

183. Of the firemen, Campbell and Breitmeyer saw the girls when they first arrived. Barson, another fireman, said he saw them just before the brigade call. Officer Burrows apparently did not see them until the break-through, nor was his attention directed to them.

184. Taking the evidence as a whole we cannot help thinking that, had there been some one in charge who understood that he was the person to command, direct, and keep in touch with the members of his brigade by runner or otherwise when he was perhaps on a tour of inspection, the possibility of the position the girls were in becoming dangerous would have been the subject of conference and action.

Owing to the way this fire was fought we have the absurd position of the officer in charge remaining ignorant of the fact that part of the staff was on the premises, while some brigadesmen in the road were aware that the staff was not evacuated from the top stories.

The officer (Oakman) who was the only officer left in the street, took no steps and made no preparations to prepare a rescue squad. He said he did not know of the girls' plight. He immobilized himself by taking charge of a branch of hose, thereby depriving himself of the opportunity of initiating rescue efforts or directing the men under him at the very time when there was an urgent demand to effect rescues.

185. Mr. Morrison, when asked if he could see any reason why Officer Oakman and other firemen who were standing with their engine for some seven to ten minutes did not notice the girls at the top screaming and calling out, his answer was, "I can't."

Then to the question, "It is almost incredible that they didn't, isn't it?" answered, "It is."

Closely allied with this blindness and seeming ignorance of the value of time at the beginning of the fire, which is unquestionably one of the disturbing features of the operation, is the blindness that enabled the brigade to say that no one noticed the fire-escape in the alleyway between Goodman's and Pratt's buildings. The Superintendent said Officer Burrows should have noticed it when going with Mr. Roger Ballantyne to be shown an alternative way to the cellar. If he had noticed it, he should have inquired what parts of the building it served, because at that time it cannot have been filled with smoke.

186. Of the men working to pierce a hole between Goodman's and Pratt's cellars, one went up the stairway to the first floor of Goodman's and came out that way. The other came out in the hole pierced into the alleyway without being inconvenienced by smoke.

187. If Officer Burrows failed to notice the alleyway containing the fire-escape because he was intent on following Mr. Roger Ballantyne, no like reason prevented firemen in the street who had seen the girls from seeing the alleyway and the fire-escape, and ascertaining whether the girls could come down that way from the windows where they had been seen or whether, if smoke obscured the top of the fire-escape, firemen with masks could have gone up and rescued them.

Referring to the fire brigade, Superintendent Morrison was asked :—

Q. Do you think that Oakman might have displayed a little more initiative than he did?

A. I do.

Q. It has been suggested that some one or more of the brigade personnel might have attempted a rescue of the girls in Goodman's building by utilizing the fire-escape, you heard that suggested?

A. Yes.

Q. But if these girls, knowing of the existence of the fire-escape, were unable to use it, would you assume that equal difficulties would be presented to the officers and men of the fire brigade?

A. No.

Q. They could have got up when the girls could not have got down?

A. That is so.