

GREATEST CONFLAGRATION OF THE DECADE.

Flames Ravage the South Side—Many Mills and Workmen's Homes Destroyed—Loss About One Million Dollars—Lack of Water.

If it was the firebug, he demonstrated last night how he needs watching. His business has developed into the wholesale.

The block of buildings bounded by Fifth, Fourth, Brannan and Bryant streets was swept away by flames last evening, which, not satisfied, sprang across Fourth street and ate ravenously into the block eastward, toward the water and the Mill docks.

A lack of water and the presence of a gale of wind gave every reason to those who witnessed the almost unresisted sweep of the fire that a tremendous path of ruins would stretch through the half-mile of frame structures that extended from the point of the initial blaze to the water front and its shipping. The veering wind, however, which turned the big blaze back over the ruin it had already wrought, and where the completeness of its work had left nothing for it to feed upon, saved the south of Market street.

As it was there was enough. All the horror and panic and pathos of those great fires such as come rarely into the history of great cities and has not been seen in San Francisco these ten years; horror and panic and pathos with a background of lurid magnificence such as lifts the spirit of the mere spectator and makes him indifferent for the time being to all its cost.

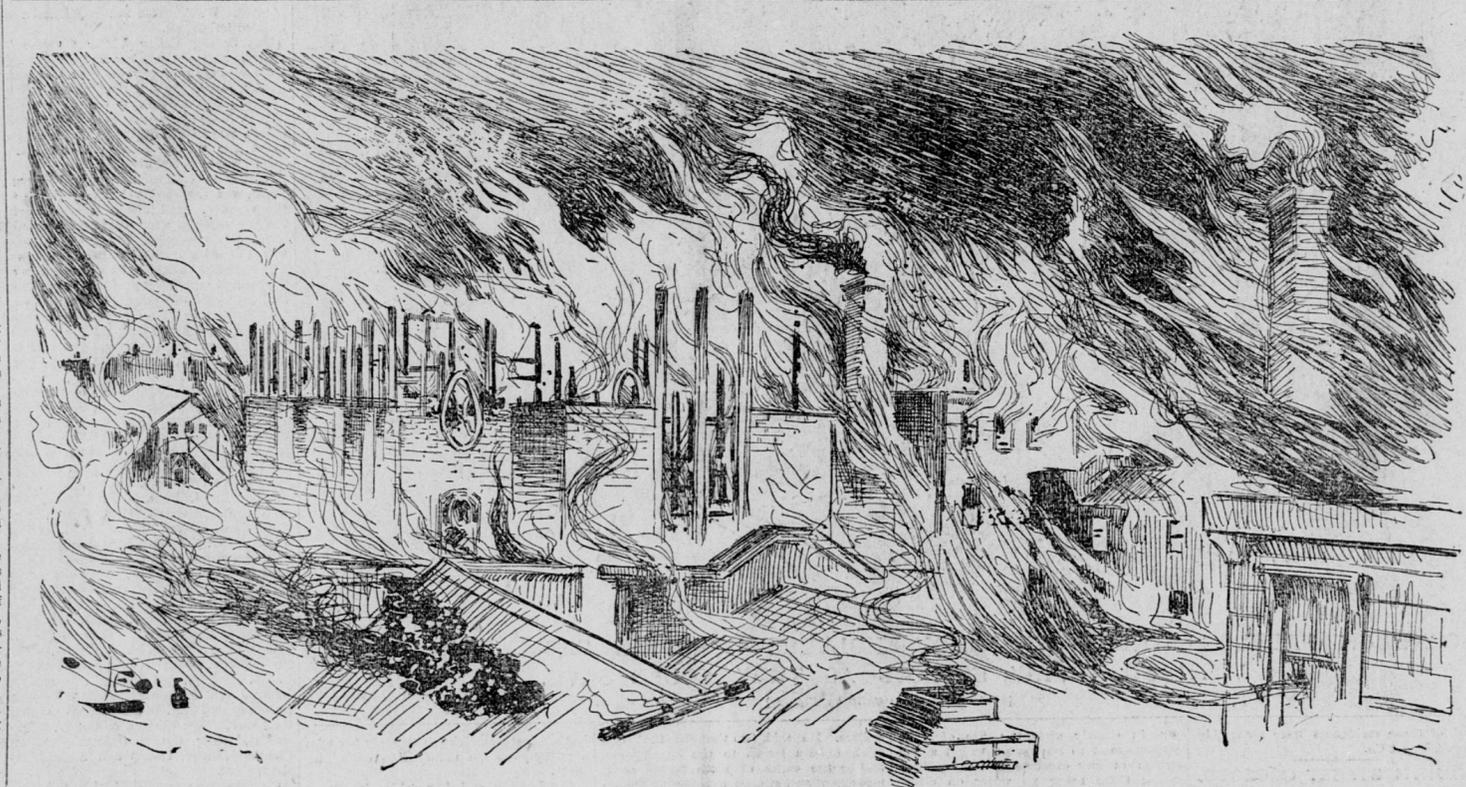
Before the swift speed of the fire—with its heat, its hungry, eager and awful roar, its arms hung into the sky—died shrieking women, bearing their children in their arms, and men and other children with them, carrying what of their belongings they could; horses struggled and became panic-stricken behind other wagon-loads of hastily piled-up furniture; policemen battled with an unnumbered mob of people pressing at the fire lines at every approach to the fire around the threatened area, while firemen with impotent hose-nozzles that threw no water rushed here and there in desperation, while others with axes and ladders did what they could to break the progress of the fire.

For two blocks in the direction the fire was speeding before the wind the residents carried their goods into the street and stood guard over them, waiting the sign of imminent danger before moving further, while the hundreds of people whose houses were destroyed made their way into neighboring streets, out of the path of the flames, and there bivouacked until late into the night, some with a few belongings, nursing their babies on the sidewalk, glad to have escaped, but already wondering and almost hopeless, in their losses and misery, concerning the morrow.

So rapid and complete was the destruction of an entire block, entirely built of wood, that it is impossible to specify the number of residences—all of them of poor people—destroyed, but their number is estimated at 200. This means considerably more than 200 families entirely burned out, for many of the houses were occupied by several. In the district were also a number of small hotels and lodging-houses, notably the Stanford House at Fourth and Brannan, the Sterling House, the New Prescott on Brannan street and Shirley's Hotel, a two-story house on Fourth street. These represent several hundred more people thrown out of homes. The total number of buildings destroyed is said to be 275.

In the fever of excitement rumors followed one another in a tangled procession concerning accidents and loss of life, but at this writing not one of them had been substantiated. It was said that a child was lost in the convent attached to St. Rose's Church on Brannan street. It was said, again, that three men were lost in the fall of the church itself; again, that a woman was burned in the Stanford House; again, that a fireman had been caught in the fall of the walls of Horstman's chemical works. This last was true in so far that a fireman was injured by some burning scantlings, but not seriously.

The loss is estimated by Fire Marshal Towe at \$1,000,000. And the great part of this great sum is chargeable to the fact that the old water-pipes of six, eight and ten inches through this district failed utterly to supply water sufficient to meet the occasion. It was pitiful to witness an army of brave firemen facing flames such as these were with a



IN THE HEART OF THE FLAMES—ST. ROSE'S CHURCH WHEN HALF CONSUMED.

[Sketched for the "Call" by Lewis.]

few little streams that rose languidly to the height of the first stories of the buildings. For a solid hour and a half an engine stood rattling its balance wheel on Brannan street, unable to throw so much as a glass of water on the furnace. In the midst of all the clash and roar and hurly-burly, the falling of buildings, the new burst of flames and the blinding rush of smoke and shower of sparks; the electric wires, telephone, telegraph, light and power—forming a network overhead throughout the entire district—were a constant menace, and nobody will ever know the number of narrow escapes that resulted from their fall. During the early part of the fire the electric-light wires on Bryant street emitted a snapping battery of sparks, warning the firemen. A telephone message was, after a time, sent to the company and the current was shut off. Later the poles supporting the wires fell here and there throughout the burning area, bringing their wires with them to the great danger and disadvantage of those within the lines.

PROGRESS OF THE FIRE.
Four Alarms Sounded—Furniture Factories Rapidly Turned Into Charcoal.
The fire started shortly before 6 o'clock

in the rear of the engine-house of the San Francisco box factory, operated at 515 to 519 Fifth street by Carrack, Williams & Wright. Their night watchman, A. W. Collins of 627 Webster street, discovered the flames. He raised the cry of fire, and the policeman on the beat turned in an alarm from box 63 at the corner of Harrison and Fifth streets. Second, third and fourth alarms followed in quick succession and soon the entire department was at the scene, but those who were on the spot speak of an unaccountable delay in getting the first stream on the fire. Meanwhile outsiders were making vigorous efforts to control the flames, but a strong northerly wind was blowing and the conflagration spread rapidly in all directions. To the southward on Fifth street were innumerable small mills and furniture manufacturers and these were as grain before the reaper. To the north, on the corner of Bryant street, was a three-story building, occupied by Main & Co. Winchester's saddle and collar manufactory. For a time it was thought possible to save this, but John Horstman's bicarbonate factory adjoining caught from the box-factory and burned like tinder. As it fell the corner building took fire, and the Humboldt Lumber Company's (Korbel Brothers') yards also became ignited. H. Washburne's horse market went also, though the animals were saved.

Soon the part of the block fronting on Fifth street was a roaring, seething furnace, of which the heat broke windows on the opposite side of the street and drove pedestrians from the sidewalks. Sashes and blinds smoked and caught from the heat, and it was only by the constant application of water that the spread of the fire to the north was prevented. On Fifth street E. Dumontelle's marble works, Uhler's furniture factory, Kuhlen's tool works, Snyder & Richter's furniture factory, Hubner's furniture frame works, a saloon occupied by John Hummel, J. Einstein's Commercial Feed mills, the Independent Tool Manufactory, W. Henneberg's tool works and the Ousten Feed mills were quickly consumed and the Belmont Hotel, on the corner of Fifth and Brannan streets, owned by the A. C. Stoetzer estate, was attacked. It stayed the flames for a moment and enabled the firemen to save the office and a portion of the sheds of the Scott & Van Arsdale Lumber Company just across Brannan street. The flames traveled so rapidly, however, that it seemed that the firemen were fighting along with rather than in advance of it. Eastward, on both sides of Brannan street, swept the fire, devouring everything in its path. St. Rose's Church, its new half-finished cathedral, the convent school and the par-

ish house, occupied by Rev. Father Nugent, were a total loss almost in an instant. Machine-shops, lumber-yards, wood works, planing-mills and dwelling-houses added to the fierceness of the flames, which now traveled at racehorse speed. The new three-story warehouse which the California Casket Company of San Jose had just fitted up fell in within ten minutes from the instant the flames first attacked it. The fire spread throughout the blocks adjoining Brannan street on either side. At Bluxome street its southerly course was checked by the big brick warehouses of the Overland Freight Transportation Company and the Breslauber wool stores. Trucks and piles of lumber on the south side of the street were burned, but the brick structures would not take fire. On the north side of Bluxome street George Fuller & Co.'s manufactory of fine office furniture offered a fine mark for the flames, and within fifteen minutes \$15,000 worth of property was in ashes. An oil storehouse of brick belonging to F. B. Joyce & Co. went next, and burned with a thick heavy smoke which stifled the firemen and seriously handicapped their efforts. At the corner of Bluxome and Fourth streets the Southern Pacific Hotel resisted the fire for a time. The wind, however, was blowing sparks and embers from two blocks of burning buildings directly over it and soon the flames captured it also.

Across Fourth street from the hotel was a large haybarn belonging to the San Francisco Hay and Grain Company. Men stood upon the roof and kicked off blazing embers and tore up kindling shingles, but in vain. Just eight minutes elapsed from the time the Southern Pacific Hotel burst into bright flames till the haybarn fell in. This, however, ended the advance of the flames in that direction. The Washington Hotel, on the southwestern corner of Bluxome and Fourth streets, was threatened and was actually on fire three or four times, but was only partially destroyed. The brick stables of the Pacific Improvement Company and the big brick winery of S. Lachman & Co. furnished an effectual barrier to further progress by the flames and soon the fire was in that section pretty well under control.

ON FOURTH STREET.
Heavy Losses of Property—Owners on Both Sides of the Thoroughfare.
For quite awhile after the fire started the residents on Fourth street did not feel any alarm that the flames would reach them. They ran out of their stores and dwelling-houses and gazed up Freelon and Welsh streets at the flames, which were roaring and crackling around Fifth street. It was fully half an hour before the serious nature

of the fire became evident to them. By that time, too, the flames had eaten their way half way through the block, and the firemen gave notice to the Fourth-street people that they should begin to pack up and move if they desired to save anything, as the fire would surely reach them.

Then the hustle began. The storekeepers began to pack up their goods and give them into the hands of messengers, who carried them to some place of safety. Those who lived in rooms upstairs brought out their household effects and took them wherever they could out of the way of the flames.

It was a little after 9 o'clock when the fire began to envelop the rear portions of the Fourth-street buildings. Those on the side below Brannan street were the first to go, as that was the spot where the flames were hottest. On the southwest corner of Fourth and Brannan streets was the saloon of Harkins & Shea. Next was the building known as the New Prescott House. The furniture in the place was insured for \$1500. At 608 Fourth street was the store of King & Young, plumbers, and adjoining them was an empty house. A Robin kept a saloon at 612, and next door was P. A. Smith's hardware store. Both men were insured to the amount of their losses. At 614 1/2 Fourth street Simon Israel kept a furnishing goods store. He was insured for \$500. The Southern Pacific Pharmacy at 618 Fourth street, owned by A. J. Ashim, was a total loss as far as the stock was concerned, but there was a small insurance on the building. Next, on the west side of Fourth street, was the Postal Telegraph office, located in a portion of the Stanford House. This entire building, which was owned by J. Rothschild, was completely destroyed. It was, however, insured for about \$15,000. Mr. Rothschild estimates his loss at \$30,000.

On the east side of Fourth street, below Brannan, there were several places completely destroyed. On the southeast corner was the Standard saloon, owned by Chris Hartman. His loss is \$1200, with \$800 insurance. Next door, going south, were several two-story dwellings. Following were the occupants: No. 603, Mrs. Duffy; 605, Mrs. Shea; 607, vacant; 609, J. Quigley; 611, Mrs. Denney; 613, vacant.

On the other side of Fourth street Stelling Bros.' grocery and saloon occupied the corner. Their place was swept out of sight, but they were insured. Next came the Bargain House and a harness and saddlery store kept by Ernst F. Stein. Adjoining was the Mechanics' store, partially insured. The rooms upstairs were occupied at the time by William Bohle, and adjoining, at 552 1/2 Fourth street, John Shea lived with his family. Abe S. Levy was also a resident. The property was insured, but the losses on stock will amount to about \$1800.

When the fire crossed Fourth street above Brannan it caught Engelberg's bakery at the corner of Freelon street and made quick work of it and the adjoining buildings down to Brannan street. Among the losses were: M. Green, boots and shoes, \$850 loss, insurance \$500; J. Samme, barber-shop, \$200, total loss; H. B. Goecken, hay and grain, \$1200 loss, insurance \$900. The corner building at Brannan street was occupied as a saloon by J. Bernhard. It was valued at \$750, insurance \$450.

All the buildings along Fourth street had families occupying the upper rooms. They moved their effects out early when the first indications were given that the fire would reach them. It was well that they took the precaution, for when first started the flames swept down like a besom, and carried everything before them. It was only the veering around of the strong wind after the fire crossed Fourth street which prevented the big railroad building from taking fire, and thus assist in carrying the flames onward. However, the heroic efforts of the firemen prevented the railroad building from being included in the holocaust. The property on the fifty-two lot on the southeast corner of Fourth and Freelon streets was owned by Thomas Knight the capitalist. It was insured for almost its full value.

Among the other sufferers on the east side of Fourth street were the following: No. 518 Fourth street, Walter Callahan, saloon, insurance \$700; No. 520, M. M. Mc-



THE BIG FIRE AS THOUSANDS SAW IT FROM THE CROWN OF NOB HILL.

[Sketched for the "Call" by Campbell.]