

## A CHRISTMAS FIRE.

### The Masonic Temple Building Nearly Destroyed.

#### J. A. FOREPAUGH'S THEATRE BURNED.

**An Immense Crowd of Spectators—A Fireman Seriously Injured—Saving Valuable Records—Number of Documents, Books and Portraits Lost.**

The Masonic Temple of Baltimore, which is on the east side of Charles street, between Lexington and Saratoga streets, was nearly destroyed by fire yesterday afternoon. The middle and rear of the interior of the building were consumed. The four exterior walls remain standing. The side and rear walls are of massive brick masonry, and the front is of white marble. Three stores on the first floor were not touched by the fire, but the stocks were damaged by water and falling plaster. The entire loss of property was estimated at \$150,000. Of this \$90,000 was said to be the loss on the building; \$10,000 the loss on scenery and furniture belonging to John A. Forepaugh, the lessee of that part of the building which was used as a theatre; \$5,000 on scenery and properties of Gray and Stevens, whose company was performing there this week; \$10,000 on furniture and paraphernalia of the lodge and commandery rooms; \$10,000 on Masonic jewels and Templars' uniforms and accoutrements; \$22,000 on the Masonic library, and \$3,000 on the stocks of the stores on Charles street, beneath the Temple. Insurance covers most of the losses. The policies on the Temple amount to about \$100,000. The lodges, chapters and commanderies had their accessories insured, and jewels and uniforms were in many cases insured by their individual owners. Gray and Stevens, of the theatrical company, were not insured, nor was Mr. Forepaugh. The fire was first seen by the gasman, Harry Likes, among upper mechanism of the stage at about 12:30 o'clock, and he sent a man to turn in the alarm. It soon became known all over town that the Masonic Temple was afire, and a great deal of excitement was created.

#### "IF IT HAD OCCURRED LATER."

Every street corner was crowded with knots of men, women and children gazing intently upon the sombre columns of smoke that rose straight into the air and faded away into the leaden sky above. Ten thousand housetops, particularly those in the elevated parts of town, bore men and boys, who took in the sight of four dark and towering walls, with a column of blood-red flame rising 200 feet into the air above them, and every lip said: "Thank Heaven this did not happen an hour and a-half later, when Forepaugh's Theatre would have been blighted with a mass of human beings." On the streets about the Masonic Temple was an impressive picture. Glittering engines and vermillion-hued hook-and-ladder wagons came dashing with clanging gongs. Policemen and firemen screamed to the thickening crowds to make way. Engines dashed up to the water plugs, clattering reels spun out their burdened cables of hose, while seeming confusion filled the air. One, two, three alarms were sounded in quick succession from box 318. The first came at 12:35 o'clock, the next eight minutes later, and the last seven minutes thereafter. The stout fire-fighters of engine companies 1, 2, 4, 7, 13, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 12, of hook-and-ladder companies 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6, and chemical engine companies 8 and 3 were soon on the spot pouring a torrent of water into the temple and striving to save what they might.

#### A DRAMATIC CONTRAST.

In dramatic contrast, while all this was going on, was the hushed solemnity of the scene in St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal Church, next door to and north of the Temple. Regular service had ended and one-half the congregation had remained to partake of the communion. The rich beauty of the sanctuary, as seen in a subdued light, and the shadows of the massive pillars, relieved by the soft illumination of the candles amid the evergreen decorations of the chancel, made the interior very impressive. The only sounds that came to the ears of the worshippers were a confused murmur from outside and a monotonous hissing that came from the streams of icy water that were thrown into the great furnace of bricks, mortar and marble little over twenty-five feet away. The rector, Dr. J. S. B. Hodges, knew of the fire and also that it would probably not spread to the church, but he made no announcement. The communion service was shortened by omitting the nuptials, but with that exception everything was done as usual. When some of the congregation passed through the church doors into the street they were plunged, to their mute astonishment, into the vortex of a city fire scene, with contorted hoses covering the streets, rushing waters flooding the drive-way, and workers and spectators moving about. As may be imagined, the holiday occasion, that gave plenty of leisure, brought surging thousands out. They stood at bay behind the ropes which the policemen had stretched at the intersections of Charles and Saratoga streets, Charles and Lexington, and in the rear on Courtland street, where the alley that leads to the other thoroughfare behind the temple gave a good view of the fire. People were jammed at the Saratoga street end of the rear alley also, and for forty feet west of Charles street on Barnet street. Promenaders out to take the air, visitors to the churches that had closed their morning services, early diners who had come out to attend some of the many festivals and places of amusement, all contributed a quota to the throng. The buildings on the west side of Charles street were filled with their occupants and friends of those doing business there. Many faces looked from the windows of the Young Men's Christian Association hall, and the Pimlico Club rooms, at Saratoga and Charles streets, had their windows thrown up to permit members, some of whom were accompanied by ladies, to view the stirring scene. All this the outgoing congregation of St. Paul's saw, and in moving away soon became a part of the crowd. The street car service was disarranged, and a line of cars using Charles street were blocked on each side of the fire.

#### TORRENTS OF WATER.

During all this time the engines were snorting and puffing with the exertion of forcing the powerful columns of water into the burning structure. The streams burst in the window panes and came rolling out of the lower floors, while the light southerly breeze carried a spray like a moderate summer shower a block from the temple. The streams falling upon the curved roof, where it had not yet given way, poured over the eaves in broad cataracts and fell with force on the pavement below. The symbolic eye in the pediment over the middle of the front seemed to be weeping copious tears of sorrow over the destruction that was being wrought. The small round windows in the curved edges of the roofs appeared to be the vent-holes of some great smelting furnace. Into two of these, with unerring aim, two streams were played from the Needles building, on the west side of Charles street. These were reinforced later by another. These streams for a time seemed to do nothing but turn into steam, which descended in a thick mist over the watching crowd. A confused network of electric-light and telegraph wires were suspended before the marble front of the building. They and the supports of the arc lamps before the building began to accumulate icicles in the frosty air until they formed a superb decoration, and when the icicles got too long and heavy long sections would break away and dash themselves to pieces on the pavement below.

#### ATTACKING THE FIRE.

Venerable-looking St. Paul's Church presented a quaint picture. Upon its porch stood a number of firemen directing a stream of water against the north side of the temple, and upon the church roof proper was another hose gang likewise engaged. A hose also trailed its length from the street upward over the porch and reached the roof, where it was tied to the cross that surmounts the ridge of the building. Here it pointed its nozzle toward the fire, looking not unlike a great snake making ready to strike an enemy. A fireman, wearied with his work, leaned on the cross in a negligent attitude and made a picture worthy of an artist's brush. Several streams played from the church roof. South of the Masonic Temple, and divided from it by a fenced alleyway twenty-six feet wide, is the building of the F. Hanson Hiss Manufacturing Company. From this side eight streams were sent into the temple from a height equal to that of the temple. So heavy was the rush of the water that a long section of the wall above the upper brick cornice of two that run along the sides of the temple was forced in. The Hiss building is connected by bridges with its cabinet workshop, six stories high in the rear. Thus the front and rear Hiss buildings form an L, which bends around the southeast corner of the temple, though divided by a twenty-two-foot alley. Four streams played from the cabinet shop and the bridges were used as a point of vantage at times. In the rear alley and in the fenced area between the north side of the temple and the south side of St. Paul's Church the firemen worked, some clambering about the iron fire-escape on that side of the temple.

#### HOW DID IT START?

"How did the fire originate?" Harry Likes, the gasman, said: "I went upon the stage to arrange for the afternoon performance. While driving up the ponies that are used in the play I noticed plaster falling from the ceiling. Looking up I saw fire between the double stage ceiling. I then called the people in the theatre and ran out the hose in the building, and assisted by Wm. Frazier and Al. Spangler, theatre attaches, I soon got three streams of water on the fire, and sent a man to turn in the city fire alarm. My efforts were futile, and I directed the immediate removal of costumes and movable stage effects. Michael Raby took in the ponies, and also the dogs which are used in the play to his place, on Barnet street. The fire then rapidly spread to the scenery. There were no gas jets lighted at the time the fire occurred, and the electric current was turned off at the back, though in the front of the building it was turned on. I ran to the cellar at once to turn off the gas, to prevent an explosion." The police report says: "The fire originated

on the south side of the building in the fire on the stage. The fire burst up through the roof."

Mr. W. T. Stevens, of the theatrical company, says: "The actors went upon the stage and saw fire in the 'gridiron' overhead, which is the roofed piece into which the scenes slide. Fire dropped from this upon the stage."

Several years ago, owing to the defective acoustic properties of the auditorium, a false ceiling was put up, leaving a vacant space fourteen or fifteen feet deep. It was in this place the fire is said to have started. It is thought the burning scenery ignited the wood-work of the lower ceiling, and the confined space acted like a flue, drawing the blaze to the front of the house.

#### PLAN OF MASONIC FLOORS.

The room over the theatre auditorium contained the south, southeast, east, northeast rooms, the Lodge of Relief, chapter rooms and library. In the top story, under the arched roof, were the asylum and armory. This story was the commandery floor. The asylum was a hollow square in the middle of the floor, surrounded by the armory and banquet hall. In the armory were three long rows of cases, containing records and valuable papers. The banner room was also on this floor, and contained many handsome designs which were destroyed. Ten lodges met in the south room, and the papers of nearly all of them were burned.

#### SAVING THE RECORDS.

After burning through the auditorium of the theatre, which occupied the first and second floors of the building, the fire ascended to the upper lodge floor above. The flames were fed by the light stage apparatus and made rapid headway toward the roof. In the record rooms, on the left-hand front corner of the floor, were stored the numerous papers containing the history of the Masonic Order in Maryland and other valuable information, of which no other copies are in existence. Grand Master Thomas J. Shryock, who was early on the scene, was the first to remember these old papers. Appreciating their value, he called for volunteers to assist in saving them. Meanwhile the fire was eating its way toward the record room.

Mr. H. F. Poske, a member of the Masonic order, volunteered to go into the room. A fire ladder was soon hoisted to the window, and, with several firemen at his back, Mr. Poske disappeared through the window. A net was arranged on the sidewalk below, and soon the books and papers came pouring out as fast as the willing hands could secure them. By hard work the most valuable of the records were secured and stored in a place of safety before the approaching flames and smoke forced Mr. Poske to desist. In the grand master's room was also kept a box containing the symbolic jewels and decorations used as a mark of distinction by that official on the occasion of all Masonic celebrations. It was feared at one time that these would be lost, but they were gotten out safely and handed over to the grand master. In this room were also three small brass tables that have been heirlooms in Masonic circles ever since the establishment of the order in Maryland. They were brought over from England and placed in the meeting-room when the charter in this city was granted and have been looked upon with veneration since that time. These were saved by the firemen. All the lodge-rooms on this floor were handsomely furnished with thick, heavy carpets covering the floors. They were soon reduced to ashes.

#### THE COMMANDERY FLOOR.

On the commandery floor were the meeting places of five commanderies of the Knights Templar in Baltimore, the library and reception-room, containing portraits of the successive grand commanders of the Masonic fraternity since its organization in Baltimore, twenty in all. About 500 Knights Templar uniforms were also stored on this floor, with much of the belongings and many emblems of the order.

#### THINGS SAVED OR LOST.

A life-size portrait of Nicholas Brewer, deputy grand master in 1861, arrayed in the insignia of his office, was saved. The books in the library were ruined by water and smoke.

Among the valuable relics saved was a chair belonging to Washington Lodge No. 3, which was used by General Washington when he was master of a lodge in Virginia. The old charter of Maryland Commandery was destroyed, together with five solid silver communion services belonging to the commanderies. All the books and papers of Concordia Lodge were saved. As soon as the fire ascended to the roof and made an opening to admit of ventilation the flames on the inside roared and spread with greater rapidity, and it was soon found to be fruitless to attempt to save the uniforms or furniture of the Knights Templar. The efforts of the firemen were directed toward subduing the flames, and nothing was saved from the upper floor of the building. What the flames did not consume was injured beyond service by the smoke and water. The uniforms in these rooms were the individual property of the Knights. Those belonging to the Maryland, Monumental and Baltimore commanderies were insured as a whole. Those of the Beauseant and Crusaders were not insured together, though it is thought a majority of the members had individual policies. The loss to the five commanderies in jewels, banners, uniforms and paraphernalia is estimated at about \$20,000. The records of Germania and Arcana (No. 110) lodges and a fine set of robes belonging to the Arcana Lodge were consumed. The charter, jewels and trowel of Union Lodge, No. 60, were rescued by the members of truck No. 5 and handed to Past Master John H. Miller, who now has them in his possession. The banners of Concordia, No. 13, Union, No. 60, Hiram, No. 107, Centre, No. 68, and Mystic Circle, No. 103, were left by Mr. Miller at the office of J. M. Berry & Son. All the records of the Grand Commandery of Maryland, Masonic Knights Templar, are lost. The uniforms of the Knights Templar, which were in cases in the front part of the armory, are thought to be safe, but damaged by water. The charter of Union Lodge is about seventy-four years old. There is an insurance of \$1,000 on the property of Monumental Commandery, No. 3, Knights Templar. C. C. Isaac, past grand master, lost jewels worth from \$300 to \$400. All past grand masters lost jewels. The library was one of the most valuable collections of Masonic writings and histories in this country. Grand Master Shryock said it will be impossible to replace the books. The library contained between 3,000 and 4,000 volumes, with Masonic valuation of from \$20,000 to \$25,000.

#### THE TEMPLE BUILDING.

A portion of the site for the Masonic Temple was purchased in September, 1863, and in April the following year the whole of the ground was secured. The corner-stone of the Temple was laid on Tuesday, November 20, 1866. There was a grand civic display, participated in by Masons and Knights Templar in the Eastern States. President Andrew Johnson, who was a past grand master of the order, was present and took part in the ceremonies. The oration was delivered by the venerable John H. B. Latrobe. The hymn sung on the occasion was composed by Mr. Brantz Mayer. The gavel used at the time by Grand Master Coates was the one used by George Washington in laying of the corner-stone of the first national Capitol in 1793. The gold trowel was the one used by Levin Winder, the grand master of Maryland, in laying the corner-stone of the old Masonic Temple, on St. Paul street, fifty years before, and was also the same used in laying the corner-stone of the Washington monument and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. In December, 1867, the old Masonic Temple was sold to the city for \$45,000, and is now used as the City Court. In January, 1868, the order took up temporary quarters on Baltimore street. They formally took charge of their new building in 1869.

The Temple was built at a cost of \$200,000 by a stock company. Most of the stock was taken by members of the order. There has been a heavy debt resting on the building, which was greatly reduced, however, by the success attending the recent Masonic fair. With the receipts of this fair applied to the liquidation of the debt the amount will be brought down to between \$35,000 and \$40,000. Before the Masons leased the auditorium for theatrical purposes the hall was used by large political and other assemblages. Lectures and public school concerts were given there, and it was frequently used for balls. The late Patrick Harris first leased it for theatrical purposes. He was followed by Forepaugh & Connelly, and then by John A. Forepaugh.

#### FIREMEN BADLY HURT.

Frank Hymes, a callman of No. 2 engine company, fell down the stairs from the third to second floor and injured his spine severely. He was also hurt internally. Dr. Alexander Hill, who was at the fire, rendered medical aid. Hymes was afterward sent to his home, No. 1109 Paca street. His condition is considered serious.

Thomas Sexton, of No. 6 engine company, was thrown from horse-carriage at Fayette and Gay streets and badly bruised. He was taken to a neighboring house, where he recovered and went to the fire.

#### ACCIDENTS AND INCIDENTS.

The firemen at no time feared a spread of the flames beyond the Temple building itself. They were at work upon it all the afternoon and night, but the fire was practically dying out at the end of four hours from its beginning.

Dr. D. F. Pennington, while saving relief records, was caught in the room by a fall of the ceiling, and made his escape by breaking through a window into the corridor.

The banquet hall in the temple was a marvel of good taste and richness. It was fitted up at a cost of \$3,000 about a year ago upon the plan of an old English dining-room. The hardwood wainscoting came up high upon the walls, and the ceiling of blue was a representation of the heavens, with the stars in correct astronomical positions.

The firms conducting business in the Temple stores were A. S. Shafer & Son, mineral waters, No. 221; T. J. Irving & Co., gentlemen's furnishing goods, No. 229, and S. V. Farson, cigars and tobacco, No. 231 North Charles street. Irving & Co.'s stock was badly damaged by water. Mr. Irving could not estimate his loss. Mr. Farson's stock was ruined by water, and Shafer & Son suffered a loss of about \$200 by the fall of a ceiling. They were fully insured.

The P. Hanson Hiss Manufacturing Company, No. 217 North Charles street, lost perhaps \$200 by water. The stock is well insured.

When the roof fell it threw the machinery

that runs the elevator into gear, and the heavy elevator shot to the top of the building and then dropped down to the fourth floor.

The front of the Temple presented a striking contrast last night to the desolation that marked the interior. Up to a late hour Engines Nos. 11 and 13 were busy pumping water into the building, and the flying spray settled upon the many telegraph and electric light wires along the street and on the cornices and windows of the front of the Temple, and freezing as it fell formed a delicate fringe of icicles, which shone and glistened from the electric light. The picture held hundreds of spectators long after the interest in the operations of the fire department had ceased to attract.

The Gray and Stevens Company had ten dogs, three ponies, a surry and a donkey cat upon the stage when the alarm was given. All the seats were sold for the afternoon performance, and there is a great probability that loss of life would have occurred had the fire occurred later.

Sixteen drop curtains and fifty set pieces were destroyed. The scenes of the play of "The Old Oaken Bucket" were saved, but those for "Vesper Bells" were lost.

The meeting of Maryland Commandery which was to have taken place tonight at the Temple, has been called for tonight at Milbourne's Hall by Mr. John B. Kurtz.

It was stated by prominent members of the order that at least 250 emblematic jewels, ranging in value from \$10 to \$250, were lost in the fire. Some of these had precious stones set in them and will be searched for in the ruins.

#### THE INSURANCE.

About \$100,000 of insurance was carried on the building and fixtures. It was placed by Mr. Frederick Fickey, who said that it was impossible to give the amount of policies in the different companies, but that the Associated Firemen's, the German, Maryland, National, German-American and Firemen's Insurance Companies of Maryland were in for amounts ranging from \$1,500 to \$2,500 each. The remainder is in out-of-town companies. Mr. Fickey said fifty companies, including the Maryland companies, were interested.