



WHEN the first news of a horrible catastrophe like that of the Boyertown holocaust reaches us we become stricken with sympathetic grief for the victims and their bereaved survivors, then as we read the terrifying accounts of how the catastrophe occurred and the sickening details of the recovering and identifying of the dead from the mass of entangled humanity, we ask ourselves would such a horrifying holocaust be

AFTERMATH probable or even possible in the public places we and ours frequent. **OF BOYERTOWN DISASTER.** Reporters on the daily papers rush to the heads of our municipal departments seeking some solace for their nervous readers, and in turn the mayor or the head of the city building department tells them to assure their readers that all is well and that everything is being done to safeguard human life in theatres, public halls, churches, schools, factories and buildings of like nature. They may acknowledge the fact that some few places are not up to the standard, but give assurances that orders will be issued at once to have the owners comply with the requirements of the law. Members of the city councils busy themselves in looking up the municipal laws governing the construction of buildings frequented by the public, and as a result many amendments are discussed and in some cases are even recommended.

The daily press is full of interviews with city officials, architects and engineers for a few days following such a catastrophe, who tell of the reforms that should be brought about in building construction. In the meantime the victims have been given their allotted number of feet of earth, and we soon pass on to other things. As soon as the public's nerves have quieted down we move on as before, forgetting the hazardous condition of our public and semi-public buildings. Our municipal officials who become exacting for the moment have laid aside their promises for reforms and our unsafe structures stand little changed from what they were before. When another holocaust occurs we shall again pass through the same nervous anxiety and our officials will again promise more stringent measures, but not until such a catastrophe takes place immediately in our midst will we awake to the understanding of the real necessity of taking every possible precaution against the loss of life in a fire in any of the buildings frequented by the public. We ask what is the reason for this? Why does it require such horrible lessons to force the public to insist upon the honest construction of the structures in its midst? The answer is simple: the money-

mad forces that militate against the interests of the public are too strong for the people's servants, "public officials," to successfully combat.

These the makers and executors of our laws fall a prey to either political pressure or corrupt influence and it is only when some such awful calamity befalls us that public opinion becomes so strong as to force the hands of our officials in spite of these undue influences. There is not a city in Canada where the repetition of the Boyertown disaster is impossible and even improbable.

POLITICAL The almost innumerable five and
PRESSURE ten cent moving picture galleries
CORRUPT that have sprung up in cities all
INFLUENCE. over the Dominion, offer little or

no protection for the safety of the thousands of nightly patrons that crowd within their doors. As a rule they are located in an old congested part of the city. A stage is built at the back of the building, seats are installed, the interior redecorated and the exterior is touched up with a little paint and made attractive by hundreds of incandescent electric lights. The moving picture apparatus is placed directly over the entrance and in a large percentage of cases there is absolutely no other available adequate exit than this front entrance that would be worse than useless should an accident occur to the machine that would cause the front to become ignited. Not one of these is sufficiently ventilated to carry off the gases and smoke caused by such a fire and the unfortunate inmates of such a structure would be doomed almost to a man before help from the outside could reach them. Why such places are permitted is a mystery and we believe our city officials would find it difficult to satisfy the public with an explanation in case of a catastrophe in one of them.

The wonder is, not that nearly 200 persons perished in the fire and panic in a theatre at Boyertown, Pa., but that such holocausts are not more common than they are. It is the almost universal rule that the audience rooms for public meetings in villages and in all cities save those of considerable size, are located on the upper floors of buildings, are reached by narrow and often by winding stairways, have usually only a single door for entry and exit and are contained in combustible wooden structures. Lighting and heating apparatus are usually such as to involve large fire risks, and it is common to fill the rooms on occasion with booths and decorations which are as inflammable as tinder.

These things are done through pure ignorance, and without a thought of the risk that is run. Do not architects or engineers resident in such com-