

The damage caused by the earthquake would not have been so extensive at Messina—which was not, after all, the town most heavily afflicted—but for the conflagration which broke out after the fall of the houses, and was provoked by the chimney-fires lighted everywhere at the hour of dinner. The large stores of oil laid up in the warehouses of Messina helped to feed the flames, which spread from point to point with incredible rapidity, carrying with them ruin and desolation on the wings of the wind. Who can picture to himself the horror of such a scene, when the unbridled fury of all the elements seemed let loose against unhappy man ; when the fugitive who sought a temporary refuge under some broken arch, or amidst the ruins of some shattered town, was pitilessly driven thence by the devouring flames and wreathing, stifling smoke, yet trembled to advance a step, lest the treacherous earth should suddenly give way before his feet !

We shall give a summary of the disasters that on this occasion befell the capital of Sicily, from the official report addressed by its Senate to the King of Naples. This simple but affecting narrative well merits preservation :—

“SIRE,—The frightful condition to which Messina has been reduced by the effects of the earthquake that commenced half an hour after noon on the 5th of the month, and still continues, induces the Senate to believe you will pardon them for addressing directly to yourself the report of the calamity, instead of transmitting it to your Majesty, according to custom, through the hands of his excellency the Viceroy.

“We do not doubt that your Majesty’s feeling heart would experience the deepest grief at the most painful spectacle of a magnificent city suddenly converted into a mass of ruins by a terrible and hitherto unexampled event. The shocks, which succeeded one another at intervals of a quarter of an hour with inconceivable violence, have shattered, from roof to basement, every edifice, public or private. The royal palace, that of the archbishop, the whole pile of the Maritime Theatre, the *Monts-de-Piété*,* the great hospital, the cathedral, the monasteries for both sexes—nothing has escaped destruction. And, accordingly, you might see the distracted nuns traversing all the city in search, if possible, of a place of refuge and security, with the small number of persons who, like themselves, had miraculously escaped the convulsion.

“This spectacle is frightful, undoubtedly ; but there is one still more terrible—namely, that of the majority of our citizens dead and dying, buried under the ruins of their habitations, while we are unable to rescue from the débris the unfortunates who are still alive, for want of workmen to render assistance in such circumstances.

“The moans, the cries, the shrieks, the wailings, all the accents of grief are everywhere audible ; and our powerlessness to save from death these miserable victims renders still more heartrending the expression of the despair which demands in vain the assistance of humanity.

“To all these calamities a new scourge is added, which increases their horrors. Above the ruins of the shattered and prostrated buildings, suddenly rises the devour-

* [These are the great pawnbroking establishments managed by the State. Advances are made to the poor at very low rates of interest.]