

attainments; an architect who had no equal in his day, and whose works, while they attest the genius of the builder, are the boast of Old England; long the Deputy and twice the Grand Master of Masons, he stands first on the "roll of the workmen" of his age; and a gentleman whose religious character was as pure as his intellectual achievements were glorious. To such a man we can fearlessly point as the model Mason of the age in which he lived.

The population of London, in the middle of the seventeenth century, was upward of half a million. It was the capital of the British Empire, and the commercial metropolis of the world. It was the home of merchant princes, whose ships sailed over every ocean, and whose commercial transactions extended to every part of the world. Its business pulsations were like the throbbings of the human heart; sending out to the utmost limits of the business world its life current of trade, and bringing back from the extremities the fruits of all lands and the wealth and luxuries of every clime. A vast and busy multitude thronged its streets, filed its quaint old habitations, and toiled in its shops and factories. London was then the home and center of science, of literature, and of art. Perhaps at no period in England's history did she possess so many men of profound and varied learning, as in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Chemistry, philosophy, the mathematics, architecture, and, indeed, all the sciences, were studied as they never were before, and the achievements of mind kept pace with the progress of civilization. The human intellect seemed to be developing new energies, and putting forth powers capable of grasping all knowledge within the reach of its finite capacity. Human genius approached its culmination, and the secrets of nature came forth at its bidding, as though to do homage to the traces of divinity in man, and throw a glow of unearthly light along the pathway trodden by humanity.

The sun of Cromwell, the fanatical "*Protector of England*," as he had assumed to call himself, had gone down in gloom, and Charles the Second returned from his exile and ascended the throne of his ancestors, in the month of May, 1660. London again became the home of royalty, and around the court were gathered the noblest of England's old nobility. The monarch, to add to the stability of his throne, endeavored to conciliate the affections of his subjects by every means in his power, and gathered round him, in his proud capital, the beauty, strength, and wisdom of his empire. Learning was fostered, learned men were patronized, and the arts encouraged. To be a profound scholar was a certain passport to royal favor, and to profitable and honorable employment. The Royal Society was organized in the fall of 1660, when the King became its Patron, and encouraged its members in their labors. This gave a new impulse to the efforts of genius, and the intellect of the nation gathered around it as wandering satellites gather around a common center by the force of gravitation. The moral power of England, at this time, among the nations of the earth, was like the sun in the solar-system; and London was the heart, the center of England.

On Sunday evening, the 2nd of September, 1666, about 10 o'clock at night, a fire broke out near the center of the great city, which ran from house to house, from street to street, and from square to square; all night and all day, and day after day, it burned. Wider and wider it extended its area of devastation; darker and denser were the huge volumes of smoke that rolled up from that burning capital; fiercer and wilder were the red flames that ascended from those blazing blocks of buildings, until it seemed as though the whole proud city was about to be offered in sacrifice by fire; dwelling and shop and warehouse, palace and church and cathedral went down, one after another, until the noblest mansions of England's aristocracy, and the proudest monuments of her architectural skill, lay in one black heap of smoking ruins. Ten thousand buildings were in ashes, three hundred thousand people were homeless in the fields, and a district a mile in width, and two miles in length, was covered with the burning fragments of the proudest city in the world! For five or six days the fire held high revelry; during the night its light was seen at the distance of forty miles; and when it ceased for want of fuel, there was but one-seventh of the great metropolis of England left standing. The whole kingdom felt the shock, and the throes of sensation ran through every nerve of the body politic, to the extremest verge of Charles's dominions.

It must be remembered, too, that the plague, which ravaged London, and made it a charnel-house—carrying away thousands upon thousands of its population, rich and poor, the opulent and high born, as well as the peasant and beggar, had but recently ceased its work of death when the great fire occurred. Civil war had long raged; an usurper had been on the throne, and England's heart had bled by the poniard in English hands. Added to all this, Charles the Second was now waging a fierce war with one or two of the continental powers, and needed all his resources to sustain himself in the field and on the sea. With all this in view, we shall more readily understand the magnitude of that calamity which swept like a flood of fire over London, and left its fairest and largest portion a desolation.