

munities owe a duty to the people among whom they live; and should they not use their influence for the safeguarding of all such public assembly rooms, whenever the opportunity occurs!

However, it is not only moving picture galleries in our cities and public halls in our country towns that require attention. Our ramshackle school houses, which

UNSAFE boards refuse to replace with modern structures or equip with adequate fire escapes, are liable at any time to reap a harvest of young deaths.

Not over 30 per cent. of our city theatres and public halls are properly constructed or equipped to safeguard the lives of patrons in case of a fire or panic. Why is this? We answer theatres spend much money with the daily press in advertising, and the daily press is feared by public officials, therefore we have unsafe theatres.

Very few of our churches have a sufficient number of efficient exits to enable the congregation to reach the open air in case of a fire and panic. Why is this condition not remedied? We answer that pastors, deacons and elders wield an influence that might control votes.

Still worse, however, than unsafe amusement halls, theatres, public halls and churches, is the plan, construction and equipment of most of our larger retail stores that renders possible with their multitude of shoppers a holocaust which would be without parallel in history. In this connection Mr. Edmund Burke in a recent address before the Ontario Association of Architects (published elsewhere in this issue) drew a most gruesome picture of a fire or panic in one of these large establishments. He said in part:

"To our mind an enormous responsibility is involved. Thousands and tens of thousands of individuals flock to such establishments, and on special days and at certain times these throngs are so great as to be practically unmanageable. No power on earth could extricate these people in the event of a serious panic. A mere unreasoning panic would probably result in a pile of crushed and smothered humanity. No system of staircases and no battery of elevators in any known establishment could begin to relieve the situation. The floor areas are so large and so lacking in subdivision that the impact of a surging crowd would be practically irresistible, possibly overturning stair railings, and well-hole guards and precipitating hundreds to the floors below. * * * The record of terrible accidents in these days of great undertakings is appalling, and any day may see, and the possibilities and probabilities are such that the next disaster may find its location in some establishment which has neglected the self-evident precautions, the lack of which is usually at the root of most of the distressing events which face the reader almost daily in the public prints."

Does not this awful picture of a probability give us reason for thought? Does it not impress us with the criminal greed of the owners and the awful responsibility that rests upon the shoulders of our city councils.

Mr. Burke continues in his address to show how through reasonable self-evident precautions this awful risk of human life could be avoided. Still day after day thousands pass in and out under the

roofs of these death traps, little knowing that every time they satisfy their desire to buy of the wares of one of these great stores they are taking their lives in their hands.

The press could do a great service to the public in bringing about a campaign that would force these structures to be so altered and equipped as to render them suitable for the patronage of the public. But if the daily papers should undertake such a campaign they would risk having the great advertising patronage of these stores withdrawn and thereby hangs the tale.

City officials cannot be expected to carry on such a campaign unless they receive the support of the press and the public. An instance of how the press may block the work of a conscientious official attempting to do his duty occurred

THE NEED OF SUPPORT OF PRESS AND PUBLIC.

in Chicago a few years ago, when the building inspector ordered the owners of one of the largest departmental stores in that city to make certain changes to comply with the city's building ordinances. They paid no attention to his repeated notices and he finally called a squad of police and forcibly closed the store during one of the busiest hours of the day. He declared that the cities ordinances must be complied with before the store could be again opened for business. The owners called their newspaper friends together who criticized the stubborn official for his "over zealous" action, under great double column headlines and brought influence to bear upon the mayor who insisted that the building inspector withdraw his order. The store was again opened and they made the required changes when they became ready.

City officials can therefore only go as far as public opinion will permit them. public opinion is controlled by the press, and the press is influenced by the patronage of these great stores. Therefore, we have unsafe retail establishments.

The architects and the engineers can nevertheless exert a great influence through their prestige as technical experts on these matters, and it should behoove them to do everything in their power to force the hands of city officials and encourage and promote the safe, sound construction of our public and semi-public buildings. It is a duty they owe to their profession as well as to the public which depends upon their integrity and knowledge for the character of their buildings.

* *

THERE is much food for careful thought and intelligent study in the recent fatal and costly fire in the Parker building in New York, which is but a reiteration of the lessons taught by the Toronto, Baltimore and San Francisco conflagrations. This, the first of big fires to take place in one of New York's much boasted of, so-called fireproof skyscrapers, has led to many erroneous statements on the part of the misinformed editors, many of whom maintain that it is positive proof of the fact that the word "fireproof" as applied to building construction is a misnomer and that it will serve to shake the confidence of the building public in the efficiency of modern fireproof construction. A thorough knowledge of the exact nature of the construction of the Parker building will have the very opposite effect, of convincing the architect and pros-

LESSONS OF THE PARKER BUILDING FIRE.