THE CALIFORNIA DISASTER

A Scene of Desolation and Ruin in San Francisco.

A despatch from San Francisco says: Of the scenes that marked the transformation of this, the gayest, the most careless city on the continent, into a wreck and a hell, it is hard to write. That the day started with a blind general panic goes without saying. People woke up with a start to find themselves floundering on the floor. In such an earthquake as this it is human instinct to get out of doors, away from falling walls. They stumbled across the floors of their heaving houses to find that even the good earth upon which they placed their reliance was swaying and rising and falling, so that the sidewalks cracked and great rents opened in the ground. The three minutes which followed were an eternity of terror. We learn here of at least two people who died of pure fright in that three minutes when there seemed no help on earth or Heaven. There was a roar like a great burst of thunder, and from all about came the crash of falling walls. It died down at last, leaving the earth quaking and quivering like jelly. Men would run forward, stop as another shock, which might be greater any moment, seemed to take the earth from under their feet, and throw themselves face downward on the ground in a perfect agony of fear.

FOUND THEIR VOICES.

It seemed to be two or three minutes after the great shock was over before people found their voices. There followed the screaming of women, beside themselves with terror, and the cries of men. With one impulse people made for the parks as far as possible from falling walls. These speedily became packed with people in their night clothes, who screamed and moaned at the little shocks which followed every few minutes. The dawn was just breaking, but there was no other light, as the gas and electric mains were gone, and the street lamps were all out. But before the dawn was white there came a light from the east, the burning warehouse district. The braver men, with no families to watch over, struck out to help. They were in the early morning light able to see the business district of the city burning before them. From every direction came the fire engines, called from the outlying district by the general alarm rung in by the assistants of the dead chief

CHINESE IN A FRIGHT

The spur of the quake ran up the hill on which Chinatown is situated, and shook down part of the crazy little buildings on the southern edge. It tore down, too, some of the Italian tenements. The rush to Portsmouth Square went on almost unchecked by the police, who had more business elsewhere. The Chinese came out of their underground burrows like rats, and tumbled into the square, beating such gongs and playing such noisy instruments as they had snatched up. They were met on the other side by the refugees of the Italian quarter.

The panic became a madness. At least two Chinamen were taken to the morgue dead of knife wounds, given for no other reason, it seems, than the madness of the panic. There are ten thousand Chinese in the quarter, and there are thousands of Italians, Spaniards and Mexicans on the other side. It seemed as though every one of these, together with the riff-raff of the Barbary coast, made for that one block of open land. The uncontrolled streams met in the centre of the square and piled upon the edges. There they fought all the morning until the troops restored order with their bayonets.

BANKS REMOVE GOLD.

Then, as the dawn broke and the lower city began to be overhung with the smoke of burning buildings, there came a back-eddy. Cabmen, hackmen, drivers of express wagons and trucks, hired at enormous prices, began carting away from the lower city the valuables of the hotels, which saw their doom in the fires which were breaking out everywhere, and the spurts of the gas mains. Even the banks began to take out their bullion and securities, and, under guard of half-dressed clerks, sent them to the hills, whence came to-day the salvation of San Francisco. One old nighthawk cab driven by a cabman mad with terror carried more than $1,000,000 in currency and securities.

Men pulling corpses or broken people from fallen buildings stopped to curse these processions as they passed. Time and again a line of wagons and cabs would run on to an impassable barrier of debris, where some building had fallen into the street, and would pile up till the guards cleared a way through the streets.

SHOT DOWN THIEVES.

And then the vandals formed and went to work. Routed out from the dens along the wharves, the rats of the San Francisco water front, the drifters who have reached the backeddy of European civilization, crawled out and began to plunder. Early in the day a policeman caught one of these men dropping through the window of a small bank on Montgomery street, and shot him dead. But the police were keeping fire lines, beating back overzealous rescuers from the fallen houses and the burning blocks, and for a time these men plundered at will. News of this development was carried early to Mayor Schmitz, and it was this as much as anything which determined him and Gen. Funston came over from the Presidio on the double quick with the whole garrison of United States troops to put the city under martial law. Orders were issued to the troops to shoot anyone caught in the act of looting, and the same orders were issued to the First Regiment, National Guard of California, when they were mustered and called out later in the day. And all this time, and clear up until noon, the earth was shaking with little tremors, many of which brought down walls and chimneys. At each of these the rescuers, even the firemen, would stop for a moment, paralyzed. The 8 o'clock, the heaviest after the big one, drove even those who had determined to stay by the stricken city to look for means of escape by water.

A SAFETY COMMITTEE.

There was an open park opposite the City Hall. Here, in default of a building, the Board of Supervisors met and formed, together with 50 substantial citizens whom they had gathered, a committee of safety. They also set themselves to the problem of providing quarters for the dying and dead. Mechanics' Pavilion, across from the City Hall, had escaped, and it was pressed into service at once. The police and the troops, working admirably together, passed the word that the dead and injured should be brought there, since the hospitals and morgues had become choked, and toward that point, in the early forenoon, thedrays, express wagons, and hacks impressed as temporary ambulances, took their course. There were perhaps 400 injured people, many of them terribly mangled, laid out on the floor before noon.

DEAD AND INJURED.

Every physician in the city volunteered, and they got together enough trained nurses to do the work. There were fewer corpses, too busy were the forces of order in stopping the conffagration and caring for the living to care for the dead. The first wagons brought a whole family—father, mother and three children—all dead except the baby, who had a terrible cut across the forehead and a broken arm. These had been dragged out from the ruins of their house, on the water front.

As the day wore on, and the wind changed, the fire along the water front burned itself out, and ran on further down South Market street. Except for the fire the city is in darkness. The refugees coming over late report that the parks are filled with people sleeping out of doors, under guard of the troops.

SAN FRANCISCO IS GONE.

Unless all information is greatly exaggerated there remains nothing left of the city except outlying suburbs, a few blocks on the water front and a narrow district of middle-class residences lying along Golden Gate Park. No American city was ever so nearly destroyed as this, and outside of the earthquake the fire is probably the greatest in American history. The city has a population of more than 400,000 people. Not more than one-fourth of these can have escaped to Oakland or the peninsula, and at least 300,000 people must be homeless in the parks or the Presidio military reservation. All the hospitals except the free City Hospital have been destroyed, and they have been dragging the injured, sick and dying from place to place of safety all day Thursday. A late report by a Western Union wire direct from San Francisco confirms the despatch which Gen. Funston sent to the War Department early on Thursday evening. He said then that the flames had crossed Van Ness Avenue, the dividing line between the better residence district and the rest of the city, and that the town was doomed. As a matter of fact, everything worth mentioning except this residence district was burned over or on fire by the afternoon. The flames finished with the district down-town, ran south through what remained of the tenement district, extended out through the mission, a region of cheap residences, and leaped to Nob Hill, where stand the great mansions of the early-day California millionaires. Before that time the water supply had been wholly exhausted. Even the sewers were sucked dry. At two o'clock the firmen brought to the volunteer helpers the news that there was no more dynamite. It passed from mouth to mouth.

"NO MORE DYNAMITE!"

This cry was the doom of San Francisco.

As a last resort, Gen. Funston emptied the artillery magazines of the Presidio, and the troops and firemen tried to make a last stand at Van Ness Avenue, west of which lie the homes of the rich and well-to-do. Funston's telegram at 8 o'clock on Thursday night showed that they had failed, and the late news over the direct wire confirmed this.

Many must have died in the fire. At least four men were shot during the day for looting. The unburied dead, many of them half burned in the ruins, are becoming a problem. It may become necessary to sink many bodies in the bay or ocean. Owing to the fire, which caught many structures before the dead could be taken out of them, the real mortality will never be known.

It is hard to estimate the loss of money. It may be said that practically all improvements on real estate and a great part of the personal property are gone. The loss will certainly be more than $200,000,000. The last assessment roll gives the value of land and improvements in San Francisco at $402,000,000. The insurance held in San Francisco is estimated in New Yory at from $350,000,000 to $390,000,000. This estimate is based on the payment of premiums. The housing of the homeless people who are sleeping in the parks and the military reservation is going to be a great problem. So, indeed, is their feeding. No supplies can come into the town at present. The people have been living on the supplies taken from grocery stores and handed out by the soldiers, but the wholesale houses are gone with their stores of provisions and starvation is imminent.

There is plenty of money in sight for relief. The Government has appropriated a million dollars and at least half a million is awaiting order in New York. The problem, however, is not so much one of money as of ways and means of getting supplies through quickly.

This is absolutely the greatest disaster that ever overcame an American city, and one of the great fires of history. Beside it the Chicago, Boston, and Baltimore fires are almost unimportant.

THE FIRE IS CHECKED.

San Francisco, April 21.—The fire is probably checked. A turn of the wind, which came late Friday night, blew it back from the residence district, after it had leaped the gap which the soldiers had made with dynamite to save that part of the town. The steady western trade wind has set in. Telegraph Hill and the territory about it, a region of poor dwellings, had been passed by the main fire. This shaft of the wind blew the flames in that direction, and Telegraph Hill burned all day Friday. Russian Hill is also burned over, except for the small area on the sea slope; but if the trade wind continues strong, as it probably will, the fire will be turned back entirely on the area already burned over. There is every hope that the ruins will be cooling in a day or two.

Reports about the actual area of damage are conflicting. It is probable, however, that about three-quarters of the improvements on real estate is destroyed. The fringes of the city, scattered suburban residences, stand. Outside of that no considerable area is saved, except the better residence district of the Western addition and Pacific Heights. Except for a few mansions of the rich, some churches, and probably some suburban hospitals, every building in San Francisco is gone.

More than 200,000 people slept last night in the concentration camps of the Presidio, Golden Gate Park and Fort Mason. There was a shortage of water, food was scarce and poorly distributed and many went hungry and thirsty. The city authorities have been able to get at the water mains, and hope to have drinking water by this morning. The troops are preparing another concentration camp in the hills of the Potrero, south of the city, where there is access to a natural water supply. It is now possible to reach the ferry building by a route running around the edge of the bay. Over this route there was a general exodus to the ferries yesterday. The refugees went to Oakland, where there was at least a water supply. But in Oakland, too, there appears to be a shortage of provisions. While some supplies must have reached the city yesterday, and the United States Government is doing everything to rush rations, Gen. Funston has told the War Department that there is imminent danger of famine. This stands to reason, for San Francisco has never kept more than three days ahead with its provision supply, and much of that must have been destroyed in the fire.

Oakland is choked with refugees, who are sleeping in the parks or public buildings, or being accommodated by private citizens.

Admiral Goodrich landed all his available forces yesterday, and they will help out the exhausted troops. The University of California, which is tempararily closed, has sent over its cadet battalion. The Committee of Safety has taken up the work of supplying food stations. Mayor Schmitz has repeated his proclamation, ordering citizens not to build fires in houses, and cooking is still done in the public squares. Chimneys are so unsafe that house fires would certainly make trouble.

The troops, tired and irritated, have had many conflicts with looters. There is an unconfirmed report that several men were killed while trying to rob the vaults of the Mint, which hold $300,000,000 in treasure. There were several other instances of shooting for robbery.

Mayor Schmitz, Gen. Funston and the operators of the telegraph companies all agree in saying that the fire, while still burning, will probably spread no farther, but will burn itself out.

COMMONS VOTES $100,000.

Ottawa, April 20. — A vote of $100,000 was passed in the Commons to-day for the relief of the sufferers in San Francisco. Hon. Mr. Fielding, Minister of Finance, in announcing the Government's intention, said: "I have a matter of urgency to bring up, with reference to the disaster which has come upon one of the great cities of the neighboring Republic. I think the information which has now reached us through the press is sufficient to give assurance that the disaster is of a very widespread character, and there will be need of generous assistance from the liberal-minded people of the United States and other parts of the world. At all events, I am sure that this Parliament, representing the people who inhabit the northern half of the continent, will be glad to share in the opportunity of ministering to the assistance of our fellow-men in San Francisco. I propose, therefore to present a message from his Excellency recommending a grant of $100,000 as a contribution from the people of Canada to the afflicted people of San Francisco." (Applause.)

Mr. Borden, on behalf of the Opposition, said: "I do not think there are any members of the House who will not cordially support the Government in this proposal. The disaster to the City of San Francisco is one which almost staggers our belief—one which we are hardly able to understand. We have had substantial proofs in the past of the sympathy of the people of the United States in times of disaster to Canadian citizens. I wish merely to add that, in the presence of an appealing disaster such as this, and for the purpose of rendering aid on such occasions as this, the two nations are one." (Applause.)

The message was received and referred to the Committee of Supply.

RECONSTRUCTION NOW THE WORD

San Francisco, April 23.—The great fire is no longer a menace. Its ashes will smoulder for weeks, but as an active force it ended on Saturday morning. The last stroke was the destruction on Friday night of almost a mile of docks and wharfage warehouses on the northeastern waterfront.

It is known that the loss of life will be heavier and that of properly somewhat less than in the hasty estimates sent out while the fire raged. The sanitary parties now systematically searching the ruins come across scores of bodies in unsuspected places. The chief loss of life seems to have been in the large boarding houses and cheap hotels lying south of Market street. In a single section of the city adjacent to the Union Iron Works 200 bodies have been cremated by the officials for sanitary reasons. Burial parties are working steadily, and it seems likely that the death list will be far above the figure of 250 set by the acting chief of the fire brigade, may indeed be twice that total.

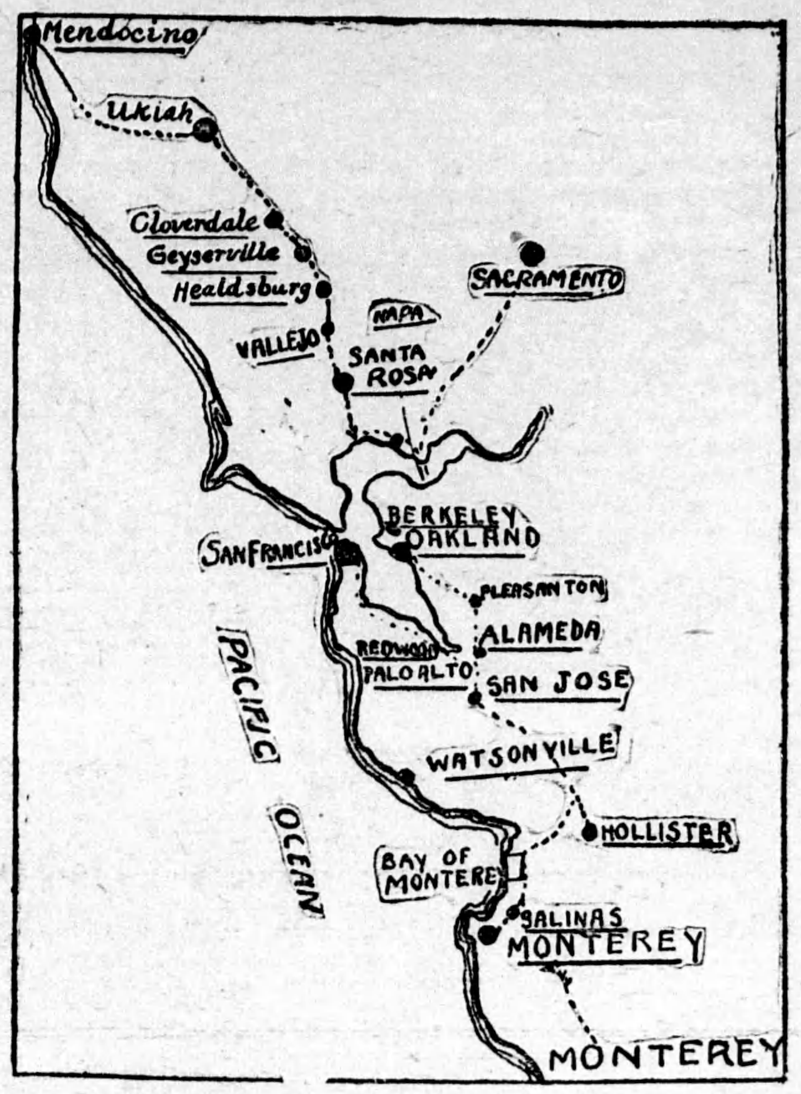
The property loss is still a matter of the wildest guesswork, figures ranging from $200,000,000 as a minimum to $500,000,000 as a maximum. The great down-town buildings, while injured badly by fire, seem to have stood the earthquake remarkably well. The steel frame skyscrapers can be repaired and fitted for use in a week or two, and hotels like the St. Francis and Fairmont are in the same position. The utter loss has been in the case of flimsy brick buildings and of wooden structures, which were swept out of existence in thousands. The plans for rebuilding already under consideration look to guarding against both earthquake and fire by steel construction, and it is estimated that 250,000 tons of steel frames will be put into the down-town section of the new San Francisco.

There will be privation, but no starvation in the destroyed city. Trainloads of food supplies are arriving from north, south and east, and Gen. Funston and the Mayor are organizing effective agencies for distribution. There will will be no lack of money for this work. Already $11,860,000 have been contributed, a sum large enough to feed the entire population, for at least two months, while thousands of tons of food, clothing, tents and medical supplies are being sent forward. President Roosevelt has intimated in very courteous words, but quite firmly, that the United States can take care of the problem in San Francisco and will not need aid from abroad. It is probable that as this intimation was made on Saturday after the Dominion Parliament took action toward granting $100,000 the Canadian donation will be accepted.

SANTA ROSA'S DISASTER.

Sacramento, Cal., April 23. — Santa Rosa, in proportion to its size, has suffered worse than San Francisco. The list of dead numbers about sixty, but many persons are missing and a still greater number seriously wounded. Forty sailors from Mare Island, fully equipped with apparatus, are working while volunteer aid has been unstinted. Santa Rosa has suffered the greatest disaster in her history, but the indomitable spirit of her people has been shown all alonng the line.

Benjamin F. Esbenshade, of Lancaster, Pa., aged sixty years, a civil war veteran, has just ended a forty days' fast made with the design of curing stomach troubles. A pint of water daily was all that passed his lips. From 164 pounds his weight dropped to 104 pounds, and he is weak as a child, but he believes himself cured.



Map of the Stricken District Showing Towns Badly Wrecked by the Earthquake.

DEL MONTE HOTEL AT MONTEREY.

Where three chimneys fell through the roof, killing a bridal couple and a hotel servant, and injuring several other persons.