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CHICAGO

BEFORE THE FIRE, AFTER THE FIRE, AND TO-DAY

By Melville E. Stone

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ORSON LOWELL

THE history of Chicago is the most romantic and dramatic of modern times. A city that is barely sixty years old stands in importance in the United States to-day as second only to a city that is more than two hundred years old ; and, what is most surprising, even to the people who have been familiar with Chicago almost from the beginning, is the way in which its greatest calamity has proved to be its greatest blessing. That a city should be founded within the memory of men now living ; that it should grow for nearly forty years rapidly but naturally, until it had achieved a distinct individuality ; that it should be swept out of existence in a single night, and then, instead of suffering an irretrievable set-back in its natural growth, should spring up on lines of cosmopolitan largeness entirely impossible to the old Chicago—these are the elements for admiration and wonder. One needs only to look at the striking contrasts presented by the illustrations accompanying this article to see the difference between the new Chicago and the old.

Look at the pictures of the Post-office before the fire and now, or the Chamber of Commerce before and after the fire and to-day, and you have an epitome of the material progress of Chicago in three stage settings. But in a larger way look at the illustrations showing Clark and Washington Streets after the

fire and now ; or the general view looking south from the Court-house in 1858 and now. The one shows a crude pioneer city with no architectural pretensions worthy the name, and no dominant characteristic except transitory fitness and ugliness. The view of to-day is that of a great metropolis, a wonderful commercial centre, with industries of such huge proportions that they have evolved a new style of architecture and a new mode of construction. Whatever may be thought of the beauty of these buildings there can be but one opinion as to their great commercial utility. If one had judged the future of Chicago by the lessons of history one would have said that a whole generation would have been a short time in which to repair the terrible disaster of 1871, and start Chicago even in the race for supremacy in the West ; but the only rule of history that has applied in this case is the rule that no circumstances can bar the progress of indomitable, persistent, and energetic men.

On certain of the maps drawn by the early French explorers, the lower Mississippi River is called the Chekaugou ; upon others it is the Ohio River which bears the name. The low land upon which the present metropolis stands was the "Portage de Chicago," because at this point the waters which flowed east through the great lakes to the At-

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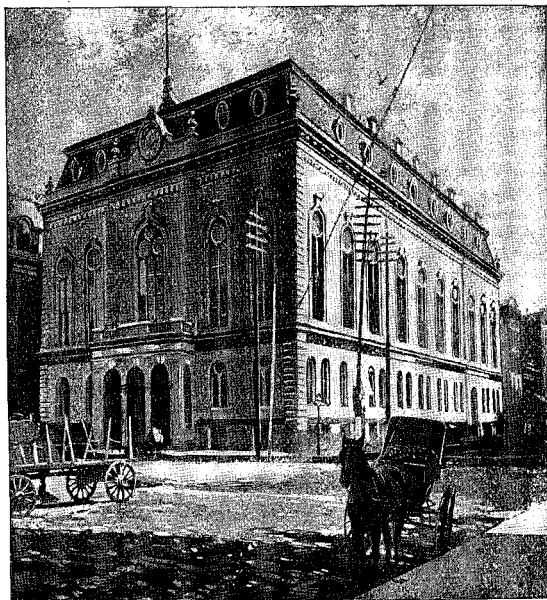
lantic, and those which flowed south through the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers to the Gulf of Mexico were separated by a watershed not more than half a dozen miles in width, and in seasons of freshet they even intermingled. And here the savages and pioneers *en route* from north to south carried their canoes from lake to river, and went their way.

Small wonder, when you look at the conditions, that a great city should have leaped into existence on this spot. The place was pregnant with certainty. There was a vast and fertile continent. Penetrating to its very heart were the great waterways from the east and south, and at the point of juncture was Chicago. Hitherward came people, easily and cheaply carried by boat, and hitherward and henceward came and went their chattels by like conveyance.

At first it was an Indian trading-post, established by a cunning French negro. He thrived, and soon there were four Frenchmen and four trading-stores. Then, in 1804, the Government built a log fort and named it after the incumbent Secretary of War, Henry Dearborn. It was garrisoned by a company under command of Captain John Whistler, progenitor of a distinguished line which

includes George Whistler, famous civil engineer in Russia; Mrs. General Sheridan, wife of the hero of the Civil War; and James McNeill Whistler, the artist. During the War of 1812 the post was evacuated, the garrison massacred while on retreat, and the fort and adjacent cabins burned by the Indians. In 1816 a new and stronger fort was built and re-garrisoned. It was not until 1833, however, that the real work of founding a city began. And then it began in earnest.

The Federal Congress made an appropriation for a harbor; a ship canal to connect Chicago with the navigable waters of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers was projected, and an era of mad speculation set in throughout the whole American nation. There was a rush to Chicago. Its population in 1832 was less than one hundred souls; in 1835 it was 2,000; in 1837 there was a city with a mayor and over four thousand inhabitants. Harriet Martineau visited the place in the summer of 1836, and wrote her impressions. "I never saw a busier place," she says, "than Chicago was at the time of our arrival. The streets were crowded with land speculators, hurrying from one sale to another. A negro, dressed up in scarlet, bearing a



The Chamber of Commerce Before and After the Fire.



The Chamber of Commerce Building, La Salle and Washington Streets, as it Appears To-day.

scarlet flag, and riding a white horse with housings of scarlet, announced the times of sale. At every street corner where he stopped, the crowd flocked round him, and it seemed as if some prevalent mania infected the whole people. The rage for speculation

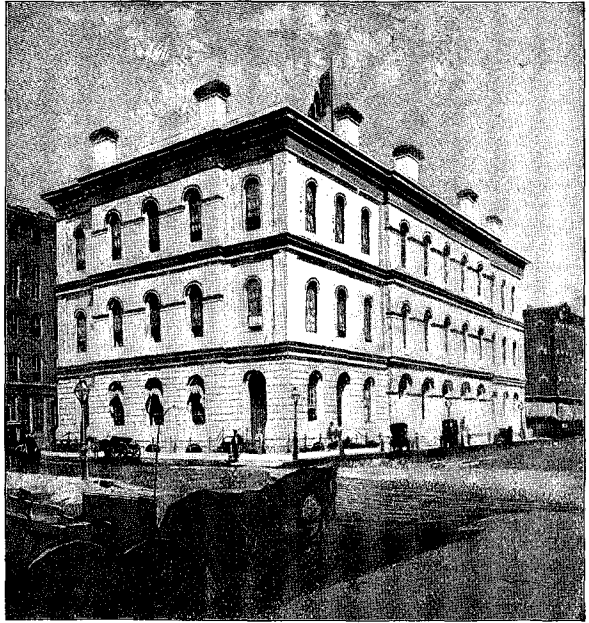
might be so regarded. As the gentlemen of our party walked the streets, store-keepers hailed them from their doors, with offers of farms, and all manner of land-lots, advising them to speculate before the price of land rose higher. A young lawyer of my ac-

quaintance there had realized five hundred dollars per day the five preceding days by merely making out titles to land."

This young lawyer was Joseph N. Balestier, grandfather of Mrs. Rudyard Kipling, and he, also, has left us a graphic story of Chicago's first "boom" and the inevitable collapse. He says: "The cities of the East were visited with an epidemic madness which found its way into every hamlet in the Atlantic States. It was suddenly discovered that the American people had labored under serious misapprehension with regard to the value of land, especially that which lay in cities and villages. . . . Sagacious men, looking far into the future, now perceived that cities and villages, covering only a few acres of land, were soon to extend over an illimitable domain. . . . Paper cities flourished in a manner unparalleled, and the public mind became utterly diseased. . . . The price of labor was exorbitant; the simplest service was purchased at a dear rate. . . . The year 1837 will ever be remembered as the era of protested notes; it was the harvest to the notary and the lawyer—the year of wrath to the mercantile, producing, and laboring interests."

In this time of insane speculation, when even Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln "lost their heads," and, as members of the Illinois Legislature, supported measures of the wildest character, a very wise young man arrived in Chicago, and before he had been a resident a full year was elected the city's first mayor. He was only thirty-one years old, and had already won fame as a member of the New York Legislature. He was a giant in stature, an athlete, a shrewd manager, a born leader and ruler of men. Withal he possessed scholarly traits. He was an omnivorous reader, a remarkable conversationalist, an eloquent and convinc-

ing orator, and a knowing amateur in art, political economy, and natural history. The child of a family distinguished in the revolutionary annals of the republic, hardened by a boyhood life on the slopes of the Catskill Moun-



The Post-office Before the Fire.

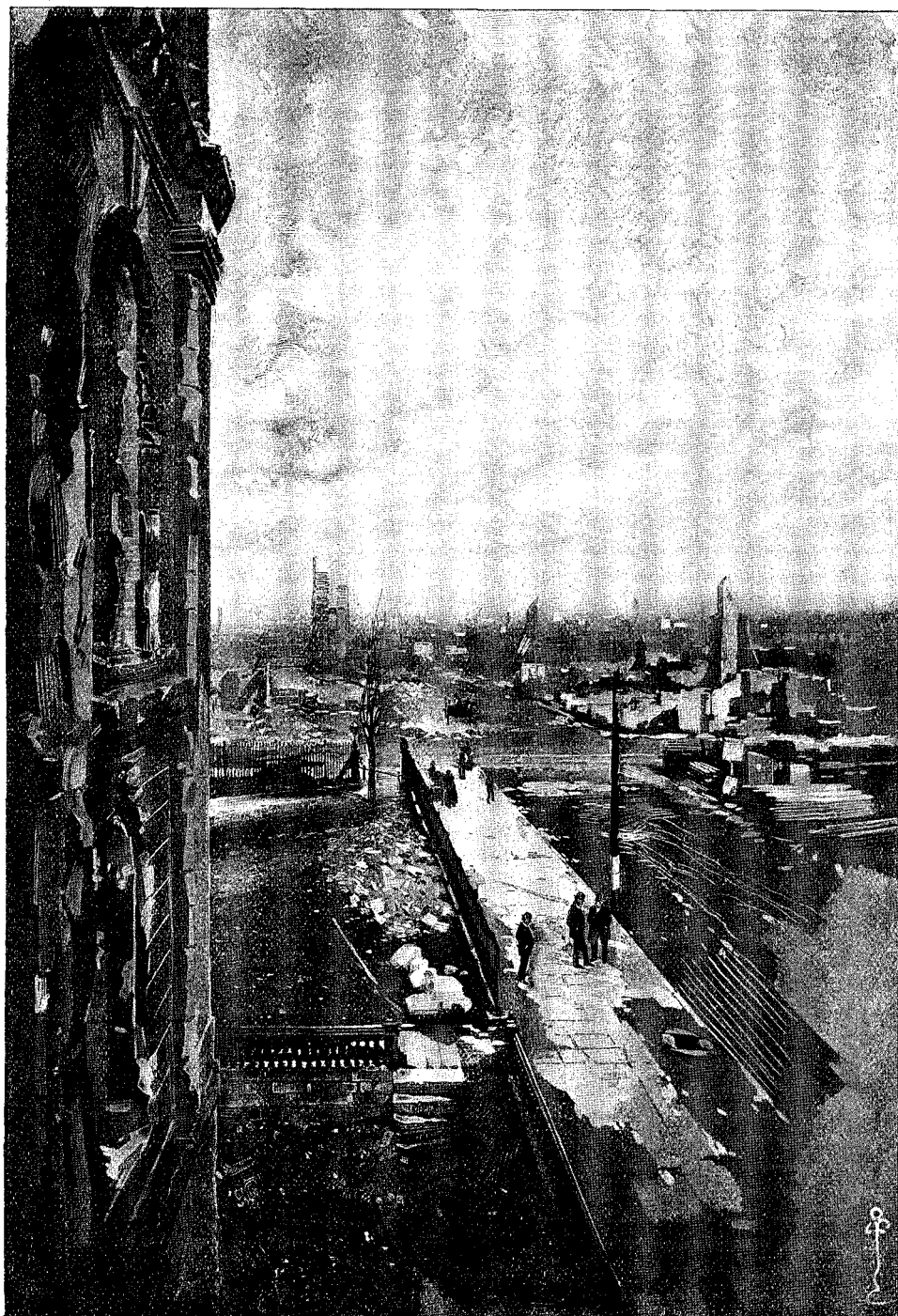
ing orator, and a knowing amateur in art, political economy, and natural history. The child of a family distinguished in the revolutionary annals of the republic, hardened by a boyhood life on the slopes of the Catskill Moun-

tains, schooled in politics by the masters of the famous "Albany Regency," this man, William B. Ogden, brought to Chicago an invaluable personal equipment, and for the succeeding thirty years was the recognized chief of the city. He rescued the canal from failure and saved the State from repudiation; he laid out the streets and projected the parks of the city, established the sewerage system, created the first railway, fostered and endowed hospitals, colleges, and literary and scientific associations, and contributed in an amazing degree to every phase of the progress of the infant metropolis. His faith in the ultimate supremacy of Chicago was boundless. He foresaw the development of the Great West, and shaped all of his innumerable enterprises in consonance with his large conception.

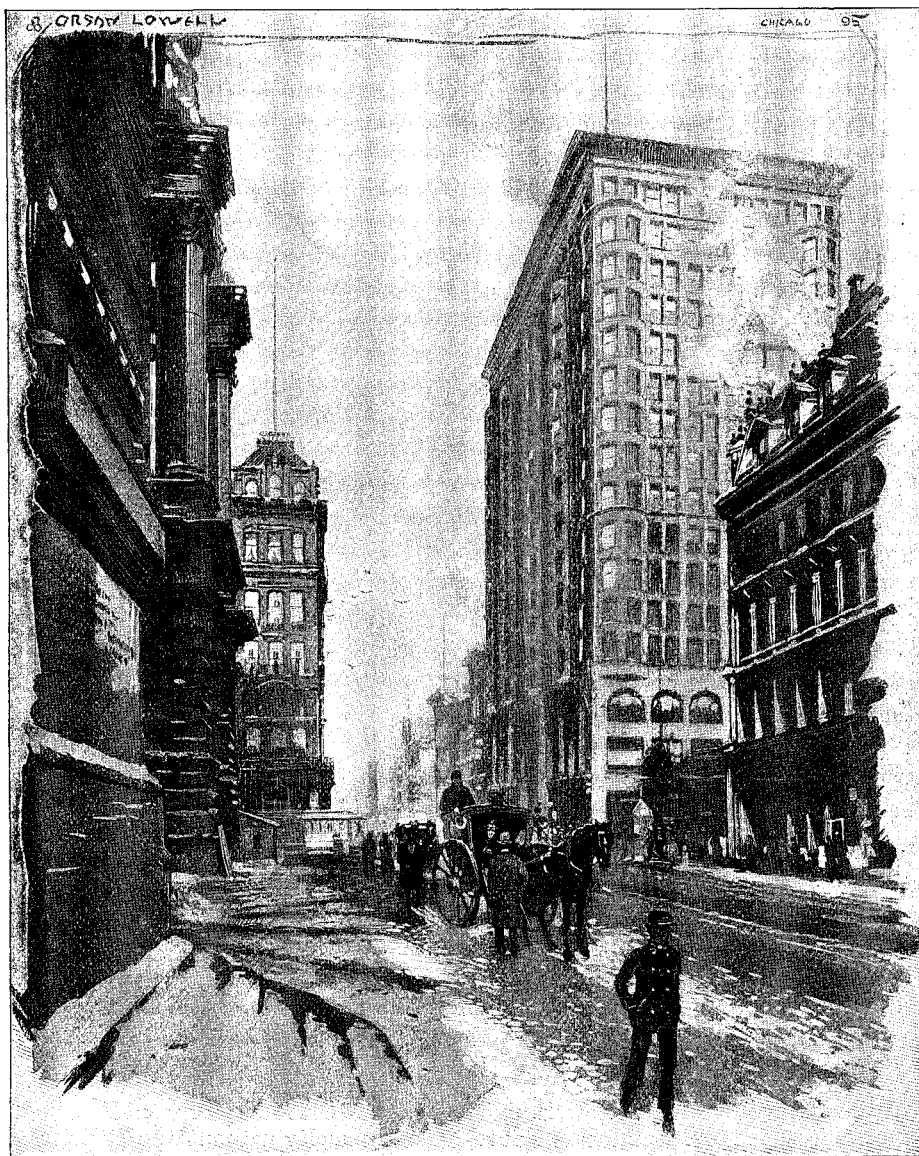
He had early prophesied, in a remarkable speech in the New York General Assembly, a system of railways



Adams Street, Looking East from Clark Street, and showing the North Entrance of Post-office and the Owings Building, as it Appears Now.



Clark Street, Looking North from the Court-house, After the Fire.



Court-house.

Sherman House.

Ashland Block.

Clark Street, Looking North from the Court-house, 1895.

stretching from New York through the Mississippi Valley, and radiating to the Northwest and the far South. He lived to see his dreams fulfilled, and to his activity and skilful management was this achievement mainly due. Finally, his restless mind took up the scheme for a transcontinental road, and as the first president of the Union Pacific line he set in motion the vast work which has

resulted in bringing the extremes of the continent into close relations.

But Ogden, after all, was only first among equals. Cyrus McCormick, the reaper man; George Pullman, the sleeping-car man; Judge Caton, the promoter of telegraphs; Potter Palmer, the merchant prince; "Long John" Wentworth, editor and statesman; J. Young Scammon, financier; Allan Pinkerton, the

detective—these were some of the men who lent a hand in the building of the earlier Chicago. There came from the Eastern States a hardy company of pioneers, attracted by the budding opportunities of the frontier; a band of sturdy Germans driven from their fatherland by the revolutions of 1848; delegations of enterprising Norwegians, cunning Irishmen, and stolid Slavs and Czechs. It was a veritable Babel.

And how the city grew! Mark the increase in population: 12,000 in 1845; 23,000 in 1849; 59,000 in 1853; 84,000 in 1856; 109,000 in 1860; 200,000 in 1866, and 334,000 in 1871. There were ups and downs, trials and triumphs—flood, cholera, and panic—but all the time a steady advance. "In 1844," said Mr. Ogden, "I purchased for \$8,000 property which, eight years thereafter, sold for \$3,000,000, and these cases could be extended almost indefinitely." And the "back country" was keeping pace with the city. Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota were forging ahead in an astonishing way. Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Omaha were growing from villages to cities of size and consequence. And all this meant added wealth and population to the metropolis—Chicago.

It was inevitable that these influences should be felt in the moral and social, as well as in the commercial and political phases of life. All eyes were fixed upon the census tables and the balance-sheets. Intense local pride was developed. Men vied with each other in extravagant prophecy respecting the city's future. Amusing enmities were engendered by the boastful claims of rival municipalities. The varied character of the population bred a spirit of tolerance, which frequently reached a dangerous extreme. Little heed was paid to art, to literature, or to music. Corrupt politicians plundered the public funds with impunity. The average citizen was making money and was burdened with the care of his business;

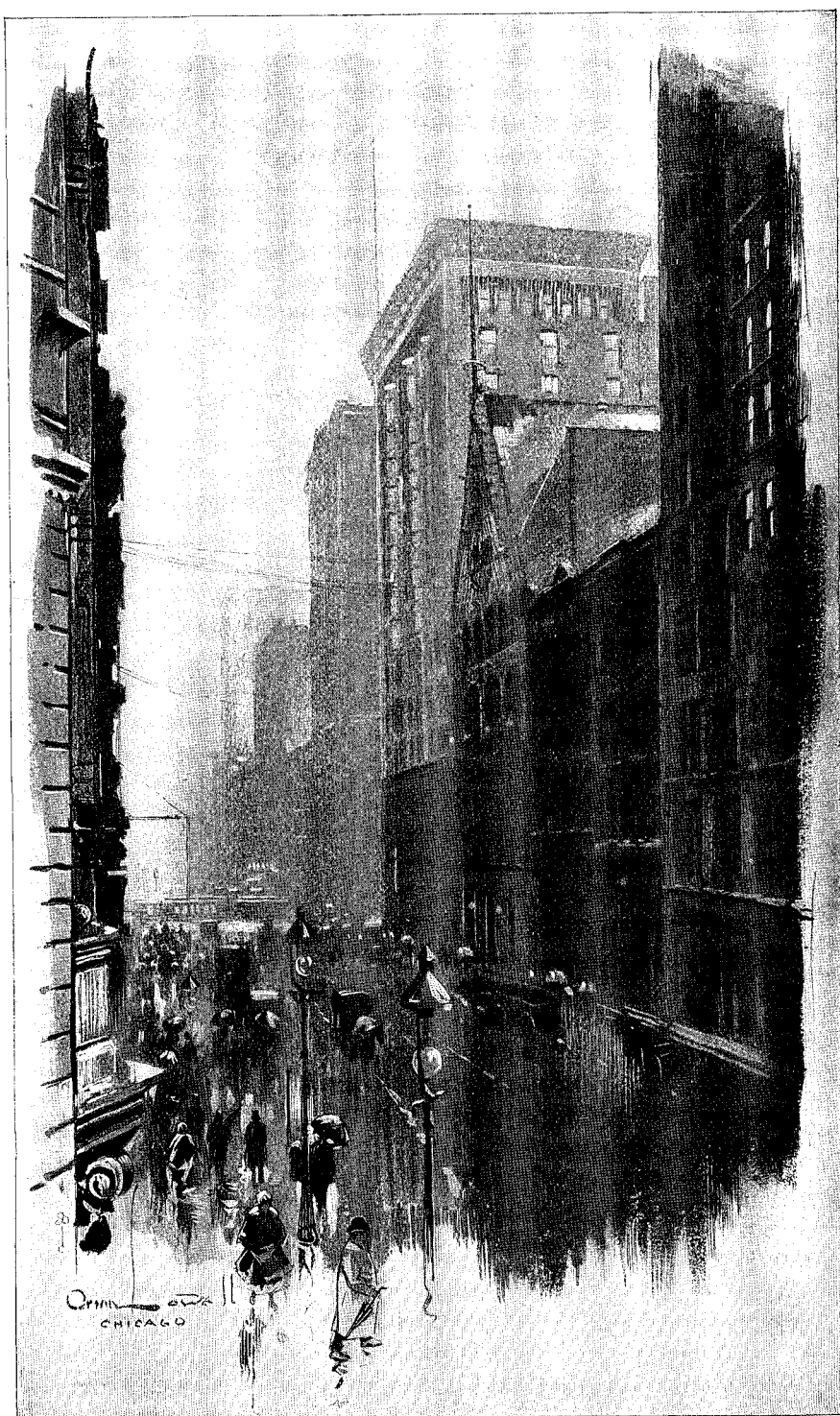


Washington Street, Looking East from Fifth Avenue, After the Fire.

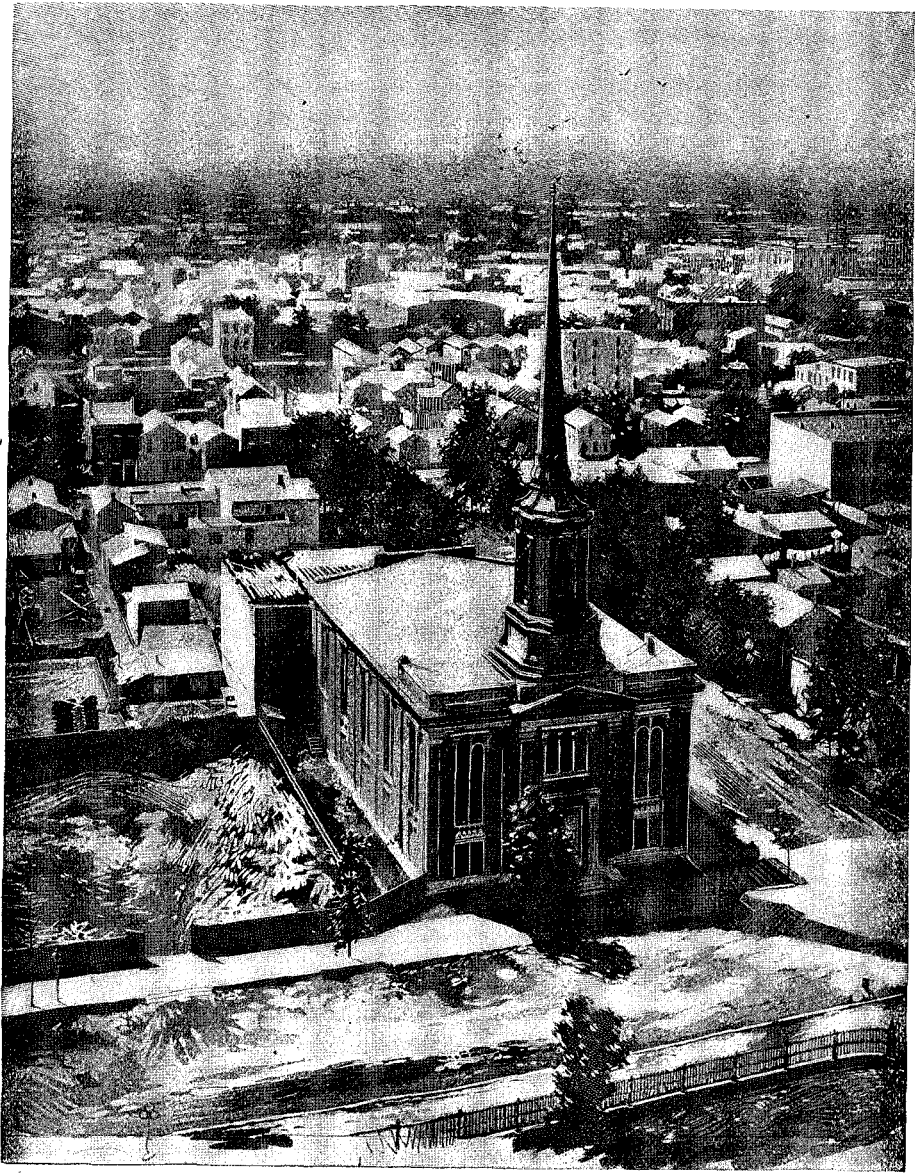
he had no time to devote to culture. *Au fond*, he was honest, and now and again he would stop long enough to discover that someone had been stealing, and then the punishment was swift and certain. A dozen murders would go unpunished; then the people being aroused and startled by the prevalence of crime, "hanging time" would come, and the next culprit would suffer the death penalty without the slightest regard to the enormity of his offence.

Speculation in real estate became very hurtful to the physical character of the city. The buildings were hastily and cheaply built, often by swindling contractors. It was quite enough that they looked well and would sell—and almost anything would sell. Building "to sell" became a most lucrative occupation. Building for permanent occupancy was well-nigh unknown.

So the city which went down before the great fire of October 9, 1871, was an ill-contrived thing. There was little



Washington Street, Looking East from the Times Building, Corner of Fifth Avenue, 1895.



Chicago, Looking South from the Court-house, 1858.

pretence to architectural beauty, and scarce a semblance of intelligent and substantial construction. Even in the business centre there were a vast number of wooden buildings, while those which were of brick or stone were, as a rule, very defective. From time to time the street grade had been raised, and as only the new buildings were required to adopt the new level, it frequently happened that there was no

uniformity in the sidewalk levels, and the visitor found himself constantly ascending and descending stairways. These uneven sidewalks were usually of plank, supported by a staging of slender timber, and the claims against the city for the broken limbs of pedestrians proved to be a considerable item of municipal expense. The street pavements were as bad as they well could be. They were made of pine or cedar blocks laid



Court-house. Chamber of Commerce.

Temple of the W. C. T. U.

Stock Exchange.

Chicago, Looking South from Court-house, 1895.



Michigan Avenue, Looking South from Jackson Street, Before the Fire.

upon a thin layer of boards, and without substantial concrete foundation. The sewerage pipes drained into the river, and that polluted stream swept sluggishly through the heart of the city, exhaling noxious odors at every foot. The abattoirs were in close proximity to the residential district and directly in the path of the prevailing southwest winds, so that the stench was at times intolerable.

A picture of the leading thoroughfare of this old Chicago would hardly be recognized by anyone to-day. The Court-house stood in the centre of the public square. It was of the conventional Western type; a huge box of a thing, approached by long flights of steps on either side; the jail in the basement, the court-rooms above, and a belfry and flag-pole topping it out. Fringing the iron fence on the four sides of the grounds, a double line of hitched and unhitched horses and buggies. Not carriages, or cabs, or phaetons, but that peculiarly unhandsome and inconvenient vehicle, with high, square box, calash top, and the frailest of running gear, which once was the pride and glory of every villager. Flanking the rutted and muddy roadway and the

tip-tilted and rickety sidewalk were the buildings—strange higgledy-piggledy structures. Here a five-story block, faced with disintegrating limestone from the neighboring quarries, with the regulation Mansard and flat roof. Next a cottage, of wood, perched high on posts, balloon frame, with clapboard sides and shingle roof, its gable end in front, and gorgeously decorated with pine-spindles and scrolls, fantastically wrought by lathe and saw. Then a vacant lot half-filled with rubbish. Now a church, built in lame imitation of English Gothic, and top-heavy with a huge, pointed spire. Then, under the very eaves of the church, a saloon or cheap variety theatre. The people, rising early, working late, and always in a hurry.

There was little or no social life. Everyone bought his entertainment and paid for it in true commercial fashion. Theatres, concerts, and lectures were well patronized, and people went in droves to see horse-races and ball games. There was no select "Four Hundred." A spirit of true democracy pervaded the entire city. Since all men worked, industry was dignified, even apotheosized. Private institu-



Michigan Avenue, Looking South from Jackson Street, as it Appears To-day.

tions of learning were almost unknown; the children of rich and poor sat side by side in the public schools. Few of them went to college; they graduated from the high school and made haste to begin a business career. In their hustling, happy-go-lucky way these people of old Chicago fared well and were content.

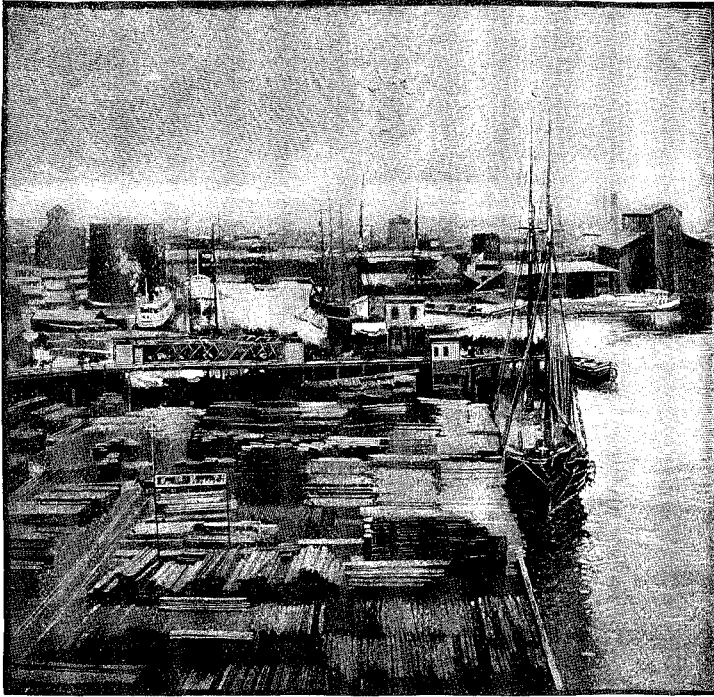
It was over this city that the flames swept with unparalleled fury. The loss of life and property was appalling. Yet at this moment no one doubts that it was a great blessing. It was the death of old Chicago and the birth of a new and better Chicago, better fitted in a thousand ways to fulfil destiny. The parent city had left a legacy of priceless value. When everything was gone and every man a beggar the old-time faith in the city's supremacy was the inspiration to a rebuilding. That cheerful self-sufficiency which had been often amusing, and at times grotesque, dispelled all doubt, all hesitation, and set men to removing *débris* and laying bricks. There were tears, to be sure, but there was no despair. By common consent the oath of loyalty was taken afresh and work went on, as it had always gone on, save that it was a little

harder, perhaps, and that it was in a new direction. There was no flinching, there were no drones. The habit of industry was still the controlling force. There was no sense of fear. These people had been taking risks all their lives. As to chancing it, incurring debt, mortgaging the future, and toiling like slaves to pay the obligation—all of these things had been done before and could be done again.

The fire had some lessons which were to be studied and understood. There must be more care taken in the building of buildings; there must be no more wooden structures in the heart of the city; and there must be a better Fire Department. These things were obvious. And so fire-proof buildings, great palaces of steel and stone, of "Chicago construction," came, and so, too, came the most efficient fire-extinguishing equipment in the world. But there were other lessons not so obvious. One of these was that the men who had made Old Chicago were to have little part in the business of making the real metropolis of which they had dreamed and made prophecy, and for which they had so earnestly toiled. Their places were to be taken

by younger and stronger men, a new and better generation. It is true that here and there some stout old citizen survived to win fresh laurels in the "Greater Chicago," but such instances

and trade was flowing again in the natural channels. Even during this period the population continued to grow. Thousands flocked to the city to find employment in the work of reconstruc-



The Chicago River, Looking North from Randolph Street Bridge, Before the Fire.

were not common. The "boys" were well fitted for the responsibilities they were called upon to assume. They were burning with enthusiasm, accustomed to hard work, intelligent beyond their years, and singularly sober-minded. The baleful influence of great wealth was as yet unfelt. The heirs of well-to-do parents no less than the lowly born made of life a serious business. There were no yachting cruises, no golf or tennis parties, no hunts afield, no coaching excursions, to relieve the weariness of an idle life. There were few persons living in ease upon fixed incomes. There were no petted darlings of fortune.

Within two years the city was substantially rebuilt. Not precisely as one could have wished, for, under the circumstances, that was impossible. But everybody and everything was housed

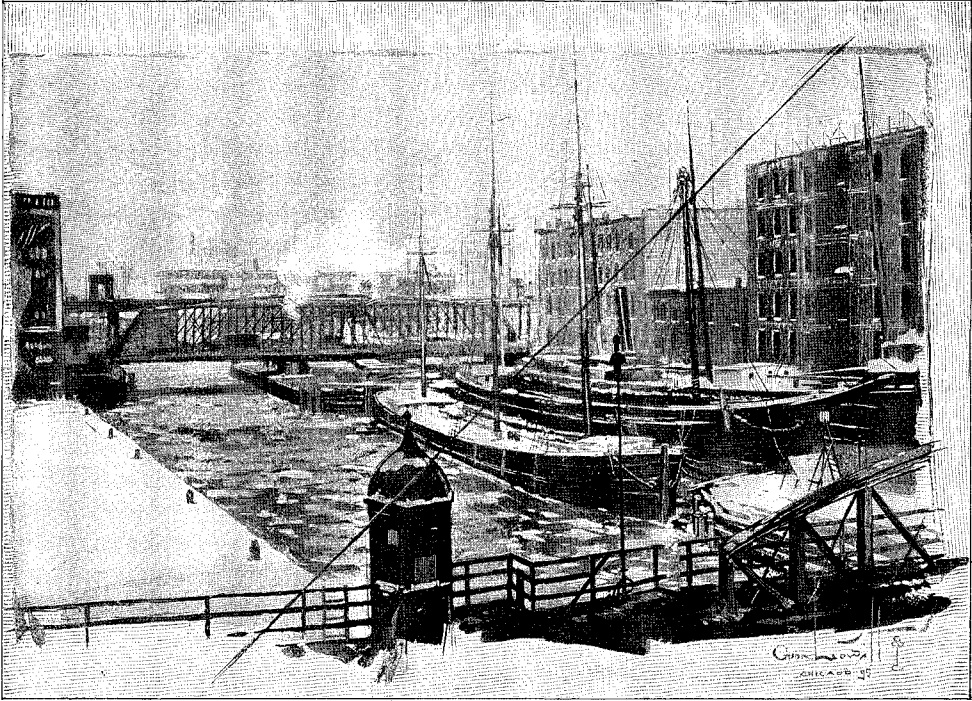
tion, and by 1873 the census roll was swollen to 375,000.

Then there was a national panic. The banks failed. Values fell grievously. Trade almost ceased. There was a prolonged period of enforced idleness and great consequent distress. Then there was another great fire—that of 1874—now well-nigh forgotten, but of big moment in its day; and bloody riot, with plundering and destroying mobs and musket-shooting and men-killing militia. More failing banks, this time the saving institutions, one of them with empty vaults and twenty-five thousand needy depositors. All of these calamities, each following the other in rapid succession, within ten years of the supreme disaster of 1871. It required clear heads and stout hearts indeed for such an emergency.

The mere restoration of the buildings

and streets was not, after all, the most difficult task. The moral and political problems were complex and puzzling. The population was unlike any other. There was a small minority of native

than other American cities, and a little more mindful of the interests of the publican than the European cities, it is true, and yet, doubtless, abreast of most of them in public morals and private

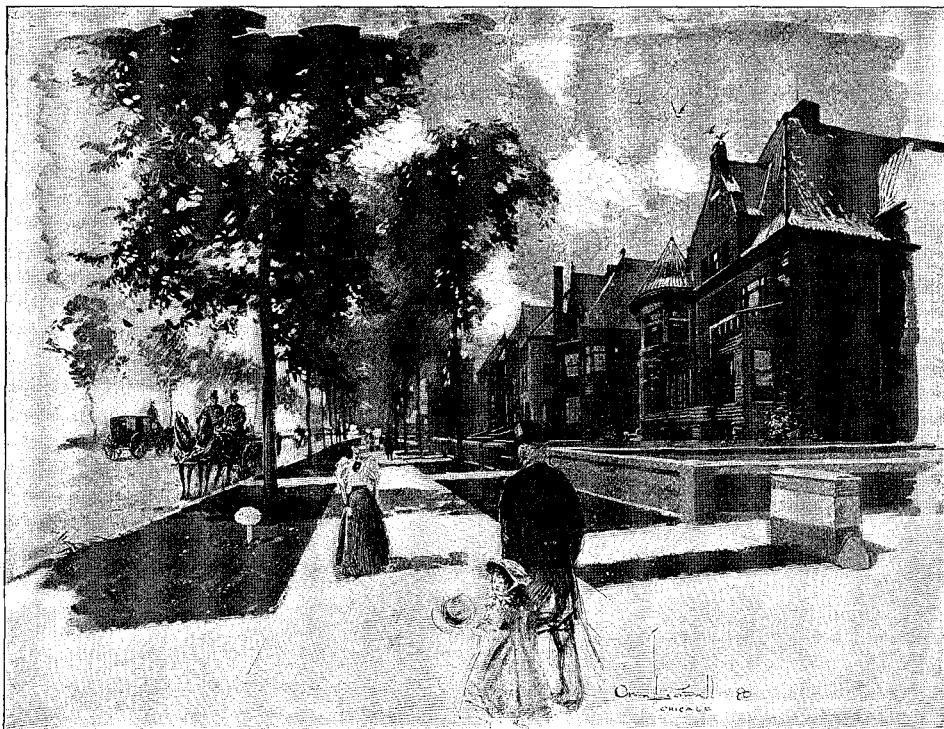


The Chicago River, Looking North from Randolph Street Bridge, 1895.

Americans (say one-fifth of the entire community), the rest were Germans, Irish, Scandinavians, Poles, Bohemians, and other foreigners. Many were fresh arrivals, with customs and prejudices at marked variance with the normal life of Chicago. They formed great colonies, each having its leaders clamorous for recognition, and sometimes bent on mischief. One class (chiefly native) demanded with urgency the passage and enforcement of sumptuary laws, and a strict observance of the Sabbath; another class (chiefly foreign born) insisted with equal vehemence upon a "liberal" government. Neither extreme wholly prevailed. Out of it all, notwithstanding the counter-claim of some good people who set very high standards for public conduct, there came a fairly well-managed metropolis. A little more tolerant of Sunday amusement

virtue, and quite as zealous for the protection of personal or property rights.

Moreover, with the increase of material prosperity there always has been a strong under-current of intellectual life, and a persistent effort to place intellectual and æsthetic opportunities within the reach of the large body of the population who are denied these things through lack of personal means, and leisure for travel and education. This spirit has shown itself in a number of splendid gifts by men whose fortunes have been made in Chicago. Notable among these, as expressing the generous impulses of individual givers, are the Newberry and Crerar Libraries, the Field Museum, the McCormick Theological Seminary, and the Armour Institute. Among other benefactions, which are not the result of the generosity of a single man, are the Chicago



The Lake Shore Drive, Below Lincoln Park, and Looking South, 1895.

University (founded by a New Yorker but contributed to by many citizens of Chicago); the Art Institute, with its unique gift of modern French paintings from the estate of Henry Field; and the Historical Society, which has but recently completed the finest building devoted to such purposes that this country possesses.

The conspicuous figures in this New Chicago are all busy men—merchants, manufacturers, financiers—burdened with heavy responsibilities, yet freely giving of their time for great public movements, and of their money for public uses.

The census of 1880 definitely settled the place of Chicago as the leading city of the West. Even St. Louis and Cincinnati, which had long been rival claimants, were forced to accept the returns of the Federal Government. This announcement gave a fresh impetus. The stride from 503,000 souls in 1880 to 1,200,000 in 1890, and 1,500,000 in 1894, caused no surprise. It was now second only to New York among American cities.

Not the least among the benefits derived from the great fire was the advertisement it gave Chicago. The burning and the wonderful rebuilding were known everywhere. The story evoked admiration and caused inquiry into the causes of the amazing vitality displayed by this hitherto unheard-of city. Fresh immigration and investment resulted.

Year by year the plans for the future, fanciful and magnificent as they had always been, broadened until they were apparently limitless. Old-time phrases of extravagant praise and prophecy seemed inept and tame. Superlatives were no longer adequate. It had long been the chief grain, lumber, and provision market of the world. It was now to take on a new complexion, and to become the great manufacturing centre of the continent, perhaps of the globe. The admirable transportation facilities, by water and rail, the proximity to the raw material, the fuel within easy reach, the favorable situation respecting labor, and the market just without the factory-door—these condi-

tions gave assurance of success. Pipe lines for oil and gas were laid from the Ohio and Indiana fields, and manufacturing suburbs sprang up in every direction. Banking capital, so indispensable to such undertakings, was provided, and then came a Stock Exchange, and Chicago began to look with confidence to the day when it should dictate the financial policy of the nation.

A thousand railway trains coming and going every day. More vessels arriving and clearing in a year than from any other American port. A business district covered with mammoth buildings, twelve, sixteen, and even twenty stories high, each employing a dozen hydraulic passenger-lifts, each accommodating thousands of occupants, and each a city of itself. The largest book, millinery, hardware, and drygoods shops in the world. Department stores eclipsing the grand *magasins* of Paris and London. Hogs, cattle, and sheep in countless numbers slaughtered daily. These are some of the facts concerning the new Chicago, the creation of the last quarter of the century.

When there was an attempt to establish anarchy and to repeat the experiences of Paris under the Commune, the calm and dignified, yet inflexible

administration of the law by this wild Western city amazed the world.

When the city appeared as a claimant for the World's Fair, its audacity challenged attention, if not admiration. Not a few of the more intelligent and responsible citizens looked upon the undertaking with alarm. A leading merchant wrote: "I am *paying* to secure it, but am *praying* that it will go elsewhere." Yet when Congress selected Chicago, the responsibility was accepted. That it did not yield a profit caused no regret. It was an artistic success. Chicago had proved itself worthy of the nation's confidence, and the citizens were content.

And such is the Chicago of to-day. Rather half-baked, one may say. Somewhat too careless of appearances, with dirty streets and smoke-filled atmosphere; a trifle bumptious, vaunting itself in an unseemly way; paying less heed to culture than to profits, unmindful, at times, of good form, too much occupied with the selling of needles and pins and short ribs and spring wheat to be able to give proper attention to elections and the conduct of aldermen — yet big-hearted, open-handed, self-reliant, and moving forward with the strides of a giant to a great destiny.



The First Merchants in the Burned District.

THE STORY OF BESSIE COSTRELL*

BY MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

SCENE IV.

JUST before dark on the following day, a man descended from a down train at the Clinton Magna station. The porters knew him and greeted him; so did one or two laborers outside, as he set off to walk to the village, which was about a mile distant.

"Well, John, so yer coom back," said one of them, an old man, grasping the new-comer by the hand. "An' I can't say as yer looks is any credit to Frampton—no, that aa can't."

John, indeed, wore a sallow and pinched air, and walked lamely, with a stick.

"Noa," he said, peevishly; "it's a beastly place is Frampton; a damp, nasty hole as iver I saw—gives yer the rheumaticks to look at it. I've 'ad a doose of a time, I 'ave, I can tell yer—iver sense I went. But I'll pull up now."

"Aye, this air 'll do yer," said the other. "Where are yer stoppin'? Costrells'?"

John nodded.

"They don't know nothin' about my comin', but I dessay they'll find me somethin' to sleep on. I'll 'ave my own place soon, and someone to look arter it."

He drew himself up involuntarily, with the dignity that waits on property. A laugh, rather jeering than cordial, ran through the group of laborers.

"Aye, yer'll be livin' at your ease," said the man who had spoken first. "When will yo' give us a drink, yer lardship?"

The others grinned.

"Where's your money, John?" said a younger man suddenly, staring hard at the returned wanderer.

John started.

"Don't you talk your nonsense!" he said, fretfully; "an' I must be getting on afore dark."

He went his way, but as he turned a

corner of the road, he saw them still standing where he had left them. They seemed to be watching his progress, which astonished him.

A light of windy sunset lay spread over the white valley, and the freshening gusts drove the powdery snow before them, and sent little stabs of pain through John's shrinking body. Yet how glad he was to find himself again between those familiar hedges, to see the church-tower in front of him, the long hill to his right! His heart swelled at once with longing and satisfaction. During his Frampton job, and in the infirmary, he had suffered much, physically and mentally. He had missed Eliza and the tendance of years more than he had ever imagined he could; and he had found himself too old for new faces and a new society. When he fell ill he had been sorely tempted to send for some of his money, and get himself nursed and cared for at the respectable lodging where he had put up. But no; in the end he set his teeth and went into the infirmary. He had planned not to touch his hoard till he had done with the Frampton job, and returned to Clinton for good. His peasant obstinacy could not endure to be beaten; nor, indeed, could he bring himself to part with his keys, to trust the opening of the hoard even to Isaac.

Since then he had passed through many weary weeks, sometimes of acute pain, sometimes of sinking weakness, during which he had been haunted by many secret torments, springing mainly from the fear of death. He had almost been driven to make his will. But in the end superstitious reluctance prevailed. He had not made the will; and to dwell on the fact gave him the sensation of having escaped a bond, if not a danger. He did not want to leave his money behind him; he wanted to spend it, as he had told Eliza and Mary Anne and Bessie scores of times. To have

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