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DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT

OF THE

BURNING

OF THE

East Parish Church,

DRUM'S AISLE,

ST. NICHOLAS STEEPLE,

AND DESTRUCTION OF

THE PEAL OF BELLS,

ON THE NIGHT OF

THE 9<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 1874.



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# Destruction of East Parish Church,

DRUM'S AISLE,

ST. NICHOLAS STEEPLE,

AND

THE PEAL OF BELLS.



From *Daily Free Press* of Saturday, 10th Oct., 1874.

Last night Aberdeen was the scene of a terribly-destructive fire, which has laid in ruins the East Church—one of the finest granite buildings in the world; obliterated the old wooden steeple, which for a number of centuries has formed one of the landmarks of the city; and destroyed the magnificent peal of bells, including the venerable old Lawrence, with the full-volumed tone of which Aberdonians have, since the 14th century, been familiar. Drum's Aisle, which formed the transept, and was the only remaining portion of the original Church of St Nicholas, and has in later times formed the majestic entrance to the City Churches, has also been ruined, at least to the extent of the total destruction of its woodwork. This lamentable occurrence, the full extent of which it was for a time scarcely possible to realise, created, it is needless to say, the utmost consternation throughout the city, and from every quarter poured eager and anxious crowds of citizens of all ranks, until every available inch of standing-ground was occupied, every one showing themselves appalled and saddened by the magnitude and character of the disaster, which we now proceed to describe.

## COMMENCEMENT OF THE FIRE.

At about twenty minutes past eight, Mr Duffus, confectioner, Castle Street, in passing homeward in company with Mr Daniel, builder, when at the foot of Upperkirkgate, remarked that he felt a strong smell of burning timber, adding that surely there was fire in the neighbourhood. His companion, on turning round, at once exclaimed that the roof of the East Church was on fire. A small jet of flame was observed to shoot up through the roof, right above the east sun-

light of the church, the somewhat dense smoke that followed immediately obscuring the flame. Both gentlemen then ran with all speed to the church, where they found the choir practising. Inside there was no appearance whatever of anything unusual at this time. After those inside had been warned, the gas was immediately screwed off, and notice at once sent to the Police Office.

For some minutes no appearance of burning was to be seen inside; outside small jets of flame in the middle of the roof were again and again visible, but only to be smothered down by the smoke. Shortly, however, the woodwork round the sunlight was observed to be on fire, and along the fretted roof indications were to be seen of the flames that were busy at work within. In a very few minutes it soon became evident that the fire was spreading with alarming rapidity, being, however, at present confined entirely to the space between the ceiling and the roof. The great clouds of smoke that burst through the interstices between the slates of the roof of the church, followed at intervals by a lurid glow, speedily attracted the attention of the passers-by, and in the course of a very short time the whole of the streets near the church were in a state of blockade, while the churchyard in front and in rear of the church buildings were one mass of people. The hose-reel from the Police Office was on the spot shortly after half-past eight, and lengths of the hose were at once attached to the fire-plugs. The pipes were laid through the Correction Wynd Gate round by the path leading to the back entrance to the West Church, and then up the belfry staircase to the bell-chamber—that part of the steeple which was seen from Union Street, above the roof of Drum's Aisle. No one who was not there and saw the difficulties which had to be overcome in taking the pipes up the narrow wooden staircases, leading up the interior of the steeple, can have any idea of the extraordinary labour that was entailed upon those who did this part of the work. And the worst of it was that when they reached the bell chamber—whence it was purposed playing on the roof—the place was found to be full of suffocating smoke, and there were no lights at all. The work had thus to be conducted in complete darkness, and what was done was not very effective. The belfry, too, soon got crowded with all and sundry who chose to come up, and the consequence was that all order was lost, and the efforts of those in charge of the pipes were greatly retarded and impeded. It soon became evident, however, that if anything was to be done to save the building, it must be done from some other part, for, in addition to the dense smoke with which the belfry was filled, the heat became in a short time positively unbearable. Driven from this part of the building, the firemen—who were by this time reinforced with new comers, bringing with them all the engines belonging to the Corporation—set themselves to work upon other parts of the burning pile, and their exertions will be commented upon in other portions of our notice of the sad occurrence.

#### THE SCENE FROM UNION STREET.

This was the point of view from which the progress of the fire was witnessed by the largest number of spectators. At one time, before the arrival of the military, the entire



churchyard was taken possession of, while at the same time Union Street was almost impassable, Correction Wynd and Back Wynd being also crowded. The first indication of fire, as seen from Union Street, was the immense clouds of varicoloured smoke that were rising in the air from the north side of the church. Shortly, however, other and more fearful indications of the danger that threatened the church buildings began to be observed. Fitful flashes of lurid flame leapt up into the air, and were smothered in the ever increasing volume of the smoke. Then a great belt of flame—intermittent at first, but in a very short time continuous—could be seen running along the roof; and by ten minutes to nine o'clock, the most casual observer could have seen that all the fire-brigades in the world could not by any means have prevented the destruction of the roof at least. Seen from the front of the building, it seemed as if nothing was being done to save the building at all—not a hose could be seen playing, and not a scaling ladder was there reared upon the sides of the church. The flames, which had made their way through the woodwork, soon displaced the covering of slates; and at nine o'clock—such was the rapid progress of the conflagration—they had obtained complete mastery over the whole roof. Every one expected that the roof would give way at once, but it was made of good, sound materials that for several minutes resisted the power of the flames. At ten minutes past nine, however, a portion of the woodwork fell in on the south gallery of the church, exactly opposite the centre window of the Union Street front. A huge volume of flame rushed up, high over the roof, as a consequence of this; and for a moment the interior of the building, which up to this time had only had a soft, subdued light as seen through the windows, was lighted up with great brilliancy. In a few minutes more another portion of the roof, more towards the east end, fell in, and then almost immediately the whole of the centre roof-work gave way, leaving nothing but the powerful main rafters and a portion of the roofing nearest the steeple standing. Inside the church there was as yet no appearance of fire to be seen, but overhead the flames were still spreading rapidly. The remaining portion of the roof at last fell down upon the west gallery, and the entire centre of the church was thus laid open, leaving the vacant space below nothing else than a smouldering furnace, that soon was to burst forth in a general blaze. For some time after the fire was discovered it was hoped that even though the East Church should be destroyed, the ancient steeple—which had looked down on so many generations of Aberdonians—might yet be saved; but after the west portion of the roof gave way, it was seen that little less than a miracle could preserve it. The venerable relic of a long-past age was observed to be on fire about twenty minutes past nine, the point at which the flames were first seen being directly under the east face of the clock.

At this time a supply of long ladders—probably “requisitioned” from some slater’s yard—was procured, and plenty of willing hands carried them along to the places where they were required. The soldiers from the barracks arrived about the same time, and one gigantic ladder had just been placed against the West Church, when Corporal Reid, an unfortu-

nate 92nd Highlander, in attempting to scale it, fell to the ground, a distance of some feet, and broke his leg. He was immediately removed to the military hospital. With great difficulty several lengths of hose-reel were got up the ladder on to the roof of the West Church, but it was sometime before any water could be obtained. While the pipes were being arranged a very distressing accident took place. One of those who had gone on to the roof to assist with the hose-reels was a plasterer, named Robert Miller, and in the bustle and confusion that prevailed his foot somehow got into a fold of the pipe, and with the first jerk that was given by those pulling at it, he toppled over the parapet, and turning once in the descent, fell on his head on the stone flags below—a depth of about forty feet. He was quite unconscious when he was taken up, and on being removed to the Infirmary it was found that he had received a compound fracture of the skull, while several of his ribs had been broken. He is lying in a very precarious condition; indeed, it is not expected that he will long survive. While those on the roof of the West Church were trying to subdue the flames inside the steeple, the fire had obtained entire possession of the fabric of the East Church. One by one the windows facing Union Street were broken by the intense heat, the woodwork in their vicinity being all ablaze. For some time nothing was heard but the crackling of glass and the hissing sound of the water among the flames. The interior of the church at this time was one entire mass of flame that streamed upwards high over the stonework. Then the long south gallery gave way with a loud crash. The fire at this time seemed as if it were to get hold of the roof of Drum's Aisle—the entrance hall to the East Church—and the heat upon it was getting most intense. A number of men had somehow clambered out of the belfry on to the roof of the aisle, but as they saw the rapid strides with which the ravages of the fire advanced, they prudently retired, leaving, however, one solitary individual, who evidently had no idea of the danger of his situation, for he remained sitting on the parapet of the aisle enjoying his unique view of the conflagration. Getting uncomfortably warm, however, he began to see that he was in rather an awkward predicament, and he began to shout most volubly for help. He cried out for a long time for a ladder, which now was the only means of escape, but no ladder was forthcoming, and, at last, in desperation, he clambered along the stone coping, and getting over the edge of the roof, got lost to sight; but we understand that he managed to get off safely.

All this time the fire had gone on increasing in brightness, and such was the light that it gave that from about nine o'clock up to half-past eleven one could easily, at a distance of a hundred yards, have read the smallest print or written with the greatest accuracy. The stonework of the large mullioned windows soon followed the glass which it had once enclosed. The west gallery now became a prey to the flames, and the spectator could see through the windows large masses of plaster peeling off the opposite wall, while the fire rushed with lightning speed all over the labbing. The principal main rafters—great powerful, ponderous beams—still held together, but shortly after they began to drop one by one into the furnace of heat and flame below. The

fire now could be seen enveloping the pretty little pulpit, which used to be the pride of the church, and in a very few minutes it was reduced to ashes. All interest in the fire, so far as concerned the East Church, ended here, for now the building was a complete wreck, and the fire had obtained entire mastery. To save anything about it was now a clear impossibility.

The fears that had been entertained about the spire were now unhappily to be fully realised. It may be mentioned that the old clock—which had marked the flight of time for so many years—chimed her last hour at nine o'clock. At an early stage the east face of the clock had taken fire, and though there was no external evidence, the entire woodwork of which the spire was composed, and which was as dry as tinder, had fairly been taken hold of; and now that the wind veered round from south-west to south-east the flames were driven out all round the west face of the clock. From this moment it was known that the ancient structure was doomed. The pinnacles now caught fire, and at ten minutes to ten o'clock the whole of the lower part of the spire was one mass of flame. And now occurred one of the grandest sights ever witnessed in the Granite City. No pyrotechnic display that we have ever seen has equalled it in its terrific but momentary grandeur. The flames inside had shot upward to the very apex of the spire, and now that the leaden covering had been melted by the fierce heat within, the whole skeleton framework of the steeple was made visible in fiery lines. Such a sight can be seen but once in a lifetime, and when once seen it can never be forgotten. For a very few minutes did this state of things continue, and then after swaying once or twice, the old spire toppled over, falling towards the Schoolhill.

The ruthless element, however, had not yet done all its work. Floor after floor of the belfry-tower was destroyed, and at the present moment the entire peal of bells—which of late have rung the citizens so pleasantly to divine worship—lie buried in the *débris*. Whether they are irretrievably damaged remains to be seen, but a fall of some 70 or 80 feet, after enduring so much intense heat, does not augur well for their safety. Some years ago poor "D Flat" was the object of much solicitude on the part of the public, but last night all the inquiries were as to the possibility of "Auld Lowrie" being preserved. The four pinnacles remained standing for some time, but they gradually succumbed to the flames, and fell down one by one.

Drum's Aisle, it was thought, would be saved from the general wreck and ruin, but this was not to be. Its connection with the belfry doomed it, for the flames rushing from the bell-ringers' room, at once caught the roof, which, in less than twenty minutes after, had fallen in. No doubt a considerable amount of damage has been effected in the aisle, and the citizens have to be thankful that the fine statue of Provost Blaikie, by Steell, the eminent sculptor, was removed from it on the completion of the County and Municipal Buildings. It is to be hoped that the old effigies and memorial stones from the Old Cathedral of St Nicholas may have remained uninjured.

The attention of the fire brigade and their host of assistants had been directed during the whole of the latter part

of the conflagration to preventing the flames extending to the West Church. The work was arduous, difficult, and dangerous, but it would have been well performed but for the extraordinary scarcity of water. We saw at one time three hose-reels on the top of the West Church, and for a whole half hour two of these were idle, waiting for a supply of water. The pipes, we understand, had to be laid from long distances, fire-plugs not being near at hand, but, whether from the great pressure or from some other cause, there appeared to be a tremendous number of burst pipes, and the worst of it was that they were always hursting just as they were most needed. One of the great difficulties to be contended with was the lifting of the pipes to the great height, and the keeping of them up when they were once lifted; and it appeared that matters could have been much expedited had there been a good supply of lifting hooks. The exertions of the firemen to save the fabric of the West Church were, we are happy to state, successful. The whole fire was well got under by about one o'clock, though sparks were still flying from the belfry-tower as late as three o'clock this morning.

#### SCENE FROM THE NORTH SIDE.

From the point of view obtained at the Schoolhill the fire perhaps presented itself in its most destructive aspect, and the first indications of the flames making their way through the roof were seen from this side. In at the windows could be seen bright shining spots on the roof like so many stars, revealing that the fire was making progress between the ceiling and the main roof, a place to which it was almost impossible to gain access. For some time—about half-an-hour—only small wreathes of smoke were now and then visible on the outside of the roof, but the appearance of these all along the eaves was but a too sure indication of the destruction working within. Gradually the smoke increased in denseness, until it began to present a tinge of red, and then followed small jets of flame breaking out here and there. Spreading with fearful rapidity, the flames soon hurst through the roof, and for some minutes nothing was to be seen but the heavy clouds of smoke rolling off towards the north. These began to rise higher through the force of the flames, and before nine o'clock the north side of the roof was enveloped in one hurning mass. Almost simultaneously with the appearance of the flames on the outside, breaches were made on the weaker portions of the ceiling in the inside by falling timbers, lighting up the entire church with great brilliancy. But only for a short space did this state of things remain. The heavy timbering of the roof began to fall through the ceiling, setting fire to the seating in the body of the church. At this stage all hopes of the splendid building being rescued from utter demolition were given up, and a more complete mastery of flames over all attempts at prevention could seldom be witnessed. Outside and inside, the flames spread with amazing rapidity, defying even the possibility of being conquered, and, indeed, no attempt was made to play water on the surging mass of fire within the building. The kindling of the interior woodwork in the body of the church, while no part of the building might be said to have become destroyed, revealed with terrible distinctness the splendid

structure that was soon to be reduced to ruins by the remorseless flames. The beautiful interior, decorated only a few years ago by Cottier, had a grand effect viewed through the windows, and a more sorrowful sight than the gradual falling in of the richly painted ceiling could scarcely be conceived. Portion after portion fell at intervals, and so furiously did the flames burn that there could scarcely be said to have been a general falling in of the roof. Before half-past nine there was nothing left of the interior but the skeleton pillars, and stray beams hanging in every possible direction from the roof, ceiling, and galleries, spreading the flames to all the corners of the building. The scene was now truly grand. The four walls of the now doomed building enclosed a complete body of roaring flames, which, like a huge boiling cauldron, threw its flames high in the air, while the puny jets of water that were being thrown upon them were not even visible by the slightest hiss of steam. For more than an hour there was a continual shower of sparks and small pieces of burning wood, the heavier portions of which were borne by the wind a great distance, one or two individuals averring that they picked up pieces of hot charred wood in the Gallowgate and St Paul Street. That these pieces were blown from the scene of the East Church fire need not be doubted, and it is unquestionable that all the surrounding houses were for a time in the utmost danger of being ignited. On the roofs of the more adjacent houses looking into the churchyard, parties were to be seen pouring down an abundant supply of water on the slates, and dashing it upon the window frames, most of which were quite scorched. In the back store of Mr Fraser, ironmonger, which happens to be within a hundred yards of the churches, there was stored a considerable quantity of paraffin, and the danger from the flying sparks was imminent enough to cause alarm to those who knew of the presence of so much inflammable material. One of the dwelling-houses was alarmed from top to bottom by a cry that the roof had taken fire, and true enough one of the vents began to give forth a startling sheet of flames, but a bucket of water poured in at the top made short work of what fire there was. It is supposed, however, that the vent had been set fire to by a piece of burning wood falling into it. But to return to the church—which by this time was blazing away with the utmost fury—on all hands were heard cries for a ladder, so that the roof of the West Church might be gained, and from that post the hose reels directed to the junction of the churches to prevent, if possible, the progress of the flames to the West Church. To save the belfry was hopeless. The flames had already got inside amongst the woodwork, and in a short time the smoke began to issue from the corners. Fears were entertained, and loudly expressed, that the fire would burn away the lower portion, and that the greater part of the tower would fall either into the body of the burning church, or be blown by the wind into the north division of the churchyard; but neither supposition turned out to be correct. The crowd instinctively fell back, expecting a crash. Loud cries were made to the men on the West Church roof to keep back for their lives, but still the grand old tower remained in its place a prey to the augment-

ing-fury of the flames. Like a mighty torch it burst into one stupendous sheet of roaring fire. On all hands, expressions of great regret were heard at the fate of the belfry. What had stood for ages as a cherished relic of past history, in an incredibly short space became stripped of its outer covering, and with melancholy nakedness showed its timbers in bright relief amid the scorching conflagration. But all the spectators did not seem capable of realising the terrible havoc. Amid the fearful scene, the sorry sight of one of the firemen coming un-luckily in the way of the discharge of a hose reel, created quite a shout of laughter. At ten minutes to ten the whole spire, which was entirely constructed of wood and covered with lead, was enveloped in flames, and pitiable indeed seemed the efforts of the firemen to play water on it. Their attempts were futile in the extreme, and only revealed their utter weakness to cope with the mastering element. Streams of molten lead ran down the sides of the rapidly vanishing tower, shining with peculiar effect amidst the flames. When the burning of the spire was at its height, the wind seemed to increase slightly and spread out the flames like a perfect cloud of fire. Nearest the spire the flames were of a bright vivid hue, then a dull heavy twining mass of half flame half smoke, breaking at last into immense showers of sparks and huge wreathes of murky vapours. Such a terrible mass of flame must have been visible for miles round, and to the scene of the conflagration many came from the other side of the Dee and Woodside. But only for fifteen minutes did its actual consuming by the flames appear visible. About 10 o'clock it was seen to waver on its skeleton supports, and then with a helpless crash it fell, the force of the wind making it topple to the north side. A portion fell on the wall of the burning church and brought down a small portion of the upper coping, but not so much damage was done in this respect as was feared. If it had fallen directly north, it would have alighted on the roof of the north wing, and if that roof had been set on fire it would have been almost impossible to save the West Church from being, at least, partially injured. As it happened, it was most fortunate that it fell where it did. Very little of the falling timbers fell upon the ground, but the heavy weathercock was precipitated a good distance among the gravestones. There it lay for some time, until some kindly individuals picked it up and got it conveyed to a neighbouring dwelling-house. When the upper part of the spire fell the operations of the fire brigade could be carried on with more effect. At least, there was not the same danger attached to their work, although all their efforts were having but a poor influence. A second part of the spire, chiefly the heavy scantling in the lower portion, fell in about a quarter of an hour after the upper portion, and from the hurrying *débris* that came hurling down the sides, several of the men narrowly escaped accident. Even the crowd below could not be kept out of danger, and only when a huge beam fell in the midst of them were they warned of the extreme risk they were running in keeping too near the building. Confusion seemed to reign everywhere. Orders were given from all quarters, and from nobody in particular, to

those in charge of the hose reels, to have water played on the West Church at different parts of the roof. Howls, for they could scarcely be called cries, were made for more length of reel, but this demand seemed unheeded, probably for the reason that all the reels were engaged, and more than one of them had been so roughly handled as to have burst, and become useless. A hose was taken through the West Church passages to the doors in connection with the belfry, and the woodwork there was kept cool by a supply of water. Only at this place and at the junction of the roofs lay the danger to the West Church, and when all chance to doing anything for either the East Church or belfry was gone, the whole endeavours of the men were concentrated, as far as the general confusion would allow, to these particular spots. While the lower part of the tower was burning loud reports were now and again heard as of something exploding, but these sounds were probably caused by the fall of accumulated masses of *debris* that had gathered on each floor as the fire descended. At what time the bells fell is unknown. But they must have come down with the upper portion of the belfry, as the beams from which they were hung were of wood, and must have been burning some time before the flames broke through the outside of the spire. When the flames had partially subsided, the bells were found lying at the bottom of the belfry, but it is impossible to say how much they may be damaged. It is too much to hope that they can have fallen such a distance after submitting to an intense heat and escaped without material injury. A few attempts were made to rescue some of the records in the rooms, but so far as could be seen, only one was brought to the outside, along with a desk and some ricketty forms—melancholy relics to be saved from such a noble structure.

#### THE SCENE FROM NETHERKIRKGATE.

Passing down this thoroughfare at 8:40, directly after the alarm of fire had been given, we found on reaching the brae at Wallace Nook, that the flames in the centre of the roof, which had been visible some minutes before, had given place to a thick smoke, curling over the east end of the church; not in any formidable quantity apparently, and the impression of the comparatively few spectators that had then gathered, seemed to be that nothing very serious would after all happen. This continued for perhaps five minutes, when the smoke began to come in greater volume, with occasionally the appearance of flame struggling through it. Light was observable in the side through the main window, but this also temporarily disappeared almost entirely. Soon, however, the progress of the burning became but too evident. Dense volumes of smoke were now curling over the end of the church, and at short intervals the flames shot upwards, lapping the pinnacles on the east gable to their full height, while showers of sparks were scattered over the adjoining houses in St Nicholas Street and north side of Correction Wynd. Several times masses of burning material fell through the ceiling into the interior of the church, lighting up the beautiful stained glass centre window, in every part more distinctly than perhaps had ever been done before. But alas for its speedy fate! Though

the wind fortunately continued quiet it was now evident the fire in the roof of the church was making rapid progress; hurning toward the east gable, and gathering strength and fierceness as it went. The flames shot up whiter than before, lighting up the dense sea of faces that now filled the Kirk-gate up to the furthest point from which a view of the conflagration could be got; one or two vivid gleams of fire from the floor as well as the roof were observable inside the church; and then a break in the stained-glass window near the top. Directly after, the whole mass of the glass in each of the three lights, with the exception of fragments here and there, seemed to crumhle or melt away like ice before the intense heat within the church. This occurred about a quarter to nine o'clock. Shortly before, indications of smoke coming through the roof of the lead-covered spire were noticed; but it was thought, or at least hoped, by those who saw it that it was merely smoke from the hurning "Quire" which had been drawn thither. And for another quarter of an hour fully nothing occurred to disturb this belief. The fire had burnt closely up to the east gable wall and partly spent itself; the flames raging for a time fiercely about the gallery staircase at the north-east corner—the intense heat hursting the window there, and the glass giving way entirely before it. The interior appeared now through the two open windows as one mass of fire, pieces of the woodwork falling every few seconds, while the flames had ceased to rise over the roof as before. It was at this stage that a man, holding the end of a fire-hose, was seen to discharge a squirt of water at the smaller window mentioned. Just when it was hoped that the destruction would now be limited to the interior of the "Quire" or East Church, flames and dense smoke were again observed. The fire seemed to be progressing westward in the roof; all at once the trailing wreaths of smoke about the spire became thick and heavy, curling closely round from the base to the top, only the gilded weather cock remaining visible. "It's gone too!" was the exclamation all round after a few moments of close scrutiny. And it was only too true. Flame followed the denser smoke, rapidly running steadily up the spire, but not shooting out to any distance. At this stage the scene became one of intense excitement on the part of the spectators, and of absolute suhlimity as regarded the spectacle. The vapour that rolled upward in huge masses—half of flame, half of smoke—bore largely the tinge of fused metal—dark, red, violet, and blue being intermingled in strikingly magnificent masses, while the body of the spire appeared as if really sheeted in liquid silver. This magnificent spectacle lasted for only a very short time, when the interior timbers became visible; the outer covering had evidently gone completely, and the framework of the spire might be reckoned over almost stick by stick. The fire now rapidly did its work; the framing gave way half up on the north side, the finial was seen to sway, and with a crash the spire fell into the interior of the now desolated Quire in a slanting direction towards the north side.

#### THE SCENE FROM THE SUBURBS.

Shortly after the outbreak of the fire, the dense smoke and lurid sky indicated that a conflagration of no ordinary nature was raging in the town. Hundreds of people from Woodside,



Auchmull, and other places in the vicinity of the town rushed to the spot with all speed, and soon the news was spread from house to house that the East Parish Church was in flames. The increasing vividness of the fire caused intense excitement, and not a few made their way to the spot from a considerable distance. A dull fringe of darkness seemed to surround the town, through which could be seen in full relief the factory stalks and spires of surrounding churches. The ruddy glare often hurst through this dark skirt as a tongue of flame darted higher than the rest, and the reflection was thrown with great grandeur on the surrounding hills. As might have been expected, conjectures of the most extravagant nature were indulged in by those at a distance as to what part of the city was burning. The effect upon the sea was, to say the least, sublime, while the weird flicker thrown upon the house-tops had a peculiarly striking appearance. From most of the prominent windows the blaze occasionally lit up the sea of faces who were eagerly watching the progress of the devouring element. We believe the reflection of the fire was seen for more than ten miles off, and watched till past midnight. The guns from H. M. S. Clyde gave the alarm with great promptitude, and many who were housed for the night hastened to the burning edifice. The pier and Torry district were lighted up with great brilliancy, and the Town-House tower, illuminated with dazzling clearness, presented a striking effect. The vast multitude which thronged the streets did not lessen till an early hour this morning, and some who had come a long way from the country did not leave till the fury of the fire was spent.

#### MISCELLANEOUS.

As we have stated, the first signs of any fire about the building was in connection with the sunlights, and there is not the least doubt that the fire originated from the lighting apparatus. The sunlights had been in use for an hour or two, a prayer meeting having taken place prior to the choir practising referred to above. A member of the choir states that he remarked on entering that the atmosphere was more than usually heated and oppressive.

The city churches are all insured, but how far the damage in this case is covered by insurance, does not appear from the printed accounts.

At 3.15 this morning, Andrew Birse, a police labourer, fell from the top of the West Church as he was about to leave the roof, and was terribly injured.

We understand that the entire staff of Infirmary surgeons remained in the hospital to a late hour in order that they might be of service should any casualties occur.

Soon after the breaking out of the fire the Lord Provost and most of the Town Council and Police Officials were on the scene. As already stated the military rendered efficient services during the evening, as also the men of the Clyde, many of whom took an active part in subduing the flames.

#### HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, &c.

The town was originally one parish (St Nicholas), with, in the days of Episcopacy, a rectory and vicarage, and the church was dedicated to the patron saint. The date of the erection of the church is not known, but in the year 1477 the

Magistrates and Town Council, at the solicitation of Bishop Spens, began to erect the Quire of St Nicholas as an addition to the building as it previously stood; and this quire was afterwards transformed into the "East Kirk." Alexander Chalmers, the provost of the city, superintended the work, which was carried out by John Gray and Richard Ancram, architects and master masons, at salaries of 25 and 20 merks respectively. The stones, it is recorded, were brought by sea from Causie, in Moray, while the lime for mortar was purchased at Dysart, in Fifeshire, at 16s per chalders. Thirty years elapsed before the building was finished, and it was duly consecrated in 1508 by William Elphinston, Bishop of Aberdeen. At the Reformation the nave and its quire were divested of their altars, stalls, &c., and rendered suitable for the plainer forms and accompaniments of worship adopted by the men of the Reformed faith. It was then usual for the worshippers to bring their seats along with them, but in order to suit the public convenience, the magistrates permitted members of the congregation to fit up pews for themselves and their families. The old church gradually fell into decay, was abandoned in 1732, and fell into ruins ten years afterwards, the internal fittings of carved oak, however, being saved. The "Quire," now the East Kirk, which was a much less ancient structure, still remained standing, and was used as the City Church. In process of time the present West Church was erected on the site of the ancient edifice, and was opened for public worship on Sunday, 9th November, 1755. In the year 1828 the Court of Teinds divided the town into six parishes, viz., East, West, North, South, Greyfriars, and St Clements, all under the patronage of the Town Council; and in 1834 a new arrangement of the whole into nine *quoad sacra* parishes was made, under the authority of the General Assembly. By this time the old East Church had fallen into decay, and it was determined that it should be replaced by a new one. Plans were drawn out by Mr Archibald Simpson, the eminent architect, to whose talent the city is indebted for so many of its finest buildings. The new church was proceeded with, and gradually developed into an elegant and massive structure in the flat Gothic style of architecture. The building, it is needless to inform Aberdonians, was one of great beauty, and formed one of the most attractive "lions" of the town. It was seated for 1700, and cost about £5000, part of which was paid by the congregation, and part by the town. In the towns account's, laid before the Council, in November, 1837, we find this entry:—"Payment on account of building East Church, exclusive of £1500 raised from the congregation, £2484 1s 8d." The new church was opened for public worship in 7th May, 1837. In the *Aberdeen Herald* of May 13th of that year, we find the following regarding the opening of the church:—"This elegant edifice was opened for public worship on Sabbath last, when the Rev. Mr Foote, pastor of the church, preached an appropriate and impressive discourse in the forenoon. The Rev. Mr Murray officiated in the afternoon; and the Rev. Mr Foote in the evening concluded the services of the day. The church was densely crowded, and we are happy to understand that, notwithstanding its great size, it is well adapted for hearing even in the most remote seats. The collection made on Sabbath

last amounted in all to £101 2s 6½d. Two anonymous contributions, as they could not be otherwise acknowledged, deserve to be particularly noticed. A twenty-pound note in a letter to Mr Robert Dyce, in which were the words 'Hänsel for the New East Church Plate,' and a ten-pound note in a letter to Mr Ledingham as 'A tribute of respect for the memory of the late Rev. D. Ross.'" A few years ago the Church was painted by Cottier at considerable cost, and a fine choir seat, presented by Mr Rose, was introduced about the same time, Drum's Aisle being also restored. Since then a beautiful memorial window, in memory of the late Mr Benjamin Moir, replaced the plain obscured glass put in when the church was built. Underneath the church was St Mary's Chapel, in which the Thursday services were held, marriages were solemnised, and the meetings of the Presbytery and Session were usually held. St Mary's Chapel was fitted up with the oak woodwork of the old church. The Chapel, which is covered by a stone roof, remains intact, having suffered no further injury than was caused by the filtration into it of a quantity of water poured on the upper part of the building.

Between the East and West Churches is situated Drum's Aisle. Respecting this portion of the buildings, Kennedy in his "Annals" says "The East and West Churches are separated from each other by the great arches of the steeple and by two aisles, one of which, on the south was the place of sepulture of the family of Irvine of Drum in ancient times, and is distinguished by the name of Drum's Aisle. Of late years it has been fitted up for the occasional meetings of the Synod and Presbytery. The north aisle was known by the name of Collinson's, as being the burial place of an ancient and eminent family of that name in the town. The extent of these structures from south to north is about one hundred feet. Above the great arches there rises a square tower, about twelve feet high, which forms the basement of the steeple. From each corner of it springs a small wooden spire, covered with lead, and in the centre the great steeple is constructed of an octagonal form, of oak, and covered with lead. It ends in a point, and is surmounted by a gilt ball with a weathercock on the top, which is about 140 feet from the level of the ground below. At what period the steeple was erected we have not been informed, but it certainly existed previous to the Reformation." Another old authority says, "Though the whole of the cross moulding is commonly called Drum's Aisle, yet, properly speaking, that end of it where the Synod meets should only be so called, for there the Drum family have always been buried. That they had originally a property in it is evident from the family arms being cut in the stone pier between the windows, and stamped upon the lead of the roof. The town of Aberdeen never would have merited this, had not the laird of Drum merited, by his benefactions to the building, the exclusive privilege of burying in that part of it. The family also founded an altarage in the Church of St Nicholas to the honour of God and St Ninian, who had three altars in that church. Those of the Drum family who are buried in this aisle pay no burial dues to the town, unless they had been *foris-familiated*."

The old bells in the steeple were five in number, and gave

out the following tones, viz., F, G, A flat, B flat, and C. At the commencement of 1857 a proposal was mooted to complete the octave by procuring other three bells. To Dr William Fraser was due the credit of this suggestion. On it being brought before the public, Provost Webster called a preliminary meeting, which was held in February, and before the end of that month Mr Boswell, of Messrs Warner's establishment, London, came and examined the bells, of whose quality he gave a very favourable report. Two plans for completing the octave were suggested, viz.—to add D, E, and F, converting the A flat into A natural; or to procure a larger bell than either, the sound being a full tone below it (E flat), and adding the upper D and E flat. The latter scheme was adopted. Subscriptions were commenced, and soon amounted to £600. The most munificent subscription was that of Mr John Smith, banker, Leeds, who presented an entire bell valued at 60 guineas. The Town Council gave 50 guineas. In the work of superintending the casting, E. B. Denison, Esq., Q.C., a high authority on these matters, took an active interest, and gave valuable assistance. The largest of the new bells weighed  $32\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. To make the peal of bells more complete, a supplementary bell, D flat, got up by subscription, was at the same time added. When finally set the bells stood E flat, F, G, A flat, B flat, C, D flat, D natural, and E flat. The bells were cast by the Messrs Warner, London, and arrived in Aberdeen in the spring of 1858. They were, without loss of time, placed in the steeple, and in the month of August were inaugurated by a company of trained ringers brought down from London for that purpose. The Town Council caused the woodwork of the bell chamber of the steeple to be thoroughly repaired, and the flooring renewed, when the bells were erected. In Kennedy's Annals of Aberdeen we read—"In the year 1351 William de Leith, Provost of Aberdeen, presented to the church a magnificent donation of two large bells, the one called "Laurence" and the other "Maria," which he purchased at his own expense. In ancient times the former bell was never allowed to be rung or tolled but on the occasion of the anniversaries of the deaths of *Fyfe, Roule, and Davidson*, who were eminently distinguished as three successive Chief Magistrates of the town." In another place, Kennedy says—"In the tower there are placed the three ancient bells belonging to the church, called *St Laurence, Saint Nicholas, and Maria*, with two additional ones, which have been lately furnished, by order of the Council. There is also an excellent public clock which chimes the quarters, with a large dial-plate on each side of the tower pointing out the hours and minutes." The Laurence weighed 4000 lbs., was four feet diameter at the mouth, and three and a half feet high, the metal being very thick.

It may be of interest to note that in the north-east corner of the old church was interred the famed Provost Davidson, and the place was marked by the following inscription:—"Sir Robert Davidson, slain at Harlaw, Equesteratus." This battle was fought in 1411; and in 1740 the remains of the body were discovered, with a small crimson cap covering the head. The north transept or aisle of the church is called Collinson's Aisle; and the effigies of a man and woman lying in the sole of a window in the north-east corner of the West

Church are supposed to represent Provost Collinson and his wife, who were removed from a niche in that aisle, where these persons had been interred in the sixteenth century. A small tablet in the north wall of the old East Church marked the spot where Mr Adam Heriot, the first Protestant minister of St Nicholas Church, was buried. That tablet is now in the east wall of Collinson's Aisle. It bears a Latin inscription, which has been thus translated:—"In this grave is deposited the body of Effemie Schives, a pious and discreet woman, a native of the province of Fife, who was formerly the dutiful wife of Mr A. Heriot, preacher of the merits of Jesus Christ at Aberdeen; the soul of which Effemie was raised to heaven, in virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ, at Aberdeen, on the 3rd February, 1568. about eight o'clock in the evening. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."

The following appeared in the second edition of Saturday:—

The extent of destruction caused by the fire can now be more clearly seen. At the present moment (10 a. m.) the burning has been completely stopped, except that amongst the mass of *debris* in the interior of the East Church and Drum's Aisle a dull smouldering is still going on, as testified by the smoke that continues to force its way outward.

The interior of the East Church presents a singularly desolate appearance. The roof is quite gone, the walls all round are stripped entirely bare of plaster and lathing, while the effects of the intense heat are visible on the broken lining and charred stones. The windows have scarcely a shred of glass in them, and the mullions are in some cases a good deal damaged. There is no trace whatever left of the fine pulpit, or indeed anything else of value, the interior to several feet in depth being simply a mass of uncouth rubbish—lime, charred beams and planks, roof slates, and pieces of broken and bent iron and brass work lying in dire confusion.

In the Aisle, the scene is, if possible, still more dreary. The charred and blackened walls, moist with water poured over them, stand. On looking upward, some of the beams at the base of the burnt spire are seen to remain blackened and burnt into; and one of the smaller bells has fallen in between a beam and the top of the side wall preventing its descent to the ground. Below, sticking out of the huge heap of rubbish, are indications of several of the others; but the eye at once fastens on a large bell lying nearly atop. At a glance we see that it is the famous Lawrence or "Old Lowrie," as it has been fondly and familiarly styled. But alas! For all purposes save those of old metal poor Lowrie's usefulness is done. The upper part of the rim presents a big ugly crack, into which one might almost thrust his finger; and the top of the bell is also broken.

Clambering down past the broken and burnt staircase of the East Church we get to St Mary's Chapel. The chapel has a groined stone roof, which happily has acted as a perfect safeguard. Little more than "the smell of fire" has touched St Mary's Chapel, whose bits of fine carved woodwork and other furnishings are all quite safe; the adjoining session-house is partially damaged, but not so much so as might have been looked for when the fire once gained an entry to it. We observe that

the large antique oak cabinet—probably its most valuable piece of furniture—remains intact.

As regards the West Church, too, the damage done is wonderfully little. We understand that there was great reluctance on the part of some gentlemen to allow the roof of this church to be cut while the fire was going on; but chiefly through the urgency of Baillies Donald and Esslemont it was done; and most fortunately so. The plaster of the church at the east end has suffered slight damage—very slight indeed—and some water has penetrated to the floor below. But the great risk the church ran of sharing the fate of the East Church must be evident to all, and that risk was averted.

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From *Daily Free Press* of Monday, 12th Oct., 1874.

#### FRESH ALARM OF FIRE.

At about half-past five o'clock on Saturday morning, the fire seemed to be thoroughly conquered, although not entirely subdued. Woodwork was still blazing away on the belfry, and the slightest current of air sent up a shower of sparks from the smouldering embers. Inside the West Church all was quiet, and apparently secure. Only a small stream of water had come in at a part of the eaves; but beyond wetting the walls for a few feet, no damage was done. The magnificent tapestry at the east end of the church behind the Magistrates' seat was quite dry, and apparently free from any damage. Shortly after six o'clock, however, a fresh alarm was raised that the corner of the roof connecting with that of the belfry had taken fire. As we mentioned in our Saturday's report, it was at this particular point where the greatest danger was to be feared. Immediately on a symptom of fire showing itself, an opening in the roof was made, a hose-rod introduced, and there being a good pressure of water at the time, the flames were got under in an hour or so. But no longer was the West Church free of damage. The quantity of water that came through the ceiling has rendered the building totally unfit for public worship, and will be so for some weeks at least. In addition to the wetting of the seats, some of which will be none the worse of the necessary cleaning they must now get, it is feared that material injury is done to the antique tapestry, which was wrought, as many of our readers are aware, by Miss Jamesone, daughter of the celebrated artist. In the course of Saturday it was taken down, and it was found that the lime from the walls and the dust that had been upon it had been "clagged" by the water, with which it was thoroughly saturated. The chairs that stand in the Magistrates' seat were taken down to the door when the fire broke out, and they have been left sitting in one of the passages.

#### THE RUINS.

During the whole of Saturday the gates of the churchyard were besieged with anxious crowds, eager to have a look at the still smouldering ruins. From the outside very little of the terrible destruction that had taken place was to be seen, except the decapitated tower and the glassless windows. A stranger passing along Union Street at any point at which

the churches are visible, would remark little amiss. The complete demolition of the steeple, down to the stone walls, has left the appearance of a half-finished square tower, but so far as can be ascertained, with the exception of a small portion on the north side, the splendid walls of the East Church remain intact. It was across this portion which has suffered injury that the upper part of the tower, which was constructed of heavy oak timbers, fell with such a fearful crash as to have been heard over all the town. Around the foot of the belfry the charred and broken timbers lie in heaps, and splintered pieces show that the oak had been as fresh as it was at the time when the spire was erected, some centuries ago. Inside, the scene is desolate indeed. On entering at the belfry door, we came upon a heterogeneous mass of *débris* several feet deep, and consisting of pieces of masonry, lime, balls of lead in all shapes, fragments of bell metal, iron rods, charred beams, etc. Long after daylight came in, there were continual signs of fire still lurking in this mass, and water was kept playing upon it until after mid-day. Only two bells in anything like their former condition were at this time visible—revered "Old Lowrie" lying mouth upwards, and displaying a ruinous rent on the upper side; and the smaller sized D flat hanging precariously between a half-burned beam and the wall. Whether any of the other seven bells are buried unbroken will only be known when the rubbish is removed, but the chances are very much against such a supposition, there being too many small pieces lying hither and thither. The immense thickness of "Lowrie" could alone have saved it from utter destruction in its fall through burning timbers, a distance of apparently about fifty feet. In the afternoon an attempt was made to lower down the D flat, but through some unfortunate hitch it was allowed to fall, though, curiously enough, it does not seem to have sustained much injury by its rapid descent. Several of the beams in the belfry, from which the bells were hung, and which must have been of great thickness, still remain in their places, the skeleton wreck of all the internal floors and staircases of the belfry.

Our recollections of the old "Lowrie," now laid so low, with its skull cracked and a big hole through it; are those of its being the finest bell, in proportion to its size and weight, one is likely to hear anywhere. There was nothing of that hard *birr* and harsh metallic clang about it which is so common in modern bells. It gave forth a full, bold, and exceedingly mellow tone ever pleasant to the ear. Since, however, operations were performed upon it when the late additions to the number of bells were made, it has sounded differently, and its tone was never so well brought out as before. Much depends upon the particular place where the clapper strikes, for the stroke must neither be too far from the lip nor too near it to bring out the full tone of the bell; it looked as though some readjustment of this kind were required. The present model of the bell, should it be recast, ought to be carefully retained, and there ought to be no admixture of any other metal. The bells will be greatly missed on Sunday, and should any one or two be happily safe, might they not be temporarily hung, say in the South Church tower in Belmont Street? Their old position, however, might be improved upon. The tower itself was too low, and being sur-

rounded with so much masonry, the sounds were not heard to the best advantage. In any new design of a tower this consideration should not be lost sight of. Moreover, the tower requires to be large, as it was found lately that there was barely room for the whole number, and some of the beams had to be made thinner than they ought to have been on that account. The peal was a very complete one, composing an octave (besides the D flat), and in this respect no improvement or alteration need be desired; the volume of tone was also sufficiently massive, originating as it did from such a deep note as E flat. Doubtless the authorities will see to it that any broken pieces of the metal are searched out and given to the bells to which they belong, as the quantity of metal is an element in the right tune or pitch of each bell. As the Messrs Warner performed the work so satisfactorily before, it might also be very proper to employ or consult them again.

From the belfry access is gained to the inside of the ruined church. It is impossible to conceive how complete has been the dreadful wreck made in one short hour. A sad, desolate sight it is now. While the work of destruction was going on, the tremendous fury of the unassuageable flames compelled a spectator to admire the grand and even awe-inspiring sublimity of the rolling clouds of fire, but even then a pang of regret would mingle with the other feelings, at seeing so valuable and cherished a building going impetuously to wreck and ruin. How little has been left to mark the place of the splendid interior of the church. Strewed in indescribable confusion on the ground nothing is seen but a blackened mass of charred materials, and so completely had the fire done its work that the entire floor was hurned up, and the sleeper walls levelled to the ground by the falling timbers. Several of the iron pillars that supported the galleries still remain standing in grim loneliness, and the only other objects that yet possess a semblance of their former selves are the cones of the sunlights, that lie in a miserably battered condition almost directly under their "former habitation." The walls are completely stripped of lath and plaster, and with the exception of the straggling pillars, there is not the slightest indication of where the large massive galleries stood, or the place that once knew the handsome pulpit. The insense heat that the bricks had undergone gave them an appearance of being freshly hurned in a kiln, and without doubt a hot enough kiln it must have proved. The action of the fire on the freestone mullions and cusps of the windows produced the most remarkable effect. Soon after the zinc framing began to run, the freestone mullions crumbled rapidly away as if they too were melting with the extraordinary heat. With the exception of the east window and the large window in Drum's Aisle, the whole of the other windows have been gutted almost completely, and only portions of the cusps are left hanging. Nothing apparently could withstand the heat but the granite, for even the iron rods seemed unable to resist being melted.

Although St Mary's Chapel has fortunately escaped serious injury, the vestry has suffered considerably, and amongst the property destroyed in this room is included the minister's robe, besides the greater portion of the church books and papers. The only papers saved are contained in a small



cabinet that was carried to the outside, and after the fire was extinguished one of the constables picked up two cases containing plans of the graveyard. Mention of the graveyard brings to mind the peculiar appearance the north portion of the cemetery presented when daylight came in. The grass, while it had been unregardingly trodden on, was almost black with the embers of the sparks, continual showers of which fell for more than an hour during the fire. So alarmingly were the sparks and pieces of burning wood flying about—some of them a great distance, and even towards the vicinity of the Broad Hill—that the utmost dread and consternation prevailed for some time. More than one family about the neighbourhood of Nelson Street fled from their houses when they saw the firebrands being carried in the direction of the Powder Magazine. It so happens that more than ordinary attention has been drawn to the fact that about thirty tons of gunpowder is stored in the Magazine, and judging from the wreck and ruin wrought by the explosion of two or three tons some days ago in London, when the houses were shaken for miles round, few will doubt that there was cause for alarm.

#### RELIC GATHERING.

Although but few were admitted near the ruins, many of those who did gain admission seemed anxious to obtain souvenirs of the disastrous event. Pieces of burned Bibles (and how many of these as well as psalm, hymn, and tunebooks must have been consumed?), fragments of lead that had run from the old steeple, chips of charred wood, anything, in short, that could be conveniently preserved as a relic. Large pieces of books were found here and there completely burned through, but still preserving an appearance of solidity. One of these pieces—part of a Bible—has been brought to our office, and among the few verses discernible on one of the sides is the following somewhat startling one:—"Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in His law, nor in His statutes, nor in His testimonies, therefore this evil has happened unto you as at this day." Perhaps this text may be some consolation to the ardent youth who felt quite indignant at the remark which fell from a sorrowful old widow who was overheard to lament, "Ay, it's a sad affair; if it had only been the theatre, or some sic place, a body widna hae cared sae muckle." It is, however, somewhat curious that such a verse should have turned up under the circumstances, and remained perfectly legible and easily read.

#### DEATH OF ONE OF THE INJURED MEN.

The plasterer named Robert Miller, who was precipitated by a base-reel from the top of the West Church—a distance of about 40 feet—to the flags below, was found, when taken to the Infirmary, to have sustained a compound fracture of the skull. Most unexpectedly, he lingered on, hovering between life and death, during the whole of Saturday and through the following night, but he ultimately expired yesterday afternoon about a quarter past one. From his appearance and the discharges of blood that were issuing from his mouth while he was lying in an unconscious state,

it was evident that he had received serious internal injury sufficient to have caused death had the skull not been harmed at all. Miller resided at Gilcomston, and leaves a widow but no family. Inquiries at the Infirmary were so numerous concerning the condition of the two men who were lying injured that it was deemed expedient to post up hulletins at the gate at intervals during yesterday forenoon. The medical men were surprised at Miller holding out so long as he did; and only his strong, powerful constitution could have sustained him under such injuries for such a length of time. Andrew Birss, the police labourer, who also fell from the roof, has had a most miraculous escape. So much better is he, that it is expected he will be able to leave the Hospital to-day or to-morrow. There are no signs of internal injuries having been received by him; indeed, after recovering from the immediate stunning effects of the fall, he was almost ready to leave for home. The soldier that got his leg broken is also progressing rapidly towards recovery. In addition to the accidents already recorded, that happened on the memorable night of Friday, a man slipped his foot in the hurry and broke his arm, and a lad was struck by one of the ladders and got his collar bone fractured.

#### ANOTHER OUTBREAK OF THE FIRE.

Between six and seven o'clock last evening, flames were observed lurking in Drum's Aisle, and a relay of the fire brigade was immediately set to work with a hose reel. In less than an hour the fire was got under, having arisen, it is supposed, through the falling of some of the beams in the roof, which had not been got at by the water. About six o'clock sparks were seen to fly from the remaining portion of the steeple, the beams having been flanned by the sharp wind that was blowing. During the whole of Saturday and yesterday water was freely played on the lower portions of the building, but it was difficult to get at the upper parts, nor was there thought to be any danger from that quarter. By the fresh igniting of the woodwork in Drum's Aisle, the West Church was again placed in imminent danger, but fortunately the fire was discovered ere it had spread to any extent. During the night constables were set to keep watch in case of any further outbreak.

#### THE INSURANCE ON THE PROPERTY.

We are definitely informed that the buildings destroyed are covered by insurance to the extent of £7000. Of that sum £5000 is upon the church, £1000 on the steeple, and £1000 on the peal of bells. It may be possible to replace the interior of the church for about £5000, but the sum of £2000 will be miserably inefficient to erect a steeple and restore the bells, for it is absolutely necessary, if an attempt be made to rebuild the steeple, that the old one be razed to the foundation.

#### THE SUPPLY OF WATER AT THE FIRE.

So much has been said on this subject, on almost all hands, that some explanation of a public nature will be required from the authorities or those who have the management of

the fire brigade. Without taking any further notice at present of what is being said, it might be remarked that perhaps the seat of a fire could not have been more difficult to get at. The fire cocks were situated at long distances from the burning building; but the height of the building itself, and the rapidity with which the flames burst through the roof were still greater difficulties. Even on the roof of the West Church, where there was no fire underneath to render working difficult, serious accidents occurred, and at least there was some room for doubting the expediency of making an attack on the East Church roof when the fire had got such a hold between the ceiling and main roof. However, there are loud complaints on other points, and these will require to be attended to in some shape or other.

#### THE SERVICES IN THE MUSIC HALL.

When it was found that the West Church was so much damaged by the water as to dispel any hope of conducting the communion services in it, the two congregations agreed to convene in the Music Hall, morning and evening, as one congregation. Accordingly, early on Saturday, posters were put out announcing that such would be the case. At both services the hall was quite filled; and in the morning Rev. A. I. Robertson and Rev. Norman Macleod, Blair-Atbole, officiated, and in the evening Rev. Mr Paterson, Dunfermline. Mr Robertson conducted the preliminary devotional exercises, and in his prayers made special reference to the calamity that had befallen them, denying both congregations the privilege of partaking at the present season of the holy communion. Over all the vast assemblage there seemed an air of sadness when any reference was made to the destruction of the church. During the reading of a portion of one of the psalms given out to be sung was this appearance most observable, and there was no one in the audience but was deeply touched as Mr Robertson read the lines:—

Thy saints take pleasure in her stones,  
Her very dust to them is dear.  
All heathen lands and kingly thrones  
On earth Thy glorious name shall fear.  
God in His glory shall appear  
When Sion He builds and repairs.  
He shall regard and lend His ear  
Unto the needy's humble prayers:  
Th' afflicted's pray'r He will not scorn—  
All times this shall be on record;  
And generations yet unborn  
Shall praise and magnify the Lord.

In the evening Mr Paterson also made a passing reference in his prayers to the destruction of their fondly-cherished house of prayer, but beyond that nothing was directly said on the subject. Intimation was made that the joint congregations would meet again in the same place next Sunday. In most of the churches in town, so far as we can ascertain, remarks, either in prayer or in the sermons, were made on the unfortunate occurrence; and everywhere the utmost sympathy has been expressed towards the houseless congregation.









