

San Francisco, California,

May 9, 1906.

My dear Mother and Brothers:

Somehow I cannot dwell for any great length of time upon the subject of the awful catastrophe which has fallen upon and swept commercial San Francisco from the face of the earth. When I undertake to speak or write upon the subject I seem to be again going through that peculiar "Jenny Put the Kettle On" process of sifting and shaking which resulted in such appalling loss of life and property.

The first evidence I had of the operation of the earthquake was when, at about 5:15 A. M., April 18th, I was awakened by having my head struck against first one and then the other side of my bed, the direction of the quake being north and south and I lying east and west; also the plastering from the walls of my room being showered in great volumes into my face and eyes. During the progress of the shakeup I did not become frightened, due, I believe, to the fact that I had decided that I would certainly die, and would therefore die fighting, which decision caused me to wrap myself in the mattress of the bed, that being the only means which I could think of to soften the grinding of the pillars and boards with which I expected to come in forcible contact before I reached the ground. I wondered, while being rocked back and forth, what would have been the result had the shock occurred during the

hours when businessmen would be in their offices and stores. They would undoubtedly have made an attempt to escape, and as the elevators are the only means of doing so, the result of the rush and crush which would have been made would have been fatal: Many, also, would have leaped to certain death from upper story windows. It seems a blessing, so far as the loss of life is concerned, that it occurred just at the time when it did. I thought of Mother a great deal during this trying 45 second space of time, and wondered how she would feel when notified that I had been crushed beneath the ruins of my hotel, for there is positively no doubt that I expected to die. The idea of living through it all did not once occur to me, and when finally the thing stopped and I was again permitted to breath freely, I realized the fact that the Divine Power must have had a hand in it, which alone could have caused our walls to withstand the awful onslaught which they received. I remained in bed until the quake was over, after which I arose, went to the wash stand to bathe my face, but alas! the water pipes failed to respond to my efforts to draw therefrom, because, as I later learned, all water mains were bursted. I then looked wonderingly around the room, and discovered that my dresser, which had been actually jammed into the north-east corner of my room, held there firmly by the table, heavily laden with books, had slidden at least one and a half feet from its place, some of my books being scattered over the floor. Next I saw the fate of my new Dunlap hat, which I had laid upon some of my books in the wardrobe. The shake having

thrown the hat to the floor, a large volume of "The Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1905", fell upon and mashed it into smithereens. Mr. hat is no more, and was, when last seen, sleeping the sleep of peace (pieces) in an ash can, among many other things which suffered a similar fate. I then returned to my bed, and, strange to relate, slept until awakened at 7:15 by the alarming of my poor clock, which was lying upon its face in sack cloth and ashes. I then dressed myself and went down to breakfast, and saw there the few who remained at the house eating by the light of candles, gas and electricity having been cut off. I remarked to some one that I would now have something of interest to write home, as I had experienced an earth-quake which threw down many chimneys. Since our hotel had stood it, I thought the rest must also have survived. After breakfast I went to the office at 4th & Townsend Streets, but was refused admittance, as the building was much shaken up, and therefore unsafe. On the way to and from the office I saw sights which would turn the head of stronger hearted men than I. Dozens of houses were by this time aflame, and women and children, some half naked, were scuttling here and there, some crying and wailing, others begging man to enter houses and save mothers or sisters. One very touching sight was a house which had fallen upon its occupants, a man, his wife and baby, the latter two being killed outright, the man having expired later while being conducted by faithful hands to a place of safety. To my everlasting horror, I saw scores of similar and worse cases. I saw many men, women and children

being taken from the debris of fallen buildings, some still alive, but most of whom were crushed. On Golden Gate Avenue and Leavenworth Street I saw a small wooden frame structure which had fallen and entrapped twenty five people, and, wonderful to relate, all escaped practically uninjured. At still another place I saw a poor woman pinned down by the fallen walls of which a short time before was her home, the flames now reaching within ten feet of her. She was praying to be shot before being burned by the flames, but ready hands removed what seemed to be tons of debris and rescued her. There were also many things in connection with this great disaster which would, under pleasanter conditions, be considered quite laughable. In one case I saw a small boy rushing out of his home, carrying a pair of roller skates across his shoulder. Again I saw a man emerge from a flaming structure bearing an umbrella and a statuette of plaster paris, representing some ancestor of misery, maybe. Also, after martial law had been proclaimed, I heard an old woman pleading with a soldier of my old company, the 29th Company, Coast Artillery, to rescue her cat from the fire which was destroying her house. Finally the man entered the building and seized the cat, but it became too hot for him, and he threw Mr. Cat out of a window of the second story, and when he struck the side-walk he flattened out like a pan-cake. When the man appeared again upon the scene, his blouse scorched, and almost suffocated, the old lady asked him where was the cat, to which he replied, in tones scarcely audible, "Damn

your cat". I approached the spot where lay the remains of Mr. Cat, and, gently kicking her up, called the lady's attention to the fact that her cat was entirely safe from the flames. When she saw the smashed form of her cat reposing peacefully upon the walk she nearly went into hysterics, and hoped, so she said, that the soldier would be shot at sunrise the next morning. Many other incidents, too numerous to undertake to mention here, occurred to mar the heartrending scenes which we had to view.

After viewing the sights above enumerated, as well as hundreds equally and more appalling, I ascended to the summit of Nob Hill, at California and Jones Streets, and watched with sorrowful eyes the devastation of what was the day before one of America's greatest business centers. But in this connection I feel safe in asserting that had the shock not destroyed the water mains, cutting off all water supply, which rendered the use of fire engines and ladders useless, the Fire Department of San Francisco, which is the best institution in the city and one of the best in the country, could have conquered the flames before noon of the first day, April 18th. However, even though without a Fire Chief, Mr. Sullivan having been killed by the falling of his hotel, I believe, the commendable manner in which the brave firemen conducted their campaign against such odds should, in my opinion, become a part of the history of "The fall of San Francisco".

At about 2:30 P.M. of April 18th, as well as I can now recollect, I wrote a letter to mother (which was mailed a week

later) stating, among other things, that I was confident the flames would never reach our hotel, but that very night, at 10:00 o'clock, a policeman came into the hotel and advised us that we should leave within a few moments, as the block was to be blown up with dynamite, that the flames might not reach to such a height when afire. I had, fortunately, already placed all my most valuable belongings in packs upon the bed, and I now threw them into a counterpane which I took from the bed, along with a fine new double blanket, which I "did take, steal and carry away", in order to insure protection from certain elements which accompany the burning of a city, cinders, ashes, etc., being more disagreeable as a tonic for the eyes than the idea of stealing what would otherwise have been burned. For the first time in my life I was now without where to lay my head. No one who has not had that experience can imagine what it is like. I longed to die, and for two days I regretted that I was not killed outright, as death thus seemed more acceptable than to be starved or burned, which I expected might be my fate. When I reached the street that night I wondered where I should go. Then I was seized with an inspiration to go to the home of Mrs. Davies, Ethel's mother, on Union and Leavenworth Streets, a distance of many blocks, which I was compelled to walk in order to reach the place, as the cars could not run at all, the tracks, in scores of instances, being twisted out of shape or thrown ten or fifteen feet high in places. Ethel was now visiting Bernal Heights, a remote suburb of San Francisco, and later I shall relate a novel

experience which I had in getting her home to our camp, after it was established. I arrived at Mrs. Davies' at about 10:30 and there deposited my trunk, spoken of above, which I had been carrying in a manner similar to that in which the country tramp, of whom John and I used to entertain such a horror, always carries his. I spent the time from then till 3:30 A M Thursday watching the flames do their work, and in trying to convince the most pessimistic that the flames would never reach that district, of which I felt perfectly confident. At 3:30 A. M. I went into the parlor, where, alas? I have enjoyed so many hours, and laid myself upon the floor, and as I was almost oblivious of what was going on down town, I felt what I thought must have been a house falling upon me, which was, in reality, Annie, who had come in to take down and save the curtains, and stepped upon my "shanks". I believe I gave a full expression of what I thought about being so "trampled upon". I then hiked me off to the couch, and deposited my sleepy self thereon, awakening at 6:10 Thursday morning. I then arose and went down to the corner of Ellis and Polk Streets, and, seeing a multitude going into a grocery store there, I marched "by the right flank, (double time)", and found myself for the first time in the "bread line", which is now famous in San Francisco. The first thing I looked for was a side of bacon or a ham. Seeing neither, I climbed three or four shelves high, stacked six quart cans of corn, two of pears and a bucket of lard upon my good left arm, stepped upon a ball of butter, did

just what any one else would have done, slipped off. But I did more than most fellows could have done: caught my sleeve on a meat hook, where I was suspended from further depredations until rescued by a good woman who wanted my place at the "counter". When I reached solid ground again I still bore the eight cans and the bucket. This was not looting, for the grocer knew the store would soon burn, and so he helped some of the women secure some articles which he thought they could best carry away, and I was surprised at the strength of some. I then returned, with the spoils of my first campaign, to Mrs. Davies', a distance of about twenty blocks, reaching there at about ten o'clock. I next went to the home of Ross' mother-in-law, Mrs. Johnsen, to ascertain whether they had heard from Ross' and his wife, Nettie, where I learned that they had spent the night there, and had just returned home to preclude the possibility of any refugees taking charge of their house. Then I called at the home of Mrs. Nicholls, a widow with four girls and one boy. This family has been very nice to me, and I was once given a birthday dinner there by them. I found them moving their effects out on North Point Street, which was not reached by the fire at all, so that they were quite safe after only one move, many families having to move several times. Mrs. Nicholls' chimney had fallen through the roof into the parlor during the earthquake, and they were frightened very much. After leaving there I returned again to Mrs. Davies', where I found her son-in-law, Chris. Jacobsen, who is

a friend of mine; also two boys from where Ethel was visiting, had come up, at her instigation, to ascertain the extent of the damage, etc., at home. I know that she had, in her anxiety, induced the boys to come, although she holds out stoutly that they volunteered to do so. It requires lots of pluck to induce one to start on a walk of 10 miles, hence my inference that they came for her sake. The cars, as above stated, were not running, and walking was not so good that day as it grew to be later, when all became more accustomed to it, and was therefore entirely out of the question for her to undertake. At this time Chris and I went to Sacramento and Jones Streets to assist in keeping a small portion of the effects of a friend of his out of reach of the flames, which were then raging in that section, returning to Mrs. Davies' in the afternoon, going then to the home of Mrs. Jacobsen, Chris' mother, about sixteen blocks away, secured two gallons of whiskey (joyfully disposing of a case of beer), now back to Mrs. Davies', then to the Presidio, (at least two miles away), where Mrs. Jacobsen had left a note she had gone for safety, searched the post for the family, and, after having located them at Fort Mason on the way back from the Presidio, returned once more to Mrs. Davies'. Then poor Chris started to his home in Oakland, and after reaching there he fell in a faint at his door. I had made many more steps that day than he, and was doomed to make more still, for at about 6:00 P. M. Thursday, (the same date), the Davies mother, girls and I started on our "Westward Ho" toward the Presidio, where we are still camping. Poor Mrs.

cried a little upon leaving the house that had for a long time been her home, and a more hospitable home was never reigned over by woman. I contented myself by bidding farewell ^{to} a certain remote corner known as the cosy corner, known far and wide as a retreat for the love sick. (Not that I was at all heir to that complaint). This was, indeed, the first home into which I was invited upon arriving at this coast.

On Friday, the 20th, we pitched our tents near my old company, and made a trip back in time to see the old house on Leavenworth Street blown up, which closed the events of the day. But during this time I was bending every energy toward the concoction of a scheme whereby I might bring Ethel to our camp, not desiring to have her remain over in the western side of the city, where I thought, properly, hardships would be first and most severely felt. Somehow (You may wonder why) I wished her to have as good accommodations as I received. I must say here that the dear old 29th Company treated us in such a genial manner that none of us can ever forget her. Well, at noon, Saturday, the 21st, I went to my old company, secured arms and uniform, went out to some fellow's camp, seized his horse, rode him across the hill and demanded from the Boulevard livery stable on First Avenue a rig, which was given me. Of course martial law was in force, and a soldier in uniform, or a red cross person could seize any private conveyance. But this was no excuse for me to take martial law into my own hands. I gave the liveryman a receipt on behalf of the Government, and then drove rapidly to Bernal Heights, scattering petty of-

felders ahead of me in every direction. I imagined that trip was the 20th Century edition of "Sheridan's March to the Sea", when really, if I had been caught, it would have been the first Edition of "Smith's March to the Guard-House", which he richly deserved. After I arrived at the foot of the heights, I actually forgot the address at which Ethel was stopping, which bears me out in the opinion that for a time I was completely "bug-house". After having rode me around for a long half hour, during which time I made many fruitless inquiries concerning the place which I desired to locate, I thought of the proper address, and proceed^{-ed} in that direction. Just before I reached the address sought, I received a call from a gentleman who stated that some people near him had been cooking on their back porch all day, and, since this was, and is up to date, against the law, on account of cracked chimneys, I approached the place pointed out, and made the gentleman of the house promise he would remove his stove a hundred yards up the hill as soon as it got cool enough. I then went to the place where Ethel was visiting, found her, surprised her, took possession of her, put her in my buggy and drove swiftly home, where I find her at night when I return from the office, waiting in front to see me come. She is the first of the girls (we have four) up in the morning, too, and cooks my breakfast, as I have to come to Oakland to work, necessitating my leaving earlier than the rest. There are three men in camp, and all three are at work, one making \$180.00 per month. We have a very fine camp on the Presidio Golf Links, having been obliged

to leave our commodious and convenient camp near my company. We have very good and wholesome food from the relief committee, and, in addition thereto, we have many palatable dishes prepared from articles which we see fit to purchase in the western addition, which was not burned, and which borders on the Golf Link.

I have read many accounts of heroism and fortitude among women, but those of San Francisco have adopted a standard of greatness in this respect which will never be equalled. There is nowhere else a class of women who could bear up against misfortune and hardship as our noble, brave women have done during the past three weeks. Indeed, my narrative would be incomplete did I not allow large space to mention the noble deeds, bull-dog tenacity and stickability which Annie Davies, Ethel's next older sister, proved to possess in large quantities. Without Annie's assisting hand, or, I might with truth say, her ===== supervision of affairs in general, I could not even have pitched our tents. She always goes at least a neck ahead of me, carries wood and water, rustles food for which she will stand in the "bread line" forever in order to secure what she wants, and all the time, during the hardest days just following the "quake", she would smile as though it were a summer vacation, and not a stringent case of possible starvation. And to see her smile so would cause the boldest to blush from shame if he had ever entertained any pessimistic views regarding the situation and consequences expected. Indeed, she seemed always to be the right one in the right place. She is

a very pretty blonde, and was engaged to poor Jack Hoddinott, who was lost on the Valencia up the coast in January. I believe I sent some clippings concerning Jack's death and his heroism. I do not hesitate to tell Ethel that Annie is the best girl I ever saw, and I tell you the same with conviction. I have known her for about two years, and have never seen her lose her temper. Our camp life would not be complete without her. Also I cannot overlook the fact that Sophie, next older than Annie, has clearly demonstrated that she possesses wonderful fortitude. The stove is never too hot or the morning too damp or foggy for her to arise with the lark (provided the lark sleeps till about 8 o'clock), and only for the reason that Annie exerted her exceptional qualifications during and immediately following the fire could I not speak alike for both. We have also another lady in our camp, Miss Casini, who is a first rate Italian and French cook, and I'll be dogged if we don't eat some of the greatest dishes (and spoons, pots, and other things, owing to how hungry we all are) that you ever heard of.

You will naturally wonder why I have thus far refrained from saying nice things about a certain other member of the family. It would be enough and the truth, maybe, if I told you that her presence in our camp has saved my life. You may conjecture what you please in this connection.

Concerning the future of San Francisco, I would say that I, for one, and many great financiers for more, have the utmost faith in her future. Already there are many temporary

being erected in the city for immediate business occupancy, and the streams of commerce are continual. Things look exceptionally good for a young man, and I am glad I did not return to the old State, which I certainly came near to doing. True, earthquakes are bad things, but the longest one I have ever felt was 48 seconds, while back there I have lived through weeks of bitter cold weather, which is just as bad, and lasts many times longer. Also your hot weather, which came so near to putting me out of further business last summer, is a thing which closely rivals earthquakes, provided they are not quite so severe as the recent temblor, although, did I know that there was to be another shock like the one just stopped, I would go away only far enough to be out of the way of the worst, and then return, by which I mean to infer that SAN FRANCISCO IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME NOW AND FOREVER.

With love, I am, being still alive,

Your son and brother,

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