

GIGANTIC ROARING FURNACE.

the flames from which could be seen for miles around. Fiercer and yet fiercer burnt the fire, and the spectacle was a grand but saddening one. The persistent efforts of the St. Albans Brigade, and the steady work of the Harpenden Brigade at length ensured the safety of the billiard room, but it was practically all that could be done, except to cool the outer walls and prevent any of the surrounding buildings firing from the pieces of burning material which were hurled hither and thither. The Childwickbury and Luton brigades arrived with their engines, but it was then really too late to do much, though the Luton men, after a considerable lapse of time, got a supply of water from the St. George's School baths, and the water used from this source was extremely useful in preventing the flames working back to the north-west portion of the premises. It was now nearing nine o'clock, and the fire had been raging for nearly three hours, but the pine and oak fittings were not yet consumed, while the enormous amount of woodwork in the house continuously provided fuel, and ever and anon a beam or bressumer would fall into the building, to be followed by an upheaval of flames and sparks which were likened by many onlookers to huge pyrotechnic displays. The fierce intensity of the fire, in conjunction with the efforts of Inspector Shore, and several members of the Herts Constabulary, kept back the surging crowd, which had assumed large proportions, and did considerable

DAMAGE TO THE SHRUBS AND GARDEN PRODUCE.

So far as we have been able to learn, the fire was observed first by Mrs. T. P. Pratt. She noticed, shortly after six, volumes of smoke issuing from the north east corner of the house, and she at once informed her husband and the other members of the household. Mr. Pratt, who is an artist, at once rushed to the Red House, separated from his own by only a short distance, and he was accompanied by his students, his daughters having just previously hastened to the house. What followed we give in his own words, as uttered to our representative: "My gardener went immediately for the Harpenden Fire Brigade, and that was very soon upon the scene, under the command of Capt. Angcombe. A wire was also sent to St. Albans, and to Mr. Vaughan Stevens, who is at Worthing. When I got to the house, smoke was issuing from the roof. With one of the gardeners I immediately entered the premises from the back, and we speedily made our way to the top of the house. It seemed to me that the electric wires must have fused, as the skirting in the top bedrooms, and for a considerable distance along the passages, was alight. We did not hesitate as to what was best to be done, but were quickly busy at work, endeavouring to quench the flames by pouring water on them from jugs and pails, and we continued our efforts until driven back by clouds of smoke. We did not then give up all hope of being successful, but on descending to the lower rooms again we found fire issuing from under the tiles at the rear of the house. We then came to the conclusion that we could not do any more, and the next thing for us to look to was to save as much as we possibly could of the furniture. There were many willing helpers, and a quantity of furniture was removed in a remarkably short space of time."

*The housekeeper, the only inmate of the house when the outbreak took place, was naturally in a very excited condition, and when interviewed by our representative she said: "I knew nothing about the fire until the gardener's daughter shouted, 'The house is on fire,' and just at that time Mr. Pratt hurried across, and we went upstairs, and there found the skirting in the passages and in the bedrooms alight. We did what we could, but the fire was too much for us, and we then tried to save what we could. It is a fearful thing. If only the bottom part had been saved it would not have been so bad, but it is awful for the burnt down like this." Asked as to what was the cause of the fire, she said she thought it must have been due to the electric wires, as there was no other cause that she could think of.

Not to be reproduced
without permission of the
Hertfordshire Record Office