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Letters concerning the
great Fire in London
Sept^r 1666

Dear S^r

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Did I not imagine the Common Report concerning y^e late Fire in London had prepar'd you to receive an Account of y^e Terrible & Calamitous Accident, I should not presume to give it you without Introducing it by a Suitable Preface; that you might not be surpris'd in reading the Relation of one of y^e most grievous & most Dismal Strokes that ever fell on England, or possibly any other Nation, unless by an Invasion.

It was on Sunday the 2^d of September a Sunday about one a clock in the Morning that it began in an heap of barris in a Bakers house in Pudding lane on the East side of Newfishstreet-hill, within ~~three~~^{ten} houses of Tharnestreet. It had gotten some Strength ere discovered, yet feasonably enough to allow a Merch^t who dwelt next door time to remove all his goods. But as soon as it felt y^e violent Impressions of a Strong E. N. E. wind (w^{ch} had continued so a Week before & as long after, with some little Intermission, & some Alteration of two or three Points) leaving a small Force to finish y^e Conquest of y^e House where it reivid its Birth, immediately directed its greatest Strength against y^e Adjacent ones. It quickly grew Powerful enough to despise y^e Use of Buckets, & was too advantageously seated among narrow Streets to be assaulted by Engines: 'twas therefore propos'd to y^e Mayor (who came before three a clock) if it would be necessary to put down some houses to prevent its Spreading: but he with a Pith answering, that a Woman might piss it out, neglected y^e prevent

prudent advice, & was not long ere unde-
 ceiv'd of y^e foolish Confidence: for, before
 3 a clock was gotten to y^e Bridge, & thro'
 dividing, left enough to burn down all that
 had been erected on it since y^e last great
 Fire 163. and with y^e main body press'd for-
 ward into Tharnestreet. About 7 a clock y^e
 morning a little Stable in Florshoo-alley
 near Winclester Stairs in Southwark was
 a fire (suppos'd by a Spark) but was stop'd
 within two hours, by y^e pulling down a third
 house after two had been burnt. I heard no-
 thing of all this till 9 a clock, & y^e running
 down into y^e Temple garden saw y^e Smoak
 of both & y^e Flames of y^e former. I was not
 satisfy'd at this distance, but going with
 some others into y^e Street, found it full of
 People, & those of Fears: for 'twas already
 imagin'd the Design of y^e French & Dutch in
 Revenge of what our Forces had lately done
 at Brandaris upon y^e Island Sekelings; and
 the riding of an hot headed fellow through
 y^e Street (with more Speed & Fear y^e Wit)
 crying Arm, Arm, had frighted most of the
 people out of y^e Churches. About 10 a clock
 we came into Gracechurch Street, & there
 from y^e top of an high house saw 'twas come
 as far westward as Old Harbor, & as far
 Northward as Crooked Lane. Returning home
 ward we found a Party of 40 horse of the
 Lifeguard in Bronkhill, & met some Companies
 of y^e Kings Regiments, & of y^e Train bands &
 Auxiliaries marching into y^e City. After dinner
 we

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 we took boat & rowing towards y^e Bridge, found
 it come to y^e Stilyard. Landing at Paulwharfe,
 & walking towards y^e Fire, were stop'd in
Canningstreet by y^e abundance of goods and
 carts with which 'twas fill'd. Here we met
 my Mayor on horseback with a few attend-
 ants, looking like one frighted out of his
 Wits. The tall Spired Steeple of S^t. Laurence
Pountney was then afire, which appearing
 first at y^e top (where it had melted y^e Lead
 with w^{ch} 'twas cover'd) discover'd it self with
 so much Terror, ~~and~~ taking a view from
 that lofty Place of w^{ch} it intended suddenly
 to devour. Getting round into Little East-
cheap, we came so near as to look into
Tillystreet, & perceiv'd it was then (being
 4 a clock) within five houses of y^e upper
 end of y^e Street. Thence we went into
Pudding Lane, & observ'd not above 3 houses
 burnt in y^e Lane on y^e Northside of y^e house
 where it began. I was y^e evening a second
 time on y^e Water; & 'twas then it appear'd
 with all y^e Horror & Dreadfulness imagi-
 nable; the Flames afforded light enough
 to discover y^e selves, y^e black Smoak, & the
 Buildings they so imminently threatned:
 The Moon offer'd her light top, but was
 overcome by this greater; ^{which} not being
 able (by day) to contend with y^e Sun, ~~had~~
 (as it were in Spite) by Smoak lessen'd it.
 I came back at 8 a clock leaving it then
 at y^e Three cranes, w^{ch} is distant from the
 Bridge

(A)

Bridge almost a fourth part of y^e space between y^e Temple & y^e Bridge. That night more of y^e Lifeguard & Soldiers Watch in y^e City. I kept my bed but few hours & slept less.

Monday

Next morning at ten a clock I went wth three or four more over to Southwark, where getting into an house fronting y^e River, I observed y^e Progress had not been great y^e preceding night: for, It had not consumed above eight houses on y^e water side, & had ~~but~~ ^{now} four houses between It & Queenhithe: where they were pulling down y^e Market place & some houses, as a probable place to stop y^e course. While we staid here y^e King came down in his Barge (as he had done y^e foregoing afternoon) and after half an hours observation returned again to Whitehall. After two hours Expectation we saw all these Endevors slighted by a Leap wth y^e Fire made over twenty houses ~~upon~~ the Turret of an house in Thames street, coming back & taking a Melancholy dinner, we went into y^e City, about 3 a clock we got into Thames street, & so round by y^e Shirk of y^e Fire (tho with much difficulty) through y^e Streets barricadoed with Goods, Carts, and Coaches. By that time we had reach'd Cornhill y^e Fire had consumed Lumbar street, and was within forty yards of this. The D. of Monmouth with several of y^e Guard sat

(B)

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at there on horseback. The D. of York was in another part of y^e City. We came home at 5 a clock, & being little of Probability in a desired Stop, Three of us (of this house) pack'd up our books &c & put y^e aboard a Barge.

In all this Narrative you meet with little of y^e Motion of y^e Fire Eastward; nor was it indeed so considerable, for, y^e violence of y^e wind drove it from those parts, yet not so much but y^e about six a clock this evening twas got to Billingsgate. Just before Midnight we met y^e Mr Manly Kolles & others in Fleet street, who taking a view of these parts, an hour after order'd y^e pulling down some houses in White Fryers; tho some earnestly urg'd it had been propos'd in the morning viz. if y^e houses on each side y^e River Fleet should be pulled down from y^e Thames to Holborn bridge.

At one a clock in y^e morning y^e wind at Tuesday 2. & by 5. we went up y^e River, & leaving our Trunks &c at a ^{little} unknown house in Battersey, we were at London again by Seven, & understood y^e Fire had nearly mastered Baynard castle, about wth It had been employ'd at least six hours. Monday evening y^e Fire was at y^e Sticks, & as soon as day at Mercers chapel, this day It came to Pauls about noon, & thrusting forward with much eagernes towards Judgate, wth two hours more drove those from y^e work who had been employ'd all that day in levelling

levelling of houses on y^e River Fleet Street.
like a Torrent down Ludgate hill, & by five
a clock was advanced as high as Fleet
conduit. Despairing then of ever seeing this
Place more, but in Ashes, we went to Hornsey
four miles off, & in our way at Highgate,
we might discern with us Rage & Greediness
It ^{made} ~~was~~ up Fleetstreet. That nights Refresh-
ment in a bed drove from me an Aguish
distemper y^e had ^{quilted} ~~tormented~~ me y^e day before.

Wednesday Next morning we came hither at ten
a clock, & were informed y^e it was stopd at
y^e Temple, Fetterlane & Holborn bridge, be-
tween y^e hours of two & six in y^e morning
but twas not mastered in Shoelane till twelve
a clock. That day Food was scarce, but
we made a Shift. About 4 in y^e afternoon
It brake out again in y^e Temple, (is thought)
by a lurking Spark y^e had lain conceald e-
ver since the morning, which happening
among Paper buildings quickly merced,
& had baffled two Engines, if y^e blowing
up some Lodgings had not prevented y^e
diffusion, w^{ch} was before Midnight. The
D. of York w^{as} here 3 or 4 hours shew-
ing much diligence, as he had done in
several parts of y^e City y^e day, where he
had seen, as he said, above 100 houses blown
up. Great guards of horse & foot were
drawn hither, & to other Places where the
Fire was extinguishd. That Night & the
following we ^{lodged} in a Stable in Lincolns
Innfields upon ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{sparks of our Clock} ~~the~~ ^{about}
All this day It had burst

about Cripplegate, & was not extinguishd till
night. but at y^e Tower Six hours sooner. 36

Thursday passed in perfecting y^e victory Thursday
over y^e Fire.

So did Friday. that night we got into a Friday
bed in an house.

Saturday we fetchd home our Monthly Saturday
& have mee remained here without dis-
turbance.

I am sensible of transgressing y^e ordi-
nary bounds of a Letter, & shall therefore
only add these of y^e Fire; w^{ch} are the
Temple church, more y^e half way up in
Fetterlane, almost at y^e ^{north} end of Shoelane
(y^e rest consumed) Holborn bridge, Py corner,
Aldersgate, Cripplegate, near y^e lower end
of Glemansstreet, at y^e ends of Bishops-
gatestreet & Leadenhallstreet, both w^{ch} are
standing, beyond Fanchurch, at y^e lower
end of Marklane, & at y^e Tower Dock. This
is y^e bare Narrative; but there remain
Observables enough to deseru another Paper,
which causes me to write no more on
this but that I am

M. Temple
Sept. 24. 1666

Your most ready Servant

Dear Sr

My last letter ended in telling you at what Places the Fire was quenched, this shall begin in acquainting you with the means used for effecting it. 'Tis true, many were employ'd especially in pulling down houses, which they alwayes begun too near of Fire, by w^{ch} they were forc'd from their work ere finished. 'Twas indeed almost impossible, after it had made such a large Circle, to make a larger round it by any other means than that of blowing up houses which had been propos'd the first day by some Experienced Persons, then esteem'd a desperate cure, but afterwards practis'd wth very good Success. For by putting a barrel of Powder or therabouts under each house, 'twas first set up a yard or two, & then fell down flat without any Danger to the Bystanders. At some places the extraordinary effort made by the Owners of houses, incorag'd the workmen, & they sav'd them, as at Py-corner, where one gave them 50 that of Sign-buildings in Southbury where they had 100. At others 'twas effected by ordinary means & less Strength than had been formerly employ'd. In Fleetstreet over against St Dunstons Church its greediness was the cause of its own ^{destruction} ~~destruction~~ by skipping over ten houses, & fastning on a wooden one, which having burnt with its neighbor, & being hindered from getting farther by a brick house & the small help of prevent

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had made a wide gap by that time the main body of the Fire was advanced. Certainly had it been let alone it would not have proceeded faster; & some, considering with what weak means & at what unlikely places (if some of them) 'twas check'd, all within the space of four hours, (except at two or three places) they cant but acknowledge the same Providence. saying Thittito shall thou come & no farther, that at first gave it a Commission, having prepared the Matter by a dry Easterly Wind the week before, w^{ch} continued blowing all the time & longer ^{but abated of its violence the Tuesday night} & appointing it a beginning among close built wooden, pitched houses, fill'd wth most combustible Commodities.

There was comonly reckon'd within the Walls of Mortality 130 Parishes, ^{Churches} w^{ch} are now reduc'd to 43: ~~whereof 10 are now no Churches standing~~ & another ~~is almost destroyed~~ So if within the Walls are left 13 Parish Churches (or but 12 if we account that none so much main'd) & the Dutch Church, the rest which were 84 are burnt, ^{at Pauls} ~~at Pauls~~ the French Church, & Mercers Chapel. without the Walls are consumed three viz Sepulchres, St Prides, & Pridenwel Chapel. In all 90. whereof some are so terribly torn & shattered, that nothing is left but pieces of walls, others have some Pillars standing. The Smaller Prebts are melted. All the Western part of Pauls is seal'd, having lost pieces of Stone broken off weighing 20, 40, 100 pounds. The Quire is fallen down into St Faiths: most of the Roof

is down too, & some of the Pillars. The Gallies
are burnt, except Iron mangers, Leather-
jessers & Gloves ^{by some persons} hall. The whole of what
lies wast is above 400 acres of ground.
About a Sixth part of what stood within the
Walls remains, w^{ch} is more than is burnt
without.

You expect something concerning the Value
of the Losses. Some reckon roundly, & say
London is ruin'd, England is ruin'd. That's
too confident, yet I dare not determine
how far they are out. The truth out is the
Computation is impossible. In general it
concluded more Commodities & Household goods
are preserv'd than perisht, especially those
of least weight & most worth, which the
Surprise & Difficulty of Carriage deterr'd
men from removing others. Some goods were
savour'd in arched Cellars, though others trust'd
in such places were consumed by the fall of
the arches, or not careful stopping the paper-
ges. None have suffred proportionably so deep
as the Booksellers, principally those in Pauls-
churchyard, who putting their books into 5 Vault
& other vaults under Pauls, had them all
destroy'd, except in 3 or 4 vaults there, w^{ch}
were warehouses; besides all y^e were in Ware-
houses at Stationers hall. Some have lost
2, 3, 4, 5, 6000^l a man. In all they compute
more than 100000^l in that Commodity. If
Persons very few lost their lives; the Bills
of Mortality mention but Six burnt, wher-
of two or three sunk into vaults since the
Fire as they were searching the Rums of their
houses.

houses. It is presum'd the hasty removal to
which sick persons & Women young were
forc'd, occasion'd the death of some.

Little to your Fancy may keep pace wth
my Discourse: but should I undertake a
Description of the General Confusion and
 Astonishment, I can't promise my self
any Probability of perfecting it. You may
more easily imagine every one running
up & down, some removing their goods
ready to be devour'd, others ^{more wife or} ~~careless~~ remov'd two dayes before they were
in danger. Some remov'd 4 or 5 times,
others carried them out into the Country.
Some went to Friends houses others into
the Fields, where they lay by them many
nights. Divers at Westminster had re-
mov'd, & some of the best Movables at
Whitehall were carried away. Carts came
in from the Country. Coaches were im-
ploy'd. Carremen got excessively, receiving
usually for small Turns between the rates
of 10^s & 5^s: nay some were offer'd 40, 50^s
for a Turn. One, while the gates were shut
that no hopes of saving any thing being left,
they might have more desperately ende-
vour'd the quenching the Fire, but that was
presently found in vain, & occasion'd the
loss of much goods. Some press'd Carts;
Others for want of them lost all, & some-
times their Numerousnes would hinder one
the other. All was in an hurry. And that it
heightned it was a Confidence among the
Most that twas a Design of our Enemies.
We had an hundred Stones of people taken
with

with Fire balls, & others endeavoring with matches to fire other places: So that none knew where to be secure. The belief of this had kindled such a rage in y^e Multitudes, that they kill'd one poor woman who had something in her upon they imagin'd Fire-balls, & sadly wounded & maimed divers others, especially French & Dutch, whose very Birth was enough to condemn them. An honest Dutch baker at Westminster had a good part of his house pull'd down upon a Surmise if he had endeavour'd to set it afire. And was nothing but the Effects of a good Government in this City preserv'd all of these Nations from a Massacre. How far they or others had an hand in this you'll see my Thoughts anon. The Prisoners for Debt in the Fleet Judgack & Counters were permitted to go out. but those in the goal at Newgate, were sent with a guard to that in Southwark, but not strong enough to hinder the most notorious from escaping by y^e way.

Every one condemn'd the D^r Mayor as a Person delighting more in drinking & dancing than is necessary for such a Magistrate. His Authority & that of y^e Aldermen was little regarded. The D^r of York bestir'd himself much especially Tuesday & Wednesday, & to good Effect. The King was in y^e City two or three times, expressing much Care to preserv y^e remaining parts, exposing himself among all persons, & not refusing to hear the advice of y^e meanest.

One Observation more & I have done. Little pieces of fronds Silk & Paper were taken up in very many places near Windsor, Henley, Beaconsfield &c. Indeed the Smoak driven by y^e wind made an Arch in the Heavens (a Sign of Wrath as y^e Rabbin says) was once of Peace) from this place to the western parts of y^e Horizon: y^e Sun shining through it, seem'd perfectly red, & might easily be look'd on with a naked eye, yielding a fainter light than in an Eclipse. I am
Sept. 25th 1666 S^r

Your most humble Servant

Dear S^r

In my two former I gave you the most particular Account I could frame out of the Ruins of this great City, & now come to transcribe what I have since gathered thence; where tho' I'll see the same Desolation; yet by looking on it with different Opinions and Interests, they make different Constructions as if the Object were so. Some thinking it a Natural & Rare Accident, while others Imagine it a Judgment of God, & are as confident of it as if they saw the Land on the waik. The Quakers say tis for their Persecution. The Separates say tis for banishing & silencing their Ministers. Others say tis for the Murder of the King & Rebellion of the City. The Clergy lay the blame on Schism & Licentiousness, while the Sedanies say it on Imposition & their Pride. Thus do many
pretend

pretend to determine the Sin aimed at in
this Punishment. Certainly His Majesty in
His late Proclamation for the Fast very
fitly calls It A Visitation so dreadful,
that scarce any Age or Nation hath seen
ever seen or felt the like: wherein although
the afflicting hand of God fell more im-
mediately upon the Inhabitants of this
City & the parts adjacent, yet all men
ought to look on It as a Judgment upō
the whole Nation.

We have now (as is usual in all extra-
ordinary Accidents) several Prophecies
started up: none more remarkable than
y^e of Nephodame a Frenchman who wrote
a Book of Prophecies above an hundred
years since, & therein exactly predicted
the Facts putting our King to death
into B. & in his book (Cent. 2. Stan 251)
hath this

Le Sang du Just a Londres fera faute
Trouble par foudres de vigat trois six.
La Dame Antiquie cherra de place haute
De mesme best plusieurs seront occis.

A little after he added these to the like pro-
phesies. Most of our last year Alman-
acks talked of Fire in London, & one
named the Month, but was expunged
by L'Esrange (who licensed them) for fear
of y^e Consequence. In the Prognostications
for the following year some threaten
the like Ruin to y^e remaining part, &
greater Judgment on the whole Land. How
far these are to be regarded I know not.

Cent. 9. St. 49.

40
You have I presume (as all other parts
of England, in some whereof have been
fires lately) Reports concerning a Con-
spiracy to burn London, which is charged
on the Papists, about whom fly up & down
a thousand Stories: I confess some are
shrewd ones, but I shall suspend my judg-
ment till time make a more perfect
Discovery; that which we have as yet
being so defective, & liable to so many Ob-
jections that I must profess my self un-
satisfied.

The Flames were scarce allay'd when Men
began to talk of rebuilding. to that end
several Architects have proposed Models,
& free from the many Inconveniencies
the former labor'd under; which is re-
jected by some as of too much diffi-
culty in determining Titles, & less con-
venience to those that were advanta-
geously seated before. Some that pre-
tend to talk Politicks affirm it unsafe
to suffer ^{the City} to swell into so great a
Bulk as might give Laws to y^e Kingdom.
but are answered by those that tell them
that Moscow, Paris, & Constantinople are
not dreaded for their Greatness by their
Princes; & add that tis impossible y^e great
Trade we ambition can be carried on
in small Towns, & that no Place in England
or possibly the world is so happily con-
triv'd for that design.

The

The first thing since done by the King was to appoint Markets in diverse Places. Since that a Declaration to forbid building is out leav. There is out too a Proclamation for a Fast. & another advising & commanding all persons to bring in goods taken up during the Fire or since at an appointed place.

The Exchange is at Gresham Colledge, which is much frequented, but rather to inquire after persons than about business. Some Merchants & such Trades are come to this end of the Town: but the rest (the ^{rest} of most of many Accomodations) resolve rather to settle in y^e other remaining parts. Many Houses are erected in Broadstreet, Smithfield, neer y^e waterside & other places. It is believed few will remove to other Towns, till they see further grounds to despair of seeing y^e City rebuilt: which would undoubtedly be in a short time, if we had Trade & that which begetteth that & other Enjoyments.

Oct 3. 1666

See in middle of vol
for ms.