



FIRE IN BACK STREET.

Yesterday afternoon, two old houses in Back Street, the property of Messrs Grabam & Johnston, W.8, Edinburgh, were burned to the ground. The houses stood with one gable within four yards of the railway viaduct which here crosses a portion of the town, and the thatched roof of the buildings was from 12 to 16 feet below the level of the line affording a most convenient lodgment for sparks from any passing locomotive. The roof has since January last been twice ignited by cinders thrown from passing engines, and on the last occasion, about the beginning of June, the G. & S.W. Railway Company paid for the damage thus caused. There is no room for doubting that the fire yesterday was due to the same cause as the two previous ignitions. A heavy loaded train had only passed over the viaduct a few minutes before some children, standing on the narrow old street, about one o'clock, saw smoke rising from the thatch at the gable nearest the railway. The thatch was as dry as tinder by the strong sunshine of two days, and on the alarmed inmates rushing to the street, and seeing the small flame on the roof, they at once resolved to clear out all they could from the dwellings. Six of the apartments were let to different households, and the remaining two rooms were untenanted. Amid the screams of women and children, a curious stream of clothing and furniture came tumbling down the narrow rickety stair from the second storey. Dirty and torn bedding, broken-legged chairs, composite tables; baskets filled with crockery and shoes, bundles of body clothing, German clocks, &c., very clearly indicated the social class of the tenantry being driven pell-mell from their homes such as they were. It was a consolation to see that every tenant had secured his or her furniture and household articles, for they were all too poor to afford any loss. Meanwhile message had been sent to the police station, and the fire-engines and the police arrived and took their station on the street. A plug was opened at the top of Fore Street, and hose

attached, but there was no pressure in the pipe to be of much value. What little water could be obtained was thrown by the engine, on the now blazing roof, but the quantity was too small to make any perceptible difference on the flame. A messenger was hurried off to an officer of the Water Company, whom, we believe, could not be found until some more time had been lost. On his arrival in Fore Street, by shutting off the water in some of the pipes, a good pressure was at last obtained, after nearly one hour had been almost lost. As may almost be imagined, long before this all hopes of putting out the fire on the roof were abandoned. A thatched roof on the opposite side of the street took fire twice, but as the water was immediately thrown on it, it was easily extinguished. The roof was before this one mass of flame, and shortly after it fell with a crash into the building. By means of ladders the firemen were now able to reach the fire, and it was put out before the second floor of the old tenement was consumed. A considerable portion of the furniture, clothing, &c., was more or less injured by the hasty removal, and some of it huddled into a back court behind the building was not improved by the streams from the hose sweeping over it. At what figure this damage might be estimated we cannot say, but in regard to the house itself, it will be somewhere about £160 or £180. It was not insured, the proximity of its thatched room to the railway presenting a greater risk than any company would engage to meet. The want of a good supply of water seems in this case to have been the reason why the fire could not be put out before the house was burned down, and, though the loss is not such as to call for any anxiety, it should be remembered that the same deficiency of water might have been felt although the property had been one of the most valuable in the town. What consequences might follow a fire during the night when we have no water at all? No accident or personal injury was sustained by any one, the arrangements of Capt. Galt and his personal superintendence preventing all crowding and disorder on the street.