down to Hatfield House and taken possession of the apartments which she had occupied in the west wing of the mansion ever since the death of her husband, the late Marquis. These apartments were on the first and second story of the building, and have formed her Ladyship's temporary summer and winter residence for some years past. We were also informed, that though her Ladyship was labouring under some of those infirmities which are the concomitants even of a green old age, she was still hale and vigorous, considering her advanced period of life, and that on her present visit to the scene of her early pleasures she exhibited a flow of spirits which surprised even those who were best acquainted with her usual cheerfulness. It appears that on the afternoon of Friday last she retired a short time before dinner to her dressing room to write a few letters. At five o'clock her maid entered her apartment and found her writing by the light of two candles. Her Ladyship complained of the dimness of the light, and requested her maid to bring to her, her own bed candle, alleging that she always saw better by it than by anything else. The bed candle was brought according to her orders, and the maid left her Ladyship, who wore a very lofty head dress, writing by these three tapers. It is supposed that as she was stooping over her paper her head dress must have caught fire, and that before she was aware of it she was enveloped in flames. But on this point all must be conjecture, as nobody saw her alive after her maid left her to take her tea in the housekeeper's room. It is further supposed that, paralyzed by terror, on seeing herself in flames, she was unable to resort to the bell or to give that alarm which must have called some of her attendants to her assistance. About half past five o'clock some fear was felt by the female servants of the house in consequence of the vast volumes of smoke which pervaded it, and of the strong smell of burning. One of the householders who perceived a dense pillar of smoke hovering over the staircase of the left wing, was the first to raise the cry of fire. According to one of the stories which we have heard, her Ladyship's footman, according to another, her son's confidant, was the first who, suspecting that the fire might be in her Ladyship's room, made an attempt to enter it. The attempt was unsuccessful. The alarm was then communicated to the Marquis and Marchioness of Salisbury. Both these noble personages exerted themselves to the utmost to rescue their venerable relative from her horrible fate, but in vain. Lord Salisbury attempted to force his way into his mother's dressing room through a door, which opened into it out of a sitting apartment, but it was locked; and the implements for forcing it not being at hand, his Lordship endeavoured to reach another door, which opened into it from the domestic offices

belonging to that wing of his mansion. He succeeded in reaching that door, but on opening it, found it so enveloped in flame and smoke as to render it impossible for any person to enter it and live. The floor and ceiling of the room were then blazing together, with such terrific violence as to render all hopes of rescuing her Ladyship through the windows utterly desperate. Every person with whom we conversed yesterday expressed their admiration of the zealous but ineffectual efforts made by Lord Salisbury to rescue his mother from the imminent danger by which she was surrounded; and one account stated that his Lordship was only prevented by main force from endangering his own life in a desperate attempt to save that of his mother. As soon as it was found that all efforts to save the Dowager Marchioness were unavailing, the fire bell was rung, and its dull and sullen clang, and the rising flames, soon announced to the neighbourhood the serious peril by which this magnificent specimen of our domestic architecture in the reign of Elizabeth and of James I. was environed. A crowd soon gathered on the lawn, eager to give every assistance in their power to stop the ravages of the conflagration. Engine-teams shortly afterwards arrived from Barnet, St. Alban's and Hertford; and before the fire was extinguished an engine of the County Fire Office had arrived from London. In spite of the alacrity with which all the spectators endeavoured to bring to her, her own bed candle, alleging that she always saw better by it than by anything else. The bed candle was brought according to her orders, and the maid left her Ladyship, who wore a very lofty head dress, writing by these three tapers. It is supposed that as she was stooping over her paper her head dress must have caught fire, and that before she was aware of it she was enveloped in flames. But on this point all must be conjecture, as nobody saw her alive after her maid left her to take her tea in the housekeeper's room. It is further supposed that, paralyzed by terror, on seeing herself in flames, she was unable to resort to the bell or to give that alarm which must have called some of her attendants to her assistance. About half past five o'clock some fear was felt by the female servants of the house in consequence of the vast volumes of smoke which pervaded it, and of the strong smell of burning. One of the householders who perceived a dense pillar of smoke hovering over the staircase of the left wing, was the first to raise the cry of fire. According to one of the stories which we have heard, her Ladyship's footman, according to another, her son's confidant, was the first who, suspecting that the fire might be in her Ladyship's room, made an attempt to enter it. The attempt was unsuccessful. The alarm was then communicated to the Marquis and Marchioness of Salisbury. Both these noble personages exerted themselves to the utmost to rescue their venerable relative from her horrible fate, but in vain. Lord Salisbury attempted to force his way into his mother's dressing room through a door, which opened into it out of a sitting apartment, but it was locked; and the implements for forcing it not being at hand, his Lordship endeavoured to reach another door, which opened into it from the domestic offices

who were below to see that the rooms above the chapel and the furniture were enveloped in a general blaze. The Marquis of Salisbury was the first to perceive the danger impending over the honest countrymen who were actively engaged in endeavouring to save his property; and immediately insisted that they should leave the spot, as he would rather see the whole building reduced to ashes, than hear of one of them suffering injury in their struggles to save it. The men for whom the Noble Marquis expressed this provident care, displayed in their turn equal gallantry. They refused to depart as long as they could, in opposition to the flames. Their courage and perseverance were crowned with success. The fire was partly stayed by their unremitting efforts, and partly by the emptying of the chapel of a reservoir of water situated upon the roof of that part of the mansion. When things were at the worst, it was apprehended that the chapel must perish, and the object of the parties working the engines then was to prevent the flames from spreading further, after yesterday they had exhausted their rage upon the sacred edifice. The chapel is not far distant from the library. They are situated on different sides of a gallery and each had communication with it by means of a door. To check the progress of the devouring element, preparations were made to stop up these doors with solid masonry. At the same time the printed books and manuscript papers belonging to the Cecil family, and illustrating its history, and that of the nation at large, were removed from the library into the grand drawing room, from which, as well as from the other banqueting apartments, the valuable furniture had been transferred, first to the lawn in front of the mansion, and afterwards to places of greater security in the town of Hatfield. Every thing was also in readiness to take the window frames out of the drawing room, in order that the library might be summarily ejected on to the grass, in case the wind, which blew in that direction, carried the flames into the interior of the mansion. Fortunately these precautions became unnecessary. About eleven o'clock, the conflagration was got under; and by two o'clock on the following morning the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who had signalized themselves by their energetic endeavours to save this noble pile, had the satisfaction of knowing that the work of destruction had not extended beyond the least valuable part of it, and that the library, the pictures, and the Cecil papers were all uninjured. They had also the satisfaction of learning the next day, that though much valuable property had been exposed upon the lawn during the night no part of it had been lost, stolen, or damaged—a fact which speaks volumes in praise of the honesty and kindly feeling of the peasantry, in the neighbourhood.

This has produced a double advantage—it has checked the inquiries of idle curiosity, and has left the firemen at liberty to give their undivided attention to the still smouldering ruins. About three o'clock, on Saturday afternoon, some of the timber again ignited, and was soon extinguished by the play of the engines. In the course of yesterday afternoon, the ruins were still smouldering, and although the rain fell almost incessantly, it was found necessary to douse them occasionally with water. We may here add that Hatfield House and the furniture it contained, are insured in the Sun Fire Office to a reasonable value. The appearance of the ruins is at the present moment frightful. They present a mere shell of lofty walls, connected together by not more than two or three blackened beams. They seem tottering to their fall, and from their cracked and dilapidated condition must be taken down before the western wind can be repelled, and the object of the parties built. The Hertfordshire yeomanry continued to post sentinels all round the Hatfield House, but this, we understand, is more out of respect to the Noble Marquis than from any idea that their services were wanted. Most of the furniture, we have already stated, has been removed from Hatfield House to different places in the vicinity. Some of it was taken from the life by Zuccherro. It is considered, as a portrait, extremely worth notice, not only because it is the handsomest known to exist of her, but also as it points out her turn to allegory and odd devices. As there are many historical associations of deep interest connected with Hatfield House, we make no apology for extracting the following of it from *Pennant's Journey &c.* "The small town of Hatfield is prettily seated on a gentle ascent. Its Saxon name was Haethfield, from its situation on a heath. The important synod held during the heptarchy, at the instance of Theodore, consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury, in 668, in which the most interesting tenets of Christianity were declared and confirmed, is generally supposed to have been held at a place of that name in Yorkshire. Hatfield was part of the revenues of the Saxon princes till it was bestowed by Edgar on the monastery of Ely. At the time of the conquest, it was found to be in the possession of that great house, in which it continued till the Abbey was converted into a bishopric, in the reign of Henry I.—It then became one of the residences of the prelates; for which they had not fewer than ten palaces belonging to the see and from that circumstance was called Bishop's Hatfield, to distinguish it from other places of the same name. It probably fell into decay during the long wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster; for I find that it was rebuilt and ornamented by Bishop Moncton, in the reign of Henry VIII. Among the shameful alienations made from the bishopric of Ely by Queen Elizabeth (by virtue of the imprudent statute which gave her the power of exchanges over all the manor of Hatfield. The palace had at times been an occasional royal residence, notwithstanding it