

DISASTROUS FIRE AT SANDFORD.

NINETEEN HOUSES DESTROYED.

A disastrous fire broke out at Sandford, a village about two miles from Crediton, on Monday night, resulting in the total destruction of nineteen dwellings, occupied principally by working people. The houses, which form a square block, are at the higher part of the village facing the parish church, and they are said to be at least 200 years old. The fire originated in the top storey of a dwelling occupied by Francis Packer, a general dealer, who was sitting beside his kitchen fire, in company with his wife, when he heard an alarm of fire raised by someone in the lower part of the village. On proceeding to ascertain the cause he found that his premises were full of smoke and that a lumber room at the top was ablaze. By this time the flames had burst through the thatch roof and were attracting a crowd of villagers, including the Vicar of the parish (Rev. G. T. Llewellyn) who was accompanied by one of his employes. Messages were despatched to the Crediton and local fire brigades, but on their arrival there was found to be a scarcity of water in consequence of the wells from which the inhabitants get their supply being situated some distance apart. Consequently there was a great delay. The parsonage well contained a copious supply of water, but it was impossible to get the engines near it. The difficulty, however, was got over by means of a piece of hose being attached to the pump of the well and connected with a soft-water tank at the Vicar's stables, but quite an hour elapsed before this was accomplished. Meanwhile the flames had obtained a strong hold upon Mr. Packer's house, and were rapidly consuming the adjoining premises, which were built of cob, with thatched roofs. Everyone was now busily engaged in removing furniture, bedding, etc., from the remaining cob-built houses in the block as it was seen to be utterly impossible to save them from destruction. Several aged widows who were receiving parish relief were among the occupants of these dwellings, and much difficulty was experienced in getting some of them to leave their homes. One, Mrs. Cockings, had been confined to her bed for some weeks, and she had to be removed to the Vicarage in a weak condition. The night, too, was bitterly cold. The Vicar rendered great assistance and allowed several of the aged people to be taken to his house until other accommodation could be provided for them. The progress of the fire could not be checked until it had reached the rear of the square, where there were one or two slate roofed houses; between these and the burning dwellings the roofs of the other houses were cut away. The Crediton Fire Brigade, under the Captaincy of Mr. S. Jones and the superintendence of Mr. Davey, rendered excellent services in this direction. It was not until 3 a.m. yesterday that the fire was completely under control and by that time the majority of the dwellings comprising the block had been gutted, and a number of poor people rendered homeless. It was fortunate that the fire was discovered when it was; had it occurred later in the night probably many of the aged people would have been burnt in their beds. The origin of the fire is unknown, but it is supposed that it originated from a defect in the chimney of Mr. Packer's house. Mr. Packer was the owner of eleven of the houses, and is insured in the Atlas Office for £300. His stock-in-trade and furniture are also insured in the same office for £150. Four of the block belonged to Mr. Walter Hookway, of Exeter, who it insured in the West of England. Two belonged to Miss Jennings, of Sandford, and the other two to Mr. Linscott, of Coleford, who are also said to be insured. The tenants were P. C. Kemp, Susan Jackman, widow, John Phillips, Mrs. Hill, widow (who was staying at Newton Abbot), James Phillips, Mrs. Jennings, widow (who was on a visit to a friend in Bristol), Grace Heard, widow, Sally Cobby, widow, Mary Southcott, widow, Betsy Cockings, widow, Mary Case, widow, and Mary Ann Leach, widow. Two or three of the houses were unoccupied. The fatal damage is estimated at about £2,000. It has been decided to start a relief fund to assist those who are without homes and a meeting for that purpose will be held shortly.