

EVERETT MARSHALL

LEST WE FORGET:
CHICAGO'S AWFUL
THEATER HORROR

Marshall Everett

**Lest We Forget: Chicago's
Awful Theater Horror**

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Marshall Everett

Chicago's Awful Theater Horror

INTRODUCTION

By the Rt. Rev. Samuel Fallows, D.D., LL.D

When Chicago was burning, a little girl in a christian home in a neighboring city stamped her foot indignantly on the floor and said: "Why doesn't God put out the fire?"

The cry of many an agonized heart, beating in children of a larger growth, has been: "Why doesn't a God of wisdom and love prevent such an awful occurrence as the Iroquois fire?" "I have lost all faith in God," said a dear friend of mine, as its full meaning began to break upon him.

When we were carrying out the dying and the dead from that horrible darkness and choking smoke to the outer air, those of us who were wont to pray could only say, "O God have mercy! O God have mercy!"

But there must be no panic in our faculties. Reason must not desert her rightful throne. Blinded by tears, we must not in our consuming passion of resentment against the sickening catastrophe, attempt with our puny arms to strike against God. He did not cause the calamity. No responsibility for it can be rolled upon Him. God is law; and his laws had been palpably broken by human negligence and incompetency. God is love; and human greed and selfishness had violated every principle of love which "worketh no ill to his neighbor."

God cannot coerce man, as one by sheer brute force can another. The savage father may break both the body and soul of his child. Not so God, those of his children. Man must render a voluntary obedience to the Divine command. By pains and crosses and sorrows and shame he may be led to that surrender. But he must say with a free, princely spirit at last, "I will to do thy will O God."

It is the old problem of evil with which this terrible tragedy has brought us face to face. The generic evil, out of which all evils spring, every giant intellect of the ages has grappled with, and it has thrown them all. The question is not "Why should God permit this special evil to come to us, which has well nigh paralyzed our city and thrilled the civilized world both with horror and sympathy, but why did he create the world at all and put man upon it?" The finite cannot measure the Infinite. Imperfection belongs to the one; perfection to the other. Where there is imperfection there is always the possibility of evil.

A reverent faith will bow before the mystery and yet master it with an undaunted courage. Evil must exist if the Universe is to be. The Universe is, and it is the best possible Universe God can create. If he could have given us a better one he would not be the God we revere.

Evil is the vast, dark background against which He brings out the brightest pictures of beauty and life. From a "Paradise Lost" comes forth a "Paradise Regained" with its transcendent glory of progress, and allegiance to law and love.

"Calvary and Easter Day,
Earth's saddest day and gladdest day,
Were but one day apart."

God did not forsake his son in that supreme hour of anguish upon the Cross, when he cried out "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He has never forsaken his world, nor the sinning and suffering souls that are in it. "God in history," is faith's jubilant assertion. He is in its minutest

incidents and in its mightiest events, "in the rocking of a baby's cradle and the shaking of a monarch's throne," in the fiery furnace of the Iroquois Theater and in the most joyous assembly of his adoring saints.

God permitted this great evil in harmony with man's free will; he did not cause it. The evidence is overwhelming that human law, as well as divine law, had been consciously or unconsciously defied. Two thousand lives or more were brought together in a building professedly fire-proof, and warranted as the best, because the latest of its kind, in the city if not of the continent. It was not fire proof. The law forbade the crowding of aisles; they were filled from end to end, until almost every inch of standing room was taken up. The unusual number of exits was boasted of. Most of them were unseen or actually bolted and locked. The alleged fire proof curtain was a flimsy sham, and was resolved in almost a moment of time, into scattered fragments by the surging flames. The scenery was of the most combustible material, loaded down with paint and oil. Not a bucket of water was on the stage, and only one water stand-pipe without any hose. There never had been a fire apparatus of any kind in the balcony or the gallery. There was none in the auditorium except one small water stand pipe. There was not a fireman to answer the call for help. At no time had there been a fire drill by the employes of the theater. There were no notices posted to tell what to do in case of fire. There was no fire alarm box anywhere in the structure. Common prudence and common sense were completely set aside. Coroner Traeger in advance of the final finding of the jury, is reported to have said: "Sufficient proof has been already found to show that there was gross mismanagement and carelessness. There is no need of denial. Instead of being the safest theater in Chicago, the Iroquois was the unsafest."

But He who "maketh the wrath of man to praise him," who is ever bringing good out of evil, will overrule and is already overruling this dire calamity for the well being of mankind.

As I looked upon the charred and mangled and bruised bodies of tender women and little children and once strong men; as I listened to the moans of agony, and the cry of the living, tortured ones for help and for loved friends whom they had left behind or been separated from as the fiery blast swept them onward and outward, I said in my haste, "you all are 'martyrs by the pang without the palm'." I do not say it now. Martyrs indeed they were, by the criminal neglect of recreant men. But the palm is theirs. They have saved others, themselves they could not save. Thousands, perhaps millions, will in the future be secure in their places of resort, because these went on that fateful day to their inevitable doom. Mayors, architects, fire-inspectors, managers, stage carpenters, electricians, ushers and chiefs of police in every city have had their duty burned into their inmost consciousness by this consuming fire.

Human law, which has been so flagrantly set at naught, demands punishment. The public conscience will be outraged if the guilty parties do not meet stern, inexorable justice. It is not vengeance that is sought, for "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

But those who are immediately responsible, have not been the only transgressors, although they must suffer for their own guilt, and also vicariously for the sins of omission by others. For we have all sinned and come short of our duty. A common blame rests upon the whole community. Many a minister has been preaching upon the fire, but has his own church, perhaps crowded to the door, been safe while his eager congregation has listened to his impassioned utterances? Suppose the unexpected had happened, and the cry of fire had been heard and bursting flames been seen, would his hearers have escaped unhurt? Not if the church doors swung inward instead of outward; not if the means of escape were not abundant; not if camp chairs blocked the passages to the street. Who then would have been responsible? The clergymen, the church officers, the janitor, with the municipal or legal authorities would have had to share the blame.

Nearly two score of our city school teachers perished in the theater. How many school buildings are in such an imperfect condition today that thousands of young lives are in constant danger? Suppose again the unexpected should happen and tragedies be enacted which might even surpass the Iroquois

disaster, would the Mayor, and his subordinates and the Board of Education and the teachers be held guiltless? Yet that fearful contingency might have taken place.

It is a question seriously to be considered whether or not the great majority of the apartment buildings in Chicago have the doors of the main entrance swinging outwards. I have climbed to the fourth and fifth stories of some of these edifices in which there are dark, narrow stair cases, and all the doors swing inwards. There is not a single element of fire proofing in them. I have gone up, in open elevators, in manufactories and office buildings where scores and hundreds of persons are employed, and have never felt safe a moment while remaining in them. They are fire traps of the worst description.

There are hotels whose very construction invites the devouring flames. There are stores crowded literally with thousands of persons on special occasions, where the consequences in case of fire would eclipse by far the Iroquois holocaust. No coaxing, or pleading, or grafting, or business considerations should stand in the way both of speedy condemnation and renovation in all these cases by our city officers.

Man is greater than Mammon. The sanctity of human life must be held supreme. The body is more than raiment and the soul than the body. A new civic spirit must pervade the people as the saltiness the sea. Duty must tower infinitely above self-indulgence. Law must take the place of luck.

The plain lesson for our whole country and the world is to be alert to meet the dangers which may menace human life in the home, the workshop, the manufactory, the hotel, the theater, the church. Let ample means of exit be provided and always known to audiences. The tendency to a panic is always increased when people are apprehensive of danger and believe that they are hemmed in. Fear is contagious. A crowd feels and does not reason. Self-preservation, the first law of nature, asserts itself the more vehemently when the way of escape is uncertain. Panics may not always be prevented, but their dangers will be greatly diminished if every individual knows that he may with comparative leisure get out when he wishes so to do.

In the theater let it be known that every modern contrivance has been employed to secure safety. Let the curtain be of steel and so arranged that it will have full play to work in its grooves. Let automatic sprinklers be provided. Let the firemen in costume be in plain sight. Let the policemen be in full evidence. Let the aisles always be clear. Let there be ample room between the seats, and let the seats be easily raised to afford rapid departure. Let the ushers be drilled like soldiers to keep their places and allay confusion. All these and other things of like character appeal forcibly to the reasoning powers and tend to give an audience self command.

In many of our public schools the pupils are occasionally called from their rooms, during recitation hours, and promptly assembling are marched in an orderly way out of the building. This is an excellent plan.

Two marked instances of superb self-control among children in the panic at the Iroquois theater have been brought to my notice. Two little daughters of a highly esteemed friend slid down the balusters from the upper balcony and reached the main floor unhurt. One of my Sunday School teachers met a young lad she knew, leading by the hand a girl younger than himself to her home. They were sitting together when the stampede took place. "Jump on my shoulders," said the boy. Then holding her fast by her feet, he said: "Now use your fists and fight for all you're worth." Bending his head he forced his way with his conquering heroine to life. Let every safeguard that human ingenuity can devise be furnished and yet there always remains the personal element to be taken into the account. Habitual practice of self-control in daily life will help give coolness and calmness in times of peril. Keeping one's head in the ordinary things prevents its losing when the extraordinary occurs.

Samuel Holloway

MEMORIAL PRAYER

The Rt. Rev. Samuel Fallows wrote this prayer for Chicago on its appointed day of mourning. It is a prayer for all mourners of all creeds:

"O God, our Heavenly Father, we pray for an unshaken faith in Thy goodness as our hearts are bowed in anguish before Thee.

Come with Thy touch of healing to those who are suffering fiery pain.

Open wide the gates of Paradise to the dying.

Comfort with the infinite riches of Thy grace the bereaved and mourning ones.

Forgive and counteract all our sins of omission and commission.

All this we ask for Thy dear name and mercy's sake. Amen."

MEMORIAL HYMN

Bishop Muldoon selected as the one familiar hymn most deeply expressive of the city's mourning, "Lead, Kindly Light," which he declared should be the united song of all Chicagoans on Memorial Day.

"Lead, kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on.
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blessed me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."

POEM BY A CHILD VICTIM

The following poem, written by Walter Bissinger, a boy victim of the Iroquois Theater fire, fifteen years old, was composed two years ago, in honor of the tenth anniversary of the youthful poet's uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Max Pottlitzer, of Lafayette, Ind., whose son Jack, aged ten, perished with his cousin in the terrible disaster:

HAVE A THOUGHT

I

Have a thought for the days that are long gone by
To the country of What-has-been,
And a thought for the ones that unseen lie
'Neath the mystic veil
Of the future pale,
As the years roll out and in.

II

Have a thought for the host and hostess here,
Aunt Emily and Uncle Max,
And a thought for our friends to our hearts so dear
That around us tonight
In the joyous light
Of pleasure their souls relax

III

Have a thought for the happy two tonight
Who have passed their tenth wedded year,
And the best of wishes, kind and bright,
Which we impart
With a loving heart
That is faithful and sincere.

VERDICT OF CORONER'S JURY

From the testimony presented to us we, the jury, find the following were the causes of said fire: Grand drapery coming in contact with electric flood or arc light, situated on iron platform on the right hand of stage, facing the auditorium.

City laws were not complied with relating to building ordinances regulating fire-alarm boxes, fire apparatus, damper or flues on and over the stage and fly galleries.

We also find a distinct violation of ordinance governing fireproofing of scenery and all woodwork on or about the stage.

Asbestos curtain totally destroyed; wholly inadequate, considering the highly inflammable nature of all stage fittings, and owing to the fact that the same was hung on wooden bottoms.

Building ordinances violated inclosing aisles on each side of lower boxes and not having any fire apparatus, dampers or signs designating exits on balcony.

LACK OF FIRE APPARATUS

Building ordinances violated regulating fire apparatus and signs designating exits on dress circle.

Building ordinances violated regulating fire apparatus and signs designating exits on balcony.

Generally the building is constructed of the best material and well planned, with the exception of the top balcony, which was built too steep and therefore difficult for people to get out of especially in case of an emergency.

We also note a serious defect in the wide stairs in extreme top east entrance leading to ladies' lavatory and gallery promenade, same being misleading, as many people mistook this for a regular exit, and, going as far as they could, were confronted with a locked door which led to a private stairway preventing many from escape and causing the loss of fifty to sixty lives.

HOLDING OF DAVIS AND HARRISON

We hold Will J. Davis, as president and general manager, principally responsible for the foregoing violations in the failure to see that the Iroquois theater was properly equipped as required by city ordinances, and that his employes were not sufficiently instructed and drilled for any and all emergencies; and we, the jury, recommend that the said Will J. Davis be held to the grand jury until discharged by due course of law.

We hold Carter H. Harrison, mayor of the city of Chicago, responsible, as he has shown a lamentable lack of force in his efforts to shirk responsibility, evidenced by testimony of Building Commissioner George Williams and Fire Marshal William H. Musham as heads of departments under the said Carter H. Harrison; following this weak course has given Chicago inefficient service, which makes such calamities as the Iroquois theater horror a menace until the public service is purged of incompetents; and we, the jury, recommend that the said Carter H. Harrison be held to the grand jury until discharged by due course of law.

RESPONSIBILITY OF WILLIAMS

We hold the said George Williams, as building commissioner, responsible for gross neglect of his duty in allowing the Iroquois Theater to open its doors to the public when the said theater was incomplete, and did not comply with the requirements of the building ordinances of the city of

Chicago; and we, the jury, recommend that the said George Williams be held to the grand jury until discharged by due process of law.

We hold Edward Loughlin, as building inspector, responsible for gross neglect of duty and glaring incompetency in reporting the Iroquois theater "O. K." on a most superficial inspection; and we, the jury, recommend that the said Edward Loughlin be held to the grand jury until discharged by due course of law.

We hold William H. Musham, fire marshal, responsible for gross neglect of duty in not enforcing the city ordinances as they relate to his department, and failure to have his subordinate, William Sallers, fireman at the Iroquois Theater, report the lack of fire apparatus and appliances as required by law; and we, the jury, recommend that the said William H. Musham be held to the grand jury until discharged by due course of law.

NEGLECT OF DUTY BY SALLERS

We hold the said William Sallers, as fireman of Iroquois Theater, for gross neglect of duty in not reporting the lack of proper fire apparatus and appliances; and we, the jury, recommend that the said William Sallers be held to the grand jury until discharged by due course of law.

We hold William McMullen, electric-light operator, for gross neglect and carelessness in performance of duty; and we, the jury, recommend that the said William McMullen be held to the grand jury until discharged by due process of law.

We hold James E. Cummings, as stage carpenter and general superintendent of stage, responsible for gross carelessness and neglect of duty in not equipping the stage with proper fire apparatus and appliances; and we, the jury, recommend that the said James E. Cummings be held to the grand jury until discharged by due course of law.

From testimony presented to this jury, same shows a laxity and carelessness in city officials and their routine in transacting business, which calls for revision by the mayor and city council; and we, the jury demand immediate action on the following:

BUILDING DEPARTMENT

Should have classified printed lists, to be filled out by an inspector, then signed by head of department, before any public building can secure amusement license, and record kept thereof in duplicate carbon book.

All fire escapes should have separate passageways to the ground, without passing any openings in the walls.

All scenery and paraphernalia of any kind kept on the stage should be absolutely fireproof.

Asbestos curtains should be reinforced by steel curtains and held by steel cables.

There should be two electric mains entering all places of amusement, one from the front, with switchboard in box office, controlling entire auditorium and exits, and one on stage, to be used for theatrical purposes.

All city officials and employes should familiarize themselves with city ordinances as they relate to their respective departments, and pass a rigid and signed examination on same before they are given positions. This same rule should be made to apply to those holding office.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

All theaters and public places should be supplied with at least two city firemen, who shall be under the direction of the fire department and paid by the proprietors of said places.

We recommend that the office and detail work of the fire department, as imposed on the fire marshal, be made a separate and distinct work from fire fighting, as it is hardly to be expected of any fire marshal to give good and efficient service in both of these branches.

Also a police officer in full uniform detailed in and about said place at each and every performance.

In testimony wherof, the said coroner and jury of this inquest have hereunto set their hands the day and year aforesaid.

L. H. Meyer, Foreman,	Peter Byrnes,
J. A. Cummings,	Walter D. Clingman,
John E. Finn,	George W. Atkin
John E. Traeger, Coroner.	

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY OF THE FIRE

No disaster, by flood, volcano, wreck or convulsion of nature has in recent times aroused such horror as swept over the civilized world when on December 30, 1903, a death-dealing blast of flame hurtled through the packed auditorium of the Iroquois theater, Chicago, causing the loss of nearly 600 lives of men, women and children, and injuries to unknown scores.

Strong words pale and appear meaningless when used in describing the full enormity of this disaster, which has no recent parallel save in the outbreaks of nature's irresistible forces. There have been greater losses of life by volcanoes, earthquakes and floods, but no fire horror of modern times has equaled this one, which in a brief half-hour turned a beautiful million-dollar theater into an oven piled high with corpses, some burned and mutilated and others almost unmarked in death.

Coming, as it did, in the midst of a holiday season, when the second greatest city in the United States was reveling in the gaiety of Christmas week, this sudden transformation of a playhouse filled with a pleasure-seeking throng into an inferno filled with shrieking living and mutilated dead, came as a thunderbolt from a clear sky.

It was a typical holiday matinee crowd, composed mostly of women and children, with here and there a few men. The production was the gorgeous scenic extravaganza "*Mr. Bluebeard*," with which the handsome new theater had been opened not a month before. "Don't fail to have the children see '*Mr. Bluebeard*,'" was the advertisement spread broadcast throughout the city, and the children were there in force when the scorching sheet of flame leaped from the stage into the balcony and gallery where a thousand were packed.

The building had been heralded abroad as a "fireproof structure," with more than enough exits. Ushers and five men in city uniform were in the aisles. All was apparently safety, mirth and good cheer.

Then came the transformation scene!

The auditorium and the stage were darkened for the popular song "The Pale Moonlight." Eight dashing chorus girls and eight stalwart men in showy costume strolled through the measures of the piece, bathed in a flood of dazzling light. Up in the scenes a stage electrician was directing the "spot-light" which threw the pale moonlight effect on the stage.

Suddenly there was a startled cry. Far overhead where the "spot" was shooting forth its brilliant ray of concentrated light a tiny serpentine tongue of flame crept over the inside of the proscenium drape. It was an insignificant thing, yet the horrible possibilities it entailed flashed over all in an instant. A spark from the light had communicated to the rough edge of the heavy cloth drape. Like a flash it stole across the proscenium and high up into the gridiron above.

Accustomed as they were to insignificant fire scares and trying ordeals that are seldom the lot of those who lead a less strenuous life, the people of the stage hurried silently to the task of stamping out the blaze. In the orchestra pit it could readily be seen that something was radically wrong, but the trained musicians played on.

Members of the octette cast their eyes above and saw the tiny tongue of flame growing into a whirling maelstrom of fire. But it was a sight they had seen before. Surely something would happen to extinguish it. America's newest and most modern fireproof playhouse was not going to disappear before an insignificant fire in the rigging loft. So they continued to sway in sinuous steps to the rhythm of the throbbing orchestra. Their presence stilled the nervousness of the vast audience, which knew that something was wrong, but had no means of realizing what that something was.

So the gorgeously attired men and dashing, voluptuous young women danced on. The throng feasted its eyes on the moving scene of life and color, little knowing that for them it was the last dance – the dance of death!

That dance was not the only one in progress. Far above the element of death danced from curtain to curtain. The fire fiend, red and glowing with exultation, snapping and crackling in anticipation of the feast before it, grew beyond all bounds. Glowing embers and blazing sparks – crumbs from its table – began to shower upon the merry dancers, and they fell back with blanched faces and trembling limbs. Eddie Foy rushed to the front of the stage to reassure the spectators, who now realized the peril at hand and rose in their seats struggling against the impulse to fly. Others joined the comedian in his plea for calmness.

Suddenly their voices were drowned in a volley of sounds like the booming of great guns. The manila lines by which the carloads of scenery in the loft above was suspended gave way before the fire like so much paper and the great wooden batons fell like thunder bolts upon the now deserted stage.

Still the audience stood, terror bound.

"Lower the fire curtain!" came a hoarse cry.

Something shot down over the proscenium, then stopped before the great opening was closed, leaving a yawning space of many feet beneath. With the dropping of the curtain a door in the rear had been opened by the performers, fleeing for their lives and battling to escape from the devouring element fast hemming them in on every side. The draft thus caused transformed the stage in one second from a dark, gloomy, smoke concealed scene of chaos into a seething volcano. With a great puff the mass of flame swept out over the auditorium, a withering blast of death. Before it the vast throng broke and fled.

Doors, windows, hallways, fire escapes – all were jammed in a moment with struggling humanity, fighting for life. Some of the doors were jammed almost instantly so that no human power could make egress possible. Behind those in front pushed the frenzied mass of humanity, Chicago's elect, the wives and children of its most prosperous business men and the flower of local society, fighting like demons incarnate. Purses, wraps, costly furs were cast aside in that mad rush. Mothers were torn from their children, husbands from their wives. No hold, however strong, could last against that awful, indescribable crush. Strong men who sought to the last to sustain their feminine companions were swept away like straws, thrown to the floor and trampled into unconsciousness in the twinkling of an eye. Women to whom the safety of their children was more than their own lives had their little ones torn from them and buried under the mighty sweep of humanity, moving onward by intuition rather than through exercise of thought to the various exits. They in turn were swept on before their wails died on their lips – some to safety, others to an unspeakably horrible death.

While some exits were jammed by fallen refugees so as to become useless, others refused to open. In the darkness that fell upon the doomed theater a struggle ensued such as was never pictured in the mind of Dante in his visions of Inferno. With prayers, curses and meaningless shrieks of terror all faced their fate like rats in a trap. The darkness was illumined by a fearful light that burst from the sea of flame pouring out from the proscenium, making Dore's representations of Inferno shrink into the commonplace. Like a horizontal volcano the furnace on the stage belched forth its blast of fire, smoke, gas and withering, blighting heat. Like a wave it rolled over every portion of the vast house, dancing.

Dancing! Yes, the pillars of flame danced! To the multitude swept into eternity before the hurricane of flame and the few who were dragged out hideously disfigured and burned almost beyond all semblance of human beings it seemed indeed a dance of death.

Withering, crushing, consuming all in its path, forced on as though by the power of some mighty blow pipe, impelled by the fearful drafts that directed the fiery furnace outward into the auditorium instead of upward into the great flues constructed to meet just such an emergency, the sea of fire

burned itself out. There was little or nothing in the construction of the building itself for it to feed upon, and it fell back of its own weight to the stage, where it roared and raged like some angry demon.

And those great flues that supposedly gave the palatial Iroquois increased safety! Barred and grated, battened down with heavy timbers they resisted the terrific force of the blast itself. There they remained intact the next day. Anxiety to throw open the palace of pleasure to the public before the builders had time to complete in detail their Herculean task had resulted in converting it into a veritable slaughter pen.

"Mr. Bluebeard's" chamber of horrors, lightly depicted in satire to settings of gold and color, wit and music, had evolved within a few minutes into an actuality. Chamber of horrors indeed – grim, silent, smoldering and sending upon high the fearful odor of burning flesh.

Policemen and firemen, hardened to terrible sights, crept into the smoldering sepulchre only to turn back sickened by the sight that met their eyes. Tears and groans fell from them and they were unnerved as they gazed upon the scene of carnage. Some gave way and were themselves the subjects of deep concern. It was a scene to wring tears from the very stones. No words can adequately describe it.

Perhaps the best description of that quarter hour of carnage and the sense of horror when the seared, scorched sepulchre was entered for the removal of the dead and dying is found in the words of the veteran descriptive writer, Mr. Ben H. Atwell, who was present from the beginning to the end of the holocaust, and after visiting the deadly spot in the gray dawn of the following day wrote his impressions as follows:

"Where at 3:15 yesterday beauty and fashion and the happy amusement seeker thronged the palatial playhouse to fall a few moments later before a deadly blast of smoke and flame sweeping over all with irresistible force, the dawn of the last day of the passing year found confusion, chaos and an all-pervading sense of the awful. It seemed to radiate the chilling, depressing volume from the streaked, grime-covered walls and the flame-licked ceilings overhead. Against this fearful background the few grim firemen or police, moving silently about the ruins, searching for overlooked dead or abandoned property, loomed up like fitful ghosts.

WAVE OF FLAME GREET'S AUDIENCE

"The progress of their noiseless and ghastly quest proved one circumstance survivors are too unsettled to realize. With the opening of the stage door to permit the escape of the members of the 'Mr. Bluebeard' company and the breaking of the skylight above the flue-like scene loft that tops the stage, the latter was converted into a furnace through which a tremendous draft poured like a blow pipe, driving billows of flame into the faces of the terrified audience. With exits above the parquet floor simply choked up with the crushed bodies of struggling victims, who made the first rush for safety, the packed hundreds in balcony and gallery faced fire that moved them up in waves.

"With a swirl that sounded death, the thin bright sheet of fire rolled on from stage to rear wall. It fed on the rich box curtains, seized upon the sparse veneer of subdued red and green decorations spread upon wall, ceiling and balcony facings. It licked the fireproof materials below clean and rolled on with a roar. Over seat tops and plush rail cushions it sped. Then it snuffed out, having practically nothing to feed upon save the tangled mass of wood scene frames, batons and paint-soaked canvas on the stage.

FEW REALIZED APPALLING RESULT

"There firemen were directing streams of water that poured over the premises in great cascades in volume, aggregating many tons. A few streams were directed about the body of the house, where vagrant tongues of flame still found material on which to feed. Silence reigned – the silence of death, but none realized the appalling story behind the awful calm.

"The stampede that followed the first alarm, a struggle in which most contestants were women and children, fighting with the desperation of death, terminated with the sudden sweep of the sea of flames across the body of the house. The awful battle ended before the irresistible hand of death, which fell upon contestants and those behind alike. Somehow those on the main floor managed to force their way out. Above, where the presence of narrower exits, stairways that precipitated the masses of humanity upon each other and the natural air current for the billows of flame to follow, spelled death to the occupants of the two balconies, the wave of flame, smoke and gas smote the multitude.

DROP WHERE THEY STAND

"Dropping where they stood, most of the victims were consumed beyond recognition. Some who were protected from contact with the flames by masses of humanity piled upon them escaped death and were dragged out later by rescuers, suffering all manner of injury. The majority, however, who beheld the indescribably terrifying spectacle of the wave of death moving upon them through the air died then and there without a moment for preparation. Few survived to tell the tale. The blood-curdling cry of mingled prayers and curses, of pleas for help and meaningless shrieks of despair died away before the roar of the fire and the silence fell that greeted the firemen upon their entry.

"Survivors describe the situation as a parallel of the condition at Martinique when a wave of gas and fire rolled down the mountain side and destroyed everything in its path. Here, however, one circumstance was reversed, for the wave of death leaped from below and smote its victims, springing from the very air beneath them.

MANY HEROES ARE DEVELOPED

"In a few minutes it was all over – all but the weeping. In those few minutes obscure people had evolved into heroes; staid business men drove out patrons to convert their stores into temporary hospitals and morgues; others converted their trucks and delivery wagons into improvised ambulances; stocks of drugs, oils and blankets were showered upon the police to aid in relief work and a corps of physicians and surgeons sufficient to the needs of an army had organized.

"Rescues little short of miraculous were accomplished and life and limb were risked by public servants and citizens with no thought of personal consequences. Public sympathy was thoroughly aroused long before the extent of the horror was known and before the sickening report spread throughout the city that the greatest holocaust ever known in the history of theatricals had fallen upon Chicago.

"While the streets began to crowd for blocks around with weeping and heartbroken persons in mortal terror because of knowledge that loved ones had attended the performance, patrol wagons, ambulances and open wagons hurried the injured to hospitals. Before long they were called upon to perform the more gruesome task of removing the dead. In wagon loads the latter were carted away. Undertaking establishments both north, south and west of the river threw open their doors.

DEAD PILED IN HEAPS

"Piled in windows in the angle of the stairway where the second balcony refugees were brought face to face and in a death struggle with the occupants of the first balcony, the dead covered a space fifteen or twenty feet square and nearly seven feet in depth. All were absolutely safe from the fire itself when they met death, having emerged from the theater proper into the separate building containing the foyer. In this great court there was absolutely nothing to burn and the doors were only a few feet

away. There the ghastly pile lay, a mute monument to the powers of terror. Above and about towered shimmering columns and facades in polished marble, whose cold and unharmed surfaces seemed to bespeak contempt for human folly. In that portion of the Iroquois structure the only physical evidences of damages were a few windows broken during the excitement.

EXITS WERE CHOKED WITH BODIES

"To that pile of dead is attributed the great loss of life within. The bodies choked up the entrance, barring the egress of those behind. Neither age nor youth, sex, quality or condition were sacred in the awful battle in the doorway. The gray and aged, rich, poor, young and those obviously invalids in life lay in a tangled mass all on an awful footing of equality in silent annihilation.

"Within and above equal terrors were encountered in what at first seemed countless victims. Lights, patience and hard work brought about some semblance of system and at last word was given that the last body had been removed from the charnel house. A large police detail surrounded the place all night and with the break of day search of the premises was renewed, none being admitted save by presentation of a written order from Chief of Police O'Neill. Fire engines pumped away removing the lake of water that flooded the basement to the depth of ten feet. As the flood was lowered it began to be apparent that the basement was free of dead.

SURVEY SCENE WITH HORROR

"Searchers gazing down from the heights of the upper balcony surveyed the scene of death below with horror stamped upon their faces. Fire had left its terrifying blight in a colorless, garish monotony that suggests the burned-out crater of an extinct volcano. In the wreckage, the scattered garments and purses, fragments of charred bodies and other debris strewn within thousands of bits of brilliantly colored glass, lay as they fell shattered in the fight against the flames. A few skulls were seen.

FIND BUSHELS OF PURSES

"Five bushel baskets were filled with women's purses gathered by the police. A huge pile of garments was removed to a near-by saloon, where an officer guards them pending removal to some more appropriate place. The shoes and overshoes picked up among the seats fill two barrels to overflowing.

"The fire manifested itself in the flies above the stage during the second act. The double octette was singing 'In the Pale Moonlight' when the tragedy swept mirth and music aside, to give way to a more somber and frightful performance. Confusion on the stage, panic in the auditorium, phenomenal spread of the incipient blaze, failure of the asbestos fire curtain to fall in place when lowered followed in rapid progress, with the holocaust as the climax."

But to return to the narrative of what happened immediately after the first alarm, as gathered by the collaborators of this work. There was a wild, futile dash – futile because few of the terrified participants succeeded in reaching the outer air. Persons in the rear of the theater building knew full well that a holocaust was in progress. There fire escapes and stage doors thronged with refugees, half clad and hysterical chorus girls flocking into the alley, and crackling flames leaping higher and higher from the flimsy stage and bursting from windows, told only too plainly what was in progress within. At the front, half a block distant, in Randolph street, ominous silence maintained. A mere handful of people burst out, those who had occupied rear seats and pushed by the ushers who sought

to restrain them and quiet their fears. Loiterers about the ornate lobby scarcely sniffed a suggestion of impending disaster before the fire apparatus began to arrive with clanging bells.

Those ushers who held back the straining, anxious spectators who sought escape at the first mild suggestion of danger – for what widespread woe are they responsible!

Mere boys of tender years and meager experience, what knew they of the awful possibilities behind the spell of excitement upon the stage? Only two weeks before there had been an incipient blaze there that had been extinguished without the knowledge of the audience.

Like all the rest of the world that now stands in shuddering wonderment, these boys scoffed at the thought of real danger in the massive pile of steel, stone and terra cotta, with its brave and shimmering veneer of glistening marble, stained glass of many hues, rich tapestries and drapings, and cold, aristocratic tints of red and old gold. And so with uplifted hands they turned back those whose sense of caution prompted them to leave at the outset. Surely disaster could not overtake the regal Iroquois in its first flush of pomp, pride and superiority. It was their sacred duty to see that no unseemly break marred the decorum established for the guidance of audiences at the Iroquois, and that duty was fully discharged.

Thus it was that the wild hegira did not begin from the front until the arrival of the fire department. Then pandemonium itself broke loose. All restraining influences from the stage had ceased. At the appearance of the all-consuming wave of flame sweeping across the auditorium the boy ushers abandoned their posts and fled for their lives, leaving the packed audience to do the same unhampered.

Unhampered – not quite! Darkness descending upon the scene, doors locked against the frightened multitude, fire escapes cut off by tongues of flame and exits and stairways choked with the bodies of those who died fighting to reach safety hampered many – at least the six hundred carried out later mangled and roasted, their features and limbs twisted and distorted until little semblance to humanity remained. After the first wild dash, in which a large portion of those on the main floor escaped, the blackness of night settled upon the long marble foyer leading from Randolph street to the auditorium. It settled in a cloud of black, fire laden smoke – death in nebulous forms defying fire fighter and rescuer alike to enter the great corridor. None entered, and, more pitiful still, none came forth.

While this situation maintained in front a vastly different scene unfolded in the rear. The theater formed a great L, extending north from Randolph street to an alley and, in the rear, west to Dearborn street. This last projection, the toe of the L, was occupied by the stage, theoretically the finest in America, if not in the world. Thus the auditorium and stage occupied the extreme northern part of the structure, paralleling an alley extending on a line with Randolph street from State street to Dearborn street. This alley wall was pierced by many windows and emergency exits and was studded with fire escapes built in the form of iron galleries, and stairways hugging close to the wall leading to the alley.

To these exits and the long, grim galleries of fire escapes the herded, fire-hunted audience surged. Those who reached doors that responded to their efforts found themselves pushed along the galleries by the resistless crush behind. As was the case in front, half way to safety another stream of humanity was encountered pouring out at right angles from another portion of the house. Coming together with the impact of opposing armies the two hosts of refugees gave unwilling and terrible answer to the time worn problem as to the outcome of an irresistible force encountering an immovable body. Both in front and rear great mounds of dead spelled annihilation as the answer. In front over 200 corpses piled in a twenty-foot angle of a stairway where two balcony exits merged told the terrible tale, and rendered both passages useless for egress, the dead being piled up in wall-like formation ten feet high.

In the rear an alley strewn with mangled men, women and children writhing in agony on the icy pavement, or relieved of their sufferings by death, lent eloquent corroboration to the solution of the problem.

It was in the rear that the true horror of the fire was most fully disclosed. There no towering mosaic studded walls or kindly mantle of smoke shut out the horrid sight. From its opening scene to its silent, ghastly denouement the successive details of this greatest of modern tragedies was forced upon the view to be stamped upon the memory of the unwilling beholder with an impressiveness that only death will blot out.

After the first great impact had hurled the overflow of the fire-escape gallery into the alley yawning far below, the crush of humanity swept onward, downward to where safety beckoned. When the advance guard had all but reached the precious goal, with only a few feet of iron gallery and one more stairway to traverse, the crowning horror of the day unfolded itself. Right in the path of the advancing horde a steel window shutter flew back, impelled by the terrific energy of an immeasurable volume of pent up superheated air.

The clang of the steel shutter swinging back on its hinges against the brick wall sounded the death knell of another host of victims, for in its wake came a huge tongue of lurid flame, leaping on high in the ecstasy of release from its stifling furnace. Fiercely in the faces of the refugees beat this agency of death. Before its withering blast the victims fell like prairie grass before an autumn blaze. Those further back waited for no more, but precipitated themselves headlong into the alley rather than face the fiery furnace that loomed up barring the way to hope.

It would be well to draw the curtain upon this awful scene of suffering and death in the gloomy alley were it not for one circumstance that stands forth a glorious example of the heights that may be attained by the modest hero who moves about unsuspected in his daily life until calamity affords opportunity to show the stuff he is made of. High up in the building occupied by the law, dental and pharmacy schools of the Northwestern University, directly across the alley from the burning theater, a number of such men were at work. They were horny handed sons of toil – painters, paper hangers and cleaners repairing minor damage caused by an insignificant fire in the university building a few weeks before. One glance at the seething vortex of death below transformed them into heroes whose deeds would put many a man to shame whose memory is kept alive by stately column or flattering memorial tablet.

Trailing heavy planks used by them in the erection of working scaffolds, they rushed to a window in the lecture room of the law school directly opposite the exit and fire escape platform leading from the topmost balcony of the theater. By almost superhuman effort and ingenuity they raised aloft the planks, scarce long enough to span the abyss, and dropped them. The prayers of thousands below and a multitude stifling in the aperture opposite were raised that the planks might fall true. All eyes followed their course as they poised in mid-air, then descended. Slow seemed their fall, a veritable period of torture, and awed silence reigned as they dropped.

Then there arose a glad cry. With a crash the great planks landed true, the free ends squarely upon the edge of the platform of the useless fire escape, the others resting firmly upon the narrow window ledge where the painters stood defying flame, smoke and torrents of burning embers and blazing sparks hurled upon them as from the crater of a volcano.

Death alley had been bridged! Across the narrow span came a volume of bedraggled humanity as though shot from a gun. A mad, screaming stream, pushed on by those behind, simply whirled across the frail support, direct from the very jaws of death, the blistering gates of hell.

Only for a moment, a brief second it seemed, the wild procession moved. Yet in that limited period scores, perhaps hundreds, poured from the seething inferno – practically all that escaped from the lofty balcony that was a moment later transformed into the death chamber of helpless hundreds. Then the wave of flame, previously described, swept over the interior of the theater, greedily searching every nook and corner as though hungry for the last victim within reach.

The last refugees to cross the narrow span, the dizzy line sharply drawn between life and death in its most terrifying aspect, staggered over with their clothing in flames, gasping, fainting with pain and terror. The workmen, students and policemen who had rushed to their assistance dashed across

into the heat and smoke and dragged forth many more who had reached the platform only to fall before the deadly blast. Then the rescuers were beaten back and the fire fiend was left to claim its own.

And claim them it did, searching them out with ruminating tongues of flame. Over every inch of paint and decoration, every tapestry, curtain and seat top it licked its way with insinuating eagerness. It pursued its victims beyond the confines of the theater walls, grasping in its deadly embrace those who lay across windows or prostrate on galleries and platforms. Thousands gazed on in helpless horror, watching the flames bestow a fatal caress upon many who had crept far, far from the blaze and almost into a zone of safety. With a gliding, caressing movement that made beholders' blood run cold it crept upon such victims, hovered a moment and glided on with sinuous motion and what approached a suggestion of intelligence in searching out those who fled before it. A shriek, a spasmodic movement and the victims lay still, their earthly troubles over forever.

A few minutes later, possibly not more than half an hour after the discovery of the fire, when the firemen had beaten back the flames to the raging stage another procession moved across that same plank again. It moved in silence, for it was a procession of death. The great tragedy began and ended in fifteen minutes. Its echoes may roll down as many centuries, compelling the proper safeguarding of all places of amusement, in America at least. If so, the Iroquois victims did not give up their lives in vain.

When the removal of the victims across the improvised bridge over death alley ended the tireless official in charge of that work, James Markham, secretary to Chief of Police O'Neill, had checked off 102 corpses. No attempt was made to keep count of the dead as they were removed from other portions of the theater and by other exits. The counting was done when the patrol wagons, ambulances, trucks and delivery wagons used in removing the dead deposited their ghastly loads at the morgues.

The instance cited was not an isolated example of heroism, but rather merely a striking instance among scores. Police, firemen and citizens vied with each other in the work of humanity. Merchants drove out customers and threw open their business houses as temporary hospitals and morgues. Others donated great wagon loads of blankets and supplies of all kinds and the municipal government was embarrassed by the unsolicited relief funds that poured in. All manner of vehicles were given freely for the removal of dead and injured. So informal was the removal of the latter that many may have reached their homes unreported. For that reason a complete list of the injured may never be secured.

An illustration of the possibilities in that direction is found in the case of one man who wrapped the dead body of his wife in his overcoat and carried it to Evanston, many miles away, where the circumstances became known days later when a burial permit was sought. Another is the case of an injured man who revived on a dead wagon en route to a morgue and was removed by friends.

All these and other details are elaborated upon elsewhere, together with the touching story of the scores of young women employed in the production, "Mr. Bluebeard," who would have been stranded penniless in a strange city a thousand miles from home but for the prompt and noble relief afforded by Mrs. Ogden Armour.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST AID TO THE INJURED AND CARE FOR THE DEAD

On the heels of the firemen came the police, intent on the work of rescue. Chief O'Neill and Assistant Chief Schuettler ordered captains from a dozen stations to bring their men, and then they rushed to the theater and led the police up the stairs to the landing outside the east entrance to the first balcony.

The firemen, rushing blindly up the stairs in the dense pall of smoke, had found their path suddenly blocked by a wall of dead eight or ten feet high. They discovered many persons alive and carried them to safety. Other firemen crawled over the mass of dead and dragged their hose into the theater to fight back the flames that seemed to be crawling nearer to turn the fatal landing into a funeral pyre.

O'Neill and Schuettler immediately began carrying the dead from the balcony, while other policemen went to the gallery to begin the work there.

In the great mass of dead at the entrance to the first balcony the bodies were so terribly interwoven that it was impossible at first to take any one out.

"Look out for the living!" shouted the chief to his men. "Try to find those who are alive."

From somewhere came a faint moaning cry.

"Some one alive there, boys," came the cry. "Lively, now!"

The firemen and police long struggled in vain to move the bodies.

The raging tide of humanity pouring out of the east entrance of the balcony during the panic had met the fighting, struggling crowd coming down the stairs from the third balcony at right angles. The two streams formed a whirlpool which ceased its onward progress and remained there on the landing where people stamped each other under foot in that mad circle of death.

In a short time the blockade in the fatal angle must have been complete. Then into this awful heap still plunged the contrary tides of humanity from each direction. Many tried to crawl over the top of the heap, but were drawn down to the grinding mill of death underneath. The smoke was heavy at the fatal angle, for the majority of those taken out at that point bore no marks of bruises.

Many, and especially the children, were trampled to death, but others were held as in a vise until the smoke had choked the life from their bodies.

It was toward this that the firemen directed O'Neill and Schuettler as they rushed into the theater. The smoke was still heavy and the great gilded marble foyer of the "handsomest theater in America" was somber and dark and still as a tomb, except for the whistling of the engines outside and now and then the shouting of the firemen. Water was dripping everywhere and stood inches deep on the floor and stairs.

Two flickering lanterns shed the only light by which the policemen worked, and this very fact, perhaps, made their task more horrible and gruesome, if such a thing were possible.

GREAT PILE OF CHARRED BODIES FOUND EVERYWHERE IN THEATER

All through the gallery the bodies were found. Some were those of persons who had decided to stay in their seats and not to join in the mad rush for the doors and run the risk of being trampled to death. Many of them no doubt had trusted to the cries, "There is no danger; keep your seats!"

They had stuck to their seats until, choked by the heavy smoke, they had been unable to move.

Some bodies were in a sitting position, while others had fallen forward, with the head resting on the seat in front, as though in prayer. Almost all were terribly burned.

In the aisles lay women and children who had staid in their seats until they finally were convinced that the danger was real. Then they had attempted to get to the door.

The smoke was so heavy the firemen worked with difficulty, but finally it cleared and workmen who were hastily sent by the Edison company equipped forty arc lights, which shone bravely through the smoke. With this help the firemen searched to better effect, and found bodies that in the blackness they had missed.

"Give that girl to some one else and get back there," shouted Chief Musham to a fireman. The fireman never answered but kept on with his burden.

"Hand that girl to some one else," shouted the battalion chief.

The fireman looked up. Even in the flickering light of the lantern the chief carried one could see the tears coming from the red eyes and falling down the man's blackened cheeks.

"Chief," said the fireman, "I've got a girl like this at home. I want to carry this one out."

"Go ahead," said the chief. The little group working at the head of the stairs broke apart while the fireman, holding the body tightly, made his way slowly down the stairs.

One by one the dead were taken from the pile in the angle. The majority of them were women. On some faces was an expression of terrible agony, but on others was a look of calmness and serenity, and firemen sometimes found it hard to believe they were dead. Three firemen carried the body of a young woman down the stairs in a rubber blanket. She appeared alive. Her hands were clasped and held flowers. Her eyes were closed and she seemed almost to smile. She looked as though she was asleep, but it was the sleep of death.

In the dark and smoke, with the dripping water and the dead piled in heaps everywhere, the Iroquois theater had been turned into a tomb by the time the rescue parties had begun their work.

MOAN INSPIRES WORKERS IN MAD EFFORT TO SAVE

The moan that the frantic workers heard as they struggled to untangle the mass of bodies gave the police hope that many in the heap might be alive.

"We can't do it, chief," shouted one of the policemen. "We can't untangle them."

"We must take these bodies out of the way to get down to those who are alive," replied the chief. "This man here is dead; lay hold, now, boys, and pull him out."

Two big firemen caught the body by the shoulders and struggled and pulled until they had it free. Then another body was taken out, and then again the workers seemed unable to unloose the dead. Again came that terrible moan through the mass.

"For God's sake, get down to that one who's alive," implored O'Neill, almost in despair.

The policemen pulled off their heavy overcoats and worked frantically at the heap. Often a body could not be moved except when the firemen and police dragged with a "yo, heave," like sailors hauling on a rope. As fast as the bodies were freed one policeman, or sometimes two or three, would stagger down the stairs with their burdens.

Over the heap of bodies crawled a fireman carrying something in his arms.

"Out of the way, men, let me out! The kid's alive."

The workers fell back and the fireman crawled over the heap and was helped out. He ran down the stairs three steps at a time to get the child to a place where help might be given before it was too late. Then other firemen from inside the theater passed out more bodies, which were handed from one policeman to another until some on the outside of the heap could take the dead and carry them downstairs.

Suddenly a policeman pulling at the heap gave a shout.

"I've got her, chief!" he said. "She's alive, all right!"

"Easy there, men, easy," cried Schuettler; "but hurry and get that woman to a doctor!"

A girl, apparently 18 years old, was moaning faintly. The policeman released her from the tangled heap, and a big fireman, lifting her tenderly in his arms, hurried with her to the outside of the building.

"There must be more alive," said the chief. "Work hard, boys."

There was hardly any need to ask the men to work harder, for they were pulling and hauling as though their own lives depended on their efforts. Everybody worked.

The reporters, the only ones in the theater besides the police and firemen, laid aside their pencils and note books and struggled down the wet, slippery stairs, carrying the dead. Newspaper artists threw their sketch books on the floor to jump forward and pick up the feet or head of a body that a fireman or policeman found too heavy to carry alone. Constantly now a stream of workers was passing slowly down the stairs. Usually two men supported each body, but often some giant policeman or fireman strode along with a body swung over his shoulders. Coming down the stairs was a fireman with a girl of 16 clasped in his arms.

"Isn't that girl alive?" asked the chief.

"No," shouted two or three men, who had jumped to see. "She's dead, poor thing, rest her soul," said the fireman reverently, and then he picked his way down the stairs. Half-way down the marble steps two arms suddenly clasped the fireman's neck.

He started so he missed his footing and would have fallen had not a policeman steadied him.

"She's alive, she's alive!" shouted the fireman. "Git out of the way, there, out of the way, men," and he went dashing headlong out into the open air and through the crowd to a drug store.

One child after another was taken from the heap and passed out to be carried downstairs. Some were little boys in new suits, sadly torn, and with their poor little faces wreathed in agony. On their foreheads was the seal of death.

A big fireman came crawling from the heavy smoke of the inner balcony. He carried a girl of 10 years in his arms. Her long, flaxen hair half covered the pure white face.

A gray haired man with a gash on his head apparently had fallen down the stairs. A woman's face bore the mark of a boot heel. A woman with a little boy clasped tight in her arms was wedged into a corner. Her clothes were almost torn from her, and her face was bruised. The child was unmarked, as she had thrown her own body over his to protect him.

Out of the mass of bodies when the police began their work protruded one slender little white hand, clinching a pair of pearl opera glasses, which the little owner had tried to save, in spite of the fact that her own life was being crushed out of her. Watches, pocketbooks and chatelaine bags were scattered all through the pile. One man was detailed to make a bag out of a rubber coat and take care of the property that was handed to him.

While the police were working so desperately at the fatal angle, another detail of police and firemen were working on the third floor. At the main entrance of the gallery lay another heap of bodies, and there was still another at the angle of the head of the stairs leading to the floor below. Here the sight was even worse than the terrible scene presented at the landing of the first balcony.

The bodies on the landing were not burned. A jam had come there, and many had been stamped under foot and either killed outright or left to suffocate. Many of the bodies were almost stripped of clothing and bore the marks of remorseless heels.

After these had been carried out, the firemen returned again and again from the pitchy blackness of the smoke-filled galleries, dragging bodies, burned sometimes beyond recognition.

NONE LEFT ALIVE IN GALLERY

While now and then some one had been found alive in the other fatal angle, no one was rescued by searchers in the top gallery. The bodies had to be laid along the hall until the merchants in State

street began sending over blankets. Men from the streets came rushing up the stairs, bending under the weight of the blankets they carried on their shoulders. Soon they went back to the street again, this time carrying their blankets weighed down with a charred body.

DEAD AND DYING CARRIED INTO NEARBY RESTAURANT BY SCORES

The scenes in John R. Thompson's restaurant in Randolph street, adjoining the theater, were ghastly beyond words.

Few half hours in battle bring more of horror than the half hour that turned the cafe into a charnel house, with its tumbled heaps of corpses, its shrieks of agony from the dying, and the confusion of doctors and nurses working madly over bodies all about as they strove to bring back the spark of life.

Bodies were everywhere – piled along the walls, laid across tables, and flung down here and there – some charred beyond recognition, some only scorched, and others black from suffocation; some crushed in the rush of the panic, others but the poor, broken remains of those who leaped into death. And most of them – almost all of them – were the forms of women and children. It is estimated that more than 150 bodies were accounted for in Thompson's alone.

The continuous tramp of the detachments of police bearing in more bodies, the efforts of the doctors to restore life, and the madness of those who surged in through the police lines to ransack piles of bodies for relatives and friends, made up a scene of pandemonium of which it is hard to form a conception. There was organization of the fifty physicians and nurses who fought back death in the dying; there was organization of the police and firemen; but still the restaurant was a chaos that left the head bewildered and the heart sick.

The work was too much for even the big force of doctors that had flocked there to volunteer their services. Everybody in which there was the slightest semblance of life was given over to the physicians, who with oxygen tanks and resuscitative movements sought to revive the heart beats. As soon as death was certain the body was drawn from the table and laid beneath, to give place to another. But systematic as was this effort, heaps of bodies remained which the doctors had not touched.

In a dozen instances, even when the end of the work was in sight, a hand or foot was seen to move in this or that heap. Instantly three or four doctors were bending over rolling away the dead bodies to drag forth one still warm with life. In a thrice the body was on a table and the oxygen turned on while the doctors worked with might and main to force respiration. Almost always it was in vain – life went out. Two or three were resuscitated, though it is uncertain with what chances of ultimate recovery. One of these was a Mrs. Harbaugh, who had been brought in for dead and her body tossed among the lifeless forms that ranged the walls.

When the first rush of people from the theater gave notice of the fire to persons in the street there were less than a score of patrons in the restaurant. These rushed into the street, too, while a panic spread among the waitresses and kitchen force. By this time fire company 13 was on the ground in the alley side of the theater and the police were at the front attempting to lead the audience from its peril with some semblance of order. In another minute women and children with blistered faces were dashing screaming into the street, taking refuge in the first doorways at hand.

Another minute, and every policeman knew in his heart the horror that was at hand. A patrolman dashed into Thompson's and ordered the tables cleared and arranged to care for the injured. Captain Gibbons dispatched another policeman to issue a general call for physicians and a detachment to take charge of the restaurant and the first aid to be administered there. Within five minutes the first of the injured were being laid on the marble topped dining tables where the police ambulance corps were getting at work.

These steps scarcely had been taken when word came from the burning theater that the fire was under control, but that the loss of life would be appalling. Chief O'Neill hurried to the scene, sending

back word as he ran that Secretary James Markham should summon doctors and ambulances from every place available. The west side district of the medical schools and hospitals was called upon to send all the volunteers possible, together with hospital equipment. One hundred students from Rush Medical College were soon on their way by street car and patrol wagon to the scene.

TERRIBLE REALITY COMES TO AWESTRICKEN CROWD

It was only fifteen minutes after the first tongue of flame shot out from behind the scenes that a lull came in the awful drama of death within the theater. The firemen had quenched the fire and all the living had escaped. All that remained were dead. But now the scenes within the improvised hospital and morgue rose to the height of their horror.

But for a narrow lane the length of the cafe the floor was covered with bodies or the tumbled bundles of clothing that told where a body was concealed. And over the scene of the dead rose the groans of the tortured beings who writhed upon the tables in the throes of their passing. And over the cries of the suffering rose the shouts of command of the Red Cross corps – now the directions of Dr. Lydston as to attempts at resuscitation, now the megaphone shouts of Senator Clark ordering the disposition of bodies and the organization of the constantly arriving volunteer nurses.

In the narrow lane of the dead surged the policemen, bringing ever more and more forms to cord up beneath the tables. Then came the press of people, who, frantic with anxiety, had beaten back the police guard to look for loved ones in the charnel house. There was Louis Wolff, Jr., searching for two nephews and his sister. There was Postmaster Coyne, who had hurried from a meeting of the crime committee to lend his aid. There were Aldermen Minwegen and Alderman Badenoch, and besides them scores of men and women anxiously looking and looking, and nerving themselves to fear the worst.

"Have you found Miss Helen McCaughan?" shrieked a hysterical woman. "She's from the Yale apartments, and – "

"I'm looking for a Miss Errett – she's a nurse," cried another.

"My little boy – Charles Hennings – have you found him, doctor?" came from another.

From every side came the heartrending appeals, while the din was so great that no single plaint rose above the volume of sounds. And all the time the doorway was a place of frightful sights.

"O, please go back for my little girl," gasped a woman whose face and hands were a blister and whose clothing was burned to the skin. She staggered across the threshold and fell prone. Her last breath had gone out of her when two policemen snatched up the body and bore it to an operating table.

"O, where's my Annie?" screamed another woman, horribly burned, whom two policemen supported between them into the restaurant. But at the word she collapsed, and, though three physicians worked over her for ten minutes, she never breathed again.

ONE LIFE BROUGHT BACK FROM DEATH

Of a sudden Dr. E. E. Vaughan saw a finger move in a mass of the dead against the far wall of the restaurant.

"Men, there's a live one in there," he cried, and, while others came running, the physician flung aside the bodies till he had uncovered a woman of middle age, terribly burned about the face, and with her outer garments a mass of charred shreds.

In a second the woman was undergoing resuscitative treatment on a table, while the oxygen streamed into her lungs. Two doctors worked her arms like pumps, while a nurse manipulated the region of the heart. At length there was a flutter of a respiration, while a doctor bending over with his stethoscope announced a heart beat just perceptible. Another minute passed and the eyelids moved, while a groan escaped the lips.

"She lives!" simply said Dr. Vaughan, as he ordered the oxygen tube removed and brandy forced between the lips. In five minutes the woman was saved from immediate death, at least, though suffering terribly from burns. She was just able to murmur that her name was Mrs. Harbaugh, but that was all that could be learned of her identity before she was taken away to a hospital.

ONE HUNDRED FEET IN AIR, POLICE CARRY INJURED ACROSS ALLEY

Over a narrow, ice covered bridge made of scaffold planks, more than 100 feet above the ground the police carried more than 100 bodies from the rear stage and balcony exits of the Iroquois theater to the Northwestern University building, formerly the Tremont house. The planks rested on the fire escape of the theater and on the ledge of a window in the Tremont building.

Two men who first ventured on this dangerous passageway in their efforts to reach safety, blinded by the fire and smoke, lost their footing and fell to the alley below. They were dead when picked up.

The bridge led directly into the dental school of the university, and at one time there were more than a score of charred bodies lying under blankets in the room. The dead were carried from the pile of bodies at the theater exits faster than the police could take them away in the ambulances and patrol wagons.

As soon as the police began to take the injured into the university building the classrooms were drawn upon for physicians, and in a few minutes professors and dental students gathered in the offices and stores to lend their assistance. Wounds were dressed, and in cases of less serious injury the unfortunates were sent to their homes. In other cases they were sent to hospitals.

When the smoke had cleared away the rescuers first realized the extent of the horror. From the bridge could be seen the rows of balcony and gallery seats, many occupied by a human form. Incited by the sight, the police redoubled their efforts, and heedless of the dangers of the narrow, slippery bridge, pressed close to each other as they worked.

While a dozen policemen were removing the dead from the theater, twice as many were engaged in carrying them to the patrol wagons and ambulances at the doors of the university building. All the afternoon the elevators carried down police in twos and fours carrying their burdens of dead in blankets. So fast were they carried down that many of the patrol wagons held five and more bodies when they were driven away.

CROWDS OF ANXIOUS FRIENDS

Behind the lines of police that guarded the passage of the dead, hundreds of anxious men and women crowded with eager questions. The rotunda of the building between 3 and 7 p. m. was thronged by those seeking knowledge of friend or relative who had been in the play. Some made their way to the third floor and looked hopelessly at the charred bodies lying there. In one corner lay the bodies of husband and wife, clasped in each other's arms. From under one sheltering blanket protruded the dainty high heeled shoes of some woman, and from the next blanket the rubber boots of a newsboy.

A Roman Catholic priest made his way into the room. He was looking for a little girl, the daughter of a parishioner.

"Have you the name of Lillian Doerr in your list?" he asked James Markham, Chief O'Neill's secretary, who was in charge of the police. Markham shook his head.

"She and another little girl named Weiskopp were with three other girls," continued the priest. "Three of the girls in the party have got home, but Lillian and the Weiskopp girl are missing. I suppose we must wait until all the bodies are identified before we can find her."

The priest's mission and its futile results were duplicated scores of times by anxious inquirers.

BALCONY AND GALLERY CLEARED

The rescue work went on until the balcony and gallery had been cleared of the dead, and then the police were called away. The exits were barred and the hotel building cleared of visitors. While the work of rescue was going on inside the building, the streets about the entrances were thronged with thousands of curious spectators. As soon as an ambulance backed up to the entrance the crowd pressed forward to get a view of the bundles placed in the wagon. Even after this work had ended the crowds remained in the cold and darkness.

Many of the small shops and offices in the University building threw open their doors to the injured and those who had been separated from their friends. When those who had escaped by the alley exits reached Dearborn street they found the doors of the Hallwood Cash Register offices, 41 Dearborn street, open to them. L. A. Weismann, Harry Snow, Harry Dewitt, and C. J. Burnett of the office force at once prepared to care for the injured. More than fifty persons were cared for.

While these men were caring for strangers they themselves were haunted by the dread that Manager H. Ludwig of the company with his wife and two daughters were among the dead. The Ludwig family lives in Norwood Park, and the father had left the office with them early in the afternoon. At 6 o'clock he had not returned for his overcoat.

FINANCE COMMITTEE OF CITY COUNCIL ACTS PROMPTLY

"Spare no expense," was the order given by the finance committee of the council which was in session when the extent of the disaster became known at the city hall. First to grasp the import of the news was Ald. Raynier, whose wife and four children had left him at noon to attend the matinee. With a gasp he hurried from the room to go to the scene.

"You are instructed," said Chairman Mavor to Acting Mayor McGann, "to direct the fire marshal, the chief of police, and the commissioner of public works to proceed in this emergency without any restrictions as to expense. Do everything needful, spend all the money needed, and look to the council for your warrant. We will be your authority."

A telegram at once was sent to Mayor Harrison informing him of the fire and the executive returned from Oklahoma on the first train.

Acting Commissioner of Public Works Brennan sent word to Chief O'Neill and Fire Marshal Musham that the public works department was at their service.

"We want men and lanterns," Chief Musham answered.

Supt. Solon was sent to a store near the theater with an order for as many lanterns as might be needed. Supt. Doherty assembled 150 men in Randolph street and seventy wagons employed on First ward streets. They were placed at the disposal of the two chiefs.

Chief O'Neill was in the council chamber when the news arrived, hearing charges against a police officer. Lieut. Beaubien came from his office and whispered to him. The chief hurried to the fire. The trial board continued its work.

On the ground floor of the city hall the fire trial board was in executive session trying six firemen on a charge of carrying tales to insurance men against the chief.

At 3:33 o'clock the alarm rang. Chief, assistant chiefs, and accused firemen listened. Then the news of the magnitude of the fire reached headquarters. The board hurriedly adjourned and Chief Musham led accusers and accused to fight the fire.

CHAPTER III.

TAKING AWAY AND IDENTIFYING THE DEAD

In drays and delivery wagons they carried the dead away from the Iroquois theater ruins. The sidewalk in front of the playhouse and Thompson's restaurant was completely filled with dead bodies, when it was realized that the patrol wagons and ambulances could not remove the bodies.

Then Chief O'Neill and Coroner Traeger sent out men to stop drays and press them into service. Transfer companies were called up on telephone and asked to send wagons. Retail stores in State street sent delivery wagons.

Into these drays and wagons were piled the bodies. They lay outstretched on the sidewalk, covered with blankets. Much care in the handling was impossible. As soon as a space on the walk was made by the removal of a body two were brought down to fill it.

One of the wagons of the Dixon Transfer Company was so heavily loaded with the dead that the two big horses drawing it were unable to start the truck. Policemen and spectators put their shoulders to the wheels.

When the drays were filled and started there was a struggle to get them through the crowds, densely packed, even within the fire lines which the police had established across Randolph street at State and Dearborn streets.

Policemen with clubs preceded many of the wagons. The crowds through which they forced their way were composed mostly of men who had sent wives and children to the theater and had reason to believe that one of the drays might carry members of their own families.

Eight and ten wagons at a time, half of them trucks and delivery wagons, were backed up to the curb waiting for their loads of dead.

Two policemen would seize a blanket at the corners and swing it, with its contents, up to two other men in the wagon. This would be continued until a wagonload of bodies had been handled. Then the police forced a way through the crowd and another wagon took the place.

Occasionally a body would be identified, and then efforts were made to remove it direct to the residence. Coroner Traeger discovered the wife of Patrick P. O'Donnell, president of the O'Donnell & Duer Brewing Company.

"Telephone to some undertaking establishment and have them take Mrs. O'Donnell's body home," he ordered one of his assistants. It was taken to the residence, at 4629 Woodlawn avenue.

Friends of another woman who were positive they identified the body among the dead in Thompson's were allowed by the coroner to remove it to Ford's undertaking establishment, in Thirty-fifth street.

HEARTRENDING SCENES WITNESSED AT THE UNDERTAKING ESTABLISHMENTS

The bodies of the fire victims were distributed among the undertaking rooms and morgues most convenient. By 8:30 o'clock 135 bodies lay on the floors in the establishment of C. H. Jordan, 14-16 East Madison street, and in the temporary annex across the alley. The first were brought in ambulances and in police patrol wagons. Later all sorts of conveyances were pressed into service, and during more than two hours there was a procession of two-horse trucks, delivery wagons, and cabs, all bringing dead. It soon became evident that the capacity of the place would be exhausted and the men, who sat drinking and talking at the tables in the big ante-room in a saloon across the alley were driven out, and this also was arranged for use as a temporary morgue.

Two policemen were in charge of each load of the dead, and as soon as the first few bodies were received, they began searching for possible marks of identification. All jewelry and valuables, as well as letters, cards, and other papers were put in sealed envelopes, marked with a number corresponding with that on the tag attached to the body. When this work was completed all the envelopes were sent to police headquarters, and all inquirers after missing friends and relatives were referred to the city hall to inspect the envelopes.

The scenes in the two long rooms of the morgue in the saloon annex across the alley were so overpowering that they appeared to lose their effect. Many of the bodies last brought from the theater were sadly burned and disfigured and almost all of the faces were discolored and the clothing rumpled and wet.

The condition of many of the bodies evidenced a vain battle for life. Almost all of them were women or children, and the majority had been well dressed. Among them were several old women. The men were few. In many cases the hands were torn, as if violent efforts had been made to wrench away some obstruction.

As quickly as the work of searching the bodies was completed, the attendants stretched strips of muslin over the forms, partly hiding the pitiful horror of the sight.

Persons were slow in coming to the undertakers in search of friends. Many had their first suspicion of the catastrophe when members of theater parties failed to return at the usual hour.

Among the first to arrive at Jordan's were George E. McCaughan, attorney for the Chicago & Rock Island railroad, 6565 Yale avenue, who came in search of his daughter, Helen, who had attended a theater party with other young women. A friend had been in Dearborn street when the fire started and soon after had discovered in Thompson's restaurant the body of Miss McCaughan. He attached a card bearing her name to the body, and, leaving it in the custody of a physician, went to the telephone to notify the father. When he returned to the restaurant the body already had been removed and the friend and the father searched last night without finding it.

As it grew later the crowd around the doors increased, but almost every one was turned away. It would have been impossible for persons to have passed through the long rooms for the purpose of inspecting the bodies, they were so close together. Women came weeping to the doors of the undertaking shop and beat upon the glass, only to be referred to the city hall or told "to come back in the morning."

Later it was learned that physicians would be admitted for the purpose of inspecting and identifying the dead, and many persons came accompanied by their family doctors for that purpose. Two women, who pressed by the officer at the door, sank half fainting into chairs in the outer office. They were looking for Miss Hazel J. Brown, of 94 Thirty-first street, and Miss Eloise G. Swayze, of Fifty-sixth street and Normal avenue. A single glance at the long lines of bodies stretched on the floor was enough to satisfy them. They were told to return in the morning or to send their family physician to make the identification.

"The poor girls had come from the convent to spend the holiday vacation," sobbed one of the women.

During the evening the telephone bell constantly was ringing, and persons whose relatives had failed to return on time were asked for information.

"Have you found a small heart-shaped locket set with a blue stone?" would come a call over the wire, and the answer would be, "We can tell nothing about that until morning."

At Rolston's undertaking rooms were 182 bodies, lying four rows deep in the rear of 18 Adams street and three rows deep in the rear of 22 Adams street.

On the floors, tagged with the numerals of the coroner's scheme for identification, were bodies of men, women, and children awaiting identification. One was that of a little girl with yellow hair in a tangle of curls around her face. She appeared as if she slept. A silk dress of blue was spread over her and the sash of white ribbon scarcely was soiled.

Over the long lines of the dead the police hovered in the search for identifying marks and for valuables. Most of the bodies were partly covered with blankets.

Outside a big crowd surged and struggled with the police. Not till 10 o'clock were the doors opened. Then Coroner Traeger arrived, and in groups of twelve or fifteen the crowd was permitted to pass through the doors.

There was a pathetic scene at Rolston's morgue when the body of John Van Ingen, 18 years old, of Kenosha, Wis., was identified. Friends of the Van Ingen family had spent the entire evening searching at the request of Mr. and Mrs. Van Ingen, who were injured. At midnight four of the Van Ingen children, who were believed to have perished in the fire, had not been accounted for. They were: Grace, 2 years old; Dottie, 5 years old; Mary, 13 years old; and Edward, 20 years old.

In the undertaking rooms of J. C. Gavin, 226 North Clark street, and Carroll Bros., 203 Wells street, forty-five bodies swathed in blankets were awaiting identification at midnight. Of the fifty-four brought to these places only nine had been identified by the hundreds of relatives and friends who filed through the rooms, and in several cases the recognition was doubtful.

An atmosphere of awe appeared to pervade the places, and no hysterical scenes followed the pointing out of the bodies. The morbid crowds usually attendant on a smaller calamity were absent, and few except those seeking missing relatives sought admission. Only one of the men, James D. Maloney, wept as he stood over the body of his dead wife.

"I can't go any further," he said. "Her sister, Tennie Peterson, who lived in Fargo, N. D., was with her, and her body probably is there," motioning to the row of blanket-covered forms, "but I can't look. I must go back to the little ones at home, now motherless."

In Inspector Campbell's office at the Chicago avenue station Sergeant Finn monotonously repeated the descriptions, as the scores of frantic seekers filled and refilled the little office. Several times he was interrupted by hysterical shrieks of women or the broken voices of men.

"Read it again, please," would be the call, and, as the description again was read off, the number of the body was taken and the relatives hurried to the undertaking rooms. The bodies of Walter B. Zeisler, 12 years old, Lee Haviland and Walter A. Austrian were partly identified from the police descriptions.

The list of hospital patients also was posted in the station and aided friends in the search for injured.

Sheldon's undertaking rooms at 230 West Madison street were the scene of pathetic incidents. Forty-seven bodies, some of them with the clothing entirely burned away, and with few exceptions with features charred beyond recognition, had been taken there. Late in the night only four had been identified. The first body recognized was that of Mrs. Brindsley, of 909 Jackson boulevard, who had attended the matinee with Miss Edna Torney, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. P. Torney, 1292 Adams street. Mr. Torney could find no trace of the young woman.

Of the forty-seven bodies thirty-six were of matured women and five of men. There were bodies of six children, three boys and three girls.

Dr. J. H. Bates, of 3256 South Park avenue, was searching for the bodies of Myrtle Shabad and Ruth Elken, numbered among the missing.

There were similar scenes at all of the undertaking rooms to which bodies were taken.

"When the fire broke out I was taking tickets at the door," said E. Lovett, one of the ushers. "The crowd began to move toward the exits on the ground floor, and I rushed to the big entrance doors and threw three of them open. From there I hurried to the cigar store and called up the police and fire departments.

"When I returned I tried to get more of the doors open, but was shoved aside and told that I was crazy. The crowd acted in a most frenzied manner and no one could have held them in check. Conditions on the balconies must have been appalling. They were well filled, but the exits, had they been opened, would have proved ample for all."

Michael Ohle, who was ushering on the first balcony, noticed the fire shortly after it started. He hurried to the entrances and cleared the way for the people to get out. Then, he says, he started downstairs to find out how serious the fire was. Before he could return the panic was on and he fled to the street for safety.

"Mrs. Phillipson, Phillipson – is Mrs. Phillipson here?"

That cry sounded in drug stores, cigar stores, and hotels until three little girls, Adeline, Frances, and Teresa, had found their mother, from whom they were separated in the panic. At last at the Continental hotel the call was weakly answered by a woman who lay upon a couch, more frightened than hurt. In another moment three little girls were sobbing in their mother's lap.

FRIENDS AND RELATIVES EAGERLY SEARCH FOR LOVED ONES MISSING AFTER THEATER HOLOCAUST

Friends sought for information of friends; husbands asked for word of wives; fathers and mothers sought news of sons and daughters; men and women begged to be told if there was any knowledge of their sweethearts; parents asked for children; and children fearfully told the names of missing playmates.

The early hours of the evening were marked by many sad scenes. Men would rush to the desk where the names of the missing were being compiled and asked if anything had been heard of some member of their families, then turn away and hurry out, barely waiting to be told that there would be no definite news until nearly midnight.

"Just think!" said one gray headed man, leaning on the arm of a younger man who was leading him down the stairs, "I bought the matinee tickets for the children as a treat, and insisted that they take their little cousin with them."

"Have you heard anything of my daughter?" asked a woman.

"What was her name?"

"Lily. She had seats in the first balcony with some girl friends. You would know her by her brown hair. She wore a white silk shirt waist and a diamond ring I gave her for Christmas. I went to the theater, but I couldn't get near it, and they said they were still carrying out bodies."

"And her name? Who was she?"

"She was my daughter – my only one!"

The woman walked away, weeping, without giving the name, and the only response she would make to questions from those who followed her was:

"My daughter!"

Two men, with two little boys, came in. "Our wives," they said, "came to the matinee with some neighbors. They have not yet come home."

Before they could give their names a third man ran up and cried:

"I just got word the folks have been taken home in ambulances. They are alive."

The men gave a shout and were gone in an instant.

Men with children in their arms came to ask for others of the family who had become separated from them in the panic at the theater. Women, tears dampening their cheeks, hushed the chatter of their little ones while they gave the names of husbands and brothers, or told of other children who had been lost.

One man yielded to his fears at the last minute and went away without asking for information or giving any name. He said:

"I went to the theater with my wife. We have only been married a year. When the rush came I was torn away from her, and the last thing I remember is of hearing her call my name. Then I was lifted off my feet and can recall nothing more except that I found myself in the street. I have been to all the hospitals and morgues, and now I am going back to the theater again."

So it went until the last dreaded news began coming in. Identifications were being made and hearts were being broken. After that time the inquiries were not for information; they were pleas to be told that a mistake had been made or that one was possible.

CHAPTER IV.

SCENE OF HORROR AS VIEWED FROM THE STAGE

All but one of the 348 members of the "Bluebeard" company escaped, although many had close calls for their lives. Some of the chorus girls displayed great coolness in the face of grave peril. Eddie Foy, who had a thrilling experience, said:

"I was up in my dressing room preparing to come on for my turn in the middle of the second act when I heard an unusual commotion on the stage that I knew could not be caused by anything that was a part of the show. I hurried out of my dressing room, and as I looked I saw that the big drop curtain was on fire.

"The fire had caught from the calcium and the paint and muslin on the drop caused the flames to travel with great rapidity. Everything was excitement. Everybody was running from the stage. My 6 year old son, Bryan, stood in the first entrance to the stage and my first thought naturally was to get him out. They would not let me go out over the footlights, so I picked up the boy and gave him to a man and told him to rush the boy out into the alley.

"I then rushed out to the footlights and called out to the audience, 'Keep very quiet. It is all right. Don't get excited and don't stampede. It is all right.'

"I then shouted an order into the flies, 'Drop the curtain,' and called out to the leader of the orchestra to 'play an overture. Some of the musicians had left, but those that remained began to play. The leader sat there, white as a ghost, but beating his baton in the air.

"As the music started I shouted out to the audience, 'Go out slowly. Leave the theater slowly.' The audience had not yet become panic stricken, and as I shouted to them they applauded me. The next minute the whole stage seemed to be afire, and what wood there was began to crackle with a sound like a series of explosions.

"When I first came out to the footlights about 300 persons had left the theater or were leaving it. They were those who were nearest the door. Then the policemen came rushing in and tried to stem the tide towards the door.

"All this happened in fifteen seconds. Up in the flies were the young women who compose the aerial ballet. They were up there waiting to do their turn, and as I stood at the front of the stage they came rushing out. I think they all got out safely.

"The fire seemed to spread with a series of explosions. The paint on the curtains and scenery came in touch with the flames and in a second the scenery was sputtering and blazing up on all sides. The smoke was fearful and it was a case of run quickly or be smothered."

Stage Director William Carleton, who was one of the last to leave the stage when the flames and smoke drove the members of the company out, said:

"I was on the stage when the flames shot out from the switchboard on the left side. It seemed that some part of the scenery must have touched the sparks and set the fire. Soon the octette which was singing "In the Pale Moonlight," discovered the fire over their heads and in a few moments we had the curtain run down. It would not go down the full length, however, leaving an opening of about five feet from the floor. Then the crowd out in front began to stampede and the lights went out. Eddie Foy, who was in his dressing room, heard the commotion, and, rushing to the front of the stage, shouted to the spectators to be calm. The warning was useless and the panic was under way before any one realized what was going on.

"Only sixteen members of the company were on the stage at the time. They remained until the flames were all about them and several had their hair singed and faces burned. Almost every one of these went out through the stage entrance on Dearborn street. In the meantime all of those who were in the dressing room had been warned and rushed out through the front entrance on Randolph street.

There was no panic among the members of the company, every one seeming to know that care would result in the saving of life. Most of the members were preparing for the next number in their dressing rooms when the fire broke out, and they hurriedly secured what wraps they could and all dashed up to the stage, making their exit in safety.

"The elevator which has been used for the members of the company, in going from the upper dressing rooms to the stage, was one of the first things to go wrong, and attempts to use it were futile.

"It seems that the panic could not be averted, as the great crowd which filled the theater was unable to control itself. Two of the women fainted."

"When the fire broke out," said Lou Shean, a member of the chorus, "I was in the dressing room underneath the stage. When I reached the top of the stairs the scenery nearby was all in flames and the heat was so fierce that I could not reach the stage door leading toward Dearborn street. I returned to the basement and ran down the long corridor leading toward the engine room, near which doors led to the smoking room and buffet. Both doors were locked. I began to break down the doors, assisted by other members of the company, while about seventy or eighty other members crowded against us. I succeeded in bursting open the door to the smoking room, when all made a wild rush. I was knocked down and trampled on and received painful bruises all over my body."

"I was just straightening up things in our dressing room upstairs," said Harry Meehan, a member of the chorus, who also acted as dresser for Eddie Foy and Harry Gilfoil, "when the fire started. Both Mr. Foy and Mr. Gilfoil were on the stage at the time. I opened Mr. Foy's trunk and took out his watch and chain and rushed out, leaving my own clothes behind. I was so scantily dressed that I had to borrow clothes to get back to the hotel. Mr. Gilfoil saved nothing but his overcoat."

Herbert Cawthorn, the Irish comedian who took the part of Pat Shaw in the play "Bluebeard," assisted many of the chorus girls from the stage exits in the panic.

"While the stage fireman was working in an endeavor to use the chemicals the flames suddenly swooped down and out, Eddie Foy shouted something about the asbestos curtain and the fireman attempted to use it, and the stage hands ran to his assistance, but the curtain refused to work.

"In my opinion the stage fireman might have averted the whole terrible affair if he had not become so excited. The chorus girls and everybody, to my mind, were less excited than he. There were at least 500 people behind the scenes when the fire started. I assisted many of the chorus girls from the theater."

Said C. W. Northrop, who took the part of one of Bluebeard's old wives: "Many of us certainly had narrow escapes. Those who were in the dressing rooms underneath the stage at the time had more difficulty in getting out. I was in the dressing room under the stage when the fire broke out, and when I found that I could not reach the stage I tried to get out through the door connecting the extreme north end of the C shaped corridor with the smoking room. I joined other members of the company in their rush for safety, but when we reached the door we found it closed. Some of the members crawled out through a coal hole, while others broke down the locked door, through which the others made their way out."

Lolla Quinlan, one of Bluebeard's eight dancers, saved the life of one of her companions, Violet Sidney, at the peril of her own. The two girls, with five others, were in a dressing room on the fifth floor when the alarm was raised. In their haste Miss Sidney caught her foot and sank to the floor with a cry of pain. She had sprained her ankle. The others, with the exception of Miss Quinlan, fled down the stairs.

Grasping her companion around the waist Miss Quinlan dragged her down the stairs to the stage and crossed the boards during a rain of fiery brands. These two were the last to leave the stage. Miss Quinlan's right arm and hand were painfully burned and her face was scorched. Miss Sidney's face was slightly burned. Both were taken to the Continental hotel.

Herbert Dillon, musical director, at the height of the panic broke through the stage door from the orchestra side, hastily cleared away obstructions with an ax, and assisted in the escape of about eighty chorus girls who occupied ten dressing rooms under the stage.

"We were getting ready for the honey and fan scene," said Miss Nina Wood, "talking and laughing, and not thinking of danger. We were so far back of the orchestra that we did not hear sounds of the panic for several moments. Then the tramping of feet came to our ears. We made our way through the smoking room and one of the narrow exits of the theater."

Miss Adele Rafter, a member of the company, was in her dressing room when the fire broke out.

"I did not wait an instant," said Miss Rafter. "I caught up a muff and boa and rushed down the stairs in my stage costume and was the first of the company to get out the back entrance. Some man kindly loaned me his overcoat and I hurried to my apartments at the Sherman house. Several of the girls followed, and we had a good crying spell together."

Miss Rafter's mother called at the hotel and spent the evening with her. Telegrams were sent to her father, who is rector of a church at Dunkirk, N. Y.

Edwin H. Price, manager of the "Mr. Bluebeard" company, was not in the building when the fire started. He said:

"I stepped out of the theater for a minute, and when I got back I saw the people rushing out and knew the stage was on fire. I helped some of the girls out of the rear entrance. With but one or two exceptions all left in stage costume.

"One young woman in the chorus, Miss McDonald, displayed unusual coolness. She remained in her dressing room and donned her entire street costume, and also carried out as much of her stage clothing as she could carry."

Quite a number of the chorus girls live in Chicago, and Mr. Price furnished cabs and sent them all to their homes.

Through some mistake it was reported that Miss Anabel Whitford, the fairy queen of the company, was dying at one of the hospitals. She was not even injured, having safely made her way out through the stage door.

Miss Nellie Reed, the principal of the flying ballet, which was in place for its appearance near the top part of the stage, was so badly burned by the flames before she was able to escape that she afterward died at the county hospital. The other members of the flying ballet were not injured.

Robert Evans, one of the principals of the Bluebeard company, was in his dressing room on the fourth floor. He dived through a mass of flame and landed three stairways below. He helped a number of chorus girls to escape through the lower basement. His hands and face are burned severely. He lost all his wardrobe and personal effects.

STORY OF HOW A SMALL BLAZE TERMINATED IN TERRIBLE LOSS

The fire started while the double octet was singing "In the Pale Moonlight." Eddie Foy, off the stage, was making up for his "elephant" specialty.

On the audience's left – the stage right – a line of fire flashed straight up. It was followed by a noise as of an explosion. According to nearly all accounts, however, there was no real explosion, the sound being that of the fuse of the "spot" light, the light which is turned on a pivot to follow and illuminate the progress of the star across the stage.

This light caused the fire. On this all reports of the stage folk agree. As to manner, accounts differ widely. R. M. Cummings, the boy in charge of the light, said that it was short circuited.

Stage hands, as they fled from the scene, however, were heard to question one another, "Who kicked over the light?" The light belonged to the "Bluebeard" company.

The beginning of the disaster was leisurely. The stage hands had been fighting the line of wavering flame along the muslin fly border for some seconds before the audience knew anything was the matter.

The fly border, made of muslin and saturated with paint, was tinder to the flames.

The stage hands grasped the long sticks used in their work. They forgot the hand grenades that are supposed to be on every stage.

"Hit it with the sticks!" was the cry. "Beat it out!" "Beat it out!"

The men struck savagely. A few yards of the border fell upon the stage and was stamped to charred fragments.

That sight was the first warning the audience had. For a second there was a hush. The singers halted in their lines; the musicians ceased to play.

Then a murmur of fear ran through the audience. There were cries from a few, followed by the breaking, rumbling sound of the first step toward the flight of panic.

At that moment a strange, grotesque figure appeared upon the stage. It wore tights, a loose upper garment, and the face was one-half made up. The man was Eddie Foy, chief comedian of the company, the clown, but the only man who kept his head.

Before he reached the center of the stage he had called out to a stage hand: "Take my boy, Bryan, there! Get him out! There by the stage way!"

The stage hand grabbed the little chap. Foy saw him dart with him to safety as he turned his head.

Freed of parental anxiety, he faced the audience.

"Keep quiet!" he shouted. "Quiet."

"Go out in order!" he shouted. "Don't get excited!"

Between exclamations he bent over toward the orchestra leader.

ORCHESTRA PLAYS IN FACE OF DEATH

"Start an overture!" he commanded. "Start anything. For God's sake play, play, play, and keep on playing."

The brave words were as bravely answered. Gillea raised his wand, and the musicians began to play. Better than any one in the theater they knew their peril. They could look slantingly up and see that the 300 sets of the "Bluebeard" scenery all were ablaze. Their faces were white, their hands trembled, but they played, and played.

Foy still stood there, alternately urging the frightened people to avoid a panic and spurring the orchestra on. One by one the musicians dropped fiddle, horn, and other instruments and stole away.

"CLOWN" PROVES A HERO

Finally the leader and Foy were left alone. Foy gave one glance upward and saw the scenery all aflame. Dropping brands fell around him, and then he fled – just in time to save his own life. The "clown" had proved himself a hero.

The curtain started to come down. It stopped, it swayed as from a heavy wind, and then it "buckled" near the center.

ALL HOPE LOST FOR GALLERY

From that moment no power short of omnipotent could have saved the occupants of the upper gallery.

The coolness of Foy, of the orchestra leader and of other players, who begged the audience to hold itself in check, however, probably saved many lives on the parquet floor. Tumultuous panic prevailed, but the maddest of it – save in the doomed gallery – was at the outskirts of the ground floor crowd.

CHAPTER V. EXCITING EXPERIENCES IN THE FIRE

"If you ever saw a field of timothy grass blown flat by the wind and rain of a summer storm, that was the position of the dead at the exits of the second balcony," said Chief of Police O'Neill.

"In the rush for the stairs they had jammed in the doorway and piled ten deep; lying almost like shingles. When we got up the stairs in the dark to the front rows of the victims, some of them were alive and struggling, but so pinned down by the great weight of the dead and dying piled upon them that three strong men could not pull the unfortunate ones free.

"It was necessary first to take the dead from the top of the pile, then the rest of the bodies were lifted easily and regularly from their positions, save as their arms had intertwined and clutched.

"Nothing in my experience has ever approached the awfulness of the situation and it may be said that from the point of physical exertion, the police department has never been taxed as it has been taxed tonight. Men have been worn out simply with the carrying out of dead bodies, to say nothing of the awfulness of their burdens."

The strong hand of the chief was called into play when the dead had been removed and when the theater management appeared at the exit of the second balcony, seeking to pass the uniformed police who guarded the heaps of sealskins, purses, and tangled valuables behind them. A spokesman for the management, backed up by a negro special policeman of the house, stood before the half dozen city police on guard, asking to be admitted that these valuables might be removed to the checkrooms of the theater.

"But these things are the property of the coroner," replied the chief, coming up behind the delegation.

"But the theater management wishes to make sure of the safety of these valuables," insisted the spokesman.

"The department of police is responsible," replied Chief O'Neill.

EXPERIENCE OF CHICAGO UNIVERSITY MEN

Clyde A. Blair, captain of the University of Chicago track team, and Victor S. Rice, 615 Yale avenue, a member of the team, accompanied Miss Majorie Mason, 5733 Monroe avenue, and Miss Anne Hough, 361 East Fifty-eighth street, to the matinee. They were sitting in the middle of the seventh row from the rear of the first floor. When the first flames broke through from the stage Miss Mason became alarmed. Seizing the girl, and leaving his overcoat and hat, Blair dragged her through the crush toward the door, closely followed by Rice and Miss Hough.

"The crush at the door," said Blair, "was terrific. Half of the double doors opening into the vestibule were fastened. People dashed against the glass, breaking it and forcing their way through. One woman fell down in the crowd directly in front of me. She looked up and said, 'For God's sake, don't trample on me.' I stepped around her, unable to help her up, and the crowd forced me past. I could not learn whether she was trampled over or not."

BISHOP BRAVES DANGER IN HEROIC WORK OF RESCUE

"I was passing the theater when the panic began," said Bishop Samuel Fallows of the St. Paul's Reformed Episcopal church. "I heard the cry for volunteers and joined the men who went into the place to carry out the dead and injured. I had no idea of the extent of the disaster until I became actively engaged in the work.

"The sight when I reached the balconies was pitiful beyond description. It grew in horror as I looked over the seats. The bodies were in piles. Women had their hands over their faces as if to shield off a blow. Children lay crushed beneath their parents, as if they had been hurled to the marble floors.

"I saw the great battlefields of the civil war, but they were as nothing to this. When we began to take out the bodies we found that many of the audience had been unable to get even near the exits. Women were bent over the seats, their fingers clinched on the iron sides so strongly that they were torn and bleeding. Their faces and clothes were burned, and they must have suffered intensely.

"I ministered to all I could and some of them seemed to welcome the presence of a clergyman as it were a gift from God. There appeared to be little system in the work of rescue, but that was due, I believe, to the intense excitement."

WOMEN AND FOUR CHILDREN SUFFER

Mrs. Anna B. Milliken, who is staying at Thompson's hotel, had four children in her charge, Felix, Jessie, Tony, and Jennie Guerrier, of 135 North Sangamon street, their ages ranging from 11 to 17 years. She and her charges were in the balcony, standing against the wall, when the fire started.

"Something told me to be calm," said Mrs. Milliken. "I had passed through one dreadful experience in the Chicago fire, and, though there was a great deal of confusion, I kept the children together, telling them not to be frightened. Men and women hurried past me, shouting like wild beasts, and if I had joined them the children and I would have been trampled under foot. It was minutes before I could leave with the two younger children. The two elder are lost. What shall I tell their folks," and the poor woman began to weep. Her face, as she stood in the lobby of the Northwestern building, was blistered and swollen. The back of her dress was burned through.

"What are the names of the missing children?" inquired a physician. "They are in here," and he led the distracted woman into one of the "first aid hospitals." There Mrs. Milliken saw her two charges so swathed in bandages that they could not be recognized.

LEARNS CHILDREN HAVE ESCAPED

"I'm looking for two little girls – Berien is the name," shouted H. E. Osborne. "They live in Aurora."

"They've been here," answered Mr. Weisman. "They are all right and have been sent to their home in Aurora."

With a glad shout Osborne ran back to the office of the National Cash Register company, 50 State street, to inform Miss Mary Stevenson, whom the children had been visiting.

The Berien children were among the first to reach the offices of the Hallwood company after the fire broke out. By some chance they had made their way out uninjured. The story of their plight touched a stranger, who took them to a railway station and bought them tickets to their home in Aurora. One was about 14 and the other about 9 years old.

FINDS HIS DAUGHTER

One young woman, terrified but uninjured, had found her way to this office and was sitting in a frightened stupor, when an elderly man hurried in from the street.

"Have you seen – " he started to ask, and then, catching sight of the forlorn little figure, he stopped. With a glad cry, father and daughter rushed into each other's arms, and the father bore his child away. Their names were not learned.

James Sullivan of Woodstock was probably the last man who got out of the parquet uninjured. With him was George Field, also of Woodstock, and the two fought their way out together.

MR. FIELD'S NARRATIVE

"We were seated in the twelfth row," said Mr. Field, "when we saw fire at the top of the proscenium arch. At the same time some sparks fell on the stage.

"Eddie Foy came out and told the audience not to be afraid, to avoid a panic, and there would be no trouble. While he was speaking, however, a burning brand fell alongside of him, and then came what looked like a huge globe of fire. The moment it struck the stage fire spread everywhere.

"The panic started at once and everybody rushed for the doors. Sullivan and I were in the rear of the fleeing mass and made our way out as best we could without getting mixed up in the panic. As long as the women and children were struggling through the straight aisles there was not so much trouble except that some of the fugitives fell to the floor and had to be helped on their feet again. At times the women and children would be lying four deep on the floor of the aisles, and in several instances we had to set them on their feet before we could go further. There was not much smoke and had the aisles been straight to the entrances every one could have got out practically unhurt.

"But when it came to the turns where they focus into the lobby the poor women and children were piled up into indiscriminate heaps. The screams and cries they uttered were something terrible. It was an impossibility to allay the panic and the frightened people simply trampled on those in front of them.

"Some of the people in the orchestra chairs immediately in front of the stage must have been burned by the fire. The fire darted directly among them and the chairs began burning at once. Those on this floor far enough in the rear to escape these flames would have been all right except for the crush of the panic.

"Sullivan, who was with me, was the last man out of the orchestra chairs who was not injured. Whoever was behind us must have been suffocated or burned to death. How many there were I have no means of knowing."

NARROW ESCAPES OF YOUNG AND OLD

One of the narrow escapes in the first rush for the open air was that of Winnie Gallagher, 11 years old, 4925 Michigan avenue. The child, who was with her mother in the third row, was left behind in the rush for safety. She climbed to the top of the seat and, stepping from one chair to another, finally reached the door. There she was nearly crushed in the crowd. At the Central police station the child was restored to her mother.

Miss Lila Hazel Coulter, of 476 °Champlain avenue, was sitting with Mr. Kenneth Collins and Miss Helen Dickinson, 3637 Michigan avenue, in the eighth row in the parquet. She escaped in safety.

"I was sitting in the fifth seat from the aisle," said Miss Coulter, "but the fire, which was bursting out from both sides of the stage, had such a fascination for me."

D. W. Dimmick, of Apple River, Ill., an old man of 70, with a long, white beard, was standing in the upper gallery when the fire broke out.

"I was with a party of four," said Mr. Dimmick. "I saw small pieces of what looked like burning paper dropping down from above at the left of the curtain. At the same time small puffs of smoke seemed to shoot out into the house. A boy in the gallery near me called 'fire,' but there were plenty of people to stop him.

"'Keep quiet!' I told him. 'If you don't look out, you'll start a panic.'"

"Then all of a sudden the whole front of the stage seemed to burst out in one mass of flame. Then everybody seemed to get up and start to get out of the place at once. From all over the house

came shrieks and cries of 'fire,' I started at once, hugging the wall on the outside of the stairway as we went down.

"When we got down to the platform where the first balcony opens it seemed to me that people were stacked up like cordwood. There were men, women, and children in the lot. At the same time there were some people whom I thought must be actors, who came running out from somewhere in the interior of the house, and whose wigs and clothes were on fire. We tried to beat out the flames as we went along. By crowding out to the wall we managed to squeeze past the mass of people who were writhing on the floor, and practically blocking the entrance so far as the people still in the gallery were concerned.

PULLS WOMEN FROM MASS ON FLOOR

"As we got by the mass on the floor I turned and caught hold of the arms of a woman who was lying near the bottom pinned down by the weight resting on her feet. I managed to pull her out, and I think she got down in safety. One of the men with me also pulled out another woman from the heap. I tried to rescue a man who was also caught by the feet, but, although I braced myself against the stairs, I was unable to move him.

"I came in from Apple River to see the sights in Chicago, and I have seen all I can stand."

Six little girls from Evanston, in a party occupying seats in the parquet, escaped by the side entrance. In the crush they lost most of their clothing. Four of the children stayed together, the other two being for the time lost in the street. The four were Hannah Gregg, 12 years old, 1038 Sheridan road; Florence and May Lang, 14 and 13 years old, Buena Park; Beatrice Moore, 12 years old, Buena Park.

CHAPTER VI.

HEROES OF THE FIRE

One of the heroes of the Iroquois theater fire was Peter Quinn, chief special agent of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe railroad system, who assisted in saving the lives of 100 or more of the performers. But for the prompt service of Quinn and two citizens who assisted him it is believed that most of the performers would have met the fate of the victims in the theater proper.

Mr. Quinn had attended a trial in the Criminal court and in the middle of the afternoon started for the downtown district, intending to proceed to his office. Reaching Randolph and Dearborn streets the railroad official had his attention attracted to a man who rushed from the theater bare-headed and without his coat. What followed Quinn describes as follows:

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