

# A STILL ALARM

Precisely What Occurred at a Little Fire at No. 231  
Broome Street Yesterday.

## THE BURNING OF A POOR MAN'S HOME.

Humor and Pathos of an Ordinary Fire in an Ordinary  
Tenement-House.

A fire broke out shortly before yesterday noon in the tenement house No. 231 Broome street. It was brought under control in a very few moments, and the damage to the building did not exceed \$1,500.

It was too insignificant an affair in the city's history to command a notice in the newspapers, and you would never have heard of it if a young man from *The World* had not happened to be present.

But this little fire yesterday—this still alarm—illustrates how the poor in the great metropolis suffer and the rich know naught of it. And check by jowl with the pathos of the situation there was so much that was humorous, so much that was laughable—how true it is that sorrow and laughter go through the world hand in hand!

The block in Broome street between Essex and Ludlow streets is simply a detail of the vast swarming town we loosely designate as the east side. It is built high with tenements, and humanity swarms there as rats do in a straggly. The dwellers in this ill-smelling, crowded thoroughfare are very poor, most of them; many of them are foreigners who cannot speak a word of the vernacular of the land to which they have

emigrated. They constitute the lowly, humble class of our great city.

### THE PATRON OF A LITTLE FIRE.

Suppose if you had toiled for years to have a little money, and at last had saved enough to take to yourself a helpmate; suppose you had only two miserable rooms away up at the top, and away at the back of a beehive tenement, and you were working your fingers to the bone to pay the meagre rent that your landlord demanded for them; suppose you had three or four little curly-headed fellows running about the landings, and you had to feed them on \$8 a week—then suppose, after laboring for years to buy a few household goods that you might have a roof-tree of your own, a cruel tongue of flame wiped out all your endeavor, as a cloth rubbed over chalk, leaving you homeless and roofless. There you have the pathos.

Well, Moses Leibkind had his wife, four little chicks in the coop and two little rooms at the top of the tenement at No. 231 Broome street. He always worked hard at his needle, stitching on clothing and man sized to see out a livelihood.

Yesterday he went to his labor early

the morning, and when it was time to go back home again for his dinner, what did he find? His home is ashes and his little folks with no place to lay their heads on the eve of Thanksgiving.

He had gone away in the morning, and his good wife had stayed behind to care for the meals and the babies. The oldest had not yet passed his eighth birthday. They had eaten their breakfast and then were sent out to school and to play. Mrs. Leibkind lighted her kerosene stove, put some stuff on it to boil, and then had gone to make a call upon the tenant in the front.

### A HUMBLE HOUSE ARRAID.

She was sitting there, talking away in a language which few of *THE WORLD* readers would understand, when she smelt smoke. It was not the smoke that comes from a spoiled dinner nor from a smoking chimney. It was the smell of burning wool and wood and cloth.

The two homely rooms which were her home were on fire!

Thirty minutes more and she was "burnt out." How much those two words mean for the poor!

Then hand in hand with the pathos of the affair comes the humor. A *WORLD* man happened to be walking through the street. He heard cries issuing from the doorway and the windows. And then these odd things happened.

### THE HUMOR OF THE SITUATION.

Have you ever been to a fire in the tenement district? No? Then you have missed a very funny sight. Quicker than the lightning flies that burning tenement-house became a picture that the variety boards could never equal. There was a big doorway and twenty-six windows in its front. Up they went with one accord as if a funeral or a circus procession were passing by. Women shrieked and children began trooping down the stairway as if school were out. Not a minute before the danger signal had been given and the street was filled.

### THE AUDIENCE OF CHILDREN.

Was the Pied Piper of Hamelin futing somewhere in the thoroughfare? A grown man could not see him, nor could he hear him. But just as they flocked after his magic piping in Hamelin City did they flood the way. Out of doorways, out of side streets, out of space they came. Dirty, bedraggled, curly haired, "they" came. You couldn't sleep without tumbling over them. They evidently didn't believe in the Mahatma theory over by Essex street.

Women, wringing their hands and beating

their breasts, congregated on the landings. Some brought up their babies, and some of them, in lieu of their ducklings, picked up their stew pans. It was pandemonium shut up in a dark, narrow staircase and gone mad.

It was exactly twenty-two minutes past 11 o'clock.

In country towns some one cries "Fire," and the whole population catches up the cry. There is smoke in the air everywhere. But how, inside one minute and a half after the little call of the fire dend at 231 Broome street yesterday, did the whole street learn of the thing? It was only a still alarm. Yet in that time the block was alive, swarming with its inhabitants.

### HIS GOATBIRD'S LUNCH INTERRUPTED.

Incidents. A goat, one of the immemorial xenos labelled "Shanty town," who sauntering by the corner browsing. He had spied a rich, succulent cabbage leaf that lay upon the top of a barrel, like silver leaf over bonbons. He held his head high in air and sniffed it as the horse the battle afar off. He leaped towards it with sportive gambles and affectionately laid his nose against it. Ah, what a breakfast—a salad, by way of appetizer. Affectionately he laid his nose against it again. Then he buried his teeth in its deliciousness. He was oblivious of the crowd in his stomachic satisfaction.

Toot, toot! hoot, hoot! Engine 17, from its house just around the corner, in Ludlow street, dashes by the corner. Toot, toot! hoot, hoot! It dashes by like death on the pale horse. And that goat? He gave a hurried glance over his shoulder to the demon that meant destruction if it crossed him. One look—that was enough—and, with one wild lunge of his heels and one frenzied whisk of his wee, small tail, he cavorted into space.

At the opposite corner an itinerant peddler, vending his wares, was ambling across the flagging. He, too, heard the mad clatter of the engine as it dashed by. With a crazed look in his eye and that convulsive shrugging of the spine which betrays a man in two when danger is about to strike him from the rear, he made one lean to the sidewalk opposite. His pack lay, spilt like a can of milk, in the mud and dirt.

### THE EXCITEMENT GROWS.

The excitement grew fast and furious. Five minutes had not elapsed when Engine 17 bore in view. Five minutes more when Engine No. 15, from Henry street, came round the bend. A hook and ladder company from Allen street, and another from

Attorney street, were at its heels. They were laying through the street what looked like a huge snake. It was the hose.

Some one at the first cry of fire had dashed off to the fire house in Ludlow street and announced the fact to the men in charge there. That is what they call a "still alarm," and just one-half a minute was consumed in harnessing up and getting connection with a hydrant.

Just half a minute more was consumed in

the house with their penates in their arms. Windows all along the line were thrown up, and five, six, seven, sometimes eight heads appeared at each.

One old woman, "working the growler," was arrested in her errand and let the beer drip on the ground in the excitement.

There was a fire in the tenement-house district!

### THE FIRE LADDIES ARRIVE.

And then the fire laddies appeared on the



THE INTERESTED AUDIENCE OF CHILDREN  
At the fire at No. 231 Broome street yesterday.

setting up steam and coiling the great snake up the staircase of the tenement.

A still alarm and the fire was quickly under way. That is why no fire lines were drawn, and why the street before the house was swarming with life instead of being clear of people, as at ordinary fires.

Smoke was stealing stealthily throughout the tenement like the fumes of ether. Women, bareheaded and barearmed, were grabbing whatever was within a babe or a bedticking, and heading for the street. Children were crying, were huddled in open-mouthed astonishment, or, like the goat, were taking to their heels at the approach of the engines.

Men and boys came running up to the scene as if there were awards to be given at the dash. Tenants were outpouring from

When the force got up there the smoke was blinding. The flames had eaten their way out into the hall. They were lapping the poor man's little stock with their hot tongues, and consuming it as if they were famished with hunger.

The demon of flame and our own brave fire laddies are fighting for the victory, tooth and nail. As they flew by box 172 they had sent out an alarm, and succor was on its feet way to them.

### CHIEF KNIFE TAKEN CHARGE.

Up speeds John H. Kaboo. He is Chief of Battalion, and he takes charge of the fire. Up come the hook and ladders, and before the hands seem to have had time to go round your watch one engine company, No. 15, is at the doorway.

The flames have five minutes' headway, that is fair odds, but they have got a hard opponent to down in the New York Fire Department. Over the poor man's furniture the flames leap, and they leap with exultation. They have ruined him, but there they must stop.

### THE WORSE FIRE LADDIES.

The flames are worsted inside five minutes. One minute and a half is a generous time to allow for the firemen to overcome an ordinary little blaze when the stream is once on. Had they come a minute and a half later the whole place would have been endangered. Some stood looking upon the fire laddies and the way they rolled up their sleeves and got to work one could feel only admiration at their pluck and surprise at their dexterity. We have crime in the midst of us, but look at our police. We have fire always ready to break out into disastrous evil, but look at our fire laddies.

A flood of water, a moist cloud of smoke like steam, a flame that flickers, darts up into thin peaks of wan, white light, flickers like a candle and then goes out! The mastery is with our firemen.

### Time, 3 minutes.

Down through the halls comes a river of water, as if floodgates somewhere above had just burst forth. Down through the ceiling it drips and drips and drips, as from statuettes in a cave.

### The fire is over.

THE POOR MAN'S DESOLATE HOME.  
But the poor man's home? It was charred like a coal. It was cinders and ashes. The windows had fallen out, the door had gone and nothing had been saved but the lives of his little ones.

The stove which had given them heat was ruined. The machine where the mother

had made the clothes for her little family was rusted and spoiled. The little stock would never tick again. The oil in the lamp was spilled and would never burn again. Their clothes, their two little pictures, their mirror and their bed—they had but one—were but black smoke. The floor and the household goods it had supported swam in a pool of slimy, lank water.

And this little fire, which meant so much to Moses Leibkind but so little to the world at large, do you know how it affected every man in the Fire Department? If it had been at night, 1,100 men would have jumped from their beds and stood in their boots in readiness to battle with the flames. And in their boots and awakes, with the horses ready at the door and the steam on in the engines, they would have waited till word came that the fire was under control. They sleep in clean little beds, these fire laddies, with snow-white spreads upon them and chains over the pillows, as dainty



THE GOAT AFFRIGHTED.

as any girl's. But they are strong men, and brave and true, and they stand always waiting, as any moment, be it dead of night or high noon of day, to meet you and your homes from burning.

As it was when that alarm came in from box 172, every family in the city was ready for the call. The little family in the burning tenement were never of so much importance in their lives. A goat taking to its heels; a frowny woman spilling her tears in the excitement; the slyed youth of the vicinity, with cigars in their mouths at a snarl of words; five decrees and concerns rushing to their trompers, watching the scene; women frantically gathering up their babies or their baggage, as the case might be—that is what a fire can do. As it is, can laugh at it, the still alarm.

A poor family in a strange land rendered homeless by a hearse-like fire; their modest belongings—of little or no intrinsic value, but their all—wrecked out of existence; a father, a mother and their four little children homeless on Thanksgiving eve—there is the pathos of realism for you.

The heavy door, the door which kept our fire laddies who never knew what fire was, have their dreams unbroken in the night that they may guard you and me—there is something for you to admire and applaud.