

Dante's Inferno Enacted

**A NARRATIVE
OF THE
EXPLOSION AT HALIFAX**

25 CENTS

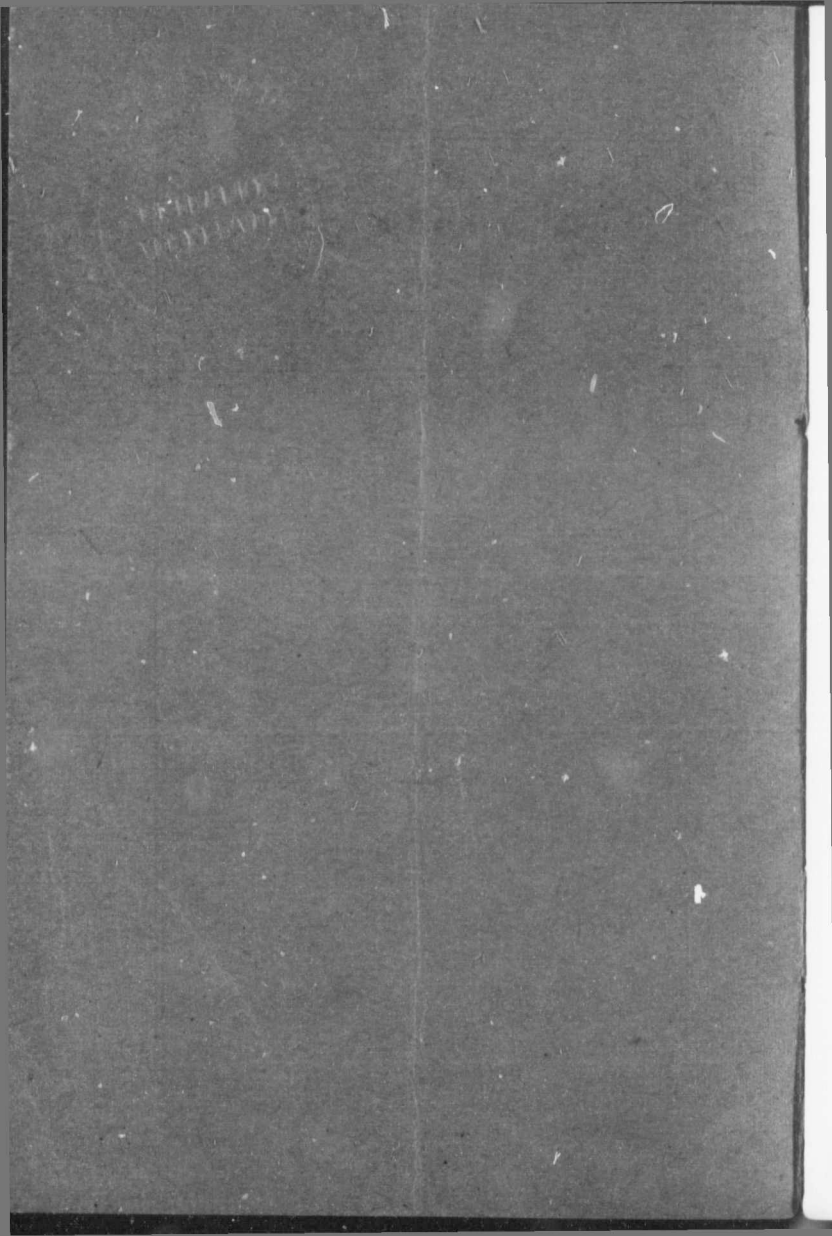


By **JOHN T. GAMMON**

Author of

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE DISASTER

By a Victim



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TO THE MEMORY OF THE UNFORTUNATE
VICTIMS AND DEEPEST SYMPATHY TO
THE SURVIVING RELATIVES

The writer is also a sufferer, home totally destroyed, two youngest children lost their lives, wife seriously injured. Read the former article.

'An Illustration by a Victim of the Halifax Explosion'
on sale for 10 cents at H. H. Marshall's
Book Store, Halifax, N. S.

PROLOGUE

THE 6th December, 1917, is a never-to-be forgotten day. Calendars of the future will probably recall the Halifax disaster. Through the colliding of the Belgian Relief Ship "Imo" and Muniton Ship "Mont Blanc", the deck cargo of benzine on the "Mont Blanc" caught fire, and shortly after the flames reached the under cargo of 3,000 tons of T.N.T., the most powerful of explosives, which immediately exploded with a resounding roar, destroying the whole North End of the City, causing the death of 2,000 people, injuring 3,000, and rendering 6,000 people homeless, damaging property to the extent of 25,000,000 dollars.

Hundreds of injured persons were rushed by trains out of the City to various towns near by, the local hospitals were unable to cope with such large numbers.

Wounded soldiers who had returned from the front, got up and dressed, giving their beds to more serious cases.

Hundreds who lost homes, relatives, and were themselves badly hurt, bore their sorrows with great heroism.

Nearly 4,000,000 dollars was collected and sent from all parts to assist in the relief of the stricken City.



CHAPTER ONE

Situated on the eastern shores of North America and washed by the broad Atlantic is the old historical port of Halifax. It has been noted for years for its great activity in the shipping world, its fine harbour has many advantages. At the head of the harbour we had Bedford Basin, which is entered through the Narrows and capable of anchoring hundreds of vessels, large and small.

During the war several ships with notable people have entered the harbour, but not one has left such a record of frightfulness as the French Muniton Ship "Mont Blanc."

The dawn of the ill-fated morning opened with the making of a glorious day, the inhabitants little dreaming that before the sun had crossed the meridian, Halifax would be visited with a catastrophe that baffles description.

The majority of husbands, fathers, brothers, had left their homes for their daily toils, mothers were getting breakfast for the little ones, others had sent the children to school, the usual daily tasks were just starting, and the thoughts of most were to get the house work finished early in order to get out and enjoy a brief respite in the beautiful sunshine.

CHAPTER TWO.

The harbour was busy as usual with its small craft bustling around, everything seemed to be tuned to the highest pitch with the prospects of a lovely day.

The Belgian Relief Ship "Imo" had left her anchorage at the Basin preparatory for her trip to New York, where she was to load with relief stores for that plucky little country Belgium.

The French Munition Ship "Mont Blanc" was preceeding up the harbour, prior to entering the Basin, where she was to await convoy.

As the ships came into view, the pilots saw the danger, and according to testimony at the subsequent enquiry, each blew their sirens for the right of way, but some one blundered, and the two ships crashed together, and almost immediately the deck together, and almost immediately the deck cargo of cargo of the munition ship caught fire.

The advent of the ships in collision and later, fire breaking out, attracted large crowds of workmen from the workshops, women ran out of their houses, their curiosity aroused, dozens of men flocked to the pier heads to get a closer view. A well known merchant of the North End telephoned for the fire engine, and a few moments later the fire engine "Patricia" with its gallant Chief and attendants, appeared on the scene to fight the flames.

The warships in the harbour dispatched their steamboats with brave sailors on board to assist also. Meanwhile the French crew with the captain and pilot were abandoning the ship and making for the Dartmouth shore and safety,—they knew the dangerous cargo she held.

CHAPTER THREE

About 9.15 a. m., the flames reached the cargo of T. N. T., which, with a tremendous roar that was heard for miles around, blew up. The whole of the North End of the City for two square miles instantly became a blazing ruin; hundreds of individuals were ushered into eternity not knowing what had happened; hundreds were burned to death, and hundreds more maimed for life. Miles of piers were swept away, carrying scores of lives with it; some bodies were recovered later by divers, others never found; also the steamboats with their crews, were sunk; boats were damaged and left high and dry upon the roads, washed up by the tidal wave which followed the explosion. There was hardly a pane of glass left intact in the whole City.

Part of the gun which was on the bow of the "Mont Blanc," was found two miles away. Huge fragments of the ship were thrown for miles, killing and maiming human beings and animals. The comfortable homes purchased by long years of labour by the owners were destroyed. Huge factories employing large numbers of hands were demolished and workmen horribly mutilated. Parts of human

limbs strewn around; frantic mothers terribly injured heard the cries of their little children caught in the burning debris of the houses and were unable to rescue them. Dead bodies of men, women and children, mingled with the remains of horses, cats and dogs.

Men who had left their work and rushed home to try and find their loved ones, desperately tearing at the burning brands to reach the inmates inside; others carrying their friends on planks and doors, placing them on teams to rush them to the hospitals, everyone covered with dirt and filth and unrecognizable. Then again to see women and children rushing along with their clothes blown off but practically unhurt; mothers with blood streaming down their faces, sitting near their old homes nursing dead children, and many other pathetic sights.

CHAPTER FOUR.

About one hour later, the news was flashed around that another explosion was expected as the flames were spreading from a ruined factory to an ammunition yard.

People already dazed were running wildly around not knowing where to turn. "Get into open ground!" was the cry. Teams were commanded, loaded with human freight, horses were lashed and headed for the open country.

"Put your child on this team," said a driver to a man who was trundling along with his wife and

child; there was only room on the team for the baby. "No," said the man addressed, "if there is another explosion we will be together." Motor cars, coal wagons and vehicles of all kinds raced to put as much distance between them and the danger spot as possible.

Everyone seemed terror stricken. "What is it?" asked one poor woman badly injured, her home and children gone, "is this the end of the world, or have the Germans come?"

Women in jewellery and furs huddled with her poorer sisters, all drawn together in one common flight.

Meanwhile, at the time the people were fleeing, a party of sailors were taking the explosives from the broken sheds and throwing them into the harbour. The bravery of these men, although not recognized, was one of the redeeming features. They belong to the Silent Service and were only doing their duty.

Later on in the day the news was passed that all danger was over, and some returned to the City, others would not be persuaded.



CHAPTER FIVE

The hospitals had not escaped, the windows and doors were destroyed and hundreds of unfortunate people were taken there. Corridors and lavatories became piled up with the never ending stream of victims. The doctors and nurses were overworked to the breaking point.

Messages were flashed over the wires for help, which was answered nobly. "We are coming with relief trains, doctors and nurses," said Boston and Massachusetts, and with utmost despatch these helpers arrived, and at once set to work to relieve the already over-burdened heroic doctors and nurses.

Our own women in the City vied with each other to do all in their power to relieve the suffering.

The injuries were frightful to witness, eyes and upper part of faces blown away, limbs torn off, others badly burned.

Several remarkable incidents happened. One woman who was in bed with her baby was blown through the side of the house and landed in the street still on the bed. The only injury was a slight blow on the hand, the child was unhurt. Her little boy who was in the bed also with her a few moments before, but had got out and gone to the window with his grandmother to watch the burning ship, had his eyes and top part of his face torn completely off, and his grandmother was killed; a total of seventeen persons lost their lives in this family.

Another peculiar experience: A man was just stepping from the gangway of his ship in which he was serving and was going to visit his captain who was in the hospital; when the explosion occurred, he found himself whirling through space and landed on Fort Nedham, a distance of half a mile, denuded of all clothing and badly shaken.

Another case occurred where a girl was blown from the road, caught in some telegraph wire overhead, where she was subsequently rescued bruised and shaken.

The freaks of the displacement of the air caused by the explosion played numerous tricks on that never-to-be forgotten day.

CHAPTER SIX

A number of prominent citizens of Halifax organized relief committees to assist the distressed people, and every available vehicle was requisitioned for transporting the dead and injured to the various hospitals and morgues.

Tents were erected to accommodate the homeless, and persons whose homes were not totally destroyed, quickly got together, boards, carpets, tarpaper, and tried to block up the huge rents and gaps in their homes, and kindly took in less fortunate than themselves, and as many as five and six families were herded together in a couple of rooms.

Relief stores were opened to supply the people with food and fuel, which was sadly needed; clothing was collected and sent from all parts of Canada.

The following day to make matters worse and increasing the misery and suffering of the people, the City was visited by a blinding blizzard, making the work of rescue extremely difficult, and many persons who might by chance have been alive amidst the ruins died from exposure.

It seemed as if the elements delighted in the havoc already wrought. The houses in which the people were housed were coated with ice, water pipes were frozen, clothing and food scarce.

For several days after the disaster, Halifax seemed in a torpid state, streets were in darkness, car service stopped, telephone and telegraph system interrupted, storm raging.

CHAPTER SEVEN

On visiting the Chebucto School Morgue were seen piles of corpses. On one side the women and children and on the other the men. The sights were hideous to behold,—here we see a poor woman with her child, the head of the mother is gone, the child is mutilated beyond recognition. They are all covered with a sheet and numbered. The roof of the morgue was damaged, windows blown out, rain and snow beating in, about two inches of water covered the floors, and the bodies were lying in pools of water. At night a few dim lights were burning, the

sentries off duty huddled around oil stoves for warmth,—it was one of the most gruesome spectacles veer witnessed.

Day by day bodies were collected and taken by the morgue to await identification, and at times the stillness would be pierced by cries of enquirers who had recognized some relatives amidst the motley throng of dead.

Not infrequently would be seen little heaps of charred remains collected in a pail, and a card having such words as "Remains of five persons," giving the names of victims and where found, headless trunks of males, a ghastly solitary human leg. Hundreds of corpses were buried and unidentified, funeral services were held by representatives of the different denominations.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A man was picked up near the Naval College, he was to all appearances dead, and placed with the corpses and taken to the morgue. Towards evening, probably through the cold water dropping on him, he recovered from his unconscious state and groaned. The sentry on duty, hearing noises proceeding from what he thought was the dead, became alarmed and called the sergeant in charge. On investigating, this man was discovered and immediately taken to the hospital, where he was treated and has now recovered with the loss of one eye.

Numerous victims lost the sight of one or both eyes, caused through broken glass. A pathetic picture to see was a poor woman who had lost her sight and by her side she was fondling her little son who was also totally blind. For days after, on going through the streets, almost every second person you met, was bearing the scars of one kind and another, showing the number of injured persons ran into thousands.

The snow which fell after the accident, although hampering the searchers in their work, mercifully covered the blackened and charred timbers with a mantle of white.

Every day victims were being discovered in all kinds of poses beneath piles of wreckage. A woman with a little boy frozen on her lap were dug out; evidently she was sitting by the stove in the act of dressing the child when the explosion occurred.

To stand amidst the devastated area and see the complete destruction caused by the ammunition ship, it seems hardly creditable that any human being escaped alive.

It was impossible to tell the different streets, etc., for burned telegraph poles, trees, tram cars, railway tracks, factory chimneys, furniture from the houses all mingled in awful chaos.

Sentries were posted to prevent curious spectators from visiting the ruins, unless by pass.

Series of workmen are employed cleaning up the rubbish.

Halifax is endeavouring to rise to the occasion and out of the ruins, emerging to a brighter and more prosperous city.

