

The Derby Mercury

7 July 1897 p6

THE TORNADO IN ESSEX.

The first accounts which appeared of the tornado that devastated a large portion of the county of Essex on Midsummer-day turn out to have been by no means exaggerated. On the contrary the amount of damage to crops and to houses and other buildings is seen to be much more extensive than was supposed. The storm, in fact, wrought such havoc that it must be regarded a veritable calamity for the country. The market gardeners have suffered from the visitation just as heavily as the farmers. Whole crops of apples, pears, strawberries, gooseberries, currants, and other outside fruits, not forgetting wall fruit, have been utterly destroyed. Greenhouses, which are very largely used in Essex for the growth of grapes, melons, tomatoes, cucumbers, and flowers, had much of their glass smashed by the hailstones, the produce beneath being either cut off or greatly injured. Perhaps the terrible force of the tornado may be realised when it is stated that, in some instances, the hailstones actually penetrated slates, tiles, and corrugated iron roofing, and were shot not merely through windows, but through loose hanging linen blinds behind them. The quantity of hail that fell, and the size of the hailstones were something quite phenomenal. At Little Baddow, for example, Mr. Chas. Smoothy, of Old Riffham's Farm, picked up some enormous specimens, one of which measured six and a-half inches in circumference. At Ingatestone Mr. Greenfield measured a hailstone five and a-half inches round, and another picked up in the same place, was found by Mr. S. Horsnell of the Ingatestone Post-Office to weigh three and a-half ounces. At Navestock, again, Mr. W. H. Long measured one hailstone which was four and a-half inches round. At Little Baddow Rodney many hailstones weighed quite half an ounce each, after lying in a ditch 48 hours, and this in a temperature of over 80 degrees. These extraordinary missiles were hurled against houses, and into gardens and fields, by a wind that blew with the force of a hurricane, that was so mighty, indeed, that it tore up by the roots, or snapped off low down, hundreds upon hundreds of the finest

trees in Essex, including oaks, elms, poplars, and willows. At Chelmsford the roof of the gymnasium of the Essex Industrial School was blown off, large sheets of corrugated iron being hurled over two fields, a distance of 530 feet. At Great Braxted, near Witham, on the farm of Mr. Thomas Goodey, a heavy plough was washed from one field over a hedge and about 300 yards into another field, and all the top soil of one field was carried into ditches, which it completely filled up. Persons who happened to be out in the storm in charge of horses and traps, and not within immediate reach of shelter, are black and blue from the severe pelting of the hailstones. This is the condition, among others, of William Gray, the coachman to Mr. F. J. Coverdale, Lord Petre's agent. Gray's arms and shoulders exhibit an appearance of having been pounded by a professional bruiser, although he was only under fire of the hailstones for a very short time, and was wearing shirt, sleeved waistcoat, livery coat, and mackintosh. The horse of which he was in charge had its nose cut by the hail and bumps were raised upon its body as large as a hen's egg.

A thousand other incidents could be quoted to show the terrible severity of the visitation. Great darkness prevailed at the time, and loud thunder and vivid lightning were continuous. Poor pea pickers in the fields shrieked aloud in agony, and many people, surrounded by crying children and frightened by the breaking of their windows and the driving in of hail and rain gave themselves up for lost, and believed that the end of the world had come. As to the gross amount of monetary damage, it is impossible for anyone at present to make even an approximate estimate of it. Sober minded people, however, are saying that it will not be less than from half to three-quarters of a million sterling. The stock of fowls in the district it need scarcely be said, has been decimated. Some were killed outright by hailstones, just as if they had been shot, and others were drowned. The storm was also destructive to game, both feathered and furred, and it is feared that there will be very little, if any, shooting over this track of Essex this season. The disappointment all round is keen, for the crops have rarely given greater promise in Essex than they did this year, while there had been a very good hatching season for birds. The despair of some of the farmers is heartrending to witness. There are hundreds of them who tell of losses varying in amount from 100l. to 2,000.

Lord Rayleigh, Lord-Lieutenant of Essex, presided at a county meeting held at Chelmsford, on Friday, to inaugurate a relief fund for those whose crops were ruined by the recent storm. There was a crowded attendance of representative men of the county, as well as of sufferers from the storm. Lord Rayleigh stated that the damage on many of the farms could not have been exceeded, as the crops had all gone, and he had received a letter from Mr. Walter Long, President of the Board of Agriculture, stating that the scene of ruin and desolation was indeed such as to make everyone deeply sympathise with the sufferers.—The Rev. F. A. Adams urged that State aid should be asked for.—Colonel Lockwood, Mr. Strutt, Mr. Osborne, Sir William Luard, and others opposed this view, and said it had been the custom of Englishmen to rely upon the help of their countrymen. It was decided to ask the Lord Mayor to open a Mansion House relief fund. 2,800l. was given in the room.