

## 42.39/34

### Translation of the account

*Relacion Neuva y Verdadera del formidable incendio que ha sucedido en la ciuda de Londres. Valencia 1666.*

On Sunday, the twelfth of September of this present year, at three o'clock in the morning, fire broke out in a blacksmiths forge. The whole house was soon in flames, and the fire extended to the neighbourhood. The result was that in hours - since the streets were narrow, the wind strong and most of the houses built of pinewood - the fire, which no human efforts could check, was carried on the winds of the wind over an enormous area. It was carried to the finest street in the city inhabited by merchants, the street which is called Paternoster Row.

With the dawn of day the news of the disaster had spread through the city; and everybody thought that the last hour of the world had come. And all this was but the beginning; for the flames gathered force in this street and it was not easy to satisfy their appetite. Consternation and terror drove the frightened dwellers from their beds at an early hour; and they thought themselves lucky to escape with their lives - forgetting what was to them their second life, namely, the life of their shops. This they left to the mercy of the flames, which, in the store of cloths, woollens, and other merchandise found material for their nourishment. So quickly did fortune carry out her designs that those persons who, their eyes dazzled by greed, remained behind for a moment to save their wealth, perished when they found their path cut off by the flames and their eyes now blinded even more by smoke than they had been previously by covetousness, those people who saw the tempest of fire approaching and endeavoured to remove their possessions to a place of safety were unable to do so: in the first place because the number of people who came to render assistance formed a danger and an impediment rather than a help; and in the second place, the fire spread so rapidly that no place which was thought to be safe was so. The sound of the bells noisily warned

the parishioners; but since these bells were not rung in Catholic churches, their only effect was to make a noise and not to act as a help.

The fire proceeded on its way and soon reached the plaza of St Paul's, where it attacked the church, one of the most celebrated religious edifices in Europe, renowned for its seven chapels. In each one of these the true faith was formerly preached simultaneously in London, the worshippers in the others being undisturbed by thereby. This church is under the patronage of the King, who, with the Lord Mayor, often attends the services of the false faith held there. This is the faith called Puritanism, in which the father of the King wished to die, thereby losing in an instant the glory he might have won by dying in our true Roman Catholic faith, on that fatal day when the crown and the scaffold were seen side by side.

Urged on by the steady wind, the fire devoured the majestic fabric of the stately church. At this point the King and his brother appeared on horseback, desirous of bringing some relief to the homeless people scattered about the streets, and wishing also to do something for the safety of the church whither they were called by consideration for their blind religion. Not even the presence of royalty, however, could do more in the midst of that multitude than add to the confusion and difficulties. The fire was now universal like Death himself, and respected neither sceptres nor crowns. In the very sight of the King himself it proceeded to crown itself the conqueror of the highest parts of the great building. The flames seized upon the carved timber of which the church was in places composed, licked it up in a twinkling; and in a few hours left this marvellous building, the labour of many years, a smoking mass of lamentable ruins. No doubt the great Paul, not satisfied with the worship of the false religion which went in inside its walls, preferred to see the magnificent edifice sacrificed to the fire rather than left for the veneration of a heretic cult.

Night approached; and the sun disappeared sooner than usual behind the thick clouds and fogs formed by the smoke; but it seemed to onlookers that the day was returning with all its light, so widely was the fire spreading. The horror, fear, pity, and confusion of that night- to relate them would be the work

of days. Think of them: people wandering about the streets because their houses had been burnt, dazed by the thought of the disaster; the fear of those in the districts towards which the flames were slowly making their way, the wind all the time fanning the flames and bringing the horror closer and keeping the remedy further away.

When Monday morning dawned the fire had gathered further strength, and its ravages now extended over a wide area. It had by this time almost approached the King's Palace. To keep the flames back it occurred to some people to use as a remedy what would at other times have been employed as one of the forces of destruction. Fifty pieces of artillery were brought to bear on the outskirts of the devastated area, the object being to make a sort of fortress, or wall, of the very ruins, so that the onslaught of the flames might be checked, because they now crept up very near the palace, at the side of it were the apartments of the Queen-Mother Henrietta were situated. It was believed that by this means the fire might be stopped in its course as well as if the wind had turned in the opposite direction. But what happened? It was observed that, in view of the direction in which the flames were extending, the first building on which they would have had to fasten, and the one nearest to them, was the Roman Catholic Church which was allowed for use of the Queen-Mother and her family and for the celebration of the holy sacrament. At this very point the onrush of flames was arrested: and it is very clear and certain that in this way the Almighty (who is Lord of all the elements) wished to rebuke the blindness of those heretics, and to show in what respect he held the sovereign Sacrament of the Altar. A hundred and forty churches of the heretics, including St Paul's, and extending over thirteen principle parishes, were destroyed by the flames; but at the sight of a Catholic temple the fire acknowledged itself and was conquered. Five-and-fifty thousand houses were left in ruins: it was only at the sight of one of them that contained within its walls memories and the worship of our holy faith, that the flaming tempest, which involved so many in disaster. Allowed itself to be subdued. Praise be God, who thus showed, and not for the first time, that He could make the flames respect those who loved him.

An end was finally put to the devastation, but not to its memory, which must remain throughout the centuries. For it was ever one of the greatest fires of the kind which the world has ever known. The loss of property was estimated at a hundred millions, and there were some thirty thousand persons who found themselves wandering about without either house or home. May God open their eyes to the truth, and enable them to take a lesson from the destruction of their own hundred and forty churches and the safety of the one Roman Catholic temple, the only building that the flames respected. The dead numbered eight thousand: these were the sick and infirm, who were buried sooner than they expected amid the dust and ashes, and the covetous ones—those who, in trying to save their effects, lost them and their own lives - and the daring people who, while trying to steal, were stolen away by Death.

It was at first thought that this disaster was due to the malice of some Dutchman or Frenchman, who, it was believed, had managed to set fire to the city, and in consequence many of these nations were seized and imprisoned. When later it became evident that the outbreak was purely accidental, the King ordered that these men should be set at liberty.

It was said that among the ruins of a Puritan church some men found a stone with a Latin inscription, which, when deciphered, was found to mean: “when these letters shall be read, woe on London, for they shall be read by the light of a fire.” Many months before, people said, a pyramid of fire was observed rising from the sea, which afterwards broke up in flames and sparks. This lasted a quarter of an hour, and appeared again in three days. Another portent was the vision of a deformed monster, who had been born in the city some days before. He was horrible in shape and colour: part of him was fiery red and part of him yellow. On his chest was a human face. He had the legs of a bull, the feet of a man, the tail of a wolf, the breasts of a goat, the shoulders of a camel, a long body, and, in place of a head, a kind of tumor with the ears of a horse. Such monstrous prodigies are permitted by God to appear to mankind as harbingers of calamities. In short, it would seem that the disaster just related was a particular punishment destined by the Almighty; because unforeseen casualties preceded it, the rapid currents of air carried it

far and wide when it came, and the ardent tongues of fire made it known to all, further, the precautions which been taken against fire were found to be useless....Nor was the solicitude of the King himself of any avail. His majesty remained thirty hours on horseback, vainly seeking to arrest the progress of the flames and to keep them from devouring the best quarter of the city. He went about the districts in which the merchants sold silks, and where the silversmiths' and other shops were situated, powerless while he saw his city destroyed by fire like the ruined Troy-counting its habitations, not by houses but by different fires; and even more by cinders than by fires.

And, finally, it was but just that the instrument of this punishment should have been a blacksmiths forge; for London itself was once a forge, and, for the sake of torturing glorious martyrs, manufactured many iron instruments; and in our age, indeed, the most formidable of them, namely the headsman's axe, which - an unheard of phenomenon - was dyed with the purple blood of a king. A forge, then, in which so many instruments of torture have been wrought, may well have such punishments wrought for itself; and let those who have escaped from this punishment with their lives give their thanks to God; and (having recognised the true Roman Catholic Church) let them pray to God that he may spare them from a greater fire, namely, the fire of Hell.