

It together violently;  
or the great discovery



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

It was probably a long time before man discovered how to produce fire. The sight of a forest catching fire by the dashing together of its branches in a storm may have prompted some primitive man, more ingenious than his fellows, to try to produce the same results by rubbing pieces of wood together violently; or the great discovery may have been due to the accidental collision of two flints.

At first the sparks so produced would be regarded as pretty toys to amuse children, and of no more practical use than the lightning, although, like it, apt to do damage under certain circumstances. In the course of time the destructive power of fire must have suggested the possibility of its being diverted to useful purposes, and from that time fire began to take its place as the servant of man. Thence forward it cooked his food, and baked the clay for him into hard bricks, of which wind-tight houses were built for himself and his cattle. It was used to convert the metals into instruments with which he felled the forests, ploughed the earth, and constructed carts to traverse the land and ships to cross the sea. Thus by the help of fire man asserted his dominion over nature, and transformed waste places into cultivated land, on which arose farms and villages and populous cities. In modern times, through the discovery of the immense power of gunpowder and steam, fire has been able to accomplish even more wonderful works than it could produce in the earlier days of civilization. But every now and then fire, the strong servant of mankind, manages to escape from control, and shows that when it gets the mastery, its destructive energy is as tremendous as the beneficent power it exercises when guided by human reason.

In America a fire often breaks out in the prairie and consumes the forest and homesteads that it encounters in its course, as it sweeps along in a great destructive current many miles broad. At sea, sailors dread a fire more than the fury of wind and wave. History records many memorable instances of the destructive ravages of fire. In the time of the Emperor Nero, a large part of Rome was burnt down to the ground. In English history a similar disaster befell London in the reign of Charles II. The greatest conflagration of the nineteenth century was the great fire of Chicago in 1871, which destroyed a third of the city and made a hundred thousand people homeless.