

## THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE.

Where on Thursday, July 3, stood the beautiful and elegantly fitted Grand Opera House is now a scene of ruin—the result of a disastrous fire.

From Monday to Thursday evening was occupied by the engagement of the "Held by the Enemy" company, while Friday and Saturday were to be taken by the performances of Boucicault's "After Dark." On Thursday evening, about 11 o'clock, the curtain went down on the programme, and the audience retired. The baggage and scenery of the "Held by the Enemy" company was packed up, and the trunks and boxes were piled together near the west door; at the same time a considerable portion of the "After Dark" company's effects were brought in, to be placed in position as soon as room could be made for them.

The stage carpenter, desiring to unite in the celebration of the Fourth, was working to get the new scenery in. In the first entrance next to the curtain are a number of drops, and by the assistance of others these were placed in position, and the men had removed to number three entrance to place the drops in position there. In number one the border lights are quite close to the drops, and at about 11:30 o'clock one of the men on the stage saw a drop take fire from the lights. He called to the men in the flies to cut the ropes down quick, and they made the attempt. Their knives were not sharp enough for the rapid work needed, and they got only two of the blazing curtains down before they had to jump for their lives. In an instant more the flames began to spread to the adjoining scenery and it seemed that the whole place was seized by the blaze almost like a flash.

When the fire was discovered the men seized the small hose that was in the building, and turned a stream of water on the fire, but it appeared to have no effect. The whole thing had happened so quickly that no alarm had been given to the outside. The men who came down from the flies rushed for the door and out into the alley on the west side of the building. There they shouted "Fire!" and one of them hastened westward, and the other to a telephone across the street, and both sent in messages to the fire department.

At this time there was an uproar in the street. The lattice work of scenery over the stage had formed as it were a grate-bottom for the furnace, into which a fierce draught was drawn, and flames from which seized the roof and shot to the outside.

The hose cart from the fire department was there in a very brief space of time, but the whole interior was a blaze, even the auditorium being lapped in the flames. A stream was turned on, but it was only as a drop to the great torrent that was necessary to quench the fury of the devouring monster. The building was a very difficult one in which to fight fire, and this the men soon discovered.

One stream played for a time on the place, there being some delay in getting on more. It probably made little difference in this instance, as the opportunity was not afforded for effective work. There was, however, a good deal of manipulation of the hose, and turning on and off of water at improper times, that would have been avoided by good management. Several streams were brought into play from the hydrants and two fire steamers, sometimes on the fire, sometimes on the solid brick walls, sometimes on the unbroken windows and doors in front, and sometimes in fine spray on the roof. There was some complaint because the firemen did not break in the front doors and windows, but it is doubtful whether this course would not have had a damaging effect.

The flames shot up far into the air, and could be seen from nearly every part of town. The heat was intense, and for a time there was some danger of the fire spreading to other buildings. This, however, was prevented by the firm brick walls, and the free use of water, by the owners of the surrounding structures. People at a distance of seventy to eighty rods saturated the roofs of barns and houses to insure safety. In the early stages of the fire there were several explosions, which caused a rumor to start that the flames had communicated to a gun and ammunition store near by, but they were caused by the materials used in Prof. Cromwell's exhibitions, and which had been left temporarily in the building.

The firemen kept the fire from entering the rooms on the first floor in the front of the building, to any material extent, yet the effect of the intense heat and the condition of the remaining portion of the structure rendered this part useless. The roof burned for a long time, the flames slowly creeping up the cupola, over which floated the Stars and Stripes. The water was thrown there many times, but only delayed the progress of the fire on the outside—the timbers within were doomed, and it was with a pang of regret that, at three minutes after 1 a. m. on the Fourth, the vast multitude who were watching the scene, beheld the roof with the flag still flying go down with a crash into the burning mass below. From this time on the firemen had control over the flames, so that neighboring places were not in danger. It took several hours, however, to quench the burning embers, and when this was done there was nothing but ashes, a few charred timbers, and twisted iron rods left, besides the walls, of the entire theatre portion of the building.

A few minutes after the fire started Mr. Daniels, the stage carpenter, was engaged with others in endeavoring to check the flames. In his anxiety he ventured too close to the burning drops, and when the pole of one was let down through the burning of a rope, it struck him on the head, inflicting a severe and painful injury. Even after he was hurt he tried frantically to save

property until he had to be prevented. He was taken home to receive the attention that he needed.

There was considerable censure passed on the action of the police for refusing to allow any persons to enter the building and save property by carrying it out. It is the height of foolishness on the part of officers to stop the saving of property by those who are willing, and at the same time make no arrangements for supplying the deficiency. "They do it elsewhere," has been the excuse, but the statement is incorrect. What they do elsewhere is to exclude the public from burning buildings, and immediately put into operation a salvage corps, either volunteer or regularly organized, and thus provide a more effective way for saving movable goods. When the officers here combine the exclusion of the public with a proper handling of a corps of men selected to save property without incurring unnecessary danger, then the common sense of such a course will commend it, and there will be no cause for complaint. In the case of the Opera House fire, however, it can not be justly said that the police are liable to censure for what they did. It was the best method under the circumstances. There was no opportunity for a salvage corps, as some time before the officers arrived—almost as soon as the alarm was given—it was too late to carry out trunks, scenery, or baggage of any kind. There were but a few persons there, and with one small door to pass through and that opening right on to the burning stage, the property of the theatrical companies could not have been saved. To have accomplished this would have required a goodly number of men, well directed at the very outset; and this was out of the question.

At one time, while there were some trunks near the stage door that might have been saved if any one would have ventured in, a member of one of the theatrical companies came up to assistant Chief Levy and said he had \$1700 worth of property in one of the trunks. Mr. Levy turned a stream of water on them and remarked, "We will keep here and it will protect you so you can pull your box out." "But I will get wet," was the reply. "Well," said Mr. Levy, "if you think more of wetting a \$5 suit than saving \$1700, it will have to go. There are not enough of us here to hold the hose and drag out the boxes too." So the trunks went up in the blaze.

The firemen worked hard in the responsible position they were placed in, but there is a lack of system. This is probably due in part to the small force of men available. The addition of a few reliable "call men" should at least be made, and would materially aid in the case of large fires. Some of the wrong could be remedied if Chief Stanton would have the duty of turning the water on and off better attended to. Sometimes a call to turn the water off, made by those at the nozzle of the pipe, was unheeded for a considerable time, while to the command to