

A TERRIBLE CALAMITY.

Destructive Fire on Hanover Street—Three Firemen Killed and Many Injured by a Falling Wall—Narrow Escape of Working People—Examples of Heroism and Presence of Mind.

Hardly has the excitement produced by the events of the great fire of last November subsided when intelligence of another terrible calamity caused by conflagration, appals the public mind. The destructive effects of fire which have now to be chronicled, though considerable, are insignificant in comparison with that of the November fire, while the sacrifice of life and limb is of almost equal magnitude. About ten o'clock, yesterday forenoon, a fire broke out in a six-story building at the corner of Hanover and Blackstone streets, in the third story. This floor and those above it were occupied by G. A. Sammett, manufacturer of mattresses, bedding, etc. The stock used in this manufacture is of course of a very combustible quality, and the flames spread with great rapidity. The employes, mostly girls, were naturally overcome with fright, and fled from the scene in various directions. A few got out of the windows of one of the stories upon an adjoining roof, and escaped to a place of safety at once. Others, less fortunate, finding their egress by the stairway cut off by fire and smoke, took refuge on the upper roof of the building, whence, for a while, there seemed to be no possible means of escape. The excitement and alarm, both on their part and the spectators below, who were unable to reach them, were intense. Had not the circumstances under which the alarm of fire took place been very peculiar, there would have been ample resources at hand in the way of firemen's ladders.

Just previous to this fire being discovered, an alarm had been sounded from box 53, the cause of which was insignificant. The firemen of the centre of the city responded instantly, and started with their apparatus in the direction of Boylston street where box 53 is located. Immediately after this box had been struck upon the bells three times, the signal was changed and the alarm followed from box 17, denoting the Hanover street fire. By this time the fire apparatus, and especially the hook and ladder ladders, were nearest the Hanover street box, as well on its way toward Boylston street. The real peril of the hour was soon understood, however, and the apparatus took the return course, moving as rapidly as possible, in the snowy condition of the streets, toward Hanover street. In the meanwhile the flames had been working toward the roof, where the girls were hemmed in, apparently doomed to destruction; but, before the arrival of the ladders, other means had been devised to extricate them, by traversing some of the adjoining roofs. One girl, named Mary Ellen Moore, was so overcome by fright that she did not seek to reach the roof, but leaped from a third-story window, and, in falling, struck first the rail of an awning and then the sidewalk. She was taken up senseless and conveyed to a neighboring apothecary store, where it did not appear that any bones were broken, but that her injuries were internal, and no doubt serious.

Great credit is due to one of the girls upon the roof, Miss Mary Keefe, by whose presence of mind and pluck the lives of some of the others were no doubt saved. Such was the terror produced by the situation that one or more of those on the roof essayed to leap off, but were prevented by personal appeal and partly by force withheld them from the desperate act. While a part of the fire apparatus had, as above stated, been attracted away from the scene of real danger, another part of it encountered the Hanover street fire while on the way toward Boylston street. Engine No. 8 and some of the hose companies may thus be said to have run right into the Hanover street fire. Instantly operations were begun for subduing the flames, and as fast as the apparatus arrived long ladders were raised against the Hanover street wall, and a deluge of water was poured into the building. The flames, though hot and fierce, visibly yielded to this assault, and it is worthy of note, as a contrast to some of the experiences of the November fire, that the hosemen, on this occasion, found no difficulty in sending a stream of water from the sidewalk to the French roof.

Judicious and energetic efforts in this way had effect in getting the fire under perfect control, and nothing further of a serious character was apprehended. But the worst was yet to be. A fifth ladder had been placed in position to the roof, and the firemen were about to ascend, when, without warning, and to the horror of all, spectators as well as firemen, the southerly half of the Hanover street wall bulged out in the middle, and fell entire from the second story to the roof into the street, carrying with it fifteen or sixteen firemen, who were on the ladders, many of whom were buried in the debris. The catastrophe was all the more astounding from the fact that no fire existed in the building except in the roof story at the time; the floors were apparently intact, owing to the vast quantity of water that had been poured on to them through the windows while the fire was at its height, and there was no visible cause for apprehension. The wall appeared staunch and strong from an outside view; but, by the manner in which the broken part fell, it was apparent that there was a serious defect in its construction, the inner and outer layers of brick evidently parting easily before reaching the pavement, as though the filling between them was of poor quality of mortar. An examination showed also that it was but eight inches in thickness, corresponding to the width of two bricks.

One incident in this connection was peculiarly thrilling. When the wall broke, between the third and fourth stories, the longest ladder was struck nearly half way of its length, and forced from the building without immediately breaking. Charles Ingersoll of Hose No. 2 was the only man upon it, nearly at the top. He tenaciously kept his hold in the lofty position while the ladder swung out over the street, displaying a presence of mind rarely witnessed even under circumstances, if possible, more appalling. The spectacle lasted but for a moment. The ladder broke in its lower section. Still he kept his hold, and came down with the upper quarter of the splice, landing but little harmed on the opposite sidewalk, clear of the mass that had fallen in advance of him. The police had kept the street so thoroughly clear of lookers-on that few were hit by flying bricks and fragments of slate from the roof. The rush of the firemen to the rescue of their comrades was simply heroic. They did not seem to heed in the least the danger that was imminent of the fall of the northerly half of the wall. The citizens and spectators who saw the disaster were frantic in the extreme, rushing wildly hither and thither like maniacs, but this condition of things did not last a minute. The well-trained police had them soon under control.

A number of persons were inside the building, engaged in throwing goods from the windows, and citizens on the sidewalk directly beneath were busily engaged in carrying them away to a place of safety. As soon as possible the Boston Fusiliers, Capt. Snow, turned out, and were employed in keeping the crowd back from the ropes, which were stretched across the territory in the vicinity of the fire. The injured men were picked up by those who rushed to their rescue, and a number of them taken into the apothecary store on the corner of Blackstone and Hanover streets.

John Prince, who was killed, was at the time of the accident on one of the short ladders, and working as a substitute on the roll of the company. As the top of the wall fell on him he commenced to descend the ladder, not being hit by the brick and wood. A second later and the outcries of the crowd mingled with the noise of the fallen masonry, and Prince went in with the falling debris. When taken out with the rest he had received fatal injuries. He was at once carried to the First police station, and Dr. Moore called. Nothing could be done for him, and he expired with only his police and fire friends about him. He was taken then to his home on Saratoga street, in East Boston. His age was twenty-two years, and unmarried.

Brown P. Stowell of steamer 15 was on the long ladder above the fourth story when the walls first commenced to fall. Like the falling of a huge derrick the long poles swayed off, partly bowed with its living freight, and then landed its burden on the pavement. Stowell was thrown to the opposite sidewalk, and those who picked him up looked upon him as dead. There was, however, life in him, without consciousness. A piece of the ladder was picked up and taken for a bier for the man, whose breath was growing thick and faint. Ere he reached the station house, he was among the killed. His home is on Broadway, South Boston, and to that he was properly taken.

Engine 15 probably furnished one more to the quota of killed, James Storck, a machinist, residing with his family at 24 Woodard street, and a member of that company. He, too, was on the long ladder when the shock was experienced, and, with the others, fell, leaving his hold on the ladder in his intense fright, he shot downward like a plumb and was engulfed in the brick, mortar and timber. With commendable heroism some of his companions rushed to the breach, with its threatening masses overhead, and seized his body and brought it forth, while their brother pipe-men cooled and cleaved the air about them with their streams of water. The injured man was taken into J. J. Cotton's drug store and at once kindly cared for. His injuries were pronounced fatal, for the blood was issuing from his ears, mouth and nose, and some of his body bones were broken. He was then taken to the Massachusetts General Hospital, where he died at twenty minutes before six o'clock last evening.

William Baker of steamer 11, residing at 12 Bremen street, East Boston, a harness-maker by trade, was badly but not dangerously injured. When he fell with the ladder on the Hanover street side, he was struck by the debris about him and received injuries to his leg, and before he could recover from his prostrate position a portion of one of the ladders struck and injured his back. He was taken into the store of Dr. Moore, the apothecary, and his wounds dressed.

Among those taken from the ruins was Henry R. Denary of steamer 11, and a resident of No. 41 Orleans street, East Boston. He was well up a ladder on the Hanover street facade, when he was precipitated to the ground; still, when extricated, he was found only slightly bruised. Two of hose 4's men were equally fortunate. Edward Martin was in the third story of the building, and when the cornice and top of the wall fell he rushed to the street front and called for a ladder. Hardly had the call been given when a second crash was heard, and he was lost in the cloud of dust and smoke. He was taken out with only a few cuts on the forehead and face. William Marshall of the same company was on a short ladder outside the building, but was only slightly injured.

Among the other parties injured were: Thomas Merritt of hose No. 2, badly injured on the head and legs; C. H. Smith of Engine No. 15, slightly injured; Henry L. Smith of Cambridge, employed by Fuller, Dana & Fitch, struck on the head by falling debris and dangerously injured; Mark W. Hayes, Steamer No. 15, injured about one of his hips; Sylvester Stone of hose 3, slightly injured; Samuel Harrington, hose 2, slightly injured; Moses A. Packard of the Insurance brigade, slightly injured.

Hoseman Groves of steam fire engine G had a narrow escape. When the excitement caused by the falling had partially subsided, so that the firemen could look around, Groves was missing; and, as he had been seen just previously to ascend one of the ladders, his comrades gave him up for lost. But he

wasn't. He was ascending the ladder in front of No. 152, hose in hand, and hearing a noise overhead, he promptly jumped from the ladder to the window opposite in the third story, where he remained secure from harm until the coping on that part of the building fell, when he emerged from his hiding place, safe and sound, and promptly resumed his position at the pipe.

The pipe men of hose No. 1 had a narrow escape, having just left their station on the ladders, for the reason that the water had been shut off from their line, and, as the smoke was suffocating, they felt authorized to withdraw till the water was let on again.

The building is a brick five-story one with Mansard roof, occupying about one-third or more of the space fronting on Hanover street, between Blackstone and Union streets, the numbers being 152, 154 and 156, and extending some eighty feet on Blackstone street. The building is mainly occupied as follows: The upper three stories and the attic are held by G. A. Sammett as a mattress manufactory. The second story and the ground floor are occupied by Fessenden & Osgood, dry goods dealers; J. W. Pepper, collector; Norton's coffee and lunch room, and Harris' hair dressing saloon, these being on Hanover street. On Blackstone street, the cellar is occupied by several produce dealers, and the ground floor by R. McLoud, country produce, and R. M. Lowell, plumber. Many years ago the locality of this fire was occupied by the firm of J. M. Beebe & Co. as a hat store. At that time, however, the building was only three stories high, and was comparatively secure.

The origin of the fire is said to have been from a defective flue in Harris' barber shop, from whence it burst into the room where the mattresses were stored.

Coroner E. B. Moore summoned a jury of inquest on the body of B. P. Stowell, who viewed the remains at the police station. They then adjourned till ten o'clock, to-day, when they will examine the locality of the disaster.

The property of Mr. Sammett is totally destroyed. His stock was worth about \$20,000, upon which there is insurance of \$5000.

The building is owned by the heirs of Dr. Shattuck, though Mr. Sammett had a ten years' lease of it. About a year ago the lessee made an addition of one story and a French roof to the height of the building. It is valued at \$22,000, and is damaged \$12,000 or \$15,000.

Fessenden & Osgood, dry goods dealers, had a stock valued at \$30,000 in their store, and an insurance of about \$10,000, which will cover the actual loss. Their property was well looked after by the insurance brigade, who covered it thickly with their cloths.

Mrs. Pepper, who carried on a wholesale confectionery business in the name of her deceased husband, had a large stock, which is mostly destroyed. Loss \$10,000; insured for \$7000.

The Blackstone street occupants were mostly small dealers. They were protected by the insurance brigade and do not sustain heavy losses.

The loss of R. H. Spaulding, auction and commission business, F. L. & J. A. Raddin, cigars and tobacco, and William Farrow, boot-maker, was small.

Messrs. O. S. Woods and C. A. Scott are at the General Hospital, the former having an arm and thigh broken, but is still comfortable; the latter had his jaw broken, and was injured severely internally. He talked about half-past nine sufficiently to permit of his wound being dressed, after which he again became unconscious. The physicians think he cannot recover. George Lachino of hose 4 lies at the City Hospital seriously injured, as is also James Delap, who was struck by a stick of timber.

The report that Mr. Sammett, the lessee of the building, had been injured, must have been incorrect, as he was seen in a store on Union street, between one and two o'clock, enquiring for a place where he could resume business at once.

Mr. Sammett employed ten or a dozen girls, and besides those reported elsewhere to have been injured, two have been missing all the afternoon, and are supposed to have been crushed in the ruins when the walls fell. Their names are Mary Kabb and Lizzie Hanks; the former was last seen standing in the room, seemingly bewildered by her perilous condition. Miss Hanks told her companions that she was going back after her watch, and also to change her dress, since when neither has been seen. About five o'clock a muff and a small bag, found among the debris, were brought into Station V, and identified as the property of Miss Hanks. The total loss of life is as follows: Three killed, two missing, twelve seriously injured and seven slightly injured.