

# Columbian Centinel.

BOSTON, SATURDAY MORNING, NOV. 7, 1818.

## DESTRUCTIVE FIRE.

On Tuesday evening at seven o'clock, fire was discovered near the south-west corner of the attic story of the *Exchange Coffee-House*, and before ten o'clock the whole of that magnificent, convenient and useful edifice, which was more than three years in building was reduced to a melancholy heap of smoking ruins.

The fire, we are satisfied, was accidental, and occasioned by a defect in the chimney leading from the kitchen being in the area of the *Coffee-House*, with many others, when the alarm was first given, and hastening to ascertain the cause of it, we found the attic room above-mentioned full of smoke, and immediately after saw the fire through fissures in the walls between that room, the roof, and the staircase leading to the roof. From its rage and extent, this fire must have been kindling for a considerable time within the walls and cornice of the house, before discovered; and found aliment to increase it. But as a large number of citizens of various societies were in the house, several of them firewards, who immediately assembled on the spot; as the house aqueduct gave a full supply of water within ten feet of the fire first discovered, and numerous buckets were at hand; confident hopes were entertained that small limits would be put to the destruction. The most spirited and judicious efforts, however, could only give it a temporary check. It still kept working behind the partition walls, and round the cornices, in places beyond reach, and communicating by the rear to the suite of chambers on the west attic story, in about 20 minutes they were so completely on fire as that columns of flame issued from all their windows into the gallery, and drove therefrom all who were engaged in extinguishing it.

An engine was drawn into the area, and a hose extended to the fifth story, but the tar in the composition of the roof taking fire, the smoke became so suffocatingly dense, as to endanger the lives of the firemen; and in less than half an hour after the discovery of the fire, all the early hopes of preserving the building were lost; and all united in efforts to save the great property in it, belonging to Mr. BARNUM, the keeper, the Proprietors, and numerous Societies, Lodgers, and Tenants; which, though extensive, were not so successful as the good wishes and exertions of the citizens were ardent and persevering.

In a very short time, so rapid was the progress of the flames, the greater part of the 210 halls, 10 ms. chambers, &c. comprised in the building, exhibited a mass of intense fire seldom witnessed; about nine o'clock the noble dome came down into the area with a frightful crash; and soon after nearly all the north, and part of the south walls, both more than eighty feet in height, fell, and damaged many of the adjoining buildings; but in no degree equal to the apprehensions of the spectators.

The energies of the firewards, firemen, and citizens, were then excited to prescribe limits to the effect of the immense mass of fire now kindled; and no other building was wholly consumed, excepting one belonging to Marshal Prince, in Devonshire-street, in which was the printing office of Mr. Ezra Lincoln, who lost a great part of his materials, not only by the fire, but the mismanagement of those who attempted to save them. Several houses, however, were very much damaged, particularly Mr. Wright's house, in Congress-street, the upper stories of the Palladium Office, and the building we occupy.

Eleven *Printing Establishments* were burnt out, or were in such imminent danger as to require the removal of their apparatus:—Those of Mr. Lincoln, above mentioned, and the *Patrol*, in Devonshire-street; Messrs. Parmenter and Norton's, in Rodger's-building; the *Daily Advertiser*, *Recorder*, *Intelligencer*, *Palladium*, *Centinel*, and *Boston Gazette*, and the extensive book offices of Messrs. West, Richardson, and Lord, and Messrs. Wells and Lallie, all in Congress-street. Goods and furniture were removed from numerous other houses, stores, and cellars.

The *Exchange Coffee House* had become the pride and boast of our metropolis; and, under the intelligent, laborious and gentlemanly superintendance of Mr. Barnum, had been admitted by foreigners, as well as natives, to be the most convenient institution of the kind in the U. S. and not exceeded by any in Europe. It covered 12,753 feet of ground, measured 132 feet on the north and south, and 84 on the east and west fronts; and was seven stories high. The extent of the distress which this calamity has caused, may be partially estimated from the fact, that, besides the numerous suites of halls, rooms, and chambers, improved by Mr. Barnum, there were in the building, an extensive *Reading Room*, a large *Masonic Hall*, most elegantly furnished and decorated, in which the Grand Lodge of the State, (a) and several subordinate Lodges, held their meetings; and a superb room for *St. John's Lodge*, which was assembled when the fire broke out; offices improved by the British Consul; the Phoenix Insurance Company; the Aqueduct Corporation; Messrs. Handy & Gibbs, insurance brokers; Messrs.

John Marston, Stephen Brown, William Leverett, and Ralph Huntington, exchange brokers; Wm. P. Whiting, Esq. attorney at law; Messrs. Thomas B. Wales, and Joseph Lee, merchants. Other parts were occupied by Mr. Whitmarsh, woolen diaper and tailor; Mr. Pitchard, grocer, and Mr. Sampson, hair-dresser.

Our danger, and that of several in our neighborhood, did not end with the extinguishment of the flames. The whole isolated front wall of the ruin, 90 feet high by 80 wide, with its marble columns, and chimneys, appeared to stand tottering over our heads, and threatening in its fall to overwhelm our building—it was impossible to induce the workmen to continue in them. But for this perilous situation, we should not have been under the necessity of omitting a publication until this day—As from the kind, efficient and collected aid of our fellow-citizens, associates and workmen, every article of our establishment and stock was removed, and returned, without much damage. We have not words to express our gratitude for this kindness. On Wednesday, the Selectmen, with praiseworthy alacrity, employed Messrs. McCleming and Maish, two ingenious and active mechanics, to level the walls of the ruin, and directed it to be surrounded by peace officers to prevent persons from running into danger. In the course of Wednesday and Thursday, the high and massy columns were levelled, with the greatest skill and alacrity, and without the least damage to the neighborhood, or to the thousands of spectators, who were witnesses of this sublime "wreck of matter."

The severity of the loss has fallen on Mr. BARNUM, whose misfortune is commiserated by the whole community. It is said, the furniture he had in the house cost 16,000 dollars, and his stores of liquors and provisions, but little short of 8000—Much of the furniture, and a small part of the liquors, were saved.

No lives were lost, though great hazards were run—On Wednesday, a promising lad, of about ten years old, fell into a kettle of hot beer, among the ruins, and was so scalded, that he died in the afternoon.

The citizens had not retired from the above scene, before a new alarm of fire was given, in Charlestown, where a rope-walk, situated near the Navy Yard, was consumed. Vast numbers sat off, crying, "they have helped us, let us haste to help them." The alarms from other parts were unfounded.

It is fact, that the upper parts of the front wall of the *Exchange*, from the pressure of the heat in it, was projected a foot or more into Congress-street, but when the pressure ceased, resumed its perpendicular direction.

The engines from all the neighboring towns came to our assistance.

The *Exchange Coffee-House*, and additions, cost nearly 600,000 dollars.

(a) The Jewels, regalia and records of the Grand Lodge, were preserved by the vigilance of the Grand Toller, but the loss of the subordinate Lodges, it is estimated, exceeded 1000 dollars.