

**JAMES  
HERBERT  
WALKER**

THE JOHNSTOWN  
HORROR!!!

James Walker

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# Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	18
CHAPTER III	27
CHAPTER IV	39
CHAPTER V	44
CHAPTER VI	49
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	52

# **James Herbert Walker**

## **The Johnstown Horror!!! or, Valley of Death, being A Complete and Thrilling Account / of the Awful Floods and Their Appalling Ruin**

### **CHAPTER I**

#### **The Appalling News**

On the advent of Summer, June 1st, the country was horror-stricken by the announcement that a terrible calamity had overtaken the inhabitants of Johnstown, and the neighboring villages. Instantly the whole land was stirred by the startling news of this great disaster. Its appalling magnitude, its dreadful suddenness, its scenes of terror and agony, the fate of thousands swept to instant death by a flood as frightful as that of the cataract of Niagara, awakened the profoundest horror. No calamity in the history of modern times has so appalled the civilized world.

The following graphic pen-picture will give the reader an accurate idea of the picturesque scene of the disaster:

Away up in the misty crags of the Alleghanies some tiny rills trickle and gurgle from a cleft in the mossy rocks. The dripping waters, timid perhaps in the bleak and lonely fastness of the heights, hug and coddle one another until they flash into a limpid pool. A score of rivulets from all the mountain side babble hither over rocky beds to join their companions. Thence in rippling current they purl and tinkle down the gentle slopes, through bosky nooks sweet with the odors of fir tree and pine, over meads dappled with the scarlet snap-dragon and purple heath buds, now pausing for a moment to idle with a wood encircled lake, now tumbling in opalescent cascade over a mossy lurch, and then on again in cheerful, hurried course down the Appalachian valley.

None stays their way. Here and there perhaps some thrifty Pennsylvania Dutchman coaxes the saucy stream to turn his mill-wheel and every league or so it fumes and frets a bit against some rustic bridge. From these trifling tourneys though, it emerges only the more eager and impetuous in its path toward the towns below.

#### **The Fatal River**

Coming nearer, step by step, to the busy haunts of men, the dashing brook takes on a more ambitious air. Little by little it edges its narrow banks aside, drinks in the waters of tributaries, swells with the copious rainfall of the lower valley. From its ladder in the Alleghanies it catches a glimpse of the steeples of Johnstown, red with the glow of the setting sun. Again it spurts and spreads as if conscious of its new importance, and the once tiny rill expands into the dignity of a river, a veritable river, with a name of its own. Big with this sounding symbol of prowess it rushes on as if to sweep by the teeming town in a flood of majesty. To its vast surprise the way is barred. The hand of man has dared to check the will of one that up to now has known no curb save those the forest gods imposed. For an instant the waters, taken aback by this strange audacity, hold themselves in leash. Then, like erl-king in the German legends, they broaden out to engulf their opponent. In vain they surge with crescent surface against the barrier of stone. By day, by night, they beat and breast in angry impotence against the ponderous wall of masonry that man has reared, for pleasure and profit, to stem the mountain stream.

## **The Awful Rush of Waters**

Suddenly, maddened by the stubborn hindrance, the river grows black and turgid. It rumbles and threatens as if confident of an access of strength that laughs at resistance. From far up the hillside comes a sound, at first soft and soothing as the fountains of Lindaraxa, then rolling onward it takes the voluminous quaver of a distant waterfall. Louder and louder, deeper and deeper, nearer and nearer comes an awful crashing and roaring, till its echoes rebound from the crags of the Alleghanies like peals of thunder and boom of cannon.

On, on, down the steep valley trumpets the torrent into the river at Jamestown. Joined to the waters from the cloud kissed summits of its source, the exultant Conemaugh, with a deafening din, dashes its way through the barricade of stone and starts like a demon on its path of destruction.

Into its maw it sucks a town. A town with all its hundreds of men and women and children, with its marts of business, its homes, its factories and houses of worship. Then, insatiate still, with a blast like the chaos of worlds dissolved, it rushes out to new desolation, until Nature herself, awe stricken at the sight of such ineffable woe, blinds her eyes to the uncanny scene of death, and drops the pall of night upon the earth.

## **Destruction Descended as a Bolt of Jove**

A fair town in a western valley of Pennsylvania, happy in the arts of peace and prospering by its busy manufactures, suddenly swept out of existence by a gigantic flood and thousands of lives extinguished as by one fell stroke—such has been the fate of Johnstown.

Never before in this country has there happened a disaster of such appalling proportions. It is necessary to refer to those which have occurred in the valleys of the great European rivers, where there is a densely crowded population, to find a parallel.

## **The Horrors Unestimated**

At first the horror was not all known. It could only be imperfectly surmised. Until a late hour on the following night there was no communication with the hapless city. All that was positively known of its fate was seen from afar. It was said that out of all the habitations, which had sheltered about twelve thousand people before this awful doom had befallen, only two were visible above the water. All the rest, if this be true, had been swallowed up or else shattered into pieces and hurled downward into the flood-vexed valley below.

What has become of those twelve thousand inhabitants? Who can tell until after the waters have wholly subsided?

Of course it is possible that many of them escaped. Much hope is to be built upon the natural exaggeration of first reports from the sorely distressed surrounding region and the lack of actual knowledge, in the absence of direct communication. But what suspense must there be between now and the moment when direct communication shall be opened!

## **Heedless of Fate**

The valley of the Conemaugh in which Johnstown stood lies between the steep walls of lofty hills. The gathering of the rain into torrents in that region is quick and precipitate. The river on one side roared out its warning, but the people would not take heed of the danger impending over them on the other side—the great South Fork dam, two and a half miles up the valley and looming one

hundred feet in height from base to top. Behind it were piled the waters, a great, ponderous mass, like the treasured wrath of fate. Their surface was about three hundred feet above the deserted town.

If Noah's neighbors thought it would be only a little shower the people of Johnstown were yet more foolish. The railroad officials had repeatedly told them that the dam threatened destruction. They still perversely lulled themselves into a false security. The blow came, when it did, like a flash. It was as if the heavens had fallen in liquid fury upon the earth. It was as if ocean itself had been precipitated into an abyss. The slow but inexorable march of the mightiest glacier of the Alps, though comparable, was not equal to this in force. The whole of a Pyramid, shot from a colossal catapult, would not have been the petty charge of a pea shooter to it. Imagine Niagara, or a greater even than Niagara, falling upon an ordinary collection of brick and wooden houses.

### **An Inconceivable Force**

The South Fork Reservoir was the largest in the United States, and it contained millions of tons of water. When its fetters were loosened, crumbling before it like sand, a building or even a rock that stood in its path presented as much resistance as a card house. The dread execution was little more than the work of an instant.

The flood passed over the town as it would over a pile of shingles, covering over or carrying with it everything that stood in its way. It bounded down the valley, wreaking destruction and death on each hand and in its fore. Torrents that poured down out of the wilds of the mountains swelled its volume.

All along from the point of its release it bore débris and corpses as its hideous trophies. In a very brief time it displayed some of both, as if in hellish glee, to the horrified eyes of Pittsburg, seventy-eight miles west of the town of Johnstown that had been, having danced them along on its exultant billows or rolled them over and over in the depths of its dark current all the way through the Conemaugh, the Kiskiminitas and the Allegheny river.

It was like a fearful monster, gnashing its dripping jaws in the scared face of the multitude, in the flesh of its victims.

One eye-witness of the effects of the deluge declares that he saw five hundred dead bodies. Hundreds were counted by others. It will take many a day to make up the death roll. It will take many a day to make up the reckoning of the material loss.

If any pen could describe the scenes of terror, anguish and destruction which have taken place in Conemaugh Valley it could write an epic greater than the "Iliad." The accounts that come tell of hairbreadth escapes, heartrending tragedies and deeds of heroism almost without number.

### **A Climax of Horror**

As if to add a lurid touch of horror to the picture that might surpass all the rest a conflagration came to mock those who were in fear of drowning with a death yet more terrible. Where the ruins of Johnstown, composed mainly of timber, had been piled up forty feet high against a railroad bridge below the town a fire was started and raged with eager fury. It is said that scores of persons were burned alive, their piercing cries appealing for aid to hundreds of spectators who stood on the banks of the river, but could do nothing.

Western Pennsylvania is in mourning. Business in the cities is virtually suspended and all minds are bent upon this great horror, all hearts convulsed with the common sorrow.

## **Heartrending Scenes and Heroic Struggles for Life**

Another eye-witness describes the calamity as follows: A flood of death swept down the Alleghany Mountains yesterday afternoon and last night. Almost the entire city of Johnstown is swimming about in the rushing, angry tide. Dead bodies are floating about in every direction, and almost every piece of movable timber is carrying from the doomed city a corpse of humanity, drifting with the raging waters. The disaster overtook Johnstown about six o'clock last evening.

As the train bearing the writer sped eastward, the reports at each stop grew more appalling. At Derry a group of railway officials were gathered who had come from Bolivar, the end of the passable portion of the road westward. They had seen but a small portion of the awful flood, but enough to allow them to imagine the rest. Down through the Packsaddle came the rushing waters. The wooded heights of the Alleghanies looked down in wonder at the scene of the most terrible destruction that ever struck the romantic valley of the Conemaugh.

The water was rising when the men left at six o'clock at the rate of five feet an hour. Clinging to improvised rafts, constructed in the death battle from floating boards and timbers, were agonized men, women and children, their heartrending shrieks for help striking horror to the breasts of the onlookers. Their cries were of no avail. Carried along at railway speed on the breast of this rushing torrent, no human ingenuity could devise a means of rescue.

With pallid face and hair clinging wet and damp to her cheek, a mother was seen grasping a floating timber, while on her other arm she held her babe, already drowned. With a death-grip on a plank a strong man just giving up hope cast an imploring look to those on the bank, and an instant later he had sunk into the waves. Prayers to God and cries to those in safety rang above the roaring waves.

The special train pulled into Bolivar at half-past eleven last night, and the trainmen were there notified that further progress was impossible. The greatest excitement prevailed at this place, and parties of citizens are out all the time endeavoring to save the poor unfortunates that are being hurled to eternity on the rushing torrent.

## **Attempts at Rescue**

The tidal wave struck Bolivar just after dark, and in five minutes the Conemaugh rose from six to forty feet and the waters spread out over the whole country. Soon houses began floating down, and clinging to the débris were men, women and children shrieking for aid. A large number of citizens at once gathered on the county bridge, and they were reinforced by a number from Garfield, a town on the opposite side of the river.

They brought a number of ropes and these were thrown over into the boiling waters as persons drifted by in efforts to save some poor beings. For half an hour all efforts were fruitless, until at last, when the rescuers were about giving up all hope, a little boy, astride a shingle roof, managed to catch hold of one of the ropes. He caught it under his left arm and was thrown violently against an abutment, but managed to keep hold, and was successfully pulled on to the bridge amid the cheers of the onlookers. His name was Hessler and his rescuer was a trainman named Carney. The lad was at once taken to the town of Garfield and was cared for. The boy was aged about sixteen. His story of the frightful calamity is as follows:

## **The Alarm**

"With my father I was spending the day at my grandfather's house in Cambria City. In the house at the time were Theodore, Edward and John Kintz, and John Kintz, Jr.; Miss Mary Kintz, Mrs. Mary

Kintz, wife of John Kintz, Jr.; Miss Treacy Kintz, Mrs. Rica Smith, John Hirsch and four children, my father and myself. Shortly after five o'clock there was a noise of roaring waters and screams of people. We looked out the door and saw persons running. My father told us to never mind, as the waters would not rise further.

"But soon we saw houses being swept away, and then we ran up to the floor above. The house was three stories, and we were at last forced to the top one. In my fright I jumped on the bed. It was an old fashioned one, with heavy posts. The water kept rising and my bed was soon afloat. Gradually it was lifted up. The air in the room grew close and the house was moving. Still the bed kept rising and pressed the ceiling. At last the posts pushed against the plaster. It yielded and a section of the roof gave way. Then suddenly I found myself on the roof, and was being carried down stream.

### **Saved**

"After a little this roof began to part, and I was afraid I was going to be drowned, but just then another house with a shingle roof floated by, and I managed to crawl on it, and floated down until nearly dead with cold, when I was saved. After I was freed from the house I did not see my father. My grandfather was on a tree, but he must have been drowned, as the waters were rising fast. John Kintz, Jr., was also on a tree. Miss Mary Kintz and Mrs. Mary Kintz I saw drown. Miss Smith was also drowned. John Hirsch was in a tree, but the four children were drowned. The scenes were terrible. Live bodies and corpses were floating down with me and away from me. I would see persons, hear them shriek, and then they would disappear. All along the line were people who were trying to save us, but they could do nothing, and only a few were caught."

This boy's story is but one incident, and shows what happened to one family. No one knows what has happened to the hundreds who were in the path of the rushing water. It is impossible to get anything in the way of news save meagre details.

An eye-witness at Bolivar Block Station tells a story of unparalleled heroism that occurred at the lower bridge which crosses the Conemaugh at this point. A. Young, with two women was seen coming down the river on a part of the floor. At the upper bridge a rope was thrown down to them. This they all failed to catch. Between the two bridges he was noticed to point towards the elder woman, who, it is supposed, was his mother. He was then seen to instruct the women how to catch the rope that was lowered from the other bridge. Down came the raft with a rush. The brave man stood with his arms around the two women.

### **Unavailing Courage**

As they swept under the bridge he seized the rope. He was jerked violently away from the two women, who failed to get a hold on the rope. Seeing that they would not be rescued, he dropped the rope and fell back on the raft, which floated on down the river. The current washed their frail craft in toward the bank. The young man was enabled to seize hold of a branch of a tree. He aided the two women to get up into the tree.

He held on with his hands and rested his feet on a pile of driftwood. A piece of floating débris struck the drift, sweeping it away. The man hung with his body immersed in the water. A pile of drift soon collected and he was enabled to get another insecure footing. Up the river there was a sudden crash, and a section of the bridge was swept away and floated down the stream, striking the tree and washing it away. All three were thrown into the water and were drowned before the eyes of the horrified spectators just opposite the town of Bolivar.

Early in the evening a woman with her two children was seen to pass under the bridge at Bolivar clinging to the roof of a coal house. A rope was lowered to her, but she shook her head and refused to desert the children. It was rumored that all three were saved at Cokeville, a few miles below Bolivar.

A later report from Lockport says that the residents succeeded in rescuing five people from the flood, two women and three men. One man succeeded in getting out of the water unaided. They were taken care of by the people of the town.

### **A Child's Faith**

A little girl passed under the bridge just before dark. She was kneeling on a part of a floor and had her hands clasped as if in prayer. Every effort was made to save her, but they all proved futile. A railroader who was standing by remarked that the piteous appearance of the little waif brought tears to his eyes. All night long the crowd stood about the ruins of the bridge which had been swept away at Bolivar. The water rushed past with a roar, carrying with it parts of houses, furniture and trees. The flood had evidently spent its force up the valley. No more living persons were being carried past. Watchers with lanterns remained along the banks until daybreak, when the first view of the awful devastation of the flood was witnessed.

Along the bank lay remnants of what had once been dwelling houses and stores; here and there was an uprooted tree. Piles of drift lay about, in some of which bodies of the victims of the flood will be found. Rescuing parties are being formed in all towns along the railroad. Houses have been thrown open to refugees, and every possible means is being used to protect the homeless.

### **Wrecking Trains to the Rescue**

The wrecking trains of the Pennsylvania Railroad are slowly making their way east to the unfortunate city. No effort was being made to repair the wrecks, and the crews of the trains were organized into rescuing parties, and an effort will be made to send out a mail train this morning. The chances are that they will go no further east than Florence. There is absolutely no news from Johnstown. The little city is entirely cut off from communication with the outside world. The damage done is inestimable. No one can tell its extent.

The little telegraph stations along the road are filled with anxious groups of men who have friends and relatives in Johnstown. The smallest item of news is eagerly seized upon and circulated. If favorable they have a moment of relief, if not their faces become more gloomy. Harry Fisher, a young telegraph operator who was at Bolivar when the first rush began, says:—"We knew nothing of the disaster until we noticed the river slowly rising and then more rapidly. News then reached us from Johnstown that the dam at South Fork had burst. Within three hours the water in the river rose at least twenty feet. Shortly before six o'clock ruins of houses, beds, household utensils, barrels and kegs came floating past the bridges. At eight o'clock the water was within six feet of the road-bed of the bridge. The wreckage floated past without stopping for at least two hours. Then it began to lessen, and night coming suddenly upon us we could see no more. The wreckage was floating by for a long time before the first living persons passed. Fifteen people that I saw were carried down by the river. One of these, a boy, was saved, and three of them were drowned just directly below the town. It was an awful sight and one that I will not soon forget."

Hundreds of animals lost their lives. The bodies of horses, dogs and chickens floated past. The little boy who was rescued at Bolivar had two dogs as companions during his fearful ride. The dogs were drowned just before reaching the bridge. One old mule swam past. Its shoulders were torn, but it was alive when swept past the town.

## **Saved from a Watery Grave to Perish by Flames**

After a long, weary ride of eight or nine miles over the worst of country roads New Florence, fourteen miles from Johnstown, was reached. The road bed between this place and Bolivar was washed out in many places. The trackmen and the wreck crews were all night in the most dangerous portions of the road.

The last man from Johnstown brought the information that scarcely a house remained in the city. The upper portion above the railroad bridge had been completely submerged. The water dammed up against the viaduct, the wreckage and débris finishing the work that the torrent had failed to accomplish. The bridge at Johnstown proved too stanch for the fury of the water. It is a heavy piece of masonry, and was used as a viaduct by the old Pennsylvania Canal. Some of the top stones were displaced.

The story reached here a short time ago that a family consisting of father and mother and nine children were washed away in a creek at Lockport. The mother managed to reach the shore, but the husband and children were carried out into the Conemaugh to drown. The woman is crazed over the terrible event.

## **A Night of Horror**

After night settled down upon the mountains the horror of the scenes was enhanced. Above the roar of the water could be heard the piteous appeals from the unfortunate as they were carried by. To add also to the terror of the night, a brilliant illumination lit up the sky. This illumination could be plainly seen from this place.

A message received from Sang Hollow stated that this light came from a hundred burning wrecks of houses that were piled upon the Johnstown Bridge. A supervisor from up the road brought the information that the wreckage at Johnstown was piled up forty feet above the bridge.

The startling news came in that more than a thousand lives had been lost. This cannot be substantiated. By actual count one hundred and ten people had been seen floating past Sang Hollow before dark. Forty-seven were counted passing New Florence and the number had diminished to eight at Bolivar. The darkness coming on stopped any further count, and it was only by the agonizing cries that rang out above the waters that it was known that a human being was being carried to death.

## **An Irresistible Torrent**

The scenes along the river were wild in the extreme. Although the water was subsiding, still as it dashed against the rocks that filled the narrow channel of the Conemaugh its spray was carried high up on the shore. The towns all along the line of the railroad from Johnstown west had received visitations. Many of the houses in New Florence were partially under water. At Bolivar the whole lower part of the town was submerged.

The ride over the mountain road gave one a good idea of the cause of this disaster. Every creek was a rushing river and every rivulet a raging torrent. The ground was water soaked, and when the immense mountain district that drains into the Conemaugh above South Fork is taken into consideration the terrible volume of water that must have accumulated can be realized. Gathering, as it did, within a few minutes, it came against the breast of the South Fork dam with irresistible force. The frightened inhabitants along the Conemaugh describe the flood as something awful. The first rise came almost without warning, and the torrent came roaring down the mountain passes in one huge wave, several feet in height. After the first swell the water continued to rise at a fearful rate.

## **Daylight Brings No Relief**

The gray morning light does not seem to show either hope or mitigation of the awful fears of the night. It has been a hard night to everybody. The overworked newspaper men, who have been without rest and food since yesterday afternoon, and the operators who have handled the messages are already preparing for the work of the day. There has been a long wrangle over the possession of a special train for the press between rival newspaper men, and it has delayed the work of others who are anxious to get further east.

Even here, so far from the washed-out towns, seven bodies have been found. Two were in a tree, a man and a woman, where the flood had carried them. The country people are coming into the town in large numbers telling stories of disaster along the river banks in sequestered places.

## **Floating Houses**

John McCarthey, a carpenter, who lives in Johnstown, reached here about four o'clock. He left Johnstown at half-past four yesterday afternoon and says the scene then was indescribable. The people had been warned early in the morning to move to the highlands, but they did not heed the warning, although it was repeated a number of times up to one o'clock, when the water poured into Cinder street several feet deep. Then the houses began rocking to and fro, and finally the force of the current carried buildings across streets and vacant lots and dashed them against each other, breaking them into fragments. These buildings were full of the people who had laughed at the cry of danger. McCarthey says that in some cases he counted as many as fifteen persons clinging to buildings. McCarthey's wife was with him. She had three sisters, who lived near her. They saw the house in which these girls lived carried away, and then they could endure the situation no longer and hurried away. The husband feared his wife would go crazy. They went inland along country roads until they reached here.

It is said to be next to impossible to get to Johnstown proper to-day in any manner except by rowboat. The roads are cut up so that even the countrymen refuse to travel over them in their roughest vehicles. The only hope is to get within about three miles by a special train or by hand car.

## **The Dead Cast Up**

Nine dead bodies have been picked up within the limits of this borough since daylight. None of them has yet been recognized. Five are women. One woman, probably twenty-five years old, had clasped in her arms a babe about six months old. The body of a young man was discovered in the branches of a huge tree which had been carried down the stream. All the orchard crops and shrubbery along the banks of the river have been destroyed.

The body of another woman has just been discovered in the river here. Her foot was seen above the surface of the water and a rope was fastened about it.

## **A Roof as a Raft**

John Weber and his wife, an old couple, Michael Metzgar and John Forney were rescued near here early this morning. They had been carried from their home in Cambria City on the roof of the house. There were seven others on the roof when it was carried off, all of whom were drowned. They were unknown to Weber, having drifted on to the roof from floating débris. Weber and wife were thoroughly drenched and were almost helpless from exposure. They were unable to walk when taken off the roof at this place. They are now at the hotel here.

Hundreds of people from Johnstown and up river towns are hurrying here in search of friends and relatives who were swept away in last night's flood. The most intense excitement prevails. The street corners are crowded with pale and anxious people who tell of the calamity with bated breath. Squire Bennett has charge of the dead bodies, and he is having them properly cared for. They are being prepared for burial, but will be held here for identification.

Four boys have just come from the river bank above here. They say that on the opposite side a number of bodies can be seen lying in the mud. They found the body of a woman on this side badly bruised.

R.B. Rodgers, Justice of the Peace at Nineveh, has wired the Coroner at Greensburg that one hundred dead bodies have been found at that place, and he asks what is to be done with them. From this one can estimate that the loss of life will reach over one thousand.

A report has just been received that twenty persons are on an island near Nineveh and that men and women are on a partly submerged tree.

A report has just reached here that at least one hundred people were consumed in the flames at Johnstown last night, but it cannot be verified here. The air is filled with thrilling and most incredible stories, but none of them have as yet been confirmed. It is certain, however, that even the worst cannot be imagined.

### **Warnings Remembered Too Late**

It is very evident that more lives have been lost because of foolish incredulity than from ignorance of the danger. For more than a year there have been fears of an accident of just such a character. The foundations of the dam were considered to be shaky early last spring and many increasing leakages were reported from time to time.

According to people who live in Johnstown and other towns on the line of the river, ample time was given to the Johnstown folks by the railroad officials and by other gentlemen of standing and reputation. In dozens, yes, hundreds of cases, this warning was utterly disregarded, and those who heeded it early in the day were looked upon as cowards, and many jeers were uttered by lips that now are cold among the rank grass beside the river.

There has grown up a bitter feeling among the surviving sufferers against those who owned the lake and dam, and damage suits will be plentiful by and by.

The dam in Stony Creek, above Johnstown, broke about noon yesterday and thousands of feet of lumber passed down the stream. It is impossible to tell what the loss of life will be, but at nine o'clock the Coroner of Westmoreland county sent a message out saying that 100 bodies had been recovered at Nineveh, halfway from here to Johnstown. Sober minded people do not hesitate to say that 1,200 is moderate.

### **Fire's Awful Work**

"How can anybody tell how many are dead?" said a railroad engineer this morning. "I have been at Long Hollow with my train since eleven o'clock yesterday, and I have seen fully five hundred persons lost in the flood."

J.W. Esch, a brave railroad employee, saved sixteen lives at Nineveh.

The most awful culmination of the awful night was the roasting of a hundred or more persons in mid-flood. The ruins of houses, old buildings and other structures swept against the new railroad bridge at Johnstown, and from an overturned stove or some such cause the upper part of the wreckage caught fire.

There were crowds of men, women and children on the wreck, and their screams were soon heard. They were literally roasted on the flood. Soon after the fire burned itself out other persons

were thrown against the mass. There were some fifty people in sight when the ruins suddenly broke up and were swept under the bridge into the darkness.

The latest news from Johnstown is that but two houses could be seen in the town. It is also said that only three houses remain in Cambria City.

The first authentic news was from W.N. Hays, of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, who reached New Florence at nine o'clock. He says the valley towns are annihilated.

### **Destruction at Blairsville**

The flood in the Conemaugh River at this point is the heaviest ever known here. At this hour the railroad bridge between here and Blairsville intersection has been swept away, and also the new bridge at Coketon, half a mile below. It is now feared that the iron bridge at the lower end of this town will go. A living woman and dead man, supposed to be her husband, were seen going under the railroad bridge. They were seen to come from under the bridge safely, but shortly disappeared and were seen no more.

A great many families lose their household goods. The river is running full of timber, houses, goods, etc. The loss will be heavy. The excitement here is very great. The river is still rising. There are some families below the town in the second story of their houses who cannot get out. It is feared that if the water goes much higher the loss of life will be very great. The railroad company had fourteen cars of coal on their bridge when it went down, and all were swept down the river.

The town bridge has just succumbed to the seething floods, whose roar can be heard a long distance. The water is still rising and it is thought that the West Pennsylvania Railroad will be without a single bridge. It is reported that a man went down with the Blairsville bridge while he was adjusting a headlight.

### **Havoc about Altoona**

The highest and most destructive flood that has visited this place for fifty years occurred yesterday. It has been raining continuously for the past twenty-four hours. The Juniata river is ten feet above low water mark and is still rising. The lower streets of Gaysport bordering on the river bank are submerged, and the water is two feet deep on the first floors of the houses there. The water rose so rapidly that the people had to be removed from the houses in boats and wagons. Three railroad trestles and a number of bridges over the streams have been carried away, and railroad travel between this place and the surrounding towns has been interrupted.

Property of all kinds was carried off. The truck gardens and grain fields along the river were utterly destroyed, and the fences carried away. The iron furnaces and rolling mills at this place and Duncanville were compelled to shut down on account of the high water. Keene & Babcock lost 300,000 brick in the kiln ready to burn, G.W. Rhodes 350,000, and Joseph Hart 15,000. It is estimated that the flood has done over \$50,000 damage in this vicinity. The fences of the Blair County Agricultural Society were destroyed.

### **Alarm at York**

Last night was one of great alarm here. It rained steadily all day, some of the showers being severe. The great flood of 1884 is forcibly recalled. Many families are moving out. At half-past one A.M. a general alarm was sounded on the bells of the city.

The flood in the Susquehanna River here reached its greatest height about six o'clock this morning, when all bridges save one were under water. Business places and residences in the low

section were flooded to a great extent, and the damage in this city alone amounts to \$25,000 so far. The injury to the Spring Grove paper mills near this city is heavy. By noon the water had fallen sufficiently to restore travel over nearly all the bridges.

A number of bridges in the county have been swept away, and the loss in the county exclusive of the city is estimated at \$100,000.

In attempting to catch some driftwood James McIlvaine lost his balance and fell into the raging current and was drowned.

Seven bodies have been taken from the water and débris on the river banks at New Florence. One body has also been taken from the river at this point, that of a young girl. None of them have been identified.

The whole face of the country between here and New Florence is under water, and houses, bridges and buildings fill the fields and even perch upon the hillside all the way to Johnstown. Great flocks of crows are already filling the valley, while buzzards are almost as frequently seen. The banks of the river are lined with people who are looking as well for booty as for bodies. Much valuable property was carried away in the houses as well as from houses not washed away.

The river has fallen again into its channel, and nothing in the stream itself except its red, angry color shows the wild horror of last night. It has fallen fully twenty feet since midnight, and by to-night it will have attained its normal depth.

### **Painful Scenes**

At all points from Greensburg to Long Hollow, the limit of the present trouble, scores of people throng the stations begging and beseeching railroad men on the repair trains to take them aboard, as they are almost frenzied with anxiety and apprehension in regard to their friends who live at or near Johnstown. Strong men are as tearful as the women who join in the request.

Pitiable sights and scenes multiply more and more rapidly. The Conemaugh is one great valley of mourning. Those who have not lost friends have lost their house or their substance, and apparently the grief for the one is as poignant as for the other.

### **They Were Warned**

The great volume of water struck Johnstown about half-past five in the afternoon. It did not find the people unprepared, as they had had notice from South Fork that the dam was threatening to go. Many, however, disregarded the notice and remained in their houses in the lower part of the city and were caught before they could get out.

Superintendent Pitcairn, of the Pennsylvania Railroad, who has spent the entire day in assisting not only those who were afflicted by the flood, but also in an attempt to reopen his road, went home this morning. Before he left he issued an order to all Pennsylvania Railroad employees to keep a sharp lookout for bodies, both in the river and in the bushes, and to return them to their friends.

Assistant Superintendent Trump is still on the ground near Lone Hollow directing the movements of gravel and construction trains, which are arriving as fast as they can be fitted up and started out. The roadbeds of both the Pennsylvania and the West Pennsylvania railroads are badly damaged, and it will cost the latter, especially from the Bolivar Junction to Saltsburg, many thousands of dollars to repair injuries to embankments alone.

In Pittsburg there was but one topic of conversation, and that was the Johnstown deluge. Crowds of eager watchers all day long besieged the newspaper bulletin boards and rendered streets impassable in their vicinity. Many of them had friends or relatives in the stricken district, and "Names!" "Names!" was their cry. But there were no names. The storm which had perhaps swept away their loved ones had also carried away all means of communication and their vigil was unrewarded. It is not yet known

whether the telegraph operator at Johnstown is dead or alive. The nearest point to that city which can be reached to-night is New Florence, and the one wire there is used almost constantly by orders for coffins, embalming fluid and preparing special cars to carry the recovered dead to their homes.

Along the banks of the now turbulent Allegheny were placed watchers for dead bodies, and all wreckage was carefully scanned for the dead. The result of this vigilance was the recovery of one body, that of a woman floating down on a pile of débris. Seven other bodies were seen, but could not be reached owing to the swift moving wreckage by which they were surrounded.

### **A Heartrending Sight**

A railroad conductor who arrived in the city this morning said:—"There is no telling how many lives are lost. We got as far as Bolivar, and I tell you it is a terrible sight. The body of a boy was picked up by some of us there, and there were eleven bodies recovered altogether. I do not think that anyone got into Johnstown, and it is my opinion that they will not get in very soon. No one who is not on the grounds has any idea of the damage done. It will be at least a week before the extent of this flood is known, and then I think many bodies will never be recovered."

Assistant Superintendent Wilson, of the West Pennsylvania Railroad, received the following despatch from Nineveh to-day:—

"There appears to be a large number of people lodged in the trees and rubbish along the line. Many are alive. Rescuing parties should be advised at every station."

Another telegram from Nineveh said that up to noon 175 bodies had been taken from the river at that point.

The stage of water in the Allegheny this afternoon became so alarming that residents living in the low-lying districts began to remove their household effects to a higher grade. The tracks of the Pittsburgh and Western Railroad are under water in several places, and great inconvenience is felt in moving trains.

### **Criminal Negligence**

It was stated at the office of the Pennsylvania Railroad early this morning that the deaths would run up into the thousands rather than hundreds, as was at first supposed. Despatches received state that the stream of human beings that was swept before the floods was pitiful to behold. Men, women and children were carried along frantically shrieking for help. Rescue was impossible.

Husbands were swept past their wives, and children were borne along at a terrible speed to certain death before the eyes of their terrorized and frantic parents. It was said at the depot that it was impossible to estimate the number whose lives were lost in the flood. It will simply be a matter of conjecture for several days as to who was lost and who escaped.

The people of Johnstown were warned of the possibility of the bursting of the dam during the morning, but very few if any of the inhabitants took the warning seriously. Shortly after noon it gave way about five miles above Johnstown, and sweeping everything before it burst upon the town with terrible force.

Everything was carried before it, and not an instant's time was given to seek safety. Houses were demolished, swept from their foundations and carried in the flood to a culvert near the town. Here a mass of all manner of débris soon lodged, and by evening it had dammed the water back into the city over the tops of many of the still remaining chimneys.

## **The Dam Always a Menace**

Assistant Superintendent Trump, of the Pennsylvania, is at Conemaugh, but the officials at the depot had not been able to receive a line from him until as late as half-past two o'clock this morning. It was said also that it will be impossible to get a train through either one way or the other for at least two or three days. This applies also to the mails, as there is absolutely no way of getting mails through.

"We were afraid of that lake," said a gentleman who had lived in Johnstown for years, "we were afraid of that lake seven years ago. No one could see the immense height to which that artificial dam had been built without fearing the tremendous power of the water behind it. I doubt if there was a man or woman in Johnstown who at some time or other had not feared and spoken of the terrible disaster that has now come.

"People wondered and asked why the dam was not strengthened, as it certainly had become weak, but nothing was done, and by and by they talked less and less about it as nothing happened, though now and then some would shake their heads as though conscious that the fearful day would come some time when their worst fears would be transcended by the horror of the actual occurrence.

## **Converted Into a Lake**

"Johnstown is in a hollow between two rivers, and that lake must have swept over the city at a depth of forty feet. It cannot be, it is impossible that such an awful thing could happen to a city of ten thousand inhabitants, and if it has, thousands have lost their lives, and men are to blame for it, for warnings have been uttered a thousand times and have received no attention."

The body of a Welsh woman, sixty years of age, was taken from the river near the suspension bridge, at ten o'clock this morning. Four other bodies were seen, but owing to the mass of wreckage which is coming down they could not be recovered, and passed down the Ohio River.

A citizens' meeting has been called to devise means to aid the sufferers. The Pennsylvania Railroad officials have already placed cars on Liberty street for the purpose of receiving provisions and clothing, and up to this hour many prominent merchants have made heavy donations.

## **Anxiety of the People**

The difficulty of obtaining definite information added tremendously to the excitement and apprehension of the people in Pittsburgh who had relatives and friends at the scene of the disaster.

Members of the South Fork Club, and among them some of the most eminent men in the Pittsburgh financial and mercantile world, were in or near Johnstown, and several of them were accompanied by their wives and families. There happened to be also quite a number of residents of Johnstown in Pittsburgh, and when the news of the horror was confirmed and the railroads bulletined the fact that no trains would go east last night the scene at Union Depot was profoundly pathetic and exciting. But two trains were sent out by the Pennsylvania road from the Union station at Pittsburgh.

A despatch states that the Cambria Iron Company's plant on the north side of the Conemaugh River at Johnstown is a complete wreck. Until this despatch was received it was not thought that this portion of the plant had been seriously injured. It was known that the portion of the plant located on the south bank of the river was washed away, and this was thought to be the extent of the damage to the property of that immense corporation. The plant is said to be valued at \$5,000,000.

## CHAPTER II

### Death and Desolation

The terrible situation on the second day after the great disaster only intensifies the horror. As information becomes more full and accurate, it does not abate one tittle of the awful havoc. Rather it adds to it, and gives a thousand-fold terror to the dreadful calamity.

Not only do the scenes which are described appear all the more dreadful, as is natural, the nearer they are brought to the imagination, but it seems only too probable that the final reckoning in loss of life and material wealth will prove far more stupendous than has even yet been supposed.

The very greatness of the destruction prevents the possibility of an accurate estimate. Beneath the ghastly ruins of the once happy towns and villages along the pathway of the deluge, who shall say how many victims lie buried? Amid the rocks and woods that border the broad track of the waters, who shall say how many lie bruised and mangled and unrecognizable, wedged between boulders or massed amid débris and rubbish, or hidden beneath the heaped-up deposits of earth, and whether all of them shall ever be found and given the last touching rites?

Already the air of the little valley, which four days ago was smiling with all the health of nature and the contentment of industrious man, is waxing pestiferous with the awful odor of decaying human bodies. Buzzards, invited by their disgusting instinct, gather for a promised feast, and sit and glower on neighboring perches or else circle round and round in the blue empyrean over the location of unfriended corpses, known only to their keen sense of smell or vision.

But another kind of buzzard, more disgusting, more hideous, more vile, has hastened to this scene of woe and anguish and desolation to exult over it to his profit. Thugs and thieves in unclean hordes have mysteriously turned up at Johnstown and its vicinity, as hyenas in the desert seem to spring bodily out of the deadly sand whenever the corpse of a gallant warrior, abandoned by his kind, lies putrefying in the night.

There is a cry from the afflicted community for the policing of the devastated region, and there is no doubt it is greatly needed. Happily, Nemesis does not sleep this time in the face of such provocation as is given her by these atrociously inhuman human beings. It is a satisfaction to record that something more than a half dozen of them have been dealt with as promptly and as mercilessly as they deserve. For such as they there should be no code of pity.

There is an inexhaustible store of pathos and heroism in the tale of this disaster. Of course, in all of its awful details it never can be fitly written. One reason is that too many of the witnesses of its more fearful phases "sleep the sleep that knows not waking." But there is a greater reason, and that is that there is a point in the intenser actuality of things at which all human language fails to do justice to it. Yet—as simply told as possible—there are many incidents of this great tragedy which nothing has ever surpassed or ever can surpass in impressiveness. It is a consolation, too, that human nature at such times does betray here and there a gleam of that side of it which gives forth a reflection of the ideal manhood or womanhood. Bits of heroism and of tender devotedness scattered throughout this dark, dismal picture of destruction and despair light it up with wonderful beauty, and while they bring tears to the eyes of the sternest reader, will serve as a grateful relief from the pervading hue of horror and blackness.

There is the very gravest need of vigorous relief measures in favor of the survivors of the flood. A spontaneous movement in that direction has been begun, but as yet lacks the efficiency only to be derived from a general and organized co-operation.

## Complete Annihilation

When Superintendent Pitcairn telegraphed from Johnstown to Pittsburgh Friday night that the town was annihilated he came very close to the facts of the case, although he had not seen the ill-fated city. To say that Johnstown is a wreck is but stating the facts of the case. Nothing like it was ever seen in this country. Where long rows of dwelling houses and business blocks stood forty-eight hours ago, ruin and desolation now reign supreme.

The losses, however, are as nothing compared to the frightful sacrifices of precious human lives. During Sunday Johnstown has been drenched with the tears of stricken mortals, and the air is filled with sobs that come from breaking hearts. There are scenes enacted here every hour and every minute that affect all beholders profoundly. When brave men die in battle, for country or for principle, their loss can be reconciled to the stern destinies of life. When homes are torn asunder in an instant, and the loved ones hurled from the arms of loving and devoted mothers, there is an element of sadness connected with the tragedy that touches every heart.

*The loss of life is simply dreadful. The most conservative people declare that the number will reach 5000, while others confidently assert that 8000 or 10,000 have perished.*

## How Johnstown Looks after Flood and Fire Have Done Their Worst

An eye-witness writing from Pittsburgh says:—We have just returned from a trip through what is left of Johnstown. The view from beyond is almost impossible to describe. To look upon it is a sight that neither war nor catastrophe can equal. House is piled upon house, not as we have seen in occasional floods of the the Western rivers, but the remains of two and four storied buildings piled upon the top of one another.

The ruins of what is known as the Club House are in perhaps the best condition of any in that portion of the town, but it is certainly damaged beyond possibility of repair. *On the upper floor five bodies are lying unidentified.* One of them, a woman of genteel birth, judging by her dress, is locked in one of the small rooms to prevent a possibility of spoliation by wreckers, who are flocking to the spot from all directions and taking possession of everything they can get hold of.

Here and there bodies can be seen sticking in the ruins. Some of the most prominent citizens are to be seen working with might and main to get at the remains of relatives whom they have located.

*There is no doubt that, wild as the estimates of the loss of life and damage to property have been, it is even larger than there is any idea of.*

Close on to 2,000 residences lie in kindling wood at the lower end of the town.

## Freaks of the Flood

An idea of the eccentricity of the flood may be gathered from the fact that houses that were situated at Woodvale and points above Johnstown are piled at the lower end of the town, while some massive houses have been lifted and carried from the lower end as far as the cemetery at the extreme upper portion of the town. All through the ruins are scattered the most costly furniture and store goods of all kinds.

## Thieves are Busy

I stood on the keyboard and strings of a piano while I watched a number of thieves break into the remnants of houses and pilfer them, while others again had got at a supply of fine groceries and

had broken into a barrel of fine brandy, and were fairly steeping themselves in it. I met quite a number of Pittsburghers in the ruins looking for friends and relatives. If the skiffs which were expected from Pittsburgh were there they would be of vast assistance in reaching the ruins, which are separated by the stream of water descending from the hills. A great fear is felt that there will be some difficulty in restoring the stream to its proper channel. Its course now lies right along Main street, and it is about two hundred yards wide.

Something should be done to get the bodies of the dead decently taken care of. The ruins are reeking with the smell of decaying bodies. Right at the edge of the ruins the decaying body of a stout colored woman is lying like the remains of an animal, without any one to identify and take care of it.

### **Lynching the Ghouls**

A number of Hungarians collected about a number of bodies at Cambria which had been washed up and began rifling the trunks. After they had secured all the contents they turned their attention to the dead.

The ghastly spectacle presented by the distorted features of those who had lost their lives during the flood had no influence upon the ghouls, who acted more like wild beasts than human beings. They took every article from the clothing on the dead bodies, not leaving anything of value or anything that would serve to identify the remains.

After the miscreants had removed all their plunder to dry ground a dispute arose over a division of the spoils. A pitched battle followed and for a time the situation was alarming. Knives and clubs were used freely. As a result several of the combatants were seriously wounded and left on the ground, their fellow countrymen not making any attempt to remove them from the field of strife.

*Johnstown, Pa., June 2, 11 A.M.*

*They have just hung a man over near the railroad to the telegraph pole for cutting the finger off of a dead woman in order to get a ring.*

### **Vengeance, Swift and Sure**

The way of the transgressor in the desolated valley of the Conemaugh is hard indeed. Each hour reveals some new and horrible story of suffering and outrage, and every succeeding hour brings news of swift and merited punishment meted out to the fiends who have dared to desecrate the stiff and mangled corpses in the city of the dead, and torture the already half crazed victims of the cruellest of modern catastrophes.

As the roads to the lands round about are opened tales of almost indescribable horror come to light, and deeds of the vilest nature, perpetrated in the darkness of the night, are brought to light.

### **Followed by Avenging Farmers**

Just as the shadows began to fall upon the earth last evening a party of thirteen Hungarians were noticed stealthily picking their way along the banks of the Conemaugh toward Sang Hollow. Suspicious of their purpose, several farmers armed themselves and started in pursuit. Soon their most horrible fears were realized. The Hungarians were out for plunder.

Lying upon the shore they came upon the dead and mangled body of a woman upon whose person there were a number of trinkets and jewelry and two diamond rings. In their eagerness to secure the plunder, the Hungarians got into a squabble, during which one of the number severed the finger upon which were the rings, and started on a run with his fearful prize. The revolting nature of the deed so wrought upon the pursuing farmers, who by this time were close at hand, that they gave

immediate chase. Some of the Hungarians showed fight, but being outnumbered were compelled to flee for their lives. Nine of the brutes escaped, but four were literally driven into the surging river and to their death. The inhuman monster whose atrocious act has been described was among the number of the involuntary suicides. Another incident of even greater moment has just been brought to notice.

### **Anxious to be a Murderer**

At half-past eight this morning an old railroader who had walked from Sang Hollow stepped up to a number of men who were congregated on the platform stations at Curranville and said:—"Gentlemen, had I a shotgun with me half an hour ago I would now be a murderer, yet with no fear of ever having to suffer for my crime.

"Two miles below here I watched three men going along the banks *stealing the jewels from the bodies of the dead wives and daughters of men who have been robbed of all they held dear on earth.*"

He had no sooner finished the last sentence than five burly men, with looks of terrible determination written on their faces, were on their way to the scene of plunder, one with a coil of rope over his shoulder and another with a revolver in his hand. In twenty minutes, so it is stated, they had overtaken two of the wretches, who were then in the act of cutting pieces from the ears and fingers from the hands of the bodies of two dead women.

### **Brutes at Bay**

With revolver leveled at the scoundrels the leader of the posse shouted, "Throw up your hands or I'll blow your heads off!" With blanched faces and trembling forms they obeyed the order and begged for mercy. They were searched, and as their pockets were emptied of their ghastly finds the indignation of the crowd intensified, and when *a bloody finger of an infant, encircled with two tiny gold rings*, was found among the plunder in the leader's pocket, a cry went up "*Lynch them! Lynch them!*" *Without a moment's delay ropes were thrown around their necks and they were dangling to the limbs of a tree, in the branches of which an hour before were entangled the bodies of a dead father and son.*

After the expiration of a half hour the ropes were cut, and the bodies lowered and carried to a pile of rocks in the forest on the hill above. It is hinted that an Allegheny county official was one of the most prominent actors in this justifiable homicide.

Another case of attempted lynching was witnessed this evening near Kernville. The man was observed stealing valuable articles from the houses. He was seized by a mob, a rope was placed around his neck and he was jerked up into the air. The rope was tied to the tree and his would-be lynchers left him. Bystanders cut him down before he was dead. The other men did not interfere and he was allowed to go. The man was so badly scared that he could not give his name if he wanted to do so.

Two colored men were shot while robbing the dead bodies, by the Pittsburgh police, who are doing guard about the town.

### **Fiends in Human Form**

To one who saw bright, bustling Johnstown a week ago the sight of its present condition must cause a thrill of horror, no matter how callous he might be. I doubt if any incident of war or flood ever caused a more sickening sight. Wretchedness of the most pathetic kind met the gaze on every side.

*Unlawfulness runs riot.* If ever military aid was needed now is the time. *The town is perfectly overrun with thieves*, many of them from Pittsburgh. The Hungarians are the worst. They seem to operate in regular organized bands. In Cambria City this morning they entered a house, drove out the

occupants at the point of revolvers and took possession. They can be constantly seen carrying large quantities of plunder to the hills.

The number of drunken men is remarkable. Whiskey seems marvelously plenty. Men are actually carrying it around in pails. Barrels of the stuff are constantly located among the drifts, and men are scrambling over each other and fighting like wild beasts in their mad search for it.

At the cemetery, at the upper end of the town, I saw a sight that rivals the inferno. A number of ghouls had found a lot of fine groceries, among them a barrel of brandy, with which they were fairly stuffing themselves. One huge fellow was standing on the strings of an upright piano singing a profane song, every little while breaking into a wild dance. A half dozen others were engaged in a hand-to-hand fight over the possession of some treasure stolen from a ruined house, and the crowd around the barrel were yelling like wild men.

The cry for help increases every hour. Something must be done to get the bodies decently taken care of. The ruins are reeking with the smell of decaying bodies. At the very edge of the ruins the body of a large colored woman, in an advanced state of decomposition, is lying like the body of an animal.

### **Watched Their Friends Die**

The fire in the drift above the bridge is still burning fiercely and will continue to do so for several days. The skulls of six people can be seen sticking up out of the ruins just above the east end of the bridge. Nothing but the blackened skulls can be seen. They are all together.

The sad scenes will never all be written. One lady told me this morning of seeing her mother crushed to pieces just before her eyes and the mangled body carried off down the stream. William Yarner lost six children and saved a baby about eighteen months old. His wife died just three weeks ago. An aged German, his wife and five daughters floated down on their house to a point below Nineveh, where the house was wrecked. The five daughters were drowned, but the old man and his wife stuck in a tree and hung there for twenty-four hours before they could be taken off.

### **Died Kissing Her Babe**

One of the most pitiful sights of this terrible disaster came to my notice this afternoon, when the body of a young lady was taken out of the Conemaugh River. The woman was apparently quite young, though her features were terribly disfigured. Nearly all the clothing except the shoes was torn off the body. The corpse was that of a mother, for although cold in death the woman clasped a young male babe apparently not more than a year old tightly in her arms. The little one was huddled close up to its mother's face, who when she realized their terrible fate, had evidently raised the babe to her lips to imprint upon its little lips the last motherly kiss it was to receive in this world. The sight was a pathetic one and turned many a stout heart to tears.

Among the miraculous escapes to be recorded in connection with the great disaster is that of George J. Leas and his family. He resided on Iron street. When the rush of water came there were eight people on the roof. The little house swung around off its moorings and floated about for nearly half an hour before it came up against the bank of drift above the stone bridge. A three-year-old girl with sunny golden hair and dimpled cheeks prayed all the while that God would save them, and it seemed that God really answered the prayer of this innocent little girl and directed the house against the drift, enabling every one of the eight to get off. Mrs. Leas carried the little girl in her arms, and how she got off she doesn't know. Every house around them, she said, was crushed, and the people either killed or drowned.

## Thugs at Their Work

One of the most dreadful features of this catastrophe has been the miserable weakness displayed by the authorities of Johnstown and the surrounding boroughs. Johnstown needed them sadly for forty-eight hours. There is supposed to be a Burgess, but like most burgesses he is a shadowy and mythical personage. If there had been concerted and intelligent action the fire in the débris at the dam could have been extinguished within a short time after it started. Too many cooks spoiled this ghastly broth.

Even now if dynamite or some other explosive was intelligently applied the huge mass of wreckage which has up to the present time escaped the flame, and no doubt contains a number of bodies, could be saved from fire.

This, however, is a matter of small import compared with the immunity granted the outrageous and open graveyard robbery and disgusting thievery which have thriven bravely since Friday morning.

Foreigners and natives carrying huge sacks, and in some instances even being assisted by horses and carts, have been busily engaged hunting corpses and stealing such valuables as were to be found in the wreckage.

Dozens of barrels of strong liquor have been rescued by the Hungarian and Polish laborers from among the ruins of saloons and hotels and the contents of the same have been freely indulged in. This has led to an alarming debauchery, which is on the increase. All day the numbers of the drunken crowd have been augmented from time to time by fresh arrivals from the surrounding districts.

Those who have suffered from the tidal wave have become much embittered against the law breakers. There have been many small fights and several small riots in consequence. This has been regarded with apprehension by the State authorities, and Adjutant General Hastings has arrived at Johnstown to examine into the condition of affairs and to guard the desolated district with troops. The Eighteenth regiment, of Pittsburgh, has tendered its services to this work, but has received no reply to its tender.

General Hastings estimates that the loss of life is at least eight thousand.

An employee of J.L. Gill, of Latrobe, says he and thirty-five other men were in a three-story building in Johnstown last night. They had been getting out logs for the Johnstown Lumber Company. The man says that the building was swept away and all the men were drowned except Gill and his family.

## Handling the Dead

The recovery of bodies has taken up the time of thousands all day. The theory now is that most of those killed by the torrent were buried beneath the débris. To-day's work in the ruins in a large degree justifies this assumption. I saw six bodies taken out of one pile of rubbish not eight feet square.

The truth is that bodies are almost as plentiful as logs. The whirl of the waters puts the bodies under and the logs and boards on top. The rigidity of arms standing out at right angles to the bloated and bruised bodies show that death in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases took place amid the ruins—that is after the wreck of houses had closed over them.

Dr. D.G. Foster, who has been here all day, is of the opinion that most of the victims were killed by coming into violent contact with objects in the river and not by drowning. He found many fractured skulls and on most heads blows that would have rendered those receiving them instantly unconscious, and the water did the rest.

*Not fewer than three hundred bodies have been taken from the river and rubbish to-day.* It has been the labor of all classes of citizens, and marvellous work has been accomplished. The eastern end of Main street, through which the waters tore most madly and destructively, and in which they

left their legacy of wrecked houses, fallen trees and dead bodies in a greater degree than in any other portion of the city, has been cleared and the remains of over fifty have been taken out.

All over town the searchers have been equally successful. As soon as a body is found it is placed on a litter and sent to the Morgue, where it is washed and placed on a board for several hours to await identification.

The Morgue is the Fourth-ward school house, and it has been surrounded all day by a crowd of several thousand people. At first the crowd were disposed to stop those bearing the stretchers, uncover the remains and view them, but this was found to be prolific not only of great delay, also scenes of agony that not even the bearers could endure.

Now a litter is guarded by a file of soldiers with fixed bayonets, and the people are forced aside until the Morgue is reached. It is astonishing to find how small a number of injured are in the city. Few survived. It was death or nothing with the demon of the flood.

Now that an adequate idea of what has befallen them has been reached, and the fact that a living has still to be made, that plants must be taken care of, that contracts must be filled, the business people of the city are giving their attention to the future. Vice President and Director James McMillan, of the Cambria Iron Company, says their loss has been well nigh incalculable. They are not daunted, but will to-morrow begin the work of clearing up the ruins of their mills preparatory to rebuilding and repairing their works. They will also immediately rebuild the Gautier Iron Works. This is the disposition of all.

"Our pockets are light," they say, "but if nothing happens all of us will be in business again." The central portion of Johnstown is as completely obliterated as if it had never had foundation. The river has made its bed upon the sites of hundreds of dwellings, and a vast area of sand, mud and gravel marks the old channel.

It is doubtful whether it will be possible even to reclaim what was once the business portion of the city. The river will have to be returned to its old bed in order to do this.

Among the lost is H.G. Rose, the District Attorney of Cambria county, whose body was among the first discovered.

Governor Foraker, of Ohio, this afternoon sent five hundred tents to this city. They will be pitched on the hillside to-morrow. They are sadly needed, as the buildings that are left are either too damp or too unsafe for occupancy.

## **Burying the Dead**

The work of burying the dead began this morning and has been kept up till late this evening. The bruising of the bodies by logs and trees and other débris and other exposure in the water have tended to hasten decomposition, which has set in in scores of cases, making interment instantly necessary.

Bodies are being buried as rapidly as they are identified. The work of Pittsburgh undertakers in examining the dead has rendered it possible to keep all those embalmed two or three days longer, but this is desirable only in cases where identification is dubious and no claimants appear at all.

To-day the cars sent out from Pittsburgh with provisions for the living were hastily cleared in order to contain the bodies of the dead intended for interment in suburban cemeteries and in graveyards handy to the city.

Formality is dispensed with. In some instances only the undertaker and his assistants are present, and in others only one or two members of the family of the dead.

The dead are more plentiful than the mourners.

Death has certainly dealt briefly with the stricken city. "Let the dead bury the dead" has been more nearly exemplified in this instance than in any other in this country's history. The magnitude of the horror increases with the hours. It is believed that not less than two thousand of the drowned

found lodgment beneath the *omnium gatherum* in the triangle of ground that the Conemaugh cut out of the bank between the river and the Pennsylvania Railroad bridge.

### **The Greatest Funeral Pyre in History**

The victims were not upon it, but were parts of it. Whole houses were washed into the apex of the triangle. Hen coops, pigstys and stables were added to the mass. Then a stove ignited the mass and the work of cremation began. It was a literal breast of fire. The smoke arose in a huge funnel-shaped cloud, and at times it changed to the form of an hour glass. At night the flames united would light up this misty remnant of mortality. The effect upon the living, both ignorant and intelligent, was the same. That volume of smoke with its dual form, produced a feeling of awe in many that was superior in most cases to that felt in the awful moment of the storm's wrath on Friday.

Hundreds stood for hours regarding the smoke and wondering whether it foreboded another visitation more dire than its predecessor.

The people hereabouts this morning awoke to find that nothing was left but a mass of ashes, calcined human bones, stoves, old iron and other approximately indestructible matter, from which only a light blue vapor was arising. General Hastings took precautions to prevent the extension of the fire to another huge pile, a short distance away, and this will be rummaged to-day for bodies of flood victims.

The Pittsburgh undertakers have contributed more to facilitate the preparation of the dead for the graves than all others besides.

There was a disposition on the part of many foreigners and negroes to raid the houses, and do an all around thieving business, but the measures adopted by the police had a tendency to frighten them off in nearly every case.

One man was caught in the act of robbing the body of an old woman, but he protested that he had got nothing and was released. He immediately disappeared, and it was found afterward that he had taken \$100 from the pocket of the corpse.

A half-breed negro yesterday and this morning was doing a thriving business in collecting hams, shoulders, chickens and even furniture. He had thieves in his employ, and while to some of them he was paying regular salaries, others were doing the work for a drink of whiskey. The authorities stopped this thing very suddenly, but not until a number of the people threatened to lynch the half breed. In one or two instance very narrow escapes from the rope were made.

Thousands of coffins and rough boxes have already arrived, and still the supply is short. They are brought in marked to some undertaker, who has a list of his dead, and as fast as the coffins come he writes the name of its intended tenant and tells the friends (when there are any) where to find it.

### **How a Funeral Takes Place**

Two of them go after it, and, carrying it between them to the Morgue or to their homes, place the body in it and take it to the burial grounds.

One unfortunate feature of the destruction is the fact that some one has been drowned from nearly every house in the city, and teams are procurable only with the greatest difficulty.

Dead horses are seen everywhere. In one stable two horses, fully harnessed, bridled and ready to be taken out, stand dead in their stable, stiff and upright. In a sand pile near the Pennsylvania Railroad depot a horse's hind feet, rump and tail are all that can be seen of him. He was caught in the rapidly running waters and had been driven into the sand.

The following telegram from Johnstown has been received at Pittsburg:

"For God's sake tell the sight-seers to keep away from Johnstown for the present. What we want is people to work, not to look on. Citizen's Committee."

Three trains have already been sent out with crowded cargoes of sight-seers. At every station along the road excited crowds are waiting for an opportunity to get aboard.

That's what would have happened to the owners of South Fork if they had put in an appearance.

There is great indignation among the people of Johnstown at the wealthy Pittsburghers who own South Fork. They blame them severely for having maintained such a frightfully dangerous institution there. The feeling among the people was intense. If any of the owners of the dam had put in an appearance in Johnstown they would have been lynched.

The dam has been a constant menace to this valley ever since it has been in existence, and the feeling, which has been bitter enough on the occasion of every flood hitherto, after this horrible disaster is now at fever heat.

Without seeing the havoc created no idea can be given of the area of the desolation or the extent of the damage.

### **Only One Left to Mourn**

An utterly wretched woman stood by a muddy pool of water, trying to find some trace of a once happy home. She was half crazed with grief, and her eyes were red and swollen. As I stepped to her side she raised her pale and haggard face, crying:

"They are all gone. Oh God be merciful to them. My husband and my seven dear little children have been swept down with the flood and I am left alone. We were driven by the raging flood into the garret, but the waters followed us there. Inch by inch it kept rising until our heads were crushing against the roof. It was death to remain. So I raised a window and one by one placed my darlings on some drift wood, trusting to the Great Creator. As I liberated the last one, my sweet little boy, he looked at me and said:

'Mamma, you always told me that the Lord would care for me; will he look after me now?'

"I saw him drift away with his loving face turned toward me, and with a prayer on my lips for his deliverance he passed from sight forever. The next moment the roof crashed in and I floated outside to be rescued fifteen hours later from the roof of a house in Kernville. If I could only find one of my darlings, I could bow to the will of God, but they all are gone. I have lost everything on earth now but my life, and I will return to my old Virginia home and lay me down for my last great sleep."

A handsome woman, with hair as black as a raven's wing, walked through the depot, where a dozen or more bodies were awaiting burial. Passing from one to another, she finally lifted the paper covering from the face of a woman, young and with traces of beauty showing through the stains of muddy water. With a cry of anguish she reeled backward, to be caught by a rugged man who chanced to be passing. In a moment or so she had calmed herself sufficiently to take one more look at the features of her dead. She stood gazing at the unfortunate as if dumb. Finally turning away with another wild burst of grief she said:—

"And her beautiful hair all matted and her sweet face bruised and stained with mud and water."

The dead woman was the sister of the mourner. The body was placed in a coffin a few minutes later and sent away to its narrow house.

These incidents are but fair samples of the scenes familiar to every turn in this stricken city.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **The Horror Increases**

During the night thirty-three bodies were brought to one house. As yet the relief force is not perfectly organized and bodies are lying around on boards and doors. Within twenty feet of where this was written the dead body of a colored woman lies.

Provision has been made by the Relief Committee for the sufferers to send despatches to all parts of the country. The railroad company has a track through to the bridge. The first train arrived about half-past nine o'clock this morning. A man in a frail craft got caught in the rapids at the railroad bridge, and it looked as if he would increase the already terrible list of dead, but fortunately he caught on a rock, where he now is and is liable to remain all day.

The question on every person's lips is—Will the Cambria Iron Company rebuild? The wire mill is completely wrecked, but the walls of the rolling mill are still standing. If they do not resume it is a question whether the town will be rebuilt. The Hungarians were beginning to pillage the houses, and the arrival of police was most timely. Word had just been received that all the men employed by Peabody, the Pittsburgh contractor, have been saved.

The worst part of this disaster has not been told. Indeed, the most graphic description that can be written will not tell half the tale. No pen can describe nor tongue tell the vastness of this devastation.

I walked over the greater part of the wrecked town this morning, and one could not have pictured such a wreck, nor could one have imagined that an entire town of this size could be so completely swept away.

A.J. Haws, one of the prominent men of the town, was standing on the hillside this morning, taking a view of the wreck. He said:

"I never saw anything like this, nor do I believe any one else ever did. No idea can be had of the tremendous loss of property here. It amounts up into the millions. I am going to leave the place. I never will build here."

I heard the superintendents and managers of the Cambria Iron Works saying they doubted if the works will be rebuilt. This would mean the death blow to the place. Mr. Stackhouse, first vice-president of the iron works, is expected here to-day. Nothing can be done until a meeting of the company is held.

### **Preparations for Burial**

Adjutant General Hastings, who is in charge of the relief corps at the railroad station, has a force of carpenters at work making rough boxes in which to bury the dead. They will be buried on the hill, just above the town, on ground belonging to the Cambria Iron Company. The graves will be numbered. No one will be buried that has not been identified without a careful description being taken. General Hastings drove fifty-eight miles across the country in order to get here, and as soon as he came took charge. He has the whole town organized, and in connection with L.S. Smith has commenced the building of bridges and clearing away the wrecks to get out the dead bodies.

General Hastings has a large force of men clearing private tracks of the Cambria Iron Company in order that the small engines can be put to work bringing up the dead that have been dragged out of the river at points below.

The bodies are being brought up and laid out in freight cars. Mr. Kittle, of Ebensburg, has been deputized to take charge of the valuables taken from the bodies and keep a registry of them, and also

to note any marks of identification that may be found. A number of the bodies have been stripped of rings or bracelets and other valuables.

Over six hundred corpses have now been taken out on the south side of Stony Creek, the greater portion of which have been identified.

### **Send Us Coffins**

Preparations for their burial are being carried on as rapidly as possible, and "coffins, coffins," is the cry. No word has been received anywhere of any being shipped. Even rough boxes will be gladly received. Those that are being made, and in which many of the bodies are being buried, are of rough unplanned boards. One hundred dead bodies are laid out at the soap factory, while two hundred or more people are gathered there that are in great distress. Boats are wanted. People have the greatest difficulty in getting to the town.

### **Struggling for Order**

Another account from Johnstown on the second day after the disaster says:

The situation here has not changed, and yesterday's estimates of the loss of life do not seem to be exaggerated. Six hundred bodies are now lying in Johnstown, and a large number have already been buried. Four immense relief trains arrived last night, and the survivors are being well cared for.

Adjutant General Hastings, assisted by Mayor Sanger, has taken command at Johnstown and vicinity. Nothing is legal unless it bears the signature of the former. The town itself is guarded by Company H, Sixth regiment, Lieutenant Leggett in command. New members were sworn in by him, and they are making excellent soldiers.

Special police are numerous, and the regulations are so strict that even the smoking of a cigar is prohibited. General Hastings expresses the opinion that more troops are necessary.

Mr. Alex. Hart is in charge of the special police. He has lost his wife and family. Notwithstanding his great misfortune he is doing the work of a Hercules in his own way.

### **Firemen and Soldiers Arriving**

Chief Evans, of the Pittsburgh Fire Department, arrived this evening with engines and several hose carts, with a full complement of men. A large number of Pittsburgh physicians came on the same train.

A squad of Battery B, under command of Lieutenant Brown, the forerunners of the whole battery, arrived at the improvised telegraph office at half-past six o'clock. Lieutenant Brown went at once to Adjutant General Hastings and reported for duty.

A portion of the police force of Pittsburgh and Allegheny are on duty, and better order is maintained than prevailed yesterday. Communication has been restored between Cambria City and Johnstown by a foot bridge.

The work of repairing the tracks between Sang Hollow and Johnstown is going on rapidly, and trains will probably be running by to-morrow morning. Not less than fifteen thousand strangers are here.

The unruly element has been put down and order is now perfect. The Citizen's Committee are in charge and have matters well organized.

A proclamation has just been issued that all men who are able to work must report for work or leave the place. "We have too much to do to support idlers," says the Citizen's Committee, "And will not abuse the generous help that is being sent by doing so." From to-morrow all will be at work.

Money now is greatly needed to meet the heavy pay rolls that will be incurred for the next two weeks. W. C. Lewis, Chairman of the Finance Committee, is ready to receive the same.

### **Fall of the Wall of Water**

Mr. Crouse, proprietor of the South Fork Fishing Club Hotel, came to Johnstown this afternoon. He says:—

"When the dam of Conemaugh Lake broke the water seemed to leap, scarcely touching the ground. It bounded down the valley, crashing and roaring, carrying everything before it. For a mile its front seemed like a solid wall twenty feet high."

Freight Agent Dechert, when the great wall that held the body of water began to crumble at the top sent a message begging the people of Johnstown for God's sake to take to the hills. He reports no serious accidents at South Fork.

Richard Davis ran to Prospect Hill when the water raised. As to Mr. Dechert's message, he says just such have been sent down at each flood since the lake was made. The warning so often proved useless that little attention was paid to it this time. "I cannot describe the mad rush," he said. "At first it looked like dust. That must have been the spray. I could see houses going down before it like a child's play blocks set on edge in a row. As it came nearer I could see houses totter for a moment, then rise and the next moment be crushed like egg shells against each other."

### **To Rise Phoenix-like**

James McMillin, vice-president of the Cambria Iron Works, was met this afternoon. In a conversation he said:

"I do not know what our loss is. I cannot even estimate, as I have not the faintest idea what it may be. The upper mill is totally wrecked—damaged beyond all possibility of repairs. The lower mill is damaged to such an extent that all machinery and buildings are useless.

"The mills will be rebuilt immediately. I have sent out orders that all men that can must report at the mill to-morrow to commence cleaning up. I do not think the building was insured against a flood. The great thing we want is to get the mill in operation again."

The Gautier Wire Works was completely destroyed. The buildings will be immediately rebuilt and put in operation as soon as possible. The loss at this point is complete. The land on which it stood is to-day as barren and desolate as if it were in the midst of the Sahara Desert.

The Cambria Iron Company loses its great supply stores. The damage to the stock alone will amount to \$50,000.

The building was valued at \$150,000, and is a total loss. The company offices which adjoins the store was a handsome structure. It was protected by the first building, but nevertheless is almost totally destroyed.

The Dartmouth Club, at which employees of the works boarded, was carried away in the flood. It contained many occupants at the time. None were saved.

Estimates of the losses of the Cambria Iron Company given are from \$2,000,000 to \$2,500,000. But little of this can be recovered.

### **History of the Works**

The Cambria Iron Works at Johnstown were built in 1853. It was the second largest plant of its kind in the country, and was completely swept away. Its capacity of finished steel per annum was 180,000 net tons of steel rails and 20,000 net tons of steel in other shapes. The mill turned out

steel rails, spike bars, angles, flats, rounds, axles, billets and wire rods. There were nine Siemens and forty-two reverberatory heating furnaces, one seven ton and two 6,000 pound hammers and three trains of rolls.

The Bessemer Steel Works made their first blow July 10, 1871, and they contained nine gross ton converters, with an annual capacity of 200,000 net tons of ingots. In 1878 two fifteen gross tons Siemens open-hearth steel furnaces were built, with an annual capacity of 20,000 net tons of ingots.

The Cambria Iron Company also owns the Gautier Steel Works at Johnstown, which were erected in 1878.

The rolling mill produced annually 30,000 net tons of merchant bar steel of every size and for every purpose. The wire mill had a capacity alone of 30,000 tons of fence wire.

There are numerous bituminous coal mines near Johnstown, operated by the Cambria Iron Company, the Euclid Coal Company and private persons. There were three woolen mills, employing over three hundred hands and producing an annual product valued at \$300,000.

### **Awful Work of the Flames**

Fifty acres of town swept clean. One thousand two hundred buildings destroyed. Eight thousand to ten thousand lives lost.

That is the record of the Johnstown calamity as it looked to me just before dark last night. Acres of the town were turned into cemeteries, and miles of the river bank were involuntary storage rooms for household goods.

From the half ruined parapet at the end of the stone railroad bridge, in Johnstown proper, one sees sights so gruesome that none but the soulless Hungarian and Italian laborers can command his emotions.

*At my right is a fiery pit that is now believed to have been the funeral pyre of almost a thousand persons.*

### **Streets Obliterated**

The fiercest rush of the current was straight across the lower, level part of Johnstown, where it entirely obliterated Cider, Washington, Market, Main and Walnut streets. These streets were from a half to three-quarters of a mile in length, and were closely crowded along their entire course with dwellings and other buildings, and there is now no more trace of streets or houses than there is at low tide on the beach at Far Rockaway.

In the once well populated boroughs of Conemaugh and Woodvale there are to-night literally but two buildings left, one the shell of the Woodvale Woolen Mill and the other a sturdy brick dwelling.

The buildings which were swept from twenty out of the thirty acres of devastated Johnstown were crowded against the lower end of the big stone bridge in a mass 200 yards wide, 500 yards broad and from 60 to 100 feet deep. They were crushed and split out of shape and packed together like playing cards.

When you realize that in nearly every one of these buildings there were at least one human being, while in some there were as many as seventy-five, it is easy to comprehend how awful it was when this mass began to burn fiercely last night. It was known that a large number of persons were imprisoned in the débris, for they could be plainly seen by those on shore, but it was not until people stopped to think and to ask themselves questions, which startled them in a ghastly way, that the fact became plain that instead of a pitiful hundred or two of victims at least a thousand were in that roaring, crackling, loathsome, blazing mass upon the surface of the water and in the huge, inaccessible arches of the big bridge.

## **Charred Bodies**

Charred bodies could be seen here and there all through the glowing embers. There was no attempt to check the fire by the authorities, nor for that matter did they try to stop the robbing of the dead, nor any other glaring violation of law. The fire is spreading toward a large block of crushed buildings further up the stream. There is a broad stretch of angry water above and below, while over there, just opposite the end of the bridge, is the ruin of the great Cambria Iron Works, which have been damaged to the extent of over \$1,000,000.

The Gautier Steel Works have been wiped away, and are represented by a loss of \$1,000,000 and a big hole.

The Holbert House, owned by Renford Brothers, has entirely disappeared. It was a five story building, was the leading hotel of Johnstown, and contained a hundred rooms. Of the seventy-five guests who were in it when the flood came, only eight have been saved. Most of them were crushed by the fall of the walls and flooring.

Hundreds of searching parties are looking in the muddy ponds and among the wreckage for bodies and they are being gathered in ghastly heaps.

In one building among the bloated victims, I saw a young and well-dressed man and woman, still locked in each other's arms, a young mother with her babe pressed with delirious tenacity to her breast, and on a small pillow was a tiny babe a few hours old, which the doctors said must have been born in the water. It is said that 720 bodies have so far been recovered, or have been located.

The coroner of Westmoreland county is ordering coffins by the carload.

## **In the Raging Waters**

A dispatch from Derry says: In this city the poor people in the raging waters cried out for aid that never came. More than one brave man risked his life in trying to save those in the flood. Every hour details of some heroic action are brought to light. In many instances the victims displayed remarkable courage and gave their chances for rescue to friends with them. Sons stood back for mothers, and were lost while their parents were taken out. Many a son went down to a watery grave that a sister or a father might be saved. Such instances of sacrifice in the face of fearful danger are numerous.

## **The Force of the Waters**

One can estimate the force of the water when it is known that it carried locomotives down the mountain side and turned them upside down where they are now lying. Long trains of cars have been derailed and carried great distances from the railroads.

The first sight that greeted the men at nine this morning was the body of a beautiful woman lying crushed and mangled under the ponderous wheels of a gondola car. The clothing was torn to shreds. Dr. Berry said that he never saw such intense pain pictured on a face before.

## **Terrible Stories**

At this time of writing it is impossible to secure the names of any of the lost. Every person one meets along the road has some horrible tale of drowned and dead bodies recovered.

One thousand people or more were buried and crushed in the great fire. The flats below Conemaugh are full of cars with many dead bodies lying under them. At Sang Hollow a man named

Duncan sat on the roof of a house and saw his father and mother die in the attic below him. The poor fellow was powerless to help them, and he stood there wringing his hands and tearing his hair.

A man was seen clinging to a tree, covered with blood. He was lost with the others.

Long after dark the flames of fire shot high above the burning mass of timber, lighting the vast flood of rushing waters on all sides.

### **The Dead**

Dead bodies are being picked up. The train master, E. Pitcairn, has been working manfully directing the rescuing of dead bodies at Nineveh. In a ten acre field seventy-five bodies were taken out within a half mile of each other. Of this number only five were men, the rest being women and children. Many beautiful young girls, refined in features and handsomely dressed, were found, and women and young mothers with their hair matted with roots and leaves are constantly being removed.

The wrecking crew which took out these bodies are confident that 150 bodies are lying buried in the sand and under the débris on those low-lying bottom lands. Some of the bodies were horribly mangled, and the features were twisted and contorted as if they had died in the most excruciating agony. Others are found lying stretched out with calm faces.

Many a tear was dropped by the men as they worked away removing the bodies. An old lady with fine gray hair was picked up alive, although every bone in her body was broken. Judging from the number of women and children found in the swamps of Nineveh, the female portion of the population suffered the most.

### **A Fatal Tree**

Mr. O'Conner was at Sang Hollow when the flood began. He remained there through the afternoon and night, and he states that there was a fatal tree on the island against which a number of people were dashed and instantly killed. Their bodies were almost tied in a knot doubled over the tree by the force of the current. Mr. O'Conner says that the first man who came down had his brains knocked out against this obstruction. In fact, those who hit the tree met the same fate and were instantly killed under the pile of driftwood collected there. He could give no estimate of the number lost at this point, but says that it is certainly large.

### **Braves Death for His Family**

One of the most thrilling incidents of the disaster was the performance of A.J. Leonard, whose family reside in Morrellville, a short distance below this point. He was at work here, and hearing that his house had been swept away determined at all hazards to ascertain the fate of his family. The bridges having been carried away he constructed a temporary raft, and clinging to it as close as a cat to the side of a fence, he pushed his frail craft out in the raging torrent and started on a chase which, to all who were watching, seemed to mean an embrace in death.

Heedless of cries "For God's sake go back, you will be drowned," and "Don't attempt it," he persevered. As the raft struck the current he threw off his coat and in his shirt sleeves braved the stream. Down plunged the boards and down went Leonard, but as it rose he was seen still clinging. A mighty shout arose from the throats of the hundreds on the banks, who were now deeply interested, earnestly hoping he would successfully ford the stream.

Down again went his bark, but nothing, it seemed, could shake Leonard off. The craft shot up in the air apparently ten or twelve feet, and Leonard stuck to it tenaciously. Slowly but surely he

worked his boat to the other side of the stream, and after what seemed an awful suspense he finally landed amid ringing cheers of men, women and children.

The last seen of him he was making his way down a mountain road in the direction of the spot where his house had lately stood. His family consisted of his wife and three children.

### **An Angel in the Mud**

The Pennsylvania Railroad Company's operators at Switch Corner, which is near Sang Hollow, tell thrilling stories of the scenes witnessed by them on Friday afternoon and evening. Said one of them:

"In order to give you an idea of how the tidal wave rose and fell, let me say that I kept a measure and timed the rise and fall of the water, and in forty-eight minutes it fell four and a half feet.

"I believe that when the water goes down about seventy-five children and fifty grown persons will be found among the weeds and bushes in the bend of the river just below the tower.

"There the current was very strong, and we saw dozens of people swept under the trees, and I don't believe that more than one in twenty came out on the other side."

"They found a little girl in white just now," said one of the other operators.

"Good God!" said the chief operator, "she isn't dead, is she!"

"Yes; they found her in a clump of willow bushes, kneeling on a board, just about the way we saw her when she went down the river." Turning to me he said:—

"That was the saddest thing we saw all day yesterday. Two men came down on a little raft, with a little girl kneeling between them, and her hands raised and praying. She came so close to us we could see her face, and that she was crying. She had on a white dress and looked like a little angel. She went under that cursed shoot in the willow bushes at the bend like all the rest, but we did hope she would get through alive."

"And so she was still kneeling," he said to his companion, who had brought the unwelcome news.

"She sat there," was the reply, "as if she were still praying, and there was a smile on her poor little face, though her mouth was full of mud."

All agreed in saying that at least one hundred people were drowned below Nineveh.

### **Direful Incidents**

The situation at Johnstown grows worse as fuller particulars are being received in Pittsburgh.

This morning it was reported that three thousand people were lost in the flood. In the afternoon this number was increased to six thousand, and at this writing despatches place the number at ten thousand.

It is the most frightful destruction of life that has ever been known in the United States.

### **Vampires at Hand**

It is stated that already a large gang of thieves and vampires have descended on and near the place. Their presumed purpose is to rob the dead and ransack the demolished buildings.

The Tenth regiment of the Pennsylvania National Guard has been ordered out to protect property.

A telegram from Bolivar says Lockport did not suffer much, but that sixty-five families were turned out of their homes. The school at that place is filled with mothers, fathers, daughters and children.

## **Noble Acts of Heroism**

Edward Dick, a young railroader living in the place, saw an old man floating down the river on a tree trunk whose agonized face and streaming gray hair excited his compassion. He plunged into the torrent, clothes and all, and brought the old man safely ashore. Scarcely had he done this when the upper story of a house floated by on which Mrs. Adams, of Cambria, and her two children were borne. He plunged in again, and while breaking through the tin roof of the house cut an artery in his left wrist, but, although weakened with loss of blood, succeeded in saving both mother and children.

George Shore, another Lockport swimmer, pulled out William Jones, of Cambria, who was almost exhausted and could not possibly have survived another twenty minutes in the water.

John Decker, who has some celebrity as a local pugilist, was also successful in saving a woman and boy, but was nearly killed in a third attempt to reach the middle of the river by being struck by a huge log.

The most miraculous fact about the people who reached Bolivar alive was how they passed through the falls halfway between Lockport and Bolivar. The seething waters rushed through that barrier of rock with a noise which drowned that of all the passing trains. Heavy trees were whirled high in the air out of the water, and houses which reached there whole were dashed to splinters against the rocks.

## **A Tale of Horror**

On the floor of William Mancarro's house, groaning with pain and grief, lay Patrick Madden, a furnace man of the Cambria Iron Company. He told of his terrible experience in a voice broken with emotion. He said: "When the Cambria Iron Company's bridge gave way I was in the house of a neighbor, Edward Garvey. We were caught through our own neglect, like a great many others, and a few minutes before the houses were struck Garvey remarked that he was a good swimmer, and could get away no matter how high the water rose. Ten minutes later I saw him and his son-in-law drowned.

"No human being could swim in that terrible torrent of débris. After the South Fork reservoir broke I was flung out of the building and saw, when I rose to the surface of the water, my wife hanging upon a piece of scantling. She let it go and was drowned almost within reach of my arm and I could not help or save her. I caught a log and floated with it five or six miles, but it was knocked from under me when I went over the dam. I then caught a bale of hay and was taken out by Mr. Morenrow."

A despatch from Greensburg says the day express, which left Pittsburgh at eight o'clock on Friday morning was lying at Johnstown in the evening at the time the awful rush of waters came down the mountains. We have been informed by one who was there that the coach next to the baggage car was struck by the raging flood, and with its human freight cut loose from the rest of the train and carried down the stream. All on board, it is feared, perished. Of the passengers who were left on the track, fifteen or more who endeavored to flee to the mountains were caught, it is thought, by the flood, and likewise carried to destruction. Samuel Bell, of Latrobe, was conductor on the train, and he describes the scene as the most appalling and heartrending he ever witnessed.

A special despatch from Latrobe says:—"The special train which left the Union Station, Pittsburgh, at half-past one arrived at Nineveh Station, nine miles from Johnstown, last evening at five o'clock. The train was composed of four coaches and locomotive, and carried, at the lowest calculation, over nine hundred persons, including the members of the press. The passengers were packed in like sardines and many were compelled to hang out upon the platform. A large proportion of the passengers were curiosity seekers, while there was a large sprinkling of suspicious looking characters, who had every appearance of being crooks and wreckers, such as visit all like disasters for the sole purpose of plundering and committing kindred depredations."

When the train reached Nineveh the report spread through it that a number of bodies had been fished out of the water and were awaiting identification at a neighboring planing mill. I stopped off to investigate the rumor, while the balance of the party journeyed on toward Sang Hollow, the nearest approach to Johnstown by rail. I visited Mumaker's planing mills and found that the report was true.

All day long the rescuers had been at work, and at this writing (six o'clock) they have taken out seventy-eight dead bodies, the majority of whom are women and children. The bodies are horribly mutilated and covered with mud and blood. Fifteen of them are those of men. Their terribly mutilated condition makes identification for the present almost impossible. One of the bodies found was that of a woman, apparently about thirty-five years of age.

Every conveyance that could be used has been pressed into service. Latrobe is all agog with excitement over the great disaster. Almost every train takes out a load of roughs and thugs who are bent on mischief. They resemble the mob that came to Pittsburgh during the riots.

### **Measures of Relief**

Pittsburgh is in a wild state of excitement. A large mass meeting was held yesterday afternoon and in a short space of time \$1,000 was subscribed for the sufferers.

The Pennsylvania company has been running trains every hour to the scene of the disaster or as near it as they can get. Provisions and a large volunteer relief corps have been sent up. The physicians have had an enthusiastic meeting at which one and all freely offered their services.

The latest project is to have the wounded and the survivors who fled to the hillsides from the angry rush of waters brought to Pittsburgh. The Exposition Society has offered the use of its splendid new building as a temporary hospital. All the hospitals in the city have also offered to care for the sufferers free of charge to the full limit of their capacity.

Word has been received at Allegheny Junction, twenty-two miles above Pittsburgh, from Leechburg that a woman and two children were seen floating past there at five o'clock yesterday morning on top of some wreckage. They were alive, and their pitiful cries for help drew the attention of the people on the shore. Some men got a boat and endeavored to reach the sufferers.

As they rowed out in the stream the woman could be heard calling to them to save the children first.

The men made a gallant effort. It was all without avail, as the strong current and floating masses of débris prevented them from reaching the victims, and the latter floated on down the stream until their despairing cries could no longer be heard.

Mrs. Chambers, of Apollo, was swept away when her house was wrecked during the night. She had gone to bed when the flood came and she had not time to dress. Fortunately she managed to secure a hold on some wreckage which was being carried past her. She kept her hold until her cries were heard by some men a short distance above Leechburg. They got out a boat and succeeded in reaching her, and took her to a house near the bank of the river. When they got her there it was found that she was badly bruised and all her clothing had been torn off by the débris with which she had come in contact, leaving her entirely naked. She was also rescued at Natrona.

### **A Lucky Change of Residence**

Mr. F.J. Moore, of the Western Union office in this city, is giving thanks to-day for the fortunate escape of his wife and two children from the devastated city. As if by some foreknowledge of the impending disaster, Mr. Moore had arranged to have his family move yesterday from Johnstown and join him in this city. Their household goods were shipped on Thursday, and yesterday just in time to save themselves, the little party departed in the single train which made the trip between Johnstown and Pittsburgh. I called on Mrs. Moore at her husband's apartments, No. 4 Webster avenue, and found

her completely prostrated by the news of the final catastrophe, coupled with the dangerous experience through which she and her little ones had passed.

"Oh, it was terrible," she said. "The reservoir had broken, and before we got out of the house the water filled the cellar, and on the way to the depot it was up to the carriage bed. Our train left at a quarter to two P.M., and at that hour the flood had commenced to rise with terrible rapidity. Houses and sheds were carried away, and two men were drowned almost under our very eyes. People gathered on the roofs to take refuge from the water which poured into the lower rooms of their dwellings, and many families took fright and became scattered beyond hope of being reunited. Just as the train pulled out I saw a woman crying bitterly. Her house had been flooded and she had escaped, leaving her husband behind, and her fears for his safety made her almost crazy. Our house was in the lower part of the town, and it makes me shudder to think what would have happened had we remained in it an hour longer. So far as I know we were the only passengers from Johnstown on the train, and therefore I suppose we are the only persons who got away in time to escape the culminating disaster."

Mrs. Moore's little son told me how he had seen the rats driven out of their holes by the flood and running along the tops of the fences. Mr. Moore endeavored to get to Johnstown yesterday, but was prevented by the suspension of traffic and says he is very glad of it.

### **What the Eye Hath Seen**

The scenes at Heanemyer's planing mill at Nineveh, where the dead bodies are lying, are never to be forgotten. The torn, bruised and mutilated bodies of the victims are lying in a row on the floor of the planing mill which looks more like the field of Bull Run after that disastrous battle than a work shop. The majority of the bodies are nude, their clothing having been torn off. All along the river bits of clothing—a tiny shoe, a baby dress, a mother's evening wrapper, a father's coat, and in fact every article of wearing apparel imaginable may be seen hanging to stumps of trees and scattered on the bank.

One of the most pitiful sights of this terrible disaster came to my notice this afternoon when the body of a young lady was taken out of the Conemaugh river. The woman was apparently quite young, though her features were terribly disfigured. Nearly all the clothing excepting the shoes was torn off the body. The corpse was that of a mother, for although cold in death she clasped a young male babe, apparently not more than a year old, tightly in her arms. The little one was huddled close up to the face of the mother, who when she realized their terrible fate had evidently raised it to her lips to imprint upon its lips the last kiss it was to receive in this world. The sight forced many a stout heart to shed tears. The limp bodies, with matted hair, some with holes in their heads, eyes knocked out and all bespattered with blood were a ghastly spectacle.

### **Story of The First Fugitives**

The first survivors of the Johnstown wreck who arrived in the city last night were Joseph and Henry Lauffer and Lew Dalmeyer, three well known Pittsburghers. They endured considerable hardship and had several narrow escapes with their lives. Their story of the disaster can best be told in their own language. Joe, the youngest of the Lauffer brothers, said:—

"My brother and I left on Thursday for Johnstown. The night we arrived there it rained continually, and on Friday morning it began to flood. I started for the Cambria store at a quarter past eight on Friday, and in fifteen minutes afterward I had to get out of the store in a wagon, the water was running so rapidly. We then arrived at the station and took the day express and went as far as Conemaugh, where we had to stop. The limited, however got through, and just as we were about to start the bridge at South Fork gave way with a terrific crash, and we had to stay there. We then went

to Johnstown. This was at a quarter to ten in the morning, when the flood was just beginning. The whole city of Johnstown was inundated and the people all moved up to the second floor.

### **Mountains of Water**

"Now this is where the trouble occurred. These poor unfortunates did not know the reservoir would burst, and there are no skiffs in Johnstown to escape in. When the South Fork basin gave way mountains of water twenty feet high came rushing down the Conemaugh River, carrying before them death and destruction. I shall never forget the harrowing scene. Just think of it! thousands of people, men, women and children, struggling and weeping and wailing as they were being carried suddenly away in the raging current. Houses were picked up as if they were but a feather, and their inmates were all carried away with them, while cries of 'God help me!' 'Save me!' 'I am drowning!' 'My child!' and the like were heard on all sides. Those who were lucky enough to escape went to the mountains, and there they beheld the poor unfortunates being crushed among the débris to death without any chance of being rescued. Here and there a body was seen to make a wild leap into the air and then sink to the bottom.

"At the stone bridge of the Pennsylvania company people were dashed to death against the piers. When the fire started there hundreds of bodies were burned. Many lookers-on up on the mountains, especially the women, fainted."

Mr. Lauffer's brother, Harry, then told his part of the tale, which was not less interesting. He said:—"We had the most narrow escapes of anybody, and I tell you we don't want to be around when anything of that kind occurs again.

"The scenes at Johnstown have not in the least been exaggerated, and indeed the worst is to be heard. When we got to Conemaugh and just as we were about to start the bridge gave way. This left the day express, the accommodation, a special train and a freight train at the station. Above was the South Fork water basin, and all of the trains were well filled. We were discussing the situation when suddenly, without any warning, the whistles of every engine began to shriek, and in the noise could be heard the warning of the first engineer, 'My God! Rush to the mountains, the reservoir has burst.' Then, with a thundering like peal came the mad rush of waters. No sooner had the cry been heard than those who could with a wild leap rushed from the train and up the mountains. To tell this story takes some time, but the moments in which the horrible scene was enacted were few. Then came the tornado of water, leaping and rushing with tremendous force. The waves had angry crests of white and their roar was something deafening. In one terrible swath they caught the four trains and lifted three of them right off the track, as if they were only a cork. There they floated in the river. Think of it, three large locomotives and finely varnished Pullmans floating around, and above all the hundreds of poor unfortunates who were unable to escape from the car swiftly drifting toward death. Just as we were about to leap from the car I saw a mother, with a smiling, blue eyed baby in her arms. I snatched it from her and leaped from the train just as it was lifted off of the track. The mother and child were saved, but if one more minute had elapsed we all would have perished."

### **Beyond the Power of Words**

During all of this time the waters kept rushing down the Conemaugh and through the beautiful town of Johnstown, picking up everything and sparing nothing.

The mountains by this time were black with people, and the moans and sighs from those below brought tears to the eyes of the most stony hearted. There in that terrible rampage were brothers, sisters, wives and husbands, and from the mountain could be seen the panic stricken marks in the faces of those who were struggling between life and death. I really am unable to do justice to the scene, and its details are almost beyond my power to relate. Then came the burning of the débris

near the Pennsylvania Railroad bridge. The scene was too sickening to endure. We left the spot and journeyed across country and delivered many notes, letters, etc., that were intrusted to us.

We rode thirty-one miles in a buckboard, then walked six miles, reached Blairsville and journeyed again on foot to what is called the "Bow," and from thence we arrived home. On our way we met Mr. F. Thompson, a friend of ours, who resides in Nineveh, and he stated that rescuing parties were busy all day at Annom. One hundred and seventy-five bodies were recovered at that place. An old couple about sixty years of age were rescued from a tree, on which they came floating down the stream. They were clasped in each other's arms.

President Harrison's private secretary, Elijah Halford, and wife, were on the train which was swept away, but escaped and were in the mountains when I left.

Among the lost are Colonel John P. Linton and his wife and children. Colonel Linton was prominent in the Grand Army of the Republic and in the Knights of Pythias and other orders. He was formerly Auditor General of Pennsylvania.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Multiplication of Terrors**

The handsome brick High School Building is damaged to such an extent that it will have to be rebuilt. The water attained the height of the window sills of the second floor. Its upper stories formed a refuge for many persons. All Saturday afternoon two little girls could be seen at the windows frantically calling for aid. They had spent all night and the day in the building, cut off from all aid. Without food and drinking water their condition was lamentable. Late in the evening the children were removed to higher ground and properly cared for.

A number of persons had been taken from this building earlier in the day, but in the excitement the children were forgotten. Their names could not be obtained.

#### **Death in Many Forms**

Morrell Institute, a beautiful building and the old homestead of the Morrell family, is totally ruined. The water has weakened the walls and foundations to such an extent that there is danger of its collapsing. Many families took refuge in this building and were saved. Now that the waters have receded there is danger from falling walls. All day long the crashing of walls could be heard across the river. Before daybreak this morning the sounds could not but make one shudder at the very thought of the horrible deaths that awaited many who had escaped the devastating flood.

Library Hall was another of the fine buildings of the many in the city that is destroyed. Of the Episcopal church not a vestige remains. Where it once stood, there is now a placid lake. The parsonage is swept away, and the rector of the church, Rev. Mr. Diller, was drowned.

#### **Buried Under Falling Buildings**

The church was one of the first buildings to fall. It carried with it several of the surrounding houses. Many of them were occupied. The victims were swept into the comparatively still waters at the bridge, and there met death either by fire or water.

James M. Walters, an attorney, spent the night in Alma Hall and relates a thrilling story. One of the most curious occurrences of the whole disaster was how Mr. Walters got to the hall. He has his office on the second floor. His home is at No. 135 Walnut street. He says he was in the house with his family when the waters struck it. All was carried away. Mr. Walters' family drifted on a roof in another direction. He passed down several streets and alleys until he came to the hall. His dwelling struck that edifice and he was thrown into his own office.

#### **Long, Dark Night of Terror**

About two hundred persons had taken refuge in the hall, and were on the second, third and fourth stories. The men held a meeting and drew up some rules, which all were bound to respect. Mr. Walters was chosen president. Rev. Mr. Beale was put in charge of the first floor, A.M. Hart of the second floor, Doctor Matthews of the fourth floor. No lights were allowed, and the whole night was spent in darkness. The sick were cared for. The weaker women and children had the best accommodations that could be had, while the others had to wait. The scenes were most agonizing. Heartrending shrieks, sobs and moans pierced the gloomy darkness. The crying of children mingled with the suppressed sobs of the women. Under the guardianship of the men all took more hope. No

one slept during all the long dark night. Many knelt for hours in prayer, their supplications mingling with the roar of the waters and the shrieks of the dying in the surrounding houses. In all this misery two women gave premature birth to children.

### **Here is a Hero**

Dr. Matthews is a hero. Several of his ribs were crushed by a falling timber and his pains were most severe, yet through all he attended the sick. When two women in a house across the street shouted for help he with two other brave young men climbed across the drift and ministered to their wants. No one died during the night, but women and children surrendered their lives on the succeeding day as a result of terror and fatigue. Miss Rose Young, one of the young ladies in the hall, was frightfully cut and bruised. Mrs. Young had a leg broken. All of Mr. Walters' family were saved.

While the loss of property about Brookville, the lumber centre of Pennsylvania, by the great flood has been enormous, variously estimated at from \$250,000 to \$500,000, not a single life has been lost. At least there have been none reported so far, and I have travelled over the line from Red Bank, on the Valley road, to Dubois, on the low grade division. Every creek is swollen to many times its natural size. A great deal of the low-lying farm lands and roads in places have water enough over them to float an ordinary steamboat.

Leaving Pittsburgh Saturday morning on the valley road, we ran past millions and millions of feet of lumber. From the city to the junction opposite Freeport the river was almost choked with debris of broken and shattered houses. In places the river was fairly black with floating masses of lath, shingles, roofs, floors and other lumber that had formerly been houses. The sight was appalling and spoke louder than any pen can describe.

At Red Bank the river was filled with a different kind of lumber, including huge saw logs ready for cutting. From the estimates of an old lumber man who was on the train I was told that between the stations named we passed at least ten million feet of lumber, which means a loss of fully \$100,000 to the owners. A big portion of this came out of the Clarion river, the estimated money loss from that section alone being anywhere from \$500,000 to \$750,000.

All along the Allegheny river were gathered people trying to catch the logs, risking their lives, for the logs swept down the river in a current that was running fully ten miles an hour. The work was very hazardous. The catchers are allowed by law six and a quarter cents for each log captured, and the river was almost lined with people trying to save the property.

At Red Bank, which we left at noon, there were at least six feet of water expected from Oil City, and with it, according to the reports from up the river, was an immense amount of lumber. Leaving the valley road at Red Bank we went up the low grade division to Bryant, where immense sawmills, the largest in the vicinity are located. The current was rushing along at a rate anywhere from twelve to fifteen miles an hour, tossing the huge logs around like so many toothpicks and carrying everything before them. So great was the current and mass of logs that the big iron bridge at Reynoldsville, sixteen miles above Brookville, was swept away, as were two wagon bridges and several small foot bridges.

### **Hundreds Homeless and Suffering**

Many houses here and there along Red Bank Creek were turned upside down, some of them floating clear away, while the more secure ones were flooded with water clear into the second floors. Many of the smaller cottages and shanties were covered, leaving only the peaks of the roofs sticking out to show the spots that families had but a few hours before called home. All along the railroad track was piled the few household effects, furniture, bedding, tables and clothes which the poor owners had saved before they were forced out on the high ground. These same people had gone to bed last evening thinking themselves safe from the high water, only to be wakened about midnight by the

noise of the rushing floods and the huge saw logs bumping against their homes. The very narrow escapes that some of them made while getting their families into places of safety would fill many pages of this book.

### **Floating to Safety on Saw Logs**

One man had to mount the different members of his family on logs. The mother and children alike sat astride of them, and then, with the father on the other end, were poled across to the high ground.

Another man, whose house was in a worse place, swam ashore and, throwing a rope back to the mother, who was surrounded on the porch of the house by the children, yelled for her to tie one end to the little ones so he could pull them over the fast running water. This operation was continued until the entire family was rescued.

Willing workers from the neighborhood were not long in getting huge bonfires started, and with the aid of these and dry clothing brought in haste by people whose homes stood on higher ground the family were soon warmed.

The same willing hands hastily constructed sheds, and with immense bonfires the people were kept warm till daylight. Others, more fortunate, were able to save enough from their houses to make themselves comfortable for a short season of camping. One poor family I noticed had saved enough carpet to make a tent out of, and under this temporary shelter the mother was doing her best to prepare a meal and attend to her other household duties.

### **Sheltered by Friendly Neighbors**

In Brookville a great many houses were submerged, but no lives were lost. While the people were driven from their homes, they were more fortunate than the people of Bryants, because they could at once find shelter under the roofs of the neighbors' houses.

All of the saw mills, the chief industry of the town, were closed down. Some because the water was over the first floor, and others because their entire working force were on the creek trying to construct temporary booms, by which they expected to save at least a portion of the property from being swept away. One man rigged a boom with the aid of a cable 1,600 feet long and thick enough to hold the heaviest steamer. About fifty logs were chained together for further protection. This arrangement for a time checked the mass of logs, but just when everybody was thinking it would stop the output a small dam gave way, bringing down with it another half million feet of lumber. When this struck the temporary boom it parted, as if the huge cable was a piece of thread, and the logs shot past.

Just at Bryants, however, a gorge formed shortly after two o'clock Friday afternoon, and within a remarkably short time there was a pile of logs wedged in that stretched back fully a quarter of a mile and the top of which was more than ten feet high. This of course changed the course of the stream a little, but the natural gorge had saved enough logs to amount to more than \$100,000 in money.

The following comments by one of our journals sum up the situation after receiving the dreadful news of the three preceding days:

### **The Great Calamity**

The appalling catastrophe which has spread such awful havoc through the teeming valley of the Conemaugh almost surpasses belief and fairly staggers imagination. Without yet measuring its dire extent, enough is known to rank it as the greatest calamity of the natural elements which this country has ever witnessed. Nothing in our history short of the deadly blight of battle has approached this

frightful cataclysm, and no battle, though destroying more life, has ever left such a ghastly trail of horror and devastation. It seems more like one of those terrible convulsions of nature from which we have hitherto been happily spared, but which at rare intervals have swallowed up whole communities in remote South American or oriental lands.

Ingenious and masterful as the human intellect is in guiding and controlling the ordinary forces of nature, how impotent and insignificant it appears in the presence of such a transcendent disaster! It is well nigh inconceivable that a great section throbbing with populous towns, and resonant with the hum of industry, should be wiped out in the twinkling of an eye by a mighty, raging torrent, more consuming than fire and more violent than the earthquake. The suddenness of the blow and the impossibility of communicating with the scene add to the terror of the event. The sickening spectacle of ruin and death which will be revealed when the veil of darkness is lifted is left to conjecture. The imagination can scarcely picture the dread realities, and it would be difficult to overdraw the awful features of a calamity which has every element of horror.

### **The River and Lake**

Nature is so framed at the fated point for such a disaster that man was called upon for unceasing vigilance. The Conemaugh makes its channel through a narrow valley between high ranges. Numerous streams drain the surrounding mountains into its current. Along its course swarm frequent hamlets busy with the wealth dug from the seams of the earth. The chief of these towns, the seat of an immense industry, lies in a little basin where the gap broadens to take in a converging stream and then immediately narrows again, no outlet save the constricted waterway. High above stands a great lake which is held in check only by an artificial barrier, and which, if once unchained, must pour its resistless torrent through this narrow gorge like a besom of destruction overwhelming everything before it. There were all the elements of an unparalleled disaster. Years of immunity had given a feeling of security for all time without some extraordinary and unexpected occasion. But the occasion appeared when in unforeseen force the rains descended and the floods came, and to-day desolation reigns.

### **A Direful Calamity**

It is impossible yet to measure the extent of the calamity. But the destruction of life and property must be something that it is appalling to think of, and the sorrow and suffering to follow are incalculable. A solemn obligation devolves upon the people of the whole country. We can not remedy the past but we can alleviate the present and the future. Thousands of families are homeless and destitute; thousands are without means of support; perchance, thousands are bereft of the strong arms upon which they have relied. There is an instant, earnest demand for help. Let there be immediate, energetic, generous action. Let us do our part to relieve the anguish and mitigate the suffering of a community upon whom has fallen the most terrible visitation in all our history.

### **An Historic Catastrophe**

When an American Charles Reade wishes in the future to weave into the woof of his novel the account of some great public calamity he will portray the misfortune which overwhelmed the towns and villages lying in the valley of the Conemaugh River. The bursting of a reservoir, and the ensuing scenes of death and destruction, which are so vividly described in "Put Yourself in His Place," were not the creatures of Mr. Reade's imagination, but actual occurrences. The novelist obtained facts and incidents for one of the most striking chapters in all of his works from the events which followed the

breaking of the Dale Dyke embankment at Sheffield, England, in March, 1864, when 238 lives were lost and property valued at millions was destroyed.

It will need even more vivid and vigorous descriptive powers than Mr. Reade possessed to adequately delineate the scene of destruction and death now presented in Johnstown and the adjacent villages. The Sheffield calamity, disastrous as it proved to be, was a small affair when compared with this latest reservoir accident. The Mill River reservoir disaster of May, 1874, with its 200 lives lost and \$1,500,000 of property destroyed, almost sinks into insignificance beside it. The only recorded calamity of the kind which anywhere approaches it occurred in Estrecho de Rientes, in Spain, in April, 1802, when a dam burst and drowned 600 persons and swept \$7,000,000 worth of property away. But above all these calamities in sad pre-eminence will stand the Conemaugh disaster.

But dark as the picture is, it will doubtless be relieved by many acts of heroism. The world will wait to learn if there was not present at Conemaugh some Myron Day, whose ride on his bareback steed before the advancing wall of water that burst from Mill River Dam in 1874, shouting to the unsuspecting people as he rode: "The reservoir is breaking! The flood is coming! Fly! Fly for your lives," was the one mitigating circumstance in that scene of woe and destruction. When the full story of the Conemaugh calamity is told it will, doubtless, be found that there were many deeds of heroism performed, many noble sacrifices made and many an act as brave as any performed on the field of battle. Already we are told of husbands and mothers who preferred to share a watery grave with their wives and children sooner than accept safety alone.

Such a calamity, while it makes the heart sick with its story of death and suffering, always serves to bring out the better and higher qualities in men and women, and to illustrate how closely all mankind are bound together by ties of sympathy and compassion. This fact will be made evident now by the open-handed liberality which will quickly flow in to relieve the suffering, and, as far as possible, to repair the loss caused by this historic calamity.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **The Awful Work of Death**

The record of June 3rd continues as follows: The horror of the situation does not lessen. The latest estimate of the number of dead is an official one by Adjutant General Hastings, and it places the number between 12,000 and 15,000.

The uncovering of hundreds of bodies by the recession of the waters has already filled the air with pestilential odors. The worst is feared for the surviving population, who must breathe this poisoned atmosphere. Sharp measures prompted by sheer necessity have resulted in an almost complete subsidence of cowardly efforts to profit by the results of the disaster. Thieves have slunk into places of darkness and are no longer to be seen at their unholy work.

All thoughts are now fixed upon the hideous revelation that awaits the light of day, when the waters shall have entirely quitted the ruins that now lie beneath them, and shall have exposed the thousands upon thousands of corpses that are massed there.

A sad and gloomy sky, almost as sad and gloomy as the human faces under it, shrouded Johnstown to-day. Rain fell all day and added to the miseries of the wretched people. The great plain where the best part of Johnstown used to stand was half covered with water. The few sidewalks in the part that escaped the flood were inches thick with black, sticky mud, through which tramped a steady procession of poor women who are left utterly destitute. The tents where the people are housed who cannot find other shelter were cold and cheerless.

#### **A Great Tomb**

The town seemed like a great tomb. The people of Johnstown have supped so full of horrors that they go about in a sort of a daze and only half conscious of their griefs. Every hour, as one goes through the streets, he hears neighbors greeting each other and then inquiring without show of feeling how many each had lost in his family. To-day I heard a gray haired man hail another across the street with this question.

"I lost five; all are gone but Mary and I," was the reply.

"I am worse off than that," said the first old gentleman. "I have only my grandson left. Seven of us gone."

And so they passed on without apparent excitement. They and everyone else had heard so much of these melancholy conversations that somehow the calamity had lost its significance to them. They treat it exactly as if the dead persons had gone away and were coming back in a week.

#### **The Ghastly Search**

The melancholy task of searching the ruins for more bodies went on to-day in the soaking rain. There were little crowds of morbid curiosity hunters around each knot of workmen, but they were not residents of Johnstown. All their curiosity in that direction was satiated long ago. Even those who come in from neighboring towns with the idea of a day's strange and ghastly experiences did not care to be near after they had seen one body exhumed. There were hundreds and thousands of these visitors from the country to-day. The effect of the dreadful things they saw and heard was to drive most of them to drink. By noon the streets were beginning to be full of boisterous and noisy countrymen, who were trying to counteract the strain on their nerves with unnatural excitement. Then the chief of police, foreseeing the unseemly sights that were likely to disgrace the streets, drove out and kept out all the visitors who had not some good reason for their presence. After that and far

into the evening all the country roads were filled with drunken stragglers, who were trying to forget what they had seen.

One thing that makes the work of searching for the bodies very slow is the strange way that great masses of objects were rolled into intricate masses of rubbish.

### **Horrible Masses**

As the flood came down the valley of the South Fork it obliterated the suburb of Woodvale, where not a house was left, nor a trace of one. The material they had contained rolled on down the valley, over and over, grinding it up to pulp and finally leaving it against an unusually firm foundation or in the bed of an eddy. The masses contain human bodies, but it is slow work to pick them to pieces. In the side of one of them I saw the remnants of a carriage, the body of a harnessed horse, a baby cradle and a doll, a tress of woman's hair, a rocking horse, and a piece of beefsteak still hanging on a hook.

The city is now very much better patrolled than it has been at any time since the flood occurred. Many members of the police force of Pittsburgh came in and offered their services. One of them showed his spirit during the first hour by striking a man, whom he saw opening a trunk among the rubbish, a tremendous blow over the head which knocked him senseless. Several big trunks and safes lie in full sight on the desolate plain in the lower part of the town, but no one dared to touch them after that.

The German Catholic Church at Cambria City, a short distance west of Johnstown, is almost a complete wreck. Rather a singular coincidence in connection with the destruction of the above is that the Immaculate Conception, that stood in the northwest corner of the lecture rooms, stands just as it was when last seen. The figure, which is wax, was not even scratched, and the clothes, which are made of white silk and deep duchess lace, were spotless. This seems strange, when the raging water destroyed everything else in the building. Hundreds of persons visited the place during the day.

### **Ten Bodies an Hour**

Bodies are now being brought in at lower Cambria at the rate of ten per hour.

A man named Dougherty tells a thrilling story of a ride down the river on a log. When the waters struck the roof of the house on which he had taken shelter he jumped astride a telegraph pole, riding a distance of some twenty-three miles, from Johnstown to Bolivar, before he was rescued.

Many inquiries have been made as to why the militia did not respond when ordered out by Adjutant General Hastings. "In the first place it is beyond the General's authority to order troops to a scene of this kind unless the Governor first issues a proclamation, then it becomes his duty to issue orders." The General said he was notified that the Pittsburgh troops, consisting of the Fourteenth and Eighteenth regiments, had tendered their services, and no doubt would have been of great service. The General consulted with the Chief Burgess of Johnstown and Sheriff of Cambria county in regard to calling the troops to the scene, but both officials strenuously objected, as they claimed the people would object to anything of this kind. As a proof of this not a breach of peace was committed last night in Johnstown and vicinity.

It has not been generally believed that the district in the neighborhood of Kernville would be so extremely prolific of corpses as it has proven to be. I visited that part of the town where both the river and Stony Creek have done their worst. I found that within the past twenty-four hours almost one thousand bodies had been recovered or were in sight. The place is one great repository of the dead.

## **The Total May Never be Known**

The developments of every hour make it more and more apparent that the exact number of lives lost in the Johnstown horror will never be known. All estimates made to this time are conservative, and when all is known will doubtless be found to have been too small. Over one thousand bodies have been found since sunrise to-day, and the most skeptical concede that the remains of thousands more rest beneath the débris above the Johnstown bridge. The population of Johnstown, the surrounding towns and the portion of the valley affected by the flood is, or was, from 50,000 to 55,000. Numerous leading citizens of Johnstown, who survived the flood, have been interviewed, and the concensus of opinion was that fully thirty per cent of the residents of Johnstown and Cambria had been victims of the continued disasters of fire and water. If this be true, the total loss of life in the entire valley cannot be less than seven or eight thousand and possibly much greater. Of the thousands who were devoured by the flames and whose ashes rest beneath the smoking débris above Johnstown bridge, no definite information can ever be obtained.

## **Hundreds Carried Miles Away**

As little will be learned of hundreds that sank beneath the current and were borne swiftly down the Conemaugh only to be deposited hundreds of miles below on the banks and in the driftwood of the raging Ohio. Probably one-third of the dead will never be recovered, and it will take a list of the missing weeks hence to enable even a close estimate to be made of the number of lives that were lost. That this estimate can never be accurate will be understood when it is remembered that in many instances whole families and their relatives were swept away, and found a common grave beneath the wild waste of waters. The total destruction of the city leaves no data to even demonstrate that the names of these unfortunates ever found place on the pages of eternity's history.

"All indications point to the fact that the death list will reach over five thousand names, and in my opinion the missing will reach eight thousand in number," declared General D.H. Hastings to-night.

At present there are said to have been twenty-two hundred bodies recovered. The great difficulties experienced in getting a correct list is the great number of morgues. There is no central bureau of information, and to communicate with the different dead houses is the work of hours. The journey from the Pennsylvania Railroad morgue to the one in the Fourth ward school house in Johnstown occupies at least one hour. This renders it impossible to reach all of them in one day, particularly as some of the morgues are situated at points inaccessible from Johnstown. At six o'clock in the evening the 630th body had been recovered at the Cambria depository for corpses.

## **None Left to Care for the Dead**

Kernville is in a deplorable condition. The living are unable to take care of the dead. The majority of the inhabitants of the town were drowned. A lean-to of boards has been erected on the only street remaining in the town. This is the headquarters for the committee that controls the dead. As quickly as the dead are brought to this point they are placed in boxes and then taken to the cemetery and buried.

A supply store has opened in the town. A milkman who was overcharging for milk narrowly escaped lynching. The infuriated men appropriated all his milk and distributed it among the poor and then drove him out of the town. The body of the Hungarian who was lynched in an orchard was removed by his friends during the night.

There is but one street left in the town. About one hundred and fifty-five houses are standing where once there stood a thousand. None of the large buildings in what was once a thriving little borough have escaped. One thousand people is a low estimate of the number of lives lost from this town, but few of the bodies have been recovered. It is directly above the ruins and the bodies have floated down into them, where they burned. A walk through the town revealed a desolate sight. Only about twenty-five able-bodied men have survived and are able to render any assistance. Men and women can be seen with black eyes, bruised faces and cut heads.

### **Useless Calls for Help**

The appearance of some of the ladies is heartrending. They were injured in the flood, and since that have not slept. Their faces have turned a sickly yellow and dark rings surround the eyes. Many have succumbed to nervous prostration. For two days but little assistance could be rendered them. The wounded remained uncared for in some of the houses cut off by the water, and died from their injuries alone. Some were alive on Sunday, and their shouts could be heard by the people on the shore.

A man is now in a temporary jail in what is left of the town. He was caught stealing a gold watch. A shot was fired at him but he was not wounded. The only thing that saved him from lynching was the smallness of the crowd. His sentence will be the heaviest that can be given him.

Services in the chapel from which the bodies were buried consisted merely of a prayer by one of the survivors. No minister was present. Each coffin had a descriptive card on it, and on the graves a similar card was placed, so that bodies can be removed later by friends.

There are about thirty Catholic priests and nuns here. The sisters are devoting themselves to the cure of the sick and injured in the hospitals, while the priests are doing anything and everything and making themselves generally useful. Bishop Phelan, who reached here on Sunday evening, returned to Pittsburgh on the three o'clock train yesterday afternoon. He has organized the Catholic forces in this neighborhood, and all are devoting themselves to hard work assiduously.

Mr. Derlin, who heeded the warning as to the danger of the dam, had hurried his wife and two children to the hills, but returned himself to save some things from his house. While in the building the flood struck it and swept it away, jamming it among a lot of other houses and hurling them all around with a regular churning motion. Mr. Derlin was in a fix, but went to his top story, clambered to the roof and escaped from there to solid structures and then to the ground. His property was entirely ruined, but he thinks himself fortunate in saving his family.

Where Woodvale once stood there is now a sea of mud, broken but rarely by a pile of wreckage. I waded through mud and water up the valley to-day over the site of the former village. As has been often stated, nothing is standing but the old woollen mills. The place is swept bare of all other buildings but the ruins of the Gautier wire mill. The boilers of this great works were carried one hundred yards from their foundations. Pieces of engines, rolls and other machinery were swept far away from where they once stood. The wreck of a hose carriage is sticking up out of the mud. It belonged to the crack company of Johnstown. The engine house is swept away and the cellar is filled with mud, so that the site is obliterated.

A German watchman was on guard at the mill when the waters came. He ran for the hillside and succeeded in escaping. He tells a graphic story of the appearance of the water as it swept down the valley. He declares that the first wave was as high as the third story of a house.

The place is deserted. No effort is being made to clean off the streets. The mire has formed the grave for many a poor victim. Arms and legs are protruding from the mud and it makes the most sickening of pictures.

## General Hastings' Report

In answer to questions from Governor Beaver, Adjutant-General Hastings has telegraphed the following:

"Good order prevailed throughout the city and vicinity last night. Police arrangements are excellent. Not one arrest made. No need of sending troops. The Mayor of Johnstown and the Sheriff of Cambria county, with whom I am in constant communication, request that no troops be sent. I concur in their judgment. There is a great outside clamor for troops. Do not send tents. Have nine hundred here, which are sufficient. I advise you to make a call on the general public for money and other assistance.

"About two thousand bodies have been rescued and the work of embalming and burying the dead is going on with regularity. There is plenty of medical assistance. We have a bountiful supply of food and clothing to-day, and the fullest telegraphic facilities are afforded and all inquiries are promptly answered.

"Have you any instructions or inquiries? The most conservative estimates here place the number of lives lost at fully 5,000. The prevailing impression is that the loss will reach from 8,000 to 10,000. There are many widows and orphans and a great many wounded—impossible to give an estimate. Property destroyed will reach \$25,000,000. The popular estimate will reach \$40,000,000 to \$50,000,000.

"I will issue a proclamation to-night to the people of the country and to all who sympathize with suffering to give aid to our deeply afflicted people. Tell them to be of good cheer, that the sympathies of all our people, irrespective of section, are with them, and wherever the news of their calamity has been carried responses of sympathy and aid are coming in. A single subscription from England just received is for \$1,000."

Grand View Cemetery has three hundred buried in it. All met death in the flood. They have thirty-five men digging graves. Seven hundred dead bodies in the hospital on Bedford street, Conneaut. One hundred dead bodies in the school-house hospital, Adam street, Conneaut. Three hundred bodies found to-day in the sand banks along Stony Creek, vicinity of the Baltimore and Ohio; 182 bodies at Nineveh.

## CHAPTER VI

### Shadows of Despair

Another graphic account of the fearful calamity is furnished by an eye-witness: The dark disaster of the day with its attendant terrors thrilled the world and drew two continents closer together in the bonds of sympathy that bind humanity to man. The midnight terrors of Ashtabula and Chatsworth evoked tears of pity from every fireside in Christendom, but the true story of Johnstown, when all is known, will stand solitary and alone as the acme of man's affliction by the potent forces to which humanity is ever subject.

The menacing clouds still hover darkly over the valley of death, and the muttering thunder that ever and anon reverberates faintly in the distance seems the sardonic chuckle of the demon of destruction as he pursues his way to other lands and other homes.

#### The Waters Receding

But the modern deluge has done its worst for Johnstown. The waters are rapidly subsiding, but the angry torrents still eddy around Ararat, and the winged messenger of peace has not yet appeared to tell the pathetic tale of those who escaped the devastation.

It is not a hackneyed utterance to say that no pen can adequately depict the horrors of this twin disaster—holocaust and deluge. The deep emotions that well from the heart of every spectator find most eloquent expression in silence—the silence that bespeaks recognition of man's subserviency to the elements and impotence to avert catastrophe. The insignificance of human life is only fully realized by those who witness such scenes as Johnstown, Chatsworth and Ashtabula, and to those whose memory retains the picture of horror the dread experience cannot fail to be a fitting lesson.

#### A Dreary Morning

This morning opened dark and dreary. Great drops of rain fell occasionally and another storm seems imminent. Every one feels thankful though that the weather still remains cold, and that the gradual putrefaction of the hundreds of bodies that still line the streams and lie hidden under the miles of driftwood and débris is not unduly hastened.

The peculiar stench of decaying human flesh is plainly perceptible to the senses as one ascends the bank of Stony Creek for a half mile along the smouldering ruins of the wreck, and the most skeptical now conceive the worst and realize that hundreds—aye, perhaps thousands—of bodies lie charred and blackened beneath this great funeral pyre. Searchers wander wearily over this smoking mass, and as occasionally a sudden shout comes over the waters, the patient watchers on the hill realize that another ghastly discovery has been added to that long list of revelations that chill every heart and draw tears to the eyes of pessimists.

From the banks many charred remains of victims of flames and flood are plainly visible to the naked eye, as the retreating waters reluctantly give up their dead. Beneath almost every log or blackened beam a glistening skull or the blanched remnants of ribs or limbs mark all that remains of life's hopes and dreams.

Since ten o'clock last night the fire engines have been busy. Water has been constantly playing on the burning ruins. At times the fire seems almost extinguished, but fitful flames suddenly break out afresh in some new quarter, and again the water and flames wage fierce combat.

## **The Count is Still Lacking**

As yet there is no telling how many lives have been lost. Adjutant General Hastings, who has charge of everything, stated this morning that he supposed there were at least two thousand people under the burning débris, but the only way to find out how many lives were lost was to take a census of the people now living and subtract that from the census before the flood. Said he, "In my opinion there are any way from twelve thousand to fifteen thousand lost."

Up to this morning people living here who lost whole families or parts of families hardly seemed to realize what a dreadful calamity had befallen them. To-day, however, they are beginning to understand the situation. Agony is stamped on the faces of every one, and it is truly a city of mourning.

The point of observation is on the hillside, midway between the woolen mills of Woodvale and Johnstown proper, which I reached to-day after a journey through the portions of the city from which the waters, receding fast, are revealing scenes of unparalleled horror. From the point on the hillside referred to an excellent view of the site of the town can be obtained. Here it can be seen that from the line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which winds along the base of Prospect Hill, to a point at which St. John's Catholic Church formerly stood, and from the stone bridge to Conemaugh, on the Conemaugh River, but twelve houses by actual count remain, and they are in such a condition as to be practically useless. To any one familiar with the geography of the iron city of Cambria county this will convey a vivid idea of a swarth averaging one-half mile in width and three miles in length. In all the length and breadth of the most peaceful and costly portion of Johnstown not a shingle remains except those adhering to the buildings mentioned.

## **Houses Upside Down**

But do not think for an instant that this comprehends in full the awfulness of the scene. What has just been mentioned is a large waste of territory swept as clean as if by a gigantic broom. In the other direction some few of the houses still remain, but they are upside down, piled on top of each other, and in many ways so torn asunder that not a single one of them is available for any purpose whatever. It is in this district that the loss of life has been heartrending. Bodies are being dug up in every direction.

On the main street, from which the waters have receded sufficiently to render access and work possible, bodies are being exhumed. They are as thick as potatoes in a field. Those in charge seem to have the utmost difficulty in securing the removal of bodies after they have been found.

The bodies are lying among the mass of wrecked buildings as thick as flies. The fire in the drift above the bridge is under control and is being rapidly smothered by the Pittsburgh firemen in charge of the work. About seven o'clock this morning a crowd of Battery B boys discovered a family of five people in the smoking and burned ruins above the bridge. They took out father, mother and three children, all terribly burned and mutilated. The little girl had an arm torn off.

## **Finding the Dead**

The work of rescuing the bodies from the mud and débris has only fairly begun, and yet each move in that direction reveals more fully the horrible extent of the calamity. It is estimated that already 1,800 corpses have been found in all parts of the valley and given some little attention. Many of them were so mangled as to be beyond identification.

A regularly organized force of men has been at work most of the day upon the mass of débris about the stone bridge. Early in the forenoon ten bodies were found close together. There was nothing

to identify them, as they were burnt almost to a crisp. Several of them must have belonged to one household, as they were taken from under the blackened timbers of a single roof.

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