

Hundreds of rope, iron and other ladders have been devised: firemen's fire-escape ladders; ladders to be secured by one end to a window sill in the interior and the loose end thrown out as required; ladders to be hauled up from the exterior by first firing a ball of twine into the window by means of which the inmate can do the needful; ladders permanently fixed to buildings, either on the front or rear; certain water conductors made to act as such by the insertion of spokes, pegs, handles, trends or whatever you may please to call them, one of which I could have reached from the 7th or attic floor of the Palmer house Chicago, and at each corner of the building.

Again have there been a variety of hoists invented and patented for letting persons down by means of a bag or basket suspended from above; canvas and other shoots by which a person could slide down and the increasing velocity of descent be counteracted by extending the shoot from below; thus throwing it into a curve approaching to the horizontal, bringing the passenger nearly to a stand still on reaching the ground and thereby preventing any shock to the system: one of the best of all the proposed modes of escape and through which I have seen hundreds of men and boys descend for the mere fun of the thing from the 4th or attic floor gable end window of the old Chateau St. Louis, Quebec, now the Laval Normal School.

There are still other devices such as moveable towers on to the roof of which a person may leap from a window, an arrangement of springs breaking the fall.

While free to admit that all and every the modes of escape alluded to, have now and then been effective in saving a few lives; it can not be denied that such means have been totally insufficient and impracticable in cases where women and children and old and helpless persons were confined in convents and asylums, the strength of whose arms is inadequate to support the weight of their bodies swinging from a rope or other ladder.

And even this may be ineffective to the able bodied man, woman or child, the ladder hanging as it must do from the window of an upper story; when in all likelyhood flames are issuing from the very windows beneath the one from which escape is thus rendered so to say impossible.

But if ladders could be and were formerly effective to some extent, they have come to be almost useless now, on account of the lines of poles in almost every street of every city supporting hundreds of telegraph, telephone and electric light wires, which prevent the erection of the fireman's ladder against the walls of the burning building or must so delay this operation while cutting the wires, that in the meantime the chances are, the inmate has been asphyxiated, stifled by the smoke and heated air.

All such means of escape, even when most efficient, are far too uncertain, far too slow where hundreds of human beings are aggregated in the upper floors or dormitories of a boarding school or manufactory or even for the less numerous inmates of a hotel.

Some other system must be devised: proper stairways by which the babe in arms may be safely secured with its mother; of which the younger children can avail themselves and down which old and enfeebled men and women may be safely conducted by their more able companions; for no woman can with one hand descend a ladder while the other is embarrassed with a child and could hardly do so even with both hands free.

The proprietor of the Buffalo hotel is reported to have said on the night of the fire or after it had done its dire work of destruction (of which he was an eye witness, and all but perished in the flames, himself, his wife and family) that never in his life again would he occupy a hotel which was not built fireproof and in addition thereto, provided with efficient means of escape in case of an emergency.

There is nothing like seeing the fire-head face to face, to bring one to such a common sense conclusion; but what is this fire escape? what must it needs be, to prove thoroughly practical and efficient?

The stairway I propose must be of iron with not one particle of wood about the structure and it must have no direct communication whatever with the interior. It must be reached from each and every flat or story of a building, even to the uppermost or attic floor and with the sole exception of the ground floor, (from which escape is easy through the doors and windows to the street) by first passing out of a window, any window facing towards the rear of the building, to a narrow iron gallery surrounding the whole court yard and giving access to the stairs.

I say "narrow iron gallery" two to three ft. wide at most, that its projection into the inner open space, may not impede the light to windows beneath it, and to reduce its cost to a minimum.

Building lots now a days are almost invariably 25 ft. front and 100 ft. deep. One such stairway in rows or tiers of tenement and dwelling houses, may be made to suffice for two adjoining houses: and, so as to take up no otherwise available space, so as not to occupy space to the exclusion of any window or door; should be built opposite the division line or wall between the two dwellings, and always towards the rear; for as I have said before, and this must be borne in mind to secure the adoption of the scheme by every one: no one would put up with any such permanent encroachment from the front of any building, be it a dwelling or a public institution of any kind, for the sake of an eventuality which might never occur.

The foot of this stairway should lead directly to a passage way, not necessarily more, where more dwelling houses are concerned, than three feet in width, running from rear to front of building or from yard or court to street. This passage way should be cut off from the remainder of the basement floor by a brick wall eight or more inches thick and roofed in or arched over with brick, or iron bearers and concrete, and should be closed towards the street by an iron lattice door, opening outwards but bolted from the inside.