



THE LINEMEN AT WORK

ways sure of an audience. "Let us know when you get to the stuff, old man; we'll keep an eye on the cops," and other pleasantries were fired at him. When the oven was opened, and, as in most cases, the batch was found to be not overdone, the waiting clerks busied themselves with passing out the books and papers, knocking and blowing the dust from them, at the same time sadly damaging their patent leathers in the mess underfoot, and keeping one eye open for additional contributions to the scrap heap from the crumbling projections overhead.

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With the fall of the wall next to the Customs House buildings, the destroying passion of the fire was withstood. The stone walls and their austere isolation were an invulnerable combination, and in the doubtful places of proximity the ordinary resources of the protective system were a sufficient defence.

Here was a scene that included about all there is to be seen at a fire. There was the all-pervading glare, there were fierce

tongues of flame, clouds of smoke and flying embers, the roar and crackle, the hum of the engines, bustling fire-fighters splashing about, in and out; tottering walls, a flight for life, and—the saving of the adjoining property. Inside that big warehouse the fire was making a thorough job of it, as could be plainly seen through the two windows, the only light spots in that immense expanse of black wall. At its foot, in the jog of the lane, three or four firemen were directing the force of a branch against susceptible portions of the rear wing of the Receiving House, whilst every minute or so a figure emerged from or disappeared around the bend of that dark tunnel, on business for the men engaged upon the roof or in the interior of the building upon which this hose was playing. It became a certainty that something must happen there soon. Everything behind the wall must have been eaten out long ago. There was a cry as a large part of the end fell down into the passage, and the men with the hose stumbled back a pace or two; but, as the freed flames reached across again, they turned their stream upward once more and stayed there. The people watched; they wondered if a wall fell inward or outward. Then the policeman who had undertaken to guard those fellows' lives uttered his strong cry. The



OPENING THE VAULTS