

## THE FIRE AT HASTINGS.

(FROM OUR 'GRAPHIC' SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

THE chief topic of conversation is the fire which caused such destruction at Hastings early on Thursday morning. The pretty little township presents a mournful appearance, two large squares having been swept by the devouring element. Shops, banks, stores, business places, and one large hotel have disappeared, leaving a wilderness of blackened and broken fragments from which rise a scattered forest of chimneys in various stages of dilapidation. The sufferers have lost no time in recommencing business. Great placards and strips of white canvas, announcing in large black type, the temporary location of banks and tradespeople, add to the air of conscious importance which the place wears. Groups of fantastically-dressed Maoris give colour to the same, and the number of visitors, insurance agents, merchants, country settlers, and mere sight-seers make business brisk.

A wonderful contrast was presented throughout the fire by the heroism, clear-headedness, and untiring efforts of a few, and the apathy and laziness shown by the great crowds who flocked into the streets to share in the excitement. Hearing praises from all quarters of Miss Caulton's energy and thoughtfulness I went to see her. She very kindly gave me a graphic account of her experiences. When awakened by the first alarm no flames were visible, but a dense cloud of smoke was borne by the wind into her room from McKwan's shop directly opposite her father's hotel. For a moment terror overmastered her, but quickly rallying, she and the rest of the household set to work carrying valuables to a place of safety, fetching blankets to hang from all the windows, and constantly drenching them with water. At this fatiguing labour women worked as hard as men, some of whom were stationed on the roof. Time was lost by the man who filled the buckets having also to carry them up a ladder. Miss Caulton went to the crowd of idlers thronging the footpath, and asked for one volunteer to stand in the gap and pass the buckets on, but her request met with no response, and she had to turn away and call her brother from some other duty. At the same time the firemen, instead of being free to fight the flames, were pumping for the manual and getting very little assistance, although ten shillings an hour was offered to outsiders. Two firemen were brought fainting to the hotel, their helmets fused by the heat, in which it was only possible to work when drenched with water. They had been forced to slide down the sides of the ladder which had caught fire.

Then Miss Caulton thought of an errand of mercy, and commenced carrying jugs of beer out to the parched Fire Brigade. She describes the heat where they were working as being like a furnace; the glare was blinding, but the general effect superb. The flames leaped into the clear blackness of the night, and paled the steady light of moon and stars. Great sheets of galvanized iron curling up and flying into space burned with starlike flashes of coloured fire, blue, green, and red. Burning grass-seed kept up a steady volume of flame.

Jull's Hotel caught, flared fiercely, and blazed out in fifteen minutes. The small jets of water which could be thrown seemed an insult to the conflagration. Ultimately water was utilized more to prevent other buildings catching. The wind was light, but variable, and with each change came fresh alarm to some; unlooked for hope to others. Property removed to what appeared a place of safety would in a few minutes be reduced to shapeless heaps of ashes as the long tongues of flame swept by a sudden gust leapt round them. Buildings some distance away caught fire, and instant aid was needed to extinguish the flames. Isolated telegraph poles stand charred monuments to the fierce heat.

In most cases people had time to dress, and there were fewer irregular toilets than usual on such occasions. One excited individual, however, disported himself among the crowd in a garment which is generally reserved for the privacy of a bedroom. There was little of the inevitable lowering of feather beds and reckless hurling of glass and china from upper stories. It is said that one gentleman wandered aimlessly about with a sieve under one arm and a pair of socks under the other.

The loss of property is very great. One man has lost the savings of thirty years; another had barely commenced business in an elaborately furnished restaurant. Great sympathy is felt for Mr and Mrs Galwey, of the New South Wales Bank. They have not long been married, and all their tasteful knickknacks, a great number of wedding presents, and even their clothes are burnt. Mr Galwey was so busy looking after the Bank's interests and getting out the safe through a hole cut in the wall that he had no time to save his own property.

There is no truth in the statement that the water supply was inadequate. Hastings is supplied by artesian wells, the overflow from which, together with the surface drainage, escapes by the sewer. There is thus a river of clear water under the town supplying over four hundred gallons a minute. This was not effectually used by the Hastings brigade, who, finding they were pumping air, concluded the water was low, while, in reality, the connection must have been defective; the hose itself burst in seven places. The 'tanks' from which the water was chiefly drawn are large cisterns, each acting as a reservoir to one artesian well. One of these was exhausted by the continued pumping, and an unavoidable delay occurred in moving the manual to another. When the steam engine came from Napier the sewer supplied much more water than was required to completely drench the smoking squares. The fire lingered obstinately, and when daylight faded the whole surface glowed with red light. The steam engine stayed till the last train left for Napier, and after its departure some of the local brigade watched till daylight. On several occasions they had to extinguish reviving flames.

L. REEN.

[Our picture of Jull's Hotel, Hastings, before the fire is from a really excellent photograph by Valentine and Co., perhaps the most famous firm of photographers in the world. Owing to bad weather, the present reproduction, though it gives a most excellent idea of the part of Hastings represented, scarcely does the photograph fullest justice. One of the new series of New Zealand scenery, the photograph, like all its companions, is a marvel of artistic workmanship. Each photograph in the hands of Valentine becomes a picture, the greatest care being

taken in the working up and development of each negative. Their specimen books are well worth looking over, as showing to what artistic perfection photography may be brought.]

## THE WHITE (LIVERED) COMPANY.

A NONSENSE BALLAD OF NEW PLYMOUTH FLUCK.

(Humbly dedicated to the eighteen men of New Plymouth who allowed the pseudo red-coated highway man to scare bluff their number and escape from the rest.—See daily papers, Monday 15th.)

TELL you the tale of our robber?  
Well, sir, I don't know as I dare,  
For my legs still tremble with funk, sir,  
And the stiffness ain't out of my hair.

We was only eighteen to one, sir,  
And the clank of his sword was enough  
To stiffen at least half a dozen,  
For New Plymouth livers ain't tough,

But milk-white, and tender like chicken,  
And shake at the sight of a mask;  
While to face a red-coat, it would sicken  
The bravest to dream such a task.

So we let him march inside the bar, sir,  
Scare the girl and do just as he willed;  
First he pocketed fifteen and sixpence,  
Then a lot of good whisky he swilled.

My God! I can scarce tell the story!  
Two pistols he drew from his girth;  
We knew that his purpose was gory,  
And took our last glimpse of the earth.

Thus we stood, sir, it might be ten seconds,  
It seemed like ten hours to be true,  
When we saw a small chance of escape, sir,  
We were six—and he covered but two.

There were four other men in the room, then,  
Mind, men and not cowards, I say,  
But we thought 'twould be cooler outside, sir,  
That place was too hot for to stay.

Hiding behind one another,  
We managed to crawl to the door,  
And each one ran home to his mother,  
Noble! brave!! courageous!!! four.

What? Didn't we try for his capture  
Lord, no, sir; why, what do you mean?  
Why, somebody's skin had got hurt, sure;  
He was one, wind, against our eighteen.

Such a course would have been most foolhardy,  
And our chaps, sir, ain't built on that plan;  
It wasn't a child or a woman  
To tackle we'd got, but a man.

No, we let him get right clean away, sir,  
And nobody ventured pursuit,  
For the bravest New Plymouth man trembled,  
Remembering the robber could shoot.

To the State we now cry for defence, sir,  
A policeman for each and wet nurse,  
To protect us from naughty highwaymen  
Who menace our skins and our purse.

W. G. RATHBONE.

February 14th, 1893.

## AMUSEMENTS.

MISS ESSIE CHEW is sure to command a numerous and appreciative audience for her farewell concert to be given in the City Hall, Auckland, on Thursday, the 23rd. This young lady has so willingly contributed voluntary items to help others, that many people will be glad of this opportunity of testifying their gratitude, and at the same time enjoying once more her excellent music.

EVERYBODY is looking forward to Max O'Rell's comedy-lectures in the Opera House next week. The witty Frenchman is a novelty in the way of platform entertainers. Most of the European celebrities whom Mr. R. S. Snythe has introduced to colonial audiences—scientists, war-correspondents, explorers—have represented the sombre side of life. This is the first time that the much-travelled manager has brought along a humorist. The author of 'John Bull and his Island' could not have arrived in Australia at a more opportune time. In their great depression the people of Melbourne naturally welcomed a humorist who would lift them out of their surroundings; and when every theatre in Melbourne was closed Max O'Rell was giving his comedy-lectures to overflowing audiences. In New Zealand he has been equally successful. His Australasian tour, which has lasted ten months, will finish at Auckland. His final lecture here will be his last appearance in this part of the world.



A VIEW OF HASTINGS, BEFORE THE FIRE, SHOWING JULL'S HOTEL.