CASUALTIES.

THE DIVISION-ST. CATASTROPHE.

CORONER'S INQUEST—TESTIMONY OF SEVERAL WITNESSES—THE FIRE BELIEVED TO BE THE WORK OF AN INCENDIARY—THE MAYOR RECOMMENDED TO OFFER A REWARD FOR THE DETECTION AND ARREST OF THE OFFENDER—SUGGESTIONS WITH REGARD TO THE STORAGE AND SALE OF PETROLEUM.

On Tuesday, Coroner Gover held an inquest at the Seventh Precinct Station-House on the bodies of the unfortunate persons who were suffocated at the fire at No. 215 Division-st., on Monday night. After the jury were impanneled, in company with the Coroner, they visited the apartments lately occupied by the deceased, at the above place, and made a thorough research. As already stated in THE TRIBUNE, it was found that the flames had not extended above the second floor, but the ceiling and furniture in the apartments occupied by the unfortunates, on the third and fourth floors, were begrimed with the thick black smoke which arose from the burning kerosene in the store on the first floor, affording indubitable evidence of the manner in which they had met their death.

The jury returned to the Station-House, and the Coroner then impressed upon the jury the necessity of carefully investigating all the circumstances connected with the outbreak of the fire. He thought there must have been some fault with regard to the storage of such a combustible material as kerosene in a building where human beings resided, and trusted that the Legislature would enact a law that might in future insure a better protection to human life. The investigation was then proceeded with.

Michael Hackett, residing at No. 201½ Division-st., testified that soon after the breaking out of the fire he proceeded thither, and attempted to enter, but was prevented by the police; he saw the inmates making their escape; the most of the smoke seemed to be in the rear of the building; he thought if he had been allowed to go up stairs he could have saved those who were lost.

Patrick O'Brien, residing at No. 62 Market-st., testified that he reached the scene of the fire soon after its outbreak; he entered the milk store on the first floor adjoining the kerosene oil store, and found the proprietor and his wife just getting out of bed; he told them to hurry into the street, as the house was on fire, and then attempted to gain the rear of the building; on opening the hall door the flames met him, and he was forced to retreat; he then went into the street; on attempting to enter the house again he was stopped by the police; he said there were others still in the house, but was assured that all had got out; in company with a friend he passed through an adjoining house, and gained the roof of the building, but the smoke was so dense they had to leave; there was no ladder leading from the top floor to the roof in the adjoining house, and they were compelled to swing themselves up by their hands; had he been allowed to enter the house the first time he attempted to do so, he thinks he could have saved all the inmates, with the assistance of friends who were with him; at that time the smoke was not very dense; he did not see any of the inmates leave the house by the door of the burning house; the most of them escaped over the roof of the adjoining building.

William Herbert, residing at No. 215 Division-st., testified—I occupied the room above the milk store; about 11½ o'clock last night I was passing through the bedroom and first noticed the smell of smoke; my sister opened the door and said the house was on fire; seeing smoke in the hall, which was filling up the stairway, I lowered all my people out of the front window; I then went round the room to gather up some things, and remained about twenty minutes in the room before I left; a small ladder was put up in about five minutes before I left the house, over which I escaped; ten minutes after I left the house a long ladder was put up; if the long ladders had been put up when they first arrived, and an entrance gained by the windows, in my opinion, all could have been saved; I had to holloo sometime to put up a ladder before the small one was put up for me to escape by; I believe at the time I left the room nobody had been smothered; I have always had a dread of that house on account of the quantity of kerosene oil stored in the basement, that some accident of this nature might happen; Phelan, who is dead, often said to me it ought to be put out of the house, there is a sub-cellar under the basement; I have often noticed the floor of the basement soaked with kerosene oil; the smell of it in the sub-cellar was very strong, and led me to think the gas generated would some time blow us up; I have no knowledge that any person went into the cellar last night; the cellar was divided into wood-houses for the families living in the house.

Matthew Deegan testified—I live at No. 215 Division-st., and keep a kerosene oil store under the dwelling part of the house, and also use the basement under the milk store as a storage room for oil; I returned home last night from feeding my horses about half past nine, and retired to bed about half past; I slept in the rear part of the store, as I was getting into bed my dog barked so incessantly that my wife said I had better look, lest some person was in the house, and I said no one could get in; the dog still continued to bark; I then got up and noticed smoke forcing itself through the crevices of the gas-light over the door leading into the back hall; I then went out to the street through the store, I saw a hook and ladder company at work putting up their ladders to the house; I heard no bell at this time; dense, black smoke was coming up through the grating just in front of the store door; my wife and child escaped; I did not attempt to save anything, on account of the smoke coming up through the grating and entering the hall door; when the smoke had somewhat subsided I went in with one of the firemen and got some of my clothing; I am insured for $700, and value my stock at $1,000; I never had any oil in the sub-cellar, never have been in it, have known tenants go down for wood there with a light, but do not know of any person doing so last night; the smoke was dense in my place; I had last night in my place only one full barrel of oil, about 5 gallons in another, and about 15 or 20 gallons in cans, which I brought back, not having sold all I brought out in the morning; I knew my oil leaked so that it would drop into the sub-cellar; I have no personal knowledge of it but from what I have been told; I have a policy from an insurance company which allows me to keep from eight to ten barrels of oil; I do not know the name of the company; I never keep more than five barrels in my store at a time. (He was here shown an oil can found in the sub-cellar.) That oil-can is mine; it had no right to be in the sub-cellar, and cannot say how it got there, it is a can which leaked, and had been repaired, and was lying in the basement since then; I have no idea how the fire originated. (A policeman who had been sent to examine how much oil was in Deegan's place returned and said there was only half a barrel there.)

James H. Ballentine, a member of the Hook and Ladder Company No. 6, and who resided at No. 215 Division-st., testified: I was in my bunk-room, No. 180 Clinton-st., at the outbreak of the fire; I ran around to the place on learning it was my house; I was anxious to get to the top floor, as my wife lived there; Mr. Riley, one of our members, said he would go with me; we both attempted to go up, but were driven back before we reached the first floor by a dense smoke, with an occasional flash of flame in it; this smoke was black and perfectly stifling; I did not see a policeman at the door at this time; no one could have got up at the time except he was a perfect salamander; I then went into the street and assisted to raise a ladder, which reached up to my room, and went up it, and with my fire cap broke the window, when the smoke gushed out and made me leave; I then went on the roof of the stable adjoining, from which a ladder led to the roof of No. 215; I went up this and found smoke and flame coming up the scuttle door; I tried to go down to look for my wife, but could not remain an instant there; I then returned to my room, and with my fire cap threw down a ladder which I escaped; ten minutes after I left the house a long ladder was put up; if the long ladders had been put up when they first arrived, and an entrance gained by the windows, in my opinion, all could have been saved; I had to holloo sometime to put up a ladder before the small one was put up for me to escape by; I believe at the time I left the room nobody had been smothered; I have always had a dread of that house on account of the quantity of kerosene oil stored in the basement, that some accident of this nature might happen; Phelan, who is dead, often said to me it ought to be put out of the house, there is a sub-cellar under the basement; I have often noticed the floor of the basement soaked with kerosene oil; the smell of it in the sub-cellar was very strong, and led me to think the gas generated would some time blow us up; I have no knowledge that any person went into the cellar last night; the cellar was divided into wood-houses for the families living in the house.

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