

ACCOUNT

of the fire which the city of New Orleans experienced on

March
~~May~~ 21, 1788

At about one-thirty P.M., the fire broke out in the approximate center of the city. A south wind, which was blowing with great violence, stirred it up to such a point, that the fire spread to several places at once. All the watchfulness of the Chiefs and the safety measures which they used became useless, even the pumps, several of which were burned by the heat of the flames, which extended out an incredible distance. In such a perilous state, each one feared for his life, and went to his home to see if it were possible to save a few possessions; the fear that the residents nearest the danger zone felt caused them to lose not only the few moments which were left, but also the confidence of those who were farther away and who were attempting to comfort their people, placing all in the same predicament. The widespread confusion resulted in the loss of the ~~XXIX~~ few moments left to save anything, since not many people had the necessary time nor the presence of mind; it is true that the terror which was caused by explosions of gunpowder that a few persons, against the precise order of the government and after the most exacting search, had had the imprudence to hide in their homes, frightened even the bravest, and succeeded in disheartening the others; to such an extent that in order not to increase the feeling of despair which was already very great, the officials were obliged not to allow the people to do rash things, since all human effort was useless. In order to make felt the great horror of this conflagration and the

impossibility of stopping its progress, it is sufficient to say that in less than five hours, 856 buildings were reduced to ashes, included among which were all the business houses except three, and the little that was salvaged was either lost or became the spoils of thieves, the unfortunate proprietors hardly having been able to escape with their lives. This loss was valued at \$3 million. If in a catastrophe which is so great and so general there is anything which can diminish one's pain, it is that not even one individual died in the confusion and inevitable disorder of such circumstances, and that it is easier to ^{imagine} the situation than to describe it. The next morning, what a spectacle to see, where the night before was a flourishing city, only smoking debris and a pile of ruins remained, pale and trembling mothers leading their children by the hand, despair not permitting them the strength to cry or complain; people of all sexes, qualities and conditions, upon the faces of which were only expressions of stupor and silence: but as in the most extreme of evils, Providence always provides the means of softening the blow. It has provided ~~XX~~ the goodness and kindness of our Governor and Intendant, all the pity and generosity that we could have expected from them to dry up part of our tears and to attend to our needs; the latter which was carried out with such order and speed that we were given assistance even before our needs were expressed: their personal charity knew no bounds, and the treasury of His Majesty was opened to obtain the necessary relief elsewhere, not to beg their pity but only to ask them to give us benefits by removing all the obstacles which could delay their prompt delivery; and we have the best laid hopes that the just measures which were taken to alleviate our present pains, will suffice in the end by helping us to forget our misfortune.

See- 976.31
(614.84)
R382.

transl. by
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