

FIRE WIPES OUT HELICON HALL

**And Upton Sinclair Hints That
the Steel Trust's Hand
May Be In It.**

LIFE LOST; SEVERAL HURT

**Woman Makes a Lifeline of Her
Flannel Nightgown and
Slides to Safety.**

COLONY FUTURE IN DOUBT

Founder Ready to Continue, but Says

the Rest Must Decide—They

Have Lost All.

Helicon Hall, the large building that housed Upton Sinclair's co-operative colony on the summit of the Palisades, just outside of Englewood, N. J., burned to the ground yesterday morning under such circumstances that the author of "The Jungle" was entertaining suspicions last night which he said his reason could scarcely accept.

Among the seventy-odd residents—colonists and workers—who escaped only in the night clothes they wore, there were many narrow escapes, and one life was lost. He was Lester Briggs, a carpenter, who, although he had been called soon after the fire was discovered, was burned to death in his room on the third or top floor of the building.

Mrs. Grace MacGowan Cooke, the writer, and her sister, Alice MacGowan, jumped from a window in the second story into a blanket held by Upton Sinclair and B. H. Nadal, after having dropped Mrs. Cooke's two little girls down to safety. They were injured and went to the Englewood Hospital. The men were unable to keep the blanket from striking the ground as the bodies of the two women, who were not light, struck it in turn. The two received internal injuries.

At the hospital it was said later that the extent of their hurts had not yet been fully determined, because they had been kept under the influence of opiates all day. Miss MacGowan, it was thought, undoubtedly would recover, but those who were attending her sister were not so sure of Mrs. Cooke.

In addition to these Mrs. Fitchtenberg, the settlement's head cook, was injured in the same manner and went to the hospital; James McNiff, an employe who had wandered about in the interior of the blazing building, and finally got down a rope at the back, was burned severely. He, too, went to the hospital. Miss Edith Somers, Mr. Sinclair's secretary, went to the hospital suffering from shock. Helen Knoll, a worker, who lived on the third floor, and who threw herself from the balcony in front of the third floor rooms down into the court on the first floor, where she struck the cement flooring and then rolled into an artificial brook, also went to the hospital.

There were rescues and narrow escapes a-plenty. One woman, after assisting in getting the children out of the common dormitory on the first floor, ran a thousand feet in her nightgown to a tower in whose top was an alarm bell. As no rope dangled from it she climbed up the twenty or thirty feet of the tower to the bell, which she rang vigorously.

Another woman, the last out of the house, managed to get to the roof of a projecting sun parlor. Seeing no way to get down she took off the only garment she wore, a flannelette nightgown, tore it into strips, which she knotted to the length of a short rope, and let herself down. Upton Sinclair himself, while arousing people on the third floor, was

Another woman, the last out of the double wall of flame.

Sinclair Deeply Suspicious.

Last night Mr. Sinclair did not seem surprised when a reporter told him that some of the colonists had heard three explosions just prior to the outbreak of the fire and that one woman had seen a man running about the hall on the second floor after the first explosion.

"Did you know about the dynamite?" he asked.

Then he added: "About three weeks ago, when we were excavating in the cellar for the foundations for our new boiler, a stick of dynamite was found sticking in a crevice in the rock. That dynamite may have been there for the last twelve years—which is the age of the building—but I doubt it."

"Do you suspect any one?" was asked.

"I do not wish to make an unfounded charge," said Mr. Sinclair. "The thing is so monstrous that I can scarcely bring my mind to believe it. But the dynamite was there, and I had many affidavits involving very high officials of the Steel Trust in all sorts of graft. It was well known in Pittsburgh that I was after the Steel Trust. These affidavits enabled one to trace the connection between railroad wrecks, where, for instance, an axle breaks, and graft in the head offices of the Steel Trust. It was not so much graft that concerned inspectors and those lower down as those in administrative control, who had it reduced to a system. I was working out a novel along these lines. When a man is doing the kind of work that I have been doing he naturally thinks that the law will protect him. But what are you going to do if they are going to blow you up?"

"I have been told that if the elder Armour had been alive when I exposed the Beef Trust I would not have lived. I do not charge anything, but I state the facts that the dynamite was found three weeks ago in the cellar, and that I had those papers in my desk. Of course, I cannot say that they were stolen. And I could not say that they were not."

"I realize now that it was a tremendous mistake not to have had fire escapes on the building. There should have been one at every window."

Sinclair Gave the Alarm.

It was a quarter after 4 in the morning when Mrs. Sinclair, who with her husband and their 5-year-old son, slept in a room in a tower above the third floor, but connecting with that floor, was awakened by a series of heavy crashes. She called Mr. Sinclair, who got up and opened the door of their bedroom.

The entire central part of the building is occupied by a big court, which extends from the first floor to the roof. The

second and third floors have oval balconies which skirt this court, from which the bedroom doors open. When Mr. Sinclair opened his door he found that the "Nita," he said to Mrs. Sinclair, "take David down to the first floor and get the other children out of the dormitory, and I'll arouse the house."

Mrs. Sinclair went down the two flights of stairs at the end of the court nearest their room, made her way across the court and into the dormitory of the children, in which were sleeping some twelve of the offspring of members of the colony.

Meanwhile Mr. Sinclair rushed along the balcony of the third floor pounding on doors and alarming the sleepers. Then, not knowing in what section of the building the fire was, he went to the northwestern end, the furthest removed from his bedroom. Here the smoke drove him into a studio. On the walls he pounded, trying to arouse the occupants of the adjoining rooms. Then he went back into the balcony and tried to make his way around the left turning of the balcony to a stairway.

A burst of flame drove him back, for by this time the whole forward section of the building was ablaze. Then he went around to the right, trying the opposite turning of the balcony. Here again he was driven back. He returned to the studio, which was free of smoke, for a breathing spell, thinking that he was entirely cut off and that he would have to jump from a window.

In a few moments he again tried the left turning of the balcony, and, shielding his face with his hands, dashed through, singeing his hair. Reaching the stairway at the other end of the building, he descended to the first floor, crossed the court, and made his way to the outside.

Rescues by Blanket.

In front of the house he found B. H. Nadal, the poet, a member of the colony. In the front windows of the first floor were Mrs. Cooke and her sister, Miss MacGowan, with Mrs. Cooke's two little daughters, Helen, aged 12, and Catherine, 9.

"Toss them down to us!" shouted Sinclair.

Mrs. Cooke swung Helen, the older child, out over the ground and then at a signal from below, let go. Helen landed safe in Sinclair's arms. When it came the turn of Catherine, the younger, there was difficulty, for she clung to her mother, crying, and then became entangled in her mother's hair. Finally she was dropped down. Then the two men on the ground shouted to the women to get their clothes. They, not understanding, threw out their bedclothing. At this Sinclair seized a blanket, which he and Nadal held stretched out.

"Now then, jump!" he called up to Mrs. Cooke and her sister.

Mrs. Cooke jumped, but as she is a heavy woman the blanket escaped the clutches of the two men, and allowed her to fall to the ground. Undeterred by her sister's plight, however, Miss MacGowan also jumped in turn. The same thing befell her. The two women were carried to the stable, moaning, and remained there until an ambulance took them to the hospital.

One Rope Fire Escape.

Meanwhile in the rear of the building, on the third floor, Edwin C. Potter, one of the men who had been aroused by Sinclair earlier, had brought out a rope he had purchased the day before for 90 cents. He had protested at the absence of fire escapes on the building, and in the face of much good-natured ridicule had walked to Englewood to buy this rope. So strong had been his insistence about fire escapes that Mrs. Emma Erskine Hahn, the manager of the house, had gone to New York to purchase a portable one. She had not returned and was away on her errand when the fire occurred.

Mr. Potter tied his little girl to one end of the rope and lowered her to the ground, where a stable hand released her. Then he sent his little boy down by the same route. His wife and then he himself followed. After he had reached the ground W. T. Grinnell stuck his head out of the window of a room adjoining that of the Potters.

"Go into Potter's room and slide down the rope," those on the ground told him.

This he did. Then those on the ground swung the rope in such a way that Margaret Hogue, a writer living on the second floor, was able to catch it as it slid past her window. Down the ninety-cent rope she came in turn.

The Craigs Saved a Few Trifles.

Then the attention of those on the ground was attracted to Mr. and Mrs. A. C. Craig, who had a room on the ground floor in the extreme rear of the building. Mrs. Craig was outside at the stable, while her husband remained in the room throwing things out of the window.

"Come out, you fool!" shouted Mrs. Craig.

"Want to save a few things," returned Craig, volleying forth cushions and hairbrushes; "haven't even got a tooth brush."

"Never mind, come out!" she shouted.

"How much time have I?" asked Craig.

"None at all," some one told him.

"The front end is falling in."

Then Craig came out.

While all this had been going on Mrs. Sinclair, Mrs. Emma Williams, in charge of the children in the dormitory on the first floor, and Mrs. Anna Noyes, wife of Prof. Noyes of Teachers' College, had passed the children out of the window on the first floor to those on the ground below.

This done, Mrs. Noyes, still in her nightdress and in her bare feet, ran across the road and down it about 1,000 feet to a tower bearing an alarm bell. At the base of the tower was a hosecart. Having reached the base of the tower, she groped about in the darkness for the bell rope. It was missing. But Mrs. Noyes is an athlete. Without a moment's hesitation, she climbed up the side of the tower to the bell and swung the hammer.

"I didn't do it so much for an alarm of fire," she said later, "as for medical aid."

Women Workers Leap.

Meanwhile many persons were grouped about the rear half of the hall, which was not still burning. Dora Steinlein had knocked on the door of Helen Knoll's room on the third floor and then made her way down stairs to the ground, thinking that Miss Knoll was following her. Miss Knoll, who was one of the "workers," as they call those who labor for hire at Helicon Hall, lost her way. Seeing no way of escape, she leaped over the railing of the balcony to the cement flag-

ging of the ground floor, whence she rolled into the brook, which runs through the courtyard. She was picked up unconscious, but without broken bones.

Ernest Eberlein, whose wife, an actress, is playing an engagement in San Francisco, slept on the top floor. On the second floor was his sister, Mrs. Davida Dagulbert, who is caring for his baby. Eberlein rushed down from the third floor to the ground, and then, not seeing Mrs. Dagulbert, fought his way back through the flames to the second and into Mrs. Dagulbert's room. He found it empty, she having taken the baby to the ground earlier. In returning from her room he became blinded and fell downstairs.

J. M. Bowles, editor of Interior Decoration, slept with his wife and two children on the third floor. Mrs. Bowles heard a series of three explosions and aroused her husband. They made their way through the hottest part of the fire in the front section, carrying their two children. As they passed the organ, near the ground floor, the hand of the little girl was scorched. Mr. Bowles and his wife had their hands and faces burned. The children were sleeping with their parents, as they were new to the colony and could not become accustomed to sleeping in the dormitory with the other children.

Earthquake Victim Hit Again.

Out on a little veranda at the front of the building in the open air, on a level with the third floor, Charles Michael Williams, the short story writer, was sleeping on a cot. Mrs. Williams, discovering the fire below on the second floor, rushed up to her husband with their two children. Arousing him, she made him take one of the children. With the greatest difficulty they got to the ground by means of the stairway. On the way down Mr. Williams, with one of the children in his arms, became lost for a moment or so, and ran his head into a post so hard that he almost lost consciousness.

"I went through the San Francisco earthquake," said he, "and what I didn't lose there I lost in this fire. Two typewriters in such a short space of time is rather hard."

Prof. William Montague of Columbia University and his wife groped their way through the second floor to the court which they crossed, although the fire was then at its height, to reach the dormitory that they might make sure that their child had been taken out.

Meanwhile at the front of the house Charles M. Helliker, a consulting engineer who was doing some work at the hall, did valiant service.

Five women were lifted by him out over the ground from a second-story window and then swung to the roof of a portico, whence they reached the ground. While he was doing this Mrs. Helen Fichtenberg, the head cook, leaped from a window of the second floor and hurt herself.

Woman Heard Explosions.

Those who slept in the front part of the building, where the fire seemed to originate, spoke with great positiveness of having heard three explosions, separated by a slight time interval. Among these was Mrs. Florence Eddy, on the second floor. At the first report she got out of bed and lighted the gas, which proved to her, she says, that the thing did not come from a gas explosion, since the flow was regular in her room. Then she opened the door into the balcony.

There was no smoke at that time, only flying particles of dust. She also saw a man running toward the front of the building in the direction of the explosion. A moment more and there was another explosion which seemed to be near the organ in the sun parlor on the ground floor. Almost immediately flames and smoke burst forth.

"I saw Mr. Collier," she said, "with nothing on but the jacket part of a pair of pajamas."

"Go back and get your clothes on," I told him, and he did.

"I am quite positive that there was no gas explosion. I think that the thing was of suspicious origin."

Made Her Own Fire Escape.

Almost the last woman out of the place was Henrietta Kimball, an artist. In her nightgown and carrying a blanket, Mrs. Kimball got to the roof of a sun parlor that jutted out from the level of the first floor. She saw no way to get down, so she tied the blanket to a projection of iron, and then, taking off her nightgown, tore it into strips. These she tied together until she had a rope, which she tied to the blanket.

On this slender line, which threatened to part under her weight, she lowered herself to the ground. Without clothing she walked for two blocks, until she met Prof. Noyes, who wore an overcoat over pajamas.

"Won't you let me have your overcoat?" she asked.

He, intent on the fire, hurried on.

"Please let me have your overcoat," she shivered out.

Then, noticing her for the first time, he took off the garment and gave it to her. She made her way to a house several thousand feet away, where she found shelter.

Other members of the colony as they reached the ground were scarcely in better plight than Mrs. Kimball had been. The men were in pajamas, though a few of them, Mr. Sinclair among the number, had bathrobes. The women were in nightgowns and kimonos.

Future Plans Not Settled.

Yesterday afternoon the colonists held a meeting in the stable of the place and drafted a resolution of thanks to the Mayor of Englewood, who had offered to aid any one who might be in financial stress. This offer they declined, saying that the colony was able to provide for its own. They further asked that all of the colonists who were scattered would send their addresses to the stable, where a business office would be opened. Another meeting will be held on Monday afternoon in the stable, when the members will talk about continuing.

Mr. Sinclair was not present at yesterday's meeting. Last night he said he did not know whether the colony would be resumed or not. It all depended on the feeling of the members. If they decided that they wanted to continue, he was willing and would look around for another property. The present site would not be rebuilt upon.

Helicon Hall was incorporated at \$100,000, and the shares were \$100 apiece. Of these Mr. Sinclair owned 100, and Edwin

Bjorkman, Mrs. Anna Noyes, and Percy Russell one each. The rest stayed in the treasury. The Trustees were Upton Sinclair, Ellis O. Jones, Edwin Potter, and Charles H. Castle.

The colonists had a waiting list of nearly 300 names. All told, colonists, resident boarders, and workers numbered more than seventy.

Carpenter Slept Too Well.

As speedily as possible a census was taken. All were accounted for except the carpenter, Lester Briggs. Both Miss Knoll and Miss Steinlein, who were on the third floor, had pounded at his door, and Miss Steinlein was positive that he had answered. But he was a heavy sleeper. It was not until morning that his charred body was found. He had been blind for a while, but an operation had restored his sight, and he wore heavy glasses.

Among those who stood in the stable while the census was being taken were Louis Tabor and his mother, the son with his arm about the mother.

"She saved my life," he said. "Although the smoke was thick and almost choked her, she went from the second floor to the top, where I was sleeping soundly, and roused me. Then we got out down the rear stairs."

Neighbors of Helicon Hall, all of whom live at some distance, sent clothing in which the homeless could travel to the nearest houses. One man, after a party had taken refuge at his house, fitted out six men with complete attire from collars to shoes, though the latter were of several sizes. When Mr. Sinclair, his wife, and son reached the house of William Dulles, Jr., fully half a mile from Helicon Hall, they were too tired to walk to their beds, but dropped exhausted on the floor and slept there.

Mr. Sinclair estimated the loss to the building at about \$50,000, covered with \$40,000 insurance. He lost every manuscript he had, as did Mrs. Cooke and Miss MacGowan. He thought that their loss alone would amount to more than \$10,000. The long distance up the hill from Englewood, which the Fire Department had to cover prevented any effectual aid from this source.