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Without receding from our principal contention of last week relative to the Iroquois theater fire (p. 609), we are forced by subsequent developments to a consideration of some of the secondary causes of that terrible catastrophe.

Laws designed for the security of life in Chicago theaters and other structures appear to have been wantonly violated. For this the responsibility rests not only upon theater builders and managers and architects, but with even greater weight upon city officials, and with still greater weight upon the business classes of Chicago—the same classes that are loud in their denunciation of crimes of far less magnitude.

We shall explain our meaning in holding the business classes to this awful responsibility. But one step at a time. First, as to the persons immediately responsible for this particular calamity—the builders, architects, and managers of the Iroquois theater. Even the commonest precautions seem to have been neglected. The asbestos curtain was badly hung and was inflammable besides. Exit doors were either locked or rusted fast, and some of them swung in such a way as to obstruct instead of facilitate safe egress. No automatic sprinklers were in place, and there was not a drop of water within reach to extinguish fire. No fire alarm was available. Stairways met so as to churn the converging currents of escaping people like converging currents of water. Fire escapes, so narrow at

the top as to barely accommodate one thin stream of panic-stricken people, were so adjusted to exits as to receive different streams at different altitudes, and yet were no wider at the bottom than at the top. But why enumerate? Had the theater been expressly constructed and equipped for wholesale and horrible slaughter, it could hardly have been adapted to the purpose much better than it was. And many of its dangerous defects were in conscious and not improbably corrupt violation of the safety laws.

But this particular theater was not peculiar in those respects. Some Chicago theaters may be safer; but most of them are not, and some are even more dangerous. It was only blind fate and not greater negligence or turpitude that has made the persons connected with the Iroquois theater so especially and unenviably conspicuous at this time. Had the fire occurred at almost any other Chicago theater during a performance, the calamity would have been similar. And it would have come from similar causes—wanton neglect of reasonable precautions, jaunty indifference to the rights of patrons, and callous neglect of legal requirements. The whole fraternity of theatrical management in Chicago is morally as responsible for the Iroquois disaster as are the managers of that ill-fated theater.

Of the facts upon which this conclusion is based there is but little room for dispute. The Mayor has now closed all the theaters. His orders are so stringent that he will not allow even the ground floors to be occupied by audiences. The necessity is so great that he is as adamant to all appeals, though his action deprives thousands of employment. He will not allow any theater to

open until it has installed safety devices in strict conformity with the law. This seems more like a panic-spasm than wise administration, since the result could be accomplished without much risk by requiring each theater to conform to the law within a reasonable time on pain of being closed in case of neglect. But it testifies most convincingly to the dangerous and lawless conditions that have heretofore been perpetuated with impunity. On the top of this testimony comes an astounding disclosure. It appears that the building department reported in detail the unsafe condition of the Chicago theaters as much as two months ago, and that the facts in this report have been practically disregarded by the building department, the Mayor, and the city council. How is it possible wholly to exonerate any of these authorities?

That brings us to the responsibility of the business classes, which, we repeat, is the weightiest of all. Why did the building department merely report the universal violation of safety laws by the theaters of Chicago instead of also proceeding at once to secure compliance with those laws? Because the head of that department was afraid of arousing the hostility of the business classes by what he thought, and with reason, they would regard as a finicky interference with business interests. And not the theatrical business classes alone, mind you, but the business classes in general; for not only might business in general have been prejudicially affected by enforcing the laws against theaters, but office buildings, churches, stores, and so on, are sinners like the theaters. Why did the Mayor merely refer this damning report to the city council, instead of also proceed-

ing—more considerately than he is doing now, but promptly and energetically—to secure compliance with the safety laws? Because he, too, feared the business classes of the city. As he now says, he would have been mobbed had he taken that course at that time. And so, probably, he would have been; and by a broadcloth mob at that. He could not have relied upon any business-class sentiment of respect for the law. Again, why did the city council merely toss the report over to a committee, and why did the committee merely refer it to a printer and indifferently await the printer's pleasure—why all this piddling over violations of laws so vital to the security of human life? The same reason. The city council, too, was afraid of the business classes.

So we may trace responsibility for the Iroquois catastrophe back from the Iroquois managers to the managers generally whose derelictions they followed; and back from the managers to the officials who winked at these derelictions; and back of the officials to the business classes, whose deadened conscience has latterly become so characteristic of American business men. Among these classes right and wrong have ceased to be distinguishable except momentarily as the distinction may happen to be useful for selfish ends; while respect for law is something which, though the "lower classes" are said to owe it to society, the business classes seem to owe to nobody whenever they are agreed upon its inconvenience or unprofitableness to themselves. With this spirit prevalent, it is certain that any official who had undertaken to enforce the fire laws prior to the Iroquois disaster would have run counter to a business class sentiment reinforced by local advertising mediums, which would probably have ended his career in public life. Officials are culpable, of course, for not having bravely met that obstacle; but the culpability of those who created the obstacle is far

the greater of the two. One of the manifest lessons of the Iroquois calamity is the importance of revitalizing public opinion with a conscience capable of distinguishing right from wrong and disposed impartially to respect laws for the right regulation of social life. This lesson needs to be learned not merely by labor strikers and hold-up men, as your modern pharisee thinks, but it is needed by the business class most of all. Nor is it applicable to Chicago alone:

Incidentally, the vice of free passes is brilliantly illuminated by disclosures regarding the Iroquois theater fire. It was by this means that minor officials were bribed to be good natured about infractions of the law that have proved so disastrous. For instance, an inspector reported the Iroquois as "O. K." only a few minutes before the audience began a terrible struggle for life in this lawlessly equipped theater lawlessly packed with human beings. It is just that sort of inspection, just that sort of official oversight, that free passes encourage. And the free pass evil is not confined to theaters nor to minor officials. How many members of the Chicago city council are not in possession of railroad passes? How often does the Mayor travel without a pass? How many judges in Chicago reject the proffered passes of railroads on whose interests they may have to sit in judgment? How many officials anywhere are without free passes? That these "courtesies" do not effect the bribery of officials with reference to large matters is doubtless true. Corrupt officials do not sell themselves so cheap. But it is beyond dispute that passes do secure small favors—compensating "courtesies;" such, for instance, as the "O. K." of a theater's violation of the law in trifles—trifles which, however, may precipitate calamities. If free passes do not improperly influence judges, inspectors, councilmen, legislators, etc., why do railroad officers and theater managers make them the regular

perquisites of public servants with whom they have official relations? Surely not for their health. The "O. K."-ing of the Iroquois theater just before it burned, tells the story. Passes put public officials in good humor toward law-breakers. The public official who takes them may not know he is bribed; but the theater or railroad manager who gives them, he knows it.

That is reason enough for this resolution offered in the Chicago city council on the 4th by Alderman Dunn:

Whereas, the receipt of gratuities, such as free passage or tickets from railroads, theaters, or other public utilities or places of amusement by city legislators, city officials and employes, is clearly detrimental to the free discharge of official duties; therefore, be it resolved, that it is the sense of this Council that the asking for or receipt of any free pass, ticket, or special favor from railroads or places of amusement be condemned; and, be it further resolved, that this asking or accepting such favors be made a ground for disqualification from municipal office or employment. Resolved, that the judiciary committee of this Council be requested to report the necessary order to bring this resolution into full force and effect.

And it is rather discouraging to be obliged to report that the "reform" council of Chicago has buried Mr. Dunn's excellent resolution in committee, thus following the example of the Democratic caucus in Congress (p. 503) which made a similar disposition of Congressman Baker's resolution pledging the party to refuse railroad passes.

President Roosevelt's special message to Congress is unusually interesting for a presidential message; and, while long, necessarily so because of the mass of its detail and the subtlety of its argument, its substance may be boiled down to Tweed's noted inquiry: "What are you going to do about it?"

And, sure enough, what are we going to do about it? If we concede that the right to recognize new governments is vested in the