

THE WESTMINSTER

NEW SERIES, VOL. VIII., No. 6.

JUNE, 1906.



Earthquakes and Volcanoes

By M. Macgillivray, D.D.

SOME current events in the history of our earth are of more than passing interest. Not that they are new or singular in themselves, but they are, in the main, new to the younger generation, and their magnitude and destructiveness are exceptional. I refer to the recent volcanic and seismic disturbances in many, and widely separated, parts of the world. And as is not unnatural, they are receiving some careful religious and scientific attention, and calling into active practical sympathy the finer qualities of the heads and hearts of men.

In dealing with such physical events as these the preachers are, as is proper, cautious and consolatory, and are coming to a pretty general agreement that the outbreaks are not the visitations of the divine wrath against sin, although San Francisco and the smitten towns around Vesuvius had probably no excess of goodness to their credit. And such outbreaks are not now, and never have been signs of the divine anger, having no more to do with the sins of men, or the punishment of them, than the fabled man in the moon. There are punishments for sin, and for culpable ignorance, which easily rank in destructive severity with earthquake, flood and volcanic fire, I mean the plagues which, now and then,

break out and decimate whole communities. The Mohammedan devotees of a single pilgrimage, on their way to the shrine of the prophet at Mecca, living in conditions of filth, eating bad food and drinking bad water may originate a plague which sweeps over one country after another, without check, until more misery has been caused, and more life lost, than can be laid to the account of all the physical catastrophes of a century. Most plagues arise from flagrant disregard of proper sanitary conditions. And so recently as 1902, India lost by plague, humanly speaking preventable, as many as 577,000 souls. When the laws of the body, as divine as they are human, are disregarded and outraged, which is sin, and when repentance is not speedy, and the works do not follow which are meet for repentance, punishment will not delay its coming, and there will be sharp reprisals for violated law. Disregard of the laws of the body is sure to bring trouble in its train, and man, the offender, will be himself the greatest sufferer, although unfortunately the blight may involve the innocent also.

Such trouble is, however, preventable, and man is justly held answerable for it when it occurs. But when it does occur, and the penalty supervenes, the penalty and the sin belong together in the nature of things, and



CITY HALL AFTER THE FIRE

Story of San Francisco's Disaster

By Professor Edward A. Wicher

San Francisco Theological Seminary, Chairman of the Presbyterian Relief Committee

"And after the earthquake a fire ; but the Lord was not in the fire ; and after the fire a still small voice."

AMONG all the great disasters of history there is none other which, in the extent of the area destroyed or the number of people left homeless, could equal the recent disaster of San Francisco, unless perhaps it were the burning of Rome. That it did not equal some other great disaster in the amount of consequent suffering was due to the hour at which the earthquake occurred, the mildness of the Californian climate, the serenity of the spring season, and, above all else, to the generous sympathy of the hundred million people of North America, who sent their hurried trains of stores and provisions from all parts of the continent.

The newspaper despatches have given detailed accounts of both earthquake and fire. The present article will give only the broader outlines, reproduced from the writer's experience. His life has not been deficient in unusual situations, but the sensation of that terrible morning when the house in which he was staying swayed and heaved and tossed like a ship in cross seas, was the most unique and awful. He knows now what is the feeling of the man who believes that the last moment of his life has come and expects in the next moment to be crushed in the ruins of the house in which he has been sleeping. But a merciful Providence spared that last shock and postponed the last mo-

ment. And now we, with all the people of this beautiful land, can again laugh and be merry. Through all the dust and smoke the sun has not ceased to shine, nor the rose to give its perfume. There is now a new solemnity in life. Beneath the gaiety forever after, there will be a new reverence of the Omnipotent God and a new dependence upon the merciful Father.

San Francisco suffered unequally from the shock. The eastern news-

papers have made many mistakes in giving account of the damage done by the shock itself. Where the made land was, the damage was greatest; that is to say, on lower Market Street and in the district lying south of Market Street. There the pavement was raised and sunken in waves, for blocks together. An old stream bed ran under one corner of the post office and across Mission Street. For a quarter of a century men had forgotten that there ever had been a stream there. Now the forces of nature have restored the lines of the channel. Next to the buildings built upon the made land, those upon the sand dunes suffered most. One part of San Francisco is simply a sand bank held down with houses, and these houses are of the flimsiest imaginable construction. But practically no damage was done upon the firm land. And in no part of the city, either upon old land or made land, was any appreciable damage done where the building was constructed of steel and founded solidly. The height of the largest building has been no disadvantage—the higher, the better. The only structural lesson of the shock, is that buildings must be substantially built. The Grand Hotel marks the boundary of the made land; and the front of the Grand Hotel fell into the street. A jerry-built lodging-house on Valencia Street fell down and killed several of its inmates—some eastern newspapers said the earth opened and swallowed it—but this building stood upon land badly filled in. Indeed if the fire had not followed the earthquake, there would be by this time very little in the aspect of the city to indicate the passing over of the latter.

With the first shock all the electric wires of the city were broken, lighted kerosene lamps were overturned, and fires from grates and stoves were scattered in the ruins of frame houses. Fires originated simultaneously in three distinct sections of the city, south of Market Street on Third Street in the tenement district, north of Market Street on Sansome Street in the wholesale district, and out upon Seventh Street in the Jewish district. From the very beginning it was manifest that the fires were serious, though no one



BURNING OF THE CALL BUILDING



THE PATH OF THE DESTROYER

Looking across California Street

had any idea how serious. The fatal Wednesday was a day of growing horror. The fire alarms would not sound and when the firemen, in answer to the red signals in the sky, did arrive at the scenes of conflagration, it was found that there was no water pressure. The shock had broken the water mains, and the city was practically at the mercy of the flames. Lines of hose were hastily laid to the water front and the full force of the engines was employed. Against such fires one might almost as well have used water from garden hose. And early in the day, while heroically leading his men out to the unequal fight, Chief Sullivan, of the fire department, was killed by a falling brick at the engine-house on California Street.

Now to the horror of the flames was added the more awful horror of bad men. The evil creatures that used to hide in the slums and brothels in the district south of Market Street, and along the Barbary Coast, fleeing like rats when their wooden hovels were shaken about their ears, swarmed out into the light of Market Street. They first broke into the saloons and filled

themselves with all the liquor they could hold. They then went mad and broke their bottles over one another's heads. Some of them lay in the gutters and others, carrying bottles in their pockets and under their arms, set out to loot the finest jewellery stores. Market Street became unsafe for the peaceful citizen, and every man carried a weapon. At ten o'clock Mayor Schmitz called for the regular soldiers in the Presidio and the militia in the city and vicinity and the whole of San Francisco was placed under martial law. This prompt action of the Mayor saved the citizens from the mob. Meanwhile the fires were spreading, and men, who after the first alarm of the earthquake had felt no uneasiness, now began to fear for the safety of property remote from the scenes of the first outbreak. The same shock that had broken wires and conduits had destroyed all street car traffic. And the breaking of the roadways in the vicinity of the ferry building had made very precarious the steps of the dray horse. Some tried to rescue part of the contents of their warehouses; but the goods so removed were for the most part destroyed by

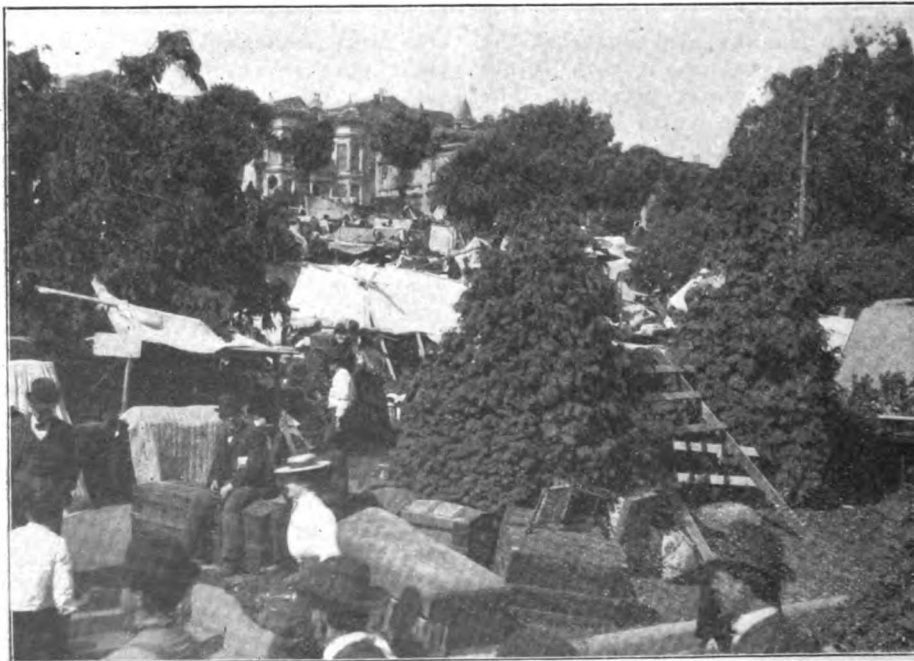
the fire in another place upon the next day. Gradually the flames moved up Market Street taking block after block, without haste and without pause, until the three great conflagrations had become one and the heart of the city was being consumed.

The water failing, the firemen used dynamite. They sought to make a broad opening of ruins across the path of the fire by which the onset of the flames might be stayed. It was thought that at least Nob Hill, with its ancestral palaces, its art galleries and its new Fairmount Hotel of white marble, might be saved. A ring of dwellings was laid low around the sides of the hill, but all in vain. The flames leaped over the open space and Nob Hill was burned on the morrow.

Among the many dynamited buildings one may select for separate mention a modest brick structure, which formerly stood upon the steepest slope of Sacramento Street and looked down over Chinatown. It was the headquarters of the (Women's) Occidental Board of Foreign Missions and the home of the Chinese orphanage. Here lived Miss Donaldina Cameron, the heroine

of many a police court, who has risked her life daily in order to save from slavery and shame the young Chinese girls to whom she is devoted. Her wards are of every age from babyhood upwards. The word came that the house must be dynamited. With the clothes they wore and a quilt or blanket apiece the Chinese family of fifty children and several Christian Chinese women who had come in from the neighborhood took their way up Sacramento Street and out to the asylum of the First Church on Van Ness Avenue. Here they spent the night and when next day the flames advanced upon the First Church, the brave woman, with her little ones, made her way on foot through all the turmoil and smoke of the burning city, a distance of three miles to the Sansalito ferry, and thence to the grounds of the San Francisco Theological Seminary. An hour later this way of escape would have been cut off.

For two days the long procession of refugees moved westward, uphill and downhill, away from the burning district, to the shelter of the squares and parks. Many of these people dragged



THE HOMELESS MULTITUDE
Thousands of people camped in the parks



OPEN AIR KITCHENS

Fire were forbidden in the houses owing to broken chimneys

trunks behind them along the pavement. They were a perspiring, footsore, hungry, thirsty crowd; but on the whole they were good-natured and bravely-spoken. Some even could pass a joke over their property which was being burnt behind them. Strange things happened in the parks that night. Babies were born to the rich on the ground, under the stars, without a cotton cloth provided to wrap them in. Caruso, who upon Tuesday evening in the Grand Opera House sang to one of the largest and most brilliant audiences of his time, spent Wednesday evening next to mother earth in the Golden Gate Park. Social distinctions were no more. The rich and the poor; the learned and unlearned; the native son and the Bohemian, Jew and Italian, all were one under the midnight sky.

And all are one. For out of this awful disaster the new San Francisco has already sprung—the San Francisco purged by fire from selfishness and private greed; from vice and intemper-

ance; the San Francisco in which public opinion is born and party jealousies are hushed in the new consciousness of humanity; the San Francisco in which labor union and corporation, Republican and Democrat, Roman Catholic and Protestant, clergy and people, are united in one vast disinterested movement for the repression of injustice, the ministration of mercy, and the erection of new houses, warehouses, courts and churches, in noble styles of architecture, which shall typify the spiritual aspiration of men. There has never in the past been a united San Francisco. Now the city is one.

On Friday night policemen went through the parks and the Presidio encampment and called aloud to the crowds, "The fire is under control; the fire is under control." And the crowds awoke and cheered again and again. And as the glad news spread in wider circles the waves of cheering rolled across the parks and filled the night.