

east side of the Plaza, was discovered to be on fire at about six o'clock. Nearly all the block bounded by Kearny, Washington, Montgomery and Clay Streets, was destroyed. The loss was estimated at a million of dollars. With no organized Fire Département, and the inflammable nature of the buildings being considered, it was wonderful that the conflagration did not make a still more general devastation. By this fire, the Parker House, which at that time was probably bringing in a much larger rental than any other building in the United States, was destroyed. The condition of the streets at this time was exceedingly disagreeable. The first rains of the season had commenced on the 8th of October, and the next day it fell in great quantities. But the streets were soon in a tolerable condition again. But about the 4th of November the rains re-commenced, and from that time until April, the mud was truly appalling. The streets were, almost without exception, in a state of nature, neither paved nor planked, and their continual use by teams soon rended them mere quagmires, where man and beast were liable to be stuck as in a bog. Something disagreeable was this to persons recently from the firm streets of eastern cities.

This year had added a large increase to the previous population of the town. More than thirty thousand persons had reached San Francisco by sea—more than two-thirds of whom had come within the latter half of the year—for the Atlantic States and Europe were now pouring their adventurous population into California. The city now contained at least twenty thousand inhabitants, and besides these, probably more than ten thousand transient persons on their way to the mines, or returned from them, for business, pleasure, or health. It was a town of men—few women and fewer children being of its population. At this period men's homes were at the eating houses, or in their miserable cloth tents, and almost the only comfortable places of resort were the gambling saloons, which were warm and dry, though foetid with the fumes of tobacco, gin, and other liquors, and the poisonous air which had done its duty in turn to a hundred sets of lungs. In such places men needed not drink as a prelude to intoxication. They could absorb it through nostrils and pores of their skin, and, in addition, bands of music helped the excitement and diverted the self-examination and reflection of those who stood within those alluring hells. Few could see the heaps of gold upon the gambling tables and breathe the air, and resist the influences around and before them. Men entered to avoid the rain and get warm, or through curiosity, saw, bet, and were ruined. Most men gambled in those days. It is fashionable and right now to denounce the habit. But some, ay, many who do so, when they do it, denounce their own conduct in 1849. The fox who lost his tail is not likely to admire the trap, nor them who set it. And the temptations now to gamble, it must be confessed, are vastly less than then. But although that vice is now deservedly unpopular, charity and consistency should not be.

Those closing months of 1849 were the golden age of the town. Nearly everybody had money, and few were there who did not assign a large tenement in their minds to the smiling goddess, Hope. There was enough to do, wages were high, gold was plenty. "On with the dance, let joy be unconfined," seemed the motto of all. Everything was high—rents, interest, goods and pleasures. Men lived a year in twenty-four hours, for events are a truer chronicler of life than days and years. To this bright picture there was a dark side, for there were some destitute and sick even in the midst of so much plenty; and woe to the invalid, whose sick-bed was