

FIRE BUGS DESTROY A TOWN

THE ENTIRE BUSINESS SECTION OF HEPLER, KAS., SWEEP AWAY.

Four Separate Blazes Started at Once—The Work of Ruin Attributed to the Vengeance of Members of the Notorious Land League.

FORT SCOTT, Kas., May 17.—Yesterday morning the town of Hepler, a village of about 600 inhabitants, sixteen miles southwest of this city on the Missouri, Kansas & Texas road, was almost completely destroyed by fires which are charged to a vindictive remnant of the old notorious Land league of that section.

The first fire was discovered in L. G. Porter's general store but before anything could be done to check it flames were found bursting from three other stores. All had been set at the same moment.

The residents of the town went to the rescue in a few minutes but, having no effective means of resistance, the flames were virtually allowed to eat their way through the business street of the town, licking up stores and stocks until they reached the terminus of the street.

The store buildings and stocks of L. G. Porter, J. L. Thompson, A. N. Bowman, J. A. Corbin and others, the principal business houses of the place, were totally destroyed, causing losses aggregating \$50,000, and today nothing of the town remains but the hotel, livery barn and two or three stores.

That the old Land league, which was made so notorious by its murderous depredations in Allen, Crawford and Bourbon counties several years ago, several of whose members are now in the penitentiary, was responsible seems conclusive, as Hepler was the stronghold of the anti-league, and lately the town had supplied witnesses against them in court in this city when one of their members was charged with theft. Officers are at work on the case and arrests will probably follow.

A BAND OF DARKEST GRADE.

The Land League was organized by a number of settlers twelve years ago for the ostensible purpose of protecting themselves against the usurpation of land by the railroads and new settlers and the members soon began the use of summary methods in gaining the possession of farms from those who refused to join them. This resulted in much civil litigation and many crimes. Some of the members withdrew, but the rougher element remained and have continually been in litigation and feud since. The most notorious of their murders occurred three years ago when Columbus Carter was, after being arrested at their instigation, taken from the constable and killed. For this crime, Dick Maddox, Jack Tiller and George Brandendref were sent to the penitentiary and two are still confined. The leaguers are banded by oaths and it is almost impossible to defeat them in court because of their ability to swear an alibi. One of their number was acquitted in court in this city two weeks ago by establishing an alibi.

Two of the band were seen in Hepler Monday night and left on the south bound train just after the fire was discovered. One store was found wide open and evidently had been robbed, but the flames left no trace of thieves.