San Francisco During the Eventful Days of April, 1906

James B. Stetson

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These recollections were written in June, 1906, but the first edition being exhausted and a new one being required, I have included some events that occurred later, without changing the original date.

Personal Recollections During the Eventful Days of April, 1906

As the earthquake and the great fire in San Francisco in the year 1906 were events of such unusual interest, and realizing how faulty is man's memory after time passes, I have here jotted down a few incidents which I personally observed, and shall lay them away, so that if in the future I should desire I can refer to these notes, made while the events were new and fresh in my mind, with some assurance of their accuracy.

On the morning of April 18, 1906, at 5:13, in my residence, 1801 Van Ness Avenue, I was awakened by a very severe shock of earthquake. The shaking was so violent that it nearly threw me out of bed. It threw down a large bookcase in my chamber, broke the glass front, and smashed two chairs; another bookcase fell across the floor; the chandelier was so violently shaken that I thought it would be broken into pieces. The bric−a−brac was thrown from the mantel and tables, and strewed the floor with broken china and glass. It is said to have lasted fifty−eight seconds, but as nearly as I can estimate the violent part was only about twelve seconds.

As soon as it was over I got up and went to the window, and saw the air in the street filled with a white dust, which was caused by the falling of masonry from St. Luke's Church on the diagonal corner from my room. I waited for the dust to settle, and I then saw the damage which had been done to Claus Spreckels's house and the church. The chimneys of the Spreckels mansion were gone, the stone balustrade and carved work wrecked. The roof and the points of the gables and ornamental stone work of the church had fallen, covering the sidewalk and lying piled up against the sides of the building to the depth of eight or ten feet.

About this time Rachel and Nora were knocking, at my door and inquiring if I were alive. I opened the door and they came in, Rachel badly frightened and Nora sprinkling holy water over the room.

I hurriedly dressed and went up, to my daughter's (Mrs. Winslow's) house, 1945 Pacific Avenue, and found her and the children with their neighbors in the street and very much frightened. Their house was cracked considerably, and she had been imprisoned in her room by the binding of the door, which had to be broken open to enable her to escape. The chimneys of her house were thrown down and much valuable glass and chinaware broken. I returned to my house and found that the tops of all my chimneys had been thrown down, and one was lying in the front yard sixteen feet from the building. There were some cracks visible in the library, but none in my room, and only very few in the parlor and dining−room. In the kitchen, however, the plastering was very badly cracked and the tiles around the sink thrown out. In the parlor the marble statue of the "Diving Girl" was thrown from its pedestal and broken into fragments. The glass case containing the table glassware in the dining−room and its contents were uninjured; very little china and glassware were broken in the pantry; the clocks were not stopped. A water−pipe broke in the ceiling of the spare room and the water did some damage.

I then went over to the power−house of the California−Street Railroad and found that about seventy feet of the smoke−stack had fallen diagonally across the roof, and about six feet of it into the stable, where were two horses; fortunately it did not touch them, but before they were released they squealed and cried, most piteously. One of them was so badly frightened that he was afterward useless and we turned him out to pasture and he grew lean and absolutely worthless. Things were considerably disturbed, but the engines were apparently uninjured. The

watchman was not injured, although surrounded by falling bricks and mortar. I was told that the water supply was stopped, and later learned that it was because the earthquake had broken the water−mains.

I then started on foot down−town, this was about 7 A. M.; no cars were running on any line. The sidewalks in many places were heaved up, chimneys thrown down, and walls cracked by the earthquake. St. Mary's Cathedral and Grace Church gave no outward sign of being injured; neither did the Fairmont Hotel. I went on California Street, over Nob Hill, and as I got in sight of the business part of the city, I saw as many as ten or twelve fires in the lower part of the city. The wind was light from the northwest, and the smoke ascended in great columns, and the sun through it looked like a large copper disk. When I arrived at California and Montgomery streets the lower part of both sides of California Street seemed to be all on fire. I did not realize that the whole city would be burned. I had a vague idea that it would stop, or be stopped, as fires had been hundreds of times before in this city. I went along Sansome Street to Pine and down Pine towards Market. I saw that Holbrook, Merrill Stetson's store was all on fire, and when I arrived at Front Street I saw that the Commercial Block on the southeast corner of Front and California streets (on the fifth floor of which was my office), was not on fire. So I started to go toward the building. The fire was then burning fiercely at the southeast corner of California and Battery. I went to the entrance at 123 California Street and met the janitor coming out, who said I could not go upstairs, as the building was on fire on the fifth floor. However, I started slowly up. The sparks were coming down into the open area in a shower, but there was no smoke in the building, so I was sure that it was not on fire on the inside. I got up to my room on the fifth floor and found the door would not come open. I tried the door in the adjoining office of the American Beet Sugar Company and found it open. From that room I got into mine. I raised my shades, and the fire was blazing at Battery Street and California, fully seventy−five feet high, and not more than three hundred feet distant from me. I looked through the hall and rooms and saw no smoke, and was sure that I was safe for a few minutes. As I turned the combination of my safe to open it another shock of earthquake came, which confused me a little, but I persevered and opened it. I had a quantity of souvenirs and presents which had been given me in years past. These I gathered up, and with my deeds and insurance and other papers soon had my arms full. I saw a fish−basket on my closet; I got it down and put all these little things in it, then opened the little iron box in the corner of the safe, and there dropped out some coins on the floor. I remembered that I had put four twenty−dollar pieces in there the day before. I felt on the floor and picked up two of them, and as I did not find any more I concluded that they must have remained in the safe; so I took the fish−basket and my books and papers in my arms, closed the safe, turned on the combination, and started down the stairs to the street. The sparks were plentiful in the area when I went up, but they were more so as I came down,—a perfect firestorm, after the manner of a snow−storm. When I got back on to California Street the air was a mass of sparks and smoke being blown down the street toward the ferry. As I had to go against it to get to Front Street, I was afraid that my papers would take fire in my arms; so I buttoned up my coat to protect my papers, pulled my hat over my eyes, and dived through, up California Street and out Front towards Pine Street, from where I started. There I found it clear of smoke and fire. As I passed along with my arms full I saw a typewriter cover on the street, which I picked up. Finding it empty, I stopped and turned it over and, dropping my bundle into it, started for Front and Market Streets. There was no fire within a block of that corner at this time. This was about 8 A. M.— perhaps 8:30. I sat down on an empty box in the middle of Market Street for a rest, when W. R. Whittier came along and helped me with my load. We took it to the door of the Union Trust Company, and they would not let me in. I went upstairs and found Mr. Deering, who took it, and we went down and put it into the vault between the outer and inner doors. (In twenty−two days afterward I received it back in as good condition as when I had left it there on the memorable 18th, of April.) I next went up to Third Street and found the fire raging strong at the corner of Third and Mission. My son was passing in his automobile, and I got in with him. He was going to the Mechanics' Pavilion, where he said he could do some work for the temporary hospital established there. When we reached the Pavilion they said there were two hundred wounded inside. At this hour there was no building on fire on the south line of Market Street west of Fremont Street. We went around to the drug−stores and hardware−stores to get hot−water bags and oil and alcohol stoves and surgeons' appliances. We took with us Miss Sarah Fry, a Salvation Army woman, who was energetic and enthusiastic. When we arrived at a drug−store under the St. Nicholas she jumped out, and, finding the door locked, seized a chair and raising it above her head smashed the glass doors in and helped herself to hot−water bags, bandages, and everything which would be useful in an emergency hospital. I continued with Harry for a couple of hours. I then started down Market Street. The fire at that hour, 10:30 A. M.,

was raging strong south of Market Street from about Fifth to Tenth Street. I left Market Street and went up on to Golden Gate Avenue. At Hyde and Golden Gate Avenue I saw a large two−story house which had been wrecked by the earthquake. The doors, windows and all the upright−portion of the first story, were crushed and stood on an angle of 45°. I enquired of a woman seated on a pile of rubbish, who said "no one was killed, but what am I to do?" The City Hall was badly wrecked, great cracks were to be seen and about two−thirds of the great dome had fallen. On one of our trips we went out to the Park Emergency Hospital, and at 11 o'clock I found myself in the Pacific Union Club and was able to get a cup of coffee and a sandwich, which was the first food I had tasted that day. I went out from the club and saw the fire raging on Market Street between First and Second. About this hour a policeman notified me to meet the Mayor at the Hall of justice, who had called a meeting of citizens for 2 o'clock. Met Mr. J. E. Tucker—sat down with him on a box in the middle of Market Street, opposite Lotta's Fountain, and we discussed the situation. We agreed that the city was doomed to destruction, and that we were unable to do anything to save it. Crowds of people were about, only looking on—some looked dazed, and others wildly excited. I walked down to Bush Street between Sansome and Montgomery, met Mr. Murphy of the First National Bank, and Herman Oelrichs, and discussed with them as to whether it would come to his building. The earthquake had thrown the heavy granite cornice of his bank building into the middle of Bush Street. Murphy, Grant Co.'s building was on fire at this time; this was between 1 and 2 P. M.. Went along Montgomery to California Street, and found the fire approaching Montgomery Street. At 3 o'clock it had got to the Palace Hotel on the Mission−Street side, and by 3:30 it was well on fire. About this time I went into the Western Union Telegraph office, and while writing a telegram to Nellie and Robert, who were on their way to New York, the announcement was made that no more telegrams would be received. I then walked home, and at that time the streets leading to Lafayette Square and the Presidio were filled with people dragging trunks and valises along, trying to find a place of safety. They generally landed in the Presidio. As night came on the fire made it as light as day, and I could read without other light in any part of my house. At 8 in the evening. I went downtown to see the situation, going to Grant Avenue through Post Street, then to Sutter, and down Sutter to Montgomery. The fire was then burning the eastern half of the Occidental Hotel and the Postal Telegraph Company's office, on Market Street, opposite Second Street, and other buildings adjoining. At this hour the fire was about a mile and a quarter from my house. The Lick House and the Masonic Temple were not on fire then. I next went to Pine and Dupont Streets, and from that point could see that the Hall of justice and all the buildings in that vicinity were on fire. Very few people were on the street. Goldberg, Bowen Co. were loading goods into wagons from their store on Sutter Street, between Grant Avenue and Kearny. I attempted to go in to speak to the salesman, with whom I was acquainted, but was harshly driven away, by an officious policeman, as if I was endeavoring to steal something. I came back to my house at 9:30 and found in the library Mr. Wilcox and his mother, Mrs. Longstreet, Dr. and Mrs. Whitney, Mrs. Hicks and her daughter, Sallie, Ruth, and Marie Louise. They were all very much alarmed, as the information which they obtained from the excited throng on the street was of the wildest kind. The two automobiles and the Wilcox carriage stayed in front of the house all night, at an expense of twenty−five dollars per hour for the carriage. I felt tired, and went to bed at 11 P. M. and slept until 2:30 A. M. got up and went down−town again to see what the situation was. I went to California Street, then to Hyde, then to Pine. From Pine and Leavenworth I could see that the fire was at that hour burning along O'Farrell from Jones to Mason and on the east side of Mason Street. The St. Francis Hotel was on fire. I went from Pine and Mason to the Fairmont Hotel at California and Mason. The hill is very steep between these streets, and many people, having exhausted themselves, were sleeping in the street on the paving−stones and on mattresses. I did not think the fire would pass beyond the Fairmont Hotel, as there was hundreds of feet of space between the front or eastern side of the hotel, and any other building. But the fire passed up beyond the hotel on Sacramento Street until it reached a point where the hotel was at the leeward of the flames. The hotel was not finished and in the northeast corner were kept the varnishes and oils, which very much aided in the destruction of the building. From California and Mason Streets I could see that old St. Mary's Church, on the corner of California and Dupont Streets and Grace Cathedral, on the corner of California and Stockton, were on fire. To the north, Chinatown was in a whirlpool of fire. I returned home on California Street and Van Ness Avenue. Both streets were thronged with men, women, and children—some with bundles, packages, and baby−carriages; but the usual method was to drag a trunk, which made a harsh, scraping noise on the sidewalk. I overtook a man dragging a trunk with a valise on the top which kept frequently falling off. As I approached him I took the valise in my hand and with the other took hold of the

rope and helped him drag the heavy trunk. As we were strangers, I am sure that he at first took me for a thief who intended to steal the valise. I at once entered into conversation with him, and from his manner later on I think he changed his mind, for when I left him a few blocks away he was hearty in his thanks.

While passing the Knickerbocker Hotel, on Van Ness Avenue, I saw a party of ladies and an elderly gentleman. They were very much excited and were hesitating about returning to their rooms for their personal effects. I stopped and assured them that they had plenty of time to go and return as many times as they wished, as the fire would not reach Van Ness Avenue for at least five hours. It did not reach there for thirteen hours. I think I succeeded in quieting them, at least for a time.

When I arrived at Sacramento Street and Van Ness Avenue I saw a woman tugging at a trunk which had caught on the car−track, and I helped her release it. From the speed at which the fire was traveling I judged that it could not reach that spot in many hours, I advised her, as she was safe, not to over−exert herself, but to take frequent rests. She would not take my advice and I was obliged to leave her.

The throng of moving people, men and women with babies and bird cages, and everything which they held most valuable on earth, began early Wednesday morning and continued until the afternoon of Thursday. Early Thursday morning Mr. Wilcox, with his mother and sister, and Mrs. Hicks and daughter left our house and were able to cross to Oakland, where they got a train for Los Angeles. Dr. and Mrs. Whitney went to a friend's house. Early in the morning I went over to the California−Street power−house and had a talk with Superintendent Harris. He said that he had run out 20 cars, but as the water was shut off and very low in the boilers, it was not safe to get up steam, and he was unable to get horses to haul away the cars; so nothing could be done but await the result, which was that every car in the house and those in the street, some of them eight blocks away, 52 in number, were all burned. Not one was left. I came back to 1801 Van Ness Avenue. The wind was light but was from the northwest. At 9 A. M. I sent in my son's automobile my personal clothing, silverware, bedding, and linen to Mrs. Oxnard's, 2104 Broadway, and at 10:30 I had the rugs and some other things ready, and he took them to the Presidio. Matters about this time began to be rather wild. Van Ness Avenue was filled with people, all pale and earnest, every one loaded with bundles and dragging valises or trunks.

We concluded that it was best for Mrs. Winslow and the children to leave the city; so my son with his automobile took them to Burlingame. He had but little gasoline in his machine, and it was very doubtful if he had enough to make the run there and return. Not a drop could be obtained in the city. He learned that it might be obtained at the Washington−Street police station, so applied for some, but could get none, and barely escaped the appropriation of his machine by the police, by saying that he was preparing to take out of the city a load of women and children, and starting up suddenly and getting out of their reach. So, with the children, Mrs. Winslow, and a few articles of apparel hastily gathered together, he, by a circuitous and zigzag route, out of the city, made the trip and landed them safely in Burlingame at 4 o'clock. They could get no accommodation at the club, so they accepted the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Coleman in a tent, and the next morning (Friday) went to Mr. and Mrs. Will Tevis's. Their kitchen chimney had not fallen, which made it possible to have cooking in the house, and as they had wells, the men put the pumps in order; so they had the luxury of a bath. When she left San Francisco she expected her own house and mine would certainly be burned. So, with neither telephone, telegraph, nor mail, she passed many anxious hours until Monday, the 23rd, when she heard that both houses were saved.

At 11:30 A. M. of Thursday from my window I could see blazes on Jones Street at Clay, and southerly as far as Sutter and Leavenworth. About this hour, although the fire did not reach here until after 3 o'clock, the soldiers and police drove the people from their stores and houses on Polk Street. Johnson Co. were ordered out and not permitted to return to save books and papers, although they begged permission to do so. I think the Pleasanton was on fire at about this time. At noon the flames were continuous from Clay, on Jones, to California. At 1:30 it had almost reached Hyde and Clay, and was continuous from that point to Polk and Sutter, the blaze reaching from 50 to 75 feet high. At 2:30 it was approaching Van Ness at Hyde and Washington, and reaching south as far as Sutter and Van Ness. I was in my front room watching with my field−glass, house after house take fire and the long line as I have just described. I saw many pigeons flying wildly about, seeking some place of safety. As it approached Van Ness it did not burn north of Washington Street. The wind being northwest, and Van Ness Avenue 125 feet in width, I felt sure the fire would not cross. While the fire was thus raging, the thought came to me, How fast in value is property being consumed?—and as I looked at the line of flame, I remember I thought it must be as much as a million dollars an hour. It shows how imperfect in this matter was my estimate, when later

the loss is estimated to be four hundred millions, and the duration of the fire, from 5:15 A. M., the 18th to 3 P. M. of the 20th—say sixty hours, which would be at the rate of about six million five hundred thousand per hour.

At 3 o'clock the soldiers drove the people north on Van Ness and west up to Franklin Street, saying that they were going to dynamite the east side of Van Ness. From my window I watched the movements of the fire−fighters and dynamiters. They first set fire to every house on the east side of Van Ness Avenue between Washington and Bush streets, and by 3:30 nearly every one was on fire. Their method was this: A soldier would, with a vessel like a fruit−dish in his hand, containing some inflammable stuff, enter the house, climb to the second floor, go to the front window, open it, pull down the shade and curtain, and set fire to the contents of his dish. In a short time the shades and curtain would be in a blaze. When the fire started slowly, they would throw bricks and stones up to the windows and break the glass to give it draught. It took about 20 minutes for a building to get well on fire. From 4 to 4:30 St. Luke's and the Presbyterian Church and all the houses on Van Ness Avenue from Bush to Washington were on fire. At about this time they began dynamiting. Then they started backfiring, and, as the line, of fire was at Polk Street, the idea was to meet the flames and not allow them to cross Van Ness Avenue. This was a great mistake, as it caused the whole of the blocks between those streets to be on fire at once, which made an intense heat, while if allowed to approach Van Ness from Polk Street the heat would have been much less, and would not have ignited the west side of Van Ness. The explosions of dynamite were felt fearfully in my house; those within two blocks would jar and shake the house violently, breaking the windows, and at the same time setting off the burglar alarm. As the windows would break it tore the shades and curtains, covered the floor with glass, and cracked the walls. After it was over I found that it had demolished in my house twelve plates and fifty−four sheets of glass, each measuring about thirty by fifty inches.

At 4:45 1 was ordered out of my house by the soldiers,—not in a quiet manner, but with an order that there was no mistaking its terms and meaning,—about like this: "Get out of this house!" I replied: "But this is my house and I have a right to stay here if I choose." "Get out d−−n quick, and make no talk about it, either!" So a soldier with a bayonet on his gun marched me up Clay Street to Gough amid flames, smoke, and explosions. Feeling exhausted from climbing the steep street, and when within one hundred feet of Gough Street I rested on a doorstep. I had not been there for more than two minutes before a soldier on the opposite side of the street leveled his gun and cried out, "Get out of that old man, and go up on to Gough Street." As he had a loaded gun, and appeared very important, I quickly obeyed his polite order. As I reluctantly ascended Clay Street in charge of the soldier, I held back long enough to see the steeple of the Presbyterian Church fall. I stayed at Gough Street a while, looking down upon my house, expecting every minute to see the flames coming out of it. I watched from Gough Street with much anxiety, and made up my mind that I would see if I could not get back into my house, for I believed I could save it. The heat was so intense that it had driven the guards away from Van Ness Avenue; so, seeing no one near, I quietly slipped down the north side of Washington Street to Franklin. As no one was around there, I continued to Washington and Van Ness and, putting up my coat−collar and protecting the side of my face with my hat, I ran along Van Ness to my front door and quickly got into the house again at 5:40, being kept out fifty−five minutes. My clothing got very hot but was not scorched. This I did at a great risk of my life, for these soldiers were very arrogant and consequential at having a little brief authority, and I was afraid they would not hesitate to shoot on slight provocation. I felt provoked and disgusted that I had to take such a risk to enter my own house. When I returned, Mr. Merrill's house had been dynamited, and the two churches, St. Luke's and the First Presbyterian, the Bradbury house at the corner of Van Ness and California Street, and the Knickerbocker Hotel adjoining, and the Gunn house, corner of Clay and Franklin, had shared the same fate.

On getting into my house again, I saw that the Neustadter house, at the corner of Sacramento and Van Ness, was half−consumed, but it had not set on fire the Spreckels residence, and as at this time Mr. Merrill's house, which had been dynamited the second time, was so demolished, I felt that I could consider that my house had passed the critical time, for I hoped that Mr. Merrill's house in burning would not endanger the west side of Van Ness.

But now a new danger threatened. The range of blocks from the north side of Washington Street to the south side of Jackson were on fire at Hyde Street, and the flames coming toward Van Ness Avenue, with the possibility of crossing. The Spreckels stable on Sacramento and also the houses back of the Neustadter residence were now on fire. This, I knew, would set fire to the three Gorovan cottages, two other two−story houses, and the dynamited house of Mr. Gunn, all fronting on Clay Street, between Van Ness and Franklin. So I watched from my front

window, the fire approach Van Ness between Washington and Jackson, then going to my back window to see the threatened danger from Clay Street. The Wenban residence, at the corner of Jackson and Van Ness, was well on fire at 6:15; at 6:55 it fell in. The Clay−Street danger began at about 7:30 P. M.. At 8:15 the whole front as here described was blazing and at its full height. My windows were so hot that I could not bear my hand on them. I opened one and felt the woodwork, which was equally hot. I had buckets of water in the front and rear rooms, with an improvised swab, made by tying up a feather duster, ready to put out any small fire which would be within my reach. I watched the situation for an hour, and as the flames died down a little I had hope, and at 10 P. M. I felt satisfied that it would not cross Van Ness Avenue, and neither would it cross Clay Street. At this time, as the heat had somewhat subsided, I ventured out, and saw a small flame, about as large as my two hands, just starting on the tower of Mrs. Schwabacher's house, which is next to mine on Clay Street. A very few people were around. James Walton of the Twenty−eighth Coast Artillery, was there, also C. C. Jones, of 2176 Fulton Street, and David Miller Ferguson, of Oakland. I said I would give any man ten dollars who would go up and put out that fire. They went into the house with a can of water, climbed the stairs and opened a window, and in a few minutes put it out. Two of the men would accept nothing; the soldier, the next day, accepted ten dollars. I later presented Ferguson with a gold matchbox as a reminder of that eventful night. Had Mrs. Schwabacher's house gone, all in the block would have gone; the fire would have crossed to the north, up Pacific, Broadway, and Vallejo, and probably over to Fillmore, when very little would have been left of the residence portion of the city.

Now again another danger came. Another tier of blocks, from Leavenworth to Van Ness, between Jackson and Pacific, had taken fire. This was about 10:15 P. M.. At 11:15 it had got to Van Ness, and Bothin's house, which was at the corner of Van Ness and Jackson, was fully on fire, but although it was entirely consumed, the fire did not cross to the west side of Van Ness. The wind during all the day and evening was steady from the northwest,—not a very strong wind, but it helped protect the west side of Van Ness. At 12 o'clock on the beginning of the 20th I saw smoke coming out of the chimney of the Spreckels mansion. I went out and spoke to a fireman, and he said he had been into the house and that it was full of smoke and on fire. At 1 o'clock the house was on fire in the upper rooms, at 1:30 it was blazing out of the upper windows, and in a short time afterwards was wholly on fire. The fire caught the house from the rear windows by the blaze from the Gorovan cottages. I feel quite sure that if any one had been on guard inside with a bucket of water the fire could have been put out.

When the Spreckels house was well on fire I knew, from its having an iron frame, hollow tile partitions, and stone outside walls, there would be no danger from the heat to my house. As I was quite tired, I told the man Ferguson that I would go into my house and take a nap. He asked me what room I would sleep in, and he promised if they were about to dynamite my house, or any other danger threatened, he would knock on my window to give me warning to get out. I went in and lay down on a lounge in the library at 2 A. M. and slept until 5 A. M.. When I awoke and looked out the flames were pouring from every window of the Spreckels mansion. At 10 A. M. the house was thoroughly burned out. (The general appearance of the house from a distance is the same as formerly, the walls and roof remaining the same as before the fire.)

In the morning I went over to the California−Street engine−house, and found it in ruins. Beams, pipes, iron columns, tie−rods, car−trucks, and a tangled mass of iron−work; all that was not consumed of 32 cars, bricks, mortar, ashes, and debris of every description filled the place. The engine−room was hot, but I crawled into it through what was left of the front stairway, which was nearly filled with loose bricks, and the stone facings of the Hyde−Street front. It was a sad sight to me, for I had something to do with it from its earliest existence. The form of everything was there, but rods, cranks, beams, and pipes were bent and burned, whether beyond hope of restoration I could not tell. No one was there or on the street, and I came away with uncertain feelings. I had hope, but whether the loss would be total or partial I could not say. A further examination showed much damage—one shaft fourteen inches in diameter was bent out of line one and one−quarter inches; one eight inches in diameter, seven eighths of an inch; some of the large sheaves badly twisted. A new cable coiled on a reel ready for use was so badly burned in the portion exposed as to render the whole useless. As strange as it may seem brass oilers and fillers on the engine−frames were comparatively uninjured. The tank, encased in brick, contained 6,000 gallons of fuel oil, and with its contents was uninjured. The granite blocks on which the engines and drivers rested were badly scaled and cracked by the heat, and in some places entirely destroyed. The portions of the cables in use that were in the engine−room were ruined, and on the street were burned off in five different places. The prospect of ever repairing and getting this machinery and appliances in operation again seemed impossible. It was, however,

restored, and started up August 1, 1906.

At this time, about 8 A. M. Friday, I saw by the smoke that three large fires were burning at North Beach, in the direction of the Union−Street engine−house, from my house.

I afterwards walked down into the business part of the city. The streets in many places were filled with debris—in some places on Kearny and Montgomery streets to the depth of four feet in the middle of the street and much greater depth on the sidewalk. The track and slot rail of the California Street R. R. were badly bent and twisted in many places. The pavement in numberless places was cracked and scaled. A very few people were to be seen at that time among the ruins, which added much to the general gloom of the situation. I found it then, and ever since, very difficult to locate myself when wandering in the ruins and in the rebuilt district, as all the old landmarks are gone and the only guide often is a prominent ruin in the distance. As there were no cars running in the burnt district, I found my automobile very useful although the rough streets filled with all manner of debris, punctured the tires too frequently.

The water supply in our house was gone, as was also the gas and electric light. The only light we could use was candle−light, and that only until 9 P. M.. The city authorities issued an order that no fires could be built in any house until the chimneys were fully rebuilt and inspected by an officer. The water we used was brought by my son in a wash−boiler in his automobile. He got it out near the Park. People all cooked in improvised kitchens made in the street. As we were prohibited from making fires in the house, I improvised a kitchen on the street. I found some pieces of board which were blown into the street and partially covered with brick and stone, from St. Luke's Church and with some portieres from the house constructed a rude shelter, and put a laundry stove in it, so we could make coffee, stew, and fry after a fashion. Some people set up a cooking stove, many set up two rows of bricks, with a piece of sheet iron laid across. Our door−bell was rung several evenings, and we were ordered to "put out that light."

About noon on the 20th the blocks between Pacific and Filbert were on fire at Jones Street, and the fire was again threatening Van Ness Avenue, but several engines were pumping, from one to another, saltwater from Black Point and had a stream on the west side of Van Ness until it was saved.

While the fire was threatening, I went up to my daughter's (Mrs. Oxnard's) and told the servants to get things ready to take out. I would go back home, and if it crossed Van Ness I would return, but if I did not return in fifteen minutes they might consider the danger over. It did not cross. While this pumping was going on, and when the fire had approached the east side of Van Ness Avenue, one of the engines in the line suddenly stopped. This was a critical moment, but the firemen were equal to the emergency, and they uncoupled the engine which was playing on the houses, and remembering that the earthquake had disrupted and choked up the sewer, thereby damming up the outlet, and in fact creating a cistern, they put the suction down the manhole and continued playing on the fire, and saved the buildings on the north side. I tried to get the names of the foreman and men who had the presence of mind and cool judgment, but was unable to do so. This ended the conflagration; but for three nights after there were fires from smouldering timbers and slow−burning debris, sufficient to light up my room so that I could see to read. I was still in fear of a fire breaking out in the unburnt district west of Van Ness Avenue, and as there was no water in the pipes we would be as helpless as ever. This gave much anxiety during the two weeks following the calamity.

When night came on the evening of the 19th, the parks and the Presidio were filled with frightened people, old and young. Thousands left their homes in the (which afterwards proved to be) unburned district, and sought shelter, as stated, in the parks and streets in the open air. Mr. and Mrs. Dr. J. W. Keeney and family left their home at 2222 Clay Street, and remained on Lafayette Square in the open air for two days and nights, with hundreds of others, who feared another earthquake and the conflagration.

The afternoon after the fire had exhausted itself, the atmosphere was hot, the great beds of coals gave out heat and glowed brightly at night. The more I saw of this desolation, the worse it looked. I barricaded my windows the best I could with mattresses and rugs, as the wind was a little chilly. They stayed that way for about two weeks. The front of my house was blistered and blackened by the intense heat. The paint melted in a peculiar way, and over two of the windows it hung like drapery. This morning (Saturday, the 21st) a man with a policeman came to the door and demanded blankets, cover−lids, pillows, and mattresses. I gave all I could spare, and some draperies besides. They insisted on taking the rugs from the floor, and I had much difficulty in making them see that rugs were not what they needed. The telegraph and telephone wires made a network on every street, and for more than

two weeks I carried in my pocket a pair of wire cutters, which I had often occasion to use. During the week following the fire, I found many water−pipes leaking, and I went around with a hammer and wooden plugs and stopped them, in hope to raise the water sufficient to have a supply in my house. I think I succeeded. This morning (Saturday) I was hungry, with nothing in my house to eat. I found a fireman on the street who gave me one of two boxes of sardines which he had, and a stranger gave me soda crackers, so I had a pretty fair breakfast under the circumstances.

Bread we were able to buy after a few days. On May 3d we were able to buy the staple articles of food. Up to that time we obtained what we needed from the Relief Committee, such as canned meats, potatoes, coffee, crackers, etc.

The city being under military rule, on May 4th I obtained the following orders:

San Francisco, May 4, 1906. To All Civic and Military Authorities:

Permit the bearer, Mr. J. B. Stetson, to visit the premises, 123 California, and get safe.

J. F. Dinan, Chief of Police. May 4, 1906.

Permit Mr. Stetson, No. 123 California Street, to open safe and remove contents.

J. M. Stafford, Major 20th Infantry, U. S. A.

So, with this permit, authority or protection, or whatever it may be called, I found my safe in the ruins and everything in it that was inflammable burned to a coal; one of the twenty−dollar gold pieces before mentioned was saved.

During the afternoon of the 18th and until 3 o'clock P. M. of the 19th the scraping sound of dragging trunks on the sidewalks was continual. All sorts of methods for conveying valuables were resorted to,—chairs on casters, baby carriages, wheelbarrows,—but the trunk−dragging was the most common. It was almost impossible to get a wagon of any kind. The object of the people was to get to the vacant lots at North Beach and to the Presidio grounds.

Shortly after the calamity the most absurd stories were in circulation. It was stated that a man came out of the wreck of the Palace Hotel with his pockets filled with human fingers and ears taken from the dead inmates for the rings and earrings. As no one was injured in the hotel, it was wholly imaginative. A man near the Park met another who related the shocking occurrence of two men having been hanged on a tree in sight, and not a long way off; the man hastened to the spot and found no crowd, nor men hanging.

My son was engaged with his automobile all the forenoon in work connected with the temporary hospital at the Mechanics' Pavilion. At about 11 A. M. it was found necessary to remove the patients, which was finished by noon. When the last one was taken out, he went in and made a search, and found that all had been taken away. Still the report was believed by many that a hundred or more perished there by the fire.

A few personal experiences have come to me, and as I can verify them, I have here inserted them.

One of our men who roomed near the engine−house on California Street, packed his trunk and dragged it downstairs, and started along the street for a place of safety until he came to a pile of brick, when he stopped and had just time to lay the brick all around it and run away. The next day as soon as the heat would permit, he went for his trunk and found it slightly roasted, but the contents uninjured.

A lady who does not wish her name mentioned relates a very interesting and thrilling story of her earthquake experience. She says she had permitted her servant to go away for the night, and at five o'clock she remembered that the milkcan had not been placed out as usual, so at that hour she concluded to get up and do it herself. She did so and before she could return to her bed, the shock came and the chimney was thrown over, falling on the roof and crashed through that and the ceiling of the chamber and on to the bed, which she had left only a few minutes before.

Alfred Boles, roadmaster of the California Street Cable R. R. Co., was working on the cables all of the previous night, and up to about 4:30 on the morning of the 18th. Therefore, that night at their home in the Richmond District, the daughter slept with her mother. The earthquake shook the chimney down, which fell through the roof and ceiling of her room, and covered the bed with brick and mortar. Had she been in it she certainly would have been killed.

Mr. and Mrs. Weatherly, who were living in the Savoy, carefully packed a trunk of their most valuable belongings, and he started up Post Street dragging the trunk, seeking a place of safety. The porter of the Savoy called him back, and showed him an express wagon in front of the house, and said he was about to start for

Golden Gate Park, so he lifted his trunk on to the wagon. About this time a soldier or policeman came along and said, "I want these horses," and without ceremony unharnessed them, and took them away. In a few minutes the fire had got so near, that it was impossible to get other horses, or move the wagon by hand and the wagon and contents were burned.

Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Tharp tell a very interesting story of their experience on that April morning. Their sleeping room was one fronting on the east side of Scott Street, between Sacramento and California Streets. When the shock came it rolled their bed from one side of the room to the other, quite across the room, and where the bed had stood was filled with the broken chimney, to the amount of more than three tons. Mrs. Tharp remembers having oiled the castors on the bedstead only a short time before, which she thinks saved their lives. Later in the day or the beginning of the next, while the fire was still miles away, some friendly but excited neighbors, came rushing into Mr. Tharp's chambers commanding him to flee as the house was in danger from the conflagration. He was at that instant engaged in changing his undergarments, and had his arms and head nearly through. They shouted for him to come quick and save himself. He begged for a little more time, when one of them petulantly exclaimed: "Oh! let him burn up if he is so slow!" The fire did not come within two miles of this place.

Shortly after the fire and as soon as people began to realize the extent of the calamity, I listened to many discussions and prophecies concerning the future in reference to business and rebuilding. It was the general opinion that the business of jewelry and other luxuries, would be ruined for many years to come; that Fillmore Street and Van Ness Avenue would be only used temporarily; that the down−town district would be restored in two years—many entertained opinions exactly the reverse, and predicted all sorts of gloomy outlooks. Many theories and predictions were made, none of which have been verified.

My daughter, Mrs. Oxnard, with her husband was on the way to New York. At about noon of the 18th they heard, at North Platte, that there had been a severe shock of earthquake in San Francisco, and that the lower part of the city south of Market Street was on fire. They thought the report exaggerated, and at first declined to give it much attention; but when they met friends at Grand Island at about 3 o'clock they got information of such a character that it began to give them fear. At every place until they reached Chicago additional news was obtained, which indicated a very alarming condition of things here. They went to the offices of the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe Railroad companies, but could get nothing that they considered reliable. So they started on their way to New York from Chicago in doubt as to whether they should continue or turn back. On arrival in New York on the 20th there was much excitement. Newspapers issued extras every hour, filled with fearful stories and of the progress of the fire. The limits of the burned districts were reported with great accuracy, but the stories were alarmingly exaggerated, and in many instances absurd. One telegram read that the dead were so numerous that it was impossible to give burial, and the Government at Washington was asked to furnish a ship that they might be carried out far into the ocean and thrown into the sea. Some were fortunate enough to get a telegram, which was eagerly read and discussed. The number of people killed was reported to be from one to thirty thousand.

I finally received a telegram from them asking whether I would advise them to return, which I answered at once to come by all means. So they started back, arriving here on the 4th of May.

My sister was in Dresden, Germany, and was like others in an excited condition, until she could hear by mail from San Francisco. She says the first knowledge of the disaster reaching her was from a small evening newspaper printed in English, which in a very brief item said that "San Francisco was destroyed by an earthquake this morning [April 18th]." This was all the information which she could obtain that afternoon and evening. A neighbor, a German lady, came in the next morning and told her that the German newspapers of that morning said that the city of San Francisco was on fire, and that the loss of life was enormous. That day, the 19th, she visited the bulletin boards of the different newspapers, and with her daughter endeavored to translate the brief cable telegrams which were posted. The news came to London in English, and there cut down as brief as possible and translated into German, so the information was very brief. San Francisco people who were there sought one another for news. Within a week the New York papers came, which gave more particulars. While waiting for authentic information, such items as these were in circulation: "Golden Gate Park has been withered by the intense heat, and people are crowded to the beach," and that "Typhoid fever has broken out"; that a tidal−wave had swept over the city; that the earthquake shocks continued; that all communication with the interior by rail or otherwise had been cut off; that thirty thousand people had been killed. Whether her family and friends were alive she did not know.

In this state of mind, she found in a New York paper a picture of the Spreckels residence which showed mine. This was the first information that she received in reference to her family or their belongings. Mr. and Mrs. Dohrmann and his sister, Mrs. Paulsen, of San Francisco, were in Dresden, and did much to allay the fears of the San Franciscans.

During the first few days the German people got over the excitement, but not so with those whose homes were in this city. A letter which I mailed to her on April 22d reached her on May 8th, which was the first one she received, and which assured her of the safety of her family and friends.

Charles Stetson Wheeler, Jr., who was in school at Belmont, sends me an interesting account of his experiences. He says:

I was awakened by the violent shaking of my bed, which rolled across the room and struck the one occupied by my roommate. The pictures and frames fell from the walls, the bowls and pitchers from the washstands, the books from the shelves, and all were scattered over the floor. A piece of plastering and a broken wash−bowl struck me on my head. I at first thought it was the playful prank of the boys, but having got out of my bed, I was thrown headlong on the floor. I knew it was something serious and realized that it was an earthquake. I in some way got down the stairs; I hardly know how. In the yard I found my companions, badly frightened, all in pajamas, gazing at the sagging walls, broken windows and chimneys. My roommate, who had got out ahead of me, rushed up to me, and cried out: "By Jove, I am glad you're out safe; I didn't think of you until I saw you zig−zagging out of the building." I thanked him and joined the crowd, watching one of the teachers, who was climbing the flagpole, so as to be on top of the building if it further collapsed. We were all silent for a few minutes, but when the shock was fully over, we talked glibly and loud enough, and had many jokes.

No fires were started, as in San Francisco. We asked one another "if this was the end of the world or only the beginning." "Do you think we will get a holiday?" etc. As the excitement subsided, we began to shiver, so by common consent we sought in the ruins for our clothing. I felt that another shock might follow, and possibly worse than the first, and got out of the wrecked building as soon as possible.

A little later I found the Head Master of the school. "Good morning," said I. "Unfortunate morning," he replied. "Brick structures do not hold together when acted upon by conflicting motions caused by the vibrations due to earthquakes. This disturbance is purely local, and I think that Belmont is the only place which has suffered." I thought of our home in the city, which is built of brick, and that my mother, father, and sisters were in it. The more I thought of it, the weaker I felt, until my knees were shaking. In about twenty minutes I was at the Belmont Station determined to go to the city to learn the fate of my family.

I tried to telephone, but I was told that both telephone and wire connections between San Francisco and Belmont were broken. This was the first proof that the earthquake was more than local, and my fears were heightened. As I waited I was joined by other boys. All were curious to know what had happened in other places, but few were worried. Soon the entire school was gathered at the station. A teacher on a bicycle arrived and demanded in the name of Mr. R—that we return to school. The majority complied, but five of us refused. We were promised expulsion.

At last the train pulled in. We boarded it with difficulty, for it was packed with Stanford students. They told us that their college was a wreck.

"The buildings are of stone, you know," said one, "and stone buildings can't stand up against, an earthquake."

Hearing remarks like this made me so dizzy with dread that I began picturing to myself the ruins of my home. I could almost hear the groans of those most dear to me buried under tons of stone and beams, It was maddening, and I had to struggle some to keep from crying out like a child.

Slowly the train pulled by the ruins of San Mateo, Burlingame, and Milbrae, but just outside of San Bruno the long line of straining cars came to a sudden halt. We climbed out to find out the cause of the stop. Ahead we saw several hundred yards of track buckled and humped like much crumpled ribbon. We had gone as far as possible by rail.

We counted the money in the crowd and decided to rent a rig if possible and drive the twenty miles to our homes. After walking three miles, we found no one willing to take us to the city for the money we were able to offer; so at this point two of our party left us.

We must have gone about eight miles when the van of the thousands leaving the city met us. They were principally hobos and riffraff, packing their blankets on their backs. We stopped and anxiously inquired the plight

of the city. Some said that the city was burned to the ground, some that the whole town was submerged by a tidal wave, but all agreed in this particular: that it was time to leave the city, for soon there would be nothing left of it.

The numbers of the retreat were increasing now. We could see mothers wheeling their babes in buggies, limping, dusty, and tired. Men lashed and swore at horses straining at loads of household furnishings. All were in desperate haste. This increased our speed in the opposite direction. We began to see the dense black cloud of smoke hanging above the sky−line ahead of us. We almost ran.

As we passed over each mile we heard more distressing tales from those leaving. Men called us fools to be going toward the doomed town. Thousands were traveling away; we were the only ones going toward San Francisco.

At last we came to the old Sutro Forest. We toiled up to the summit of the ridge and looked down for the first time upon the city we were raised in. In my mind, it was a sight that shall always be vivid. The lower part of the city was a hell−like furnace. Even from that distance we could hear the roar of the flames and the crash of falling beams. We were paralyzed for a moment with the wonder of it. Then we began to run, run hard, down the slope toward the city. It was impossible for us to see our homes, for many hills intervened. Soon we reached the outskirts of the town. Fear grew stronger and stronger in my heart as I saw that all the chimneys of the houses were littering the streets through which we passed. They were of brick and so was my father's house.

The trip across the city seemed endless, even though we strained every effort to hurry. I had had no breakfast, and was almost sick with fear and hunger. We passed a brick church, and it was in ruins, shaken to pieces by the shock. I almost reeled over when I saw it. The rest of the way I ran.

As I came within four blocks of the house I looked anxiously over the roofs of other houses for its high chimneys that had hitherto been visible from that point. I could not see them! Then I was sure that all was over, and that my father, mother, and sisters were lost forever.

These last four blocks I fairly flew, in spite of my fatigue. I kept my eyes on the ground, not daring to raise them as I ran. Then as I reached the curb before the door I never expected to enter again I looked up. The house, though shorn of its chimneys, stood staunch and strong—they were safe. For a second I stood still. Then, like a poor fool, I began to laugh and shout. That was the most joyous home−coming of my life.

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During the day of Wednesday, April 18th, I saw some of the damage done by the earthquake. The loss to the California−Street cable railroad was the upper portion of the chimney. I had my lunch at the Pacific Union Club, corner of Post and Stockton Streets, and noted that building was damaged but very little; only some few pieces of plastering fell. The Call Building gave no evidence on the outside. The Commercial Block, in which my office was located, did not show any damage. The door leading into my office would not open, but the next one did. My house shows a few cracks. The tops of the chimneys on my house were thrown off, and the kitchen chimney had to be rebuilt. But the great loss, the great calamity, was the fire. After that had raged for three days the havoc was fearful to see. For miles and miles there was not a remnant of anything inflammable remaining,—nothing but brick, stone, broken crockery, iron and telegraph poles. In the general appearance it resembles the country where a forest fire has swept, the chimneys and unburned telephone poles representing the standing trunks of trees. The loss of life is probably nearly 450. Many earthquake shocks were felt during the three days of the calamity, and for as much as two months we felt gentle reminders.

The soldiers lacked good sense and judgment, or perhaps it may have been that some incompetent officers gave senseless orders,—for instance, the people occupying the stores on Polk Street, between Clay and Pacific, and the apartments above, were driven out at 8 A. M. of Thursday, and not permitted to re−enter. As the fire did not reach this locality until about 4 P. M., there was abundant time to save many valuable articles which were by this imbecile order lost. Why this was done, I did not at the time, nor have I since been able to understand.

Being busy in the work of restoration, I forget what a terrible calamity has befallen the city and the people, but I sometimes realize it, and it comes like a shock. It is estimated that 28,000 buildings were destroyed. I find that people lost the power of keeping time and dates, and if I had not made notes at the time I would be unable to recollect the events of these three days with any degree of accuracy in point of time.

I have felt that it was fortunate that this calamity did not happen on a Friday, or on, the 13th of the month. Had it occurred on either of those days, superstitious people would have had much to aid them in their belief.

The feeding of 300,000 people suddenly made destitute is a matter of great difficulty, but it has been done. It

rained two nights,—one night quite hard,—but the health of the people has been remarkably good.

We had water in the house on the 1st of May, glass in the windows on the 16th of May, gas on the 5th of June, electric light on the 7th of June, and cooked on the street until the 8th of May.

June, 1906