

A BIG FIRE.

May 18th, there occurred the most disastrous fire known in the history of Salt Lake City. There have been fires more difficult to handle, because of the more intricate plan of the buildings. There have been occasions when more disastrous results were promised at the outset, but by the efficient work of the fire department were averted. There have also been instances where the water supply was less adequate, but this deficiency has been made good by the judicious use of the available fluid, and the prompt removal of whatever property could be taken out of the burning building. But this occurrence has connected with it events that have never before been known to transpire at a fire in this city. Prominent among these, and one that stands out in strong contrast to the record of previous conflagrations, is the utter incompetency and lack of anything akin to proper management.

It was a few minutes after one o'clock yesterday afternoon when the discovery was made that a flame had started in the rear room on the first floor of Henry Dinwoodey's large furniture store on First South Street. The alarm was given, and messengers started for the fire department headquarters, a block and a half away. A telephone message, however, took the news promptly to the fire department, and after a time the alarm was sounded. In a little while several firemen, with the hose cart, appeared, and shortly afterwards more of the apparatus arrived. From the time the alarm was sounded twenty-five minutes elapsed before a stream of water was turned on the flames.

Up to this time the fire was confined to the rear room mentioned, to the room above it, to the elevator shaft and, possibly, to the cellar in the back part of the building. It was apparent to men of judgment and experience that the attack on the flames should be made from the front, by going through the store and fighting the fire to the back. This would have checked the spread into the front of the store, and would have given the best opportunity to send a solid stream of water into the heart of the flames. A stream was turned on in the alley, and was having its effect, when a surprise was sprung by the order to break in at the back and get at the fire there. A protest was made, but it was not heeded, if it was understood. The fire was then all in the rear part of the building, and could have been made, for a time at least, to remain there. But the instant the back was opened there was a vast change. It was as if a powerful blast had been suddenly turned into an immense furnace. The fierce draft created drove the flames toward the front of the building, and in a brief space of time the devouring element was making rapid headway in each of the stories. Costly draperies, carpets, upholstered goods and furniture were quickly wrapped in the folds of the destroyer.

The great blunder had been made.

There was absolutely no hope to save the building—the flames were beyond human control, and a change of operations would have availed but little. The firemen were kept back by the intense heat, and remained outside, squirting water into the flames, which apparently were unaffected, except as indicated by the hissing and spitting of the steam that was formed. From the street, streams of water were turned on, but it was all too late.

Next to the failure to go direct at the fire in a common sense way, was the procedure that had the effect of allowing all the goods to burn. There were hundreds willing to aid in carrying out the furniture and valuable stock that was attainable, but the police combined to prevent this. Not a man who could have done any good was allowed to go in. Even the bookkeeper was not permitted to enter to save the books and papers. Employees and men experienced at fires were turned aside, and not a hand was put forth to save property. This probably was due to ignorance rather than deliberate intention. To absolutely shut out employees and interested parties was a policy attended yesterday with very serious results.

The members of the fire brigade worked hard; there can be no question of that. The misfortune is that they had not a chief who was capable of directing their efforts so that their labor would not be vain. The police probably did as well as they could, and some conducted themselves in a commendable manner. Others, and those who attracted most attention, were so excited that they did not appear to be able to exercise any judgment. The exhibition of authority backed by force would have been taken to be the leading feature, but that it could be seen that they had "lost their heads," and sadly needed cool judgment in their control.

After it was seen what policy was to be pursued, there was nothing left but to watch the place burn. Mr. Ellerbeck, of the gas works, tried to get inside to take out the meter, but he was shut out in a most summary manner. Mr. Dinwoodey was away, and his son H. M. Dinwoodey, was at work doing what little he was permitted to. Mr. Jos. A. Jennings, Mr. Dinwoodey's son-in-law, interested himself and tried to have some of the furniture saved. Failing in this, he expressed his disapproval of the course which had been adopted. Then Major Stanton, instead of attending to his business as chief engineer of the fire department, accosted Mr. Jennings and inquired if he had made derogatory statements concerning him. The reply was yes. Major Stanton then struck Mr. Jennings a blow on the nose. The interference of other parties prevented further assault. Mr. Jennings made complaint to the city marshal, and it was promised that Stanton would be arrested. He was notified to appear at the police court this morning, but the officials

there had filed no complaint against him.

Mayor Scott was at the conflagration most of the time, and after his arrival did good service in directing measures for the preservation of buildings on which the burning embers dropped. At his request a telegram was sent to Ogden, asking for assistance, and the Junction City boys turned out promptly and got to where another telegram informed them that their services were unnecessary.

The flames subsided as the fuel diminished, but the fire was burning all night down in the cellar. Today a vast quantity of water has been poured on the ruins, but they are still smoking and steaming.

That the fire did not spread is due mainly to the fact that brick walls intervened and saved adjoining structures. A large number of citizens aided in extinguishing incipient flames, started by burning timbers which were carried a considerable distance in some instances. The careful working in this line kept new fires from starting. It is said that the chief of the fire department got giant powder, with the intention of blowing up buildings if the flames reached into Calder's and Jennings' stores, on either side of Dinwoodey's, but there never was a necessity for such a move.

The losses will in the aggregate reach \$120,000. Of this amount only about \$70,000 is insured. Mr. Dinwoodey's stock was worth about \$30,000, and the building about \$25,000. His insurance is about \$65,000. The remainder is distributed among Calder Brothers, Sears & Liddle, the Jennings estate, Carroll & Kern, Mrs. Clinton, Mrs. Christie, Mrs. Schultze, Joseph Oberndorfer and others.

Speaking to an experienced fireman who has done yeoman service with the old brigade, his views were asked, and were given as follows:

"The firemen were rather a long time getting on the water. The first stream they played upon the flames was from the alley which was very proper, because it was there that the fire was then burning. But a good, solid stream should have been carried from the steamer right through the front door into the fire at the rear of the building. It appears from what I can learn that the brigade really fought this fire from the street, whence they threw the water upon the burning mass. This was an idea played out fifty years ago. To properly fight a conflagration, especially in a large furniture store, it is necessary to go right into the heart of the fire as quickly as possible, with the assurance that if the fire is not under control in ten or fifteen minutes from the time of the outbreak it will resist all efforts to subdue its fury. The fires which occurred at two other stores in this city—the Co-op. Furniture Company and Mr. Madsen's—were fought by the old brigade in this way—by carrying a solid stream right into the midst of the fire; and hence the loss was merely nominal.

"In this instance it seems to me