

# My Story of the Earthquake

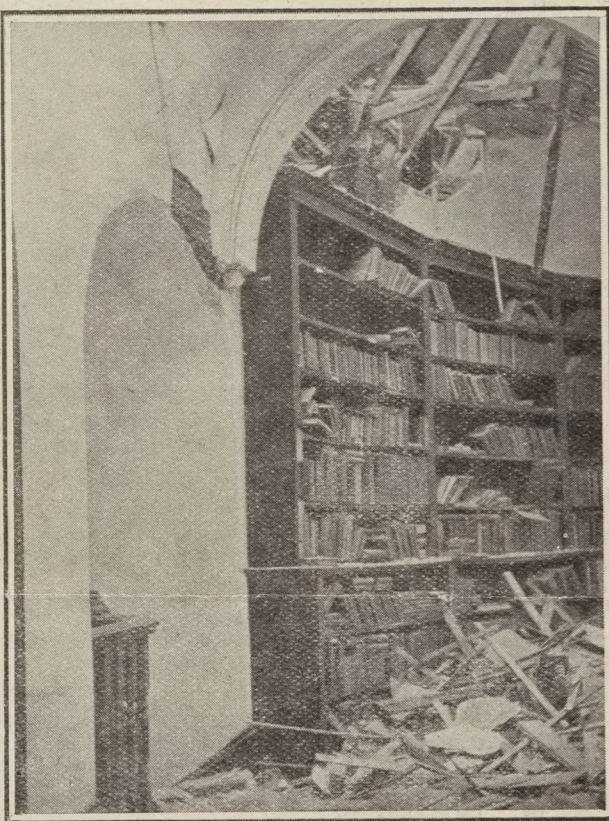
BY REVEREND PROFESSOR EDWARD A. WICHER  
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EDWARD A. WICHER, M.A., B.D.

When the earthquake struck us I was lying asleep at the house of a friend in Berkeley, not far from the University of California. It was at 5.13 on Wednesday morning, April 18th. Suddenly I was awakened by the violent tossing of the bed, which was thrown some feet out into the middle of the room and as suddenly thrown back again. At the same moment I saw the tall wardrobe that stood in the corner thrown half-way to the floor, then checked in mid-air and violently thrown back to the place where it belonged. The room was filled with pieces of flying chandelier, porcelain ornaments, books and toilet utensils. But Berkeley suffered least of all the cities in the Bay region and I afterwards learned that what had saved Berkeley was the counter-shock which came almost instantaneously upon the primary shock and neutralized its effect. In most other places the two shocks were separated from one another by some seconds, so that each increased the power of devastation of the other.

After the lateral motion there followed a perpendicular motion. The house seemed to be lifted high in the air and then let fall, and this action was repeated several times. I stood upright on the bed and was able to reach the ceiling of the room with my hands. Remembering old experiences of earthquakes in Japan, and the danger of falling plaster, I thought that I would balance myself thus and at the same time hold up the plaster. But another violent movement threw me headlong to the floor. I thought that the house was falling, and decided, whether wisely or unwisely, to make a dash for the street. I was thrown from side to side and down the stairs. A heavy glass globe struck me in falling and dazed me, but nothing worse happened, and I was in the open. The noise was terrific and indescribable. It was like the



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booming of a million of cannon, muffled by distance and yet close at hand, while at irregular intervals there came an awful crash. These were not the sounds of falling buildings, they were the sounds of the earth itself, and yet in Berkeley the effects of the earthquake were accounted slight; some porches were knocked away, some windows broken, and all the chimneys toppled over—this was all. In a few minutes quiet ensued—a deep, tremendous quiet—and I returned to the house. It was not until breakfast time that we learned something of the awful horror into which the whole region had been plunged.

I cannot go into all the details of the morning. Suffice to say that we learned that the water-front of San Francisco had been destroyed, that fire had broken out in several parts of the city, that owing to the destruction of the water-mains, there was no water to be had, and, worse than all else, that the hundreds of desperate villains who lived in the dens and shacks upon the south side of Market street had broken into the saloons, filled themselves with liquor, and begun an awful work of outrage, theft and murder. The soldiers from the Presidio had been ordered out, the whole city was under martial law, and no one was allowed to enter it from any side. No one was allowed to enter it! But I had to enter in order to reach my family upon the San Anselmo side. Then I would be shot and that would be the end of it.

I cannot describe my agony during that day. At first we heard the most conflicting rumors. San Jose had been destroyed. No, San Jose was safe. No, San Jose had been destroyed. There were 17,000 people killed in San Francisco; no, there were only 500 killed. But no one could tell me anything of the north shore or San Anselmo, where our seminary stood, where my family lived. I know that my sorrows are not great in the multitude of sorrows; but they are typical, and I tell my story of the day because it is the story of a man.

There was the greatest difficulty in obtaining information of any kind. Every telegraph and telephone line was down, and is still down. No street cars were running. Only the Southern Pacific Railway with its steam trains, maintained its suburban service; but when I applied for a ticket to the city I was told, "We are allowed to carry passengers out of the city, but not to take any into it." I purchased an extra of an Oakland newspaper and the headlines shocked me.

"Dead and missing—Two members of the Wicher family." Oh! Father in Heaven, they were mine. There were no other Wichers in the State. "No," said my companion, "not yours; they were killed in Oakland." Not mine, but the family of someone else. Yes, I thanked God they were not mine, and then I prayed for the other son and husband. The tension was terrible.

Then the refugees began to arrive from the city. They were the saddest and most haggard crew I have ever seen. There were women in their night clothes, as they had run out of the falling buildings, with a borrowed coat drawn about them; there were mothers with babies sucking at their breasts and other babies hanging to their skirts; there were wild-eyed men, whose fright had made them raving maniacs; some were praying, some were laughing, some were silent—all were horror-stricken.

But there was no panic, nor anything approaching a panic.

Then I took a ticket for the mole of the Southern Pacific Railway. If I could not reach the city, I would get as near to it as possible. But upon the mole I found the case equally hopeless. I begged from the officials to be allowed to go, "I want to reach my family," I said. But they answered me, "They all say that, we cannot make any exception; stand back," and a guard levelled a revolver at my forehead. But I had one comfort now. For upon calling out in the crowd to learn whether there was anyone who had any information about conditions in San Anselmo, I was told that the disturbance in this district was slight. But nothing definite was known.

For a long time after this I tramped the streets of Oakland from the newspaper offices to the telegraph offices and back again, forgetting even that I was hungry, until my senses began to grow dim and I realized that I had not taken food for nine hours. The work of the destroyer was everywhere in evidence. Fine mercantile buildings and fine churches had thrown their facades across the pavements; cornices were broken, steeples were twisted around, dwellings were telescoped together, so that houses of two stories looked as though they had but one. The streets were scattered with broken stones and fallen wires. No one thought of doing any business. But helpless crowds congregated upon the corners, telling of miraculous escapes from death and wishing for news of dear ones in other localities. Men who had not prayed for years felt no shame in falling upon their knees in the sight of the people and crying for mercy. A renewal of the tremor at noon sent many of them out of the streets to the refuge of Idora Park.

I learned here that San Jose was burning, that Santa Cruz was flooded and burning, that Stanford University was lying a pile of stones, that Santa Rosa was prostrate. Everywhere great loss of life was reported. But of San Anselmo I could get no word. The dark column grew thicker and reached higher over the doomed city across the Bay, while fierce tongues of red flame shot forth at intervals out of the blackness of the smoke. The sky was covered with murky clouds, hiding the view of Mount Tamalpais. The sun was turned to blood. There was not a breath of wind; but a terrible oppressive heat which closed us in to earth. Then we met a student, who had just escaped from Stanford, who told us that the great entrance gate, the splendid memorial chapel, and other beautiful stone buildings were lying in ruins upon the ground. Three hundred students in a dormitory had had a narrow escape from the same death which had fallen upon two of their comrades.

It had long since become hopeless to think of reaching home through San Francisco. In a direct line I was only ten miles from my loved ones, but to reach them I must travel a hundred and twenty miles around the headwaters of the Bay and spend the night in the devastated city of Santa Rosa.

It was four o'clock when I left Oakland with a train-load of sad, grey people, fleeing to friends in the country. Ordinarily there was only a small number of people who desired to travel by this route, but on this day there was a throng that filled the aisles and platforms.

One cannot but praise the splendid service of the Southern Pacific, California North-Western and North Shore Railroads, in this time of trial. When wires were down and travel was dangerous, they still moved the crowds without delay or accident. And where there were no tickets, they were not exacting. Their officials, like all other men, had their own sorrows; but they sank them in the common need, and bravely did their duty.

It was eight o'clock in the evening, when, in total darkness, we reached the stricken Santa Rosa. The desolation was appalling. The fine business street of the city was wiped out. The earthquake had shaken down the buildings, the live wires had set them on fire, and one of the most beautiful of California's beautiful cities was left a mound of embers. The Saint Rose hotel, in which I had lodged upon my last visit, had fallen and killed its visitors. The hotels were all gone. But the good Presbyterian minister, though bankrupt in everything except goodness, shared with me his last loaf of bread; for famine threatened to add its tortures to those of the fire. The splendid self-denial of the Christian ministers of California is one of the conspicuous features which helps to relieve the awfulness of the disaster. The light-hearted gaiety of California is everywhere showing that it is not simply wickedness, as some men would have us believe. It may be thoughtless, but in the hour of trial it can be tender also.

At the depot of the California North-Western Railway we talked with the night watchman, an old forty-niner. "First it went this way," he said, waving his lantern to the right in a circle, "and then it went this way," waving to the left. "And then, if you'll believe me, the ground flew up and hit me. I thought at first as though I might be drunk; but rec'lected I hadn't had a drink for a month. And then I jest tumbled down and

couldn't go a step except on my knees. And I prayed A'mighty God to forgive me for my iniquities. An' I saw it, mark you, I saw it, I SAW it. That oil tank jest riz up and fell over. An' the col' storage outfit jest laid down. An' see them electric poles, I see the sparks jest fly and burn holes in the wooden awnings. An' my God, the whole town come down. There was two women killed in a house across the road, thet one on the corner. An' I kin hear the groans uv the dying yet. It was awful. It was——" the old man trembled as he spoke and his utterance became choked at the end.

On the way through the street I passed a church where men and women were leaving and entering. Seeing a placard posted upon the door "Relief Committee," I went in to learn what was being done there. Inside I found a new horror. There were thirty corpses stretched upon the floor. The church had been changed into a morgue.

Needless to say we did not sleep much that night. At intervals we experienced slight shocks and around was the darkness. When morning came I was at length able to leave Santa Rosa by the California North-Western Railway. My agitation grew as I came nearer home. All this time I had had no word from San Anselmo, nor could I send any. When we passed the upbound train I shouted from the platform, "How is San Anselmo?" and received back the answer, "All right." I felt better now the farther forward I journeyed; for even the chimneys were standing at San Rafael.

And my family were safe at home—shaken but uninjured. I thanked God for His great goodness, and learned, as I had never learned before, the knowledge of human compassion. But our beautiful seminary, our grey-stone pride, was cleft asunder and forever ruined.

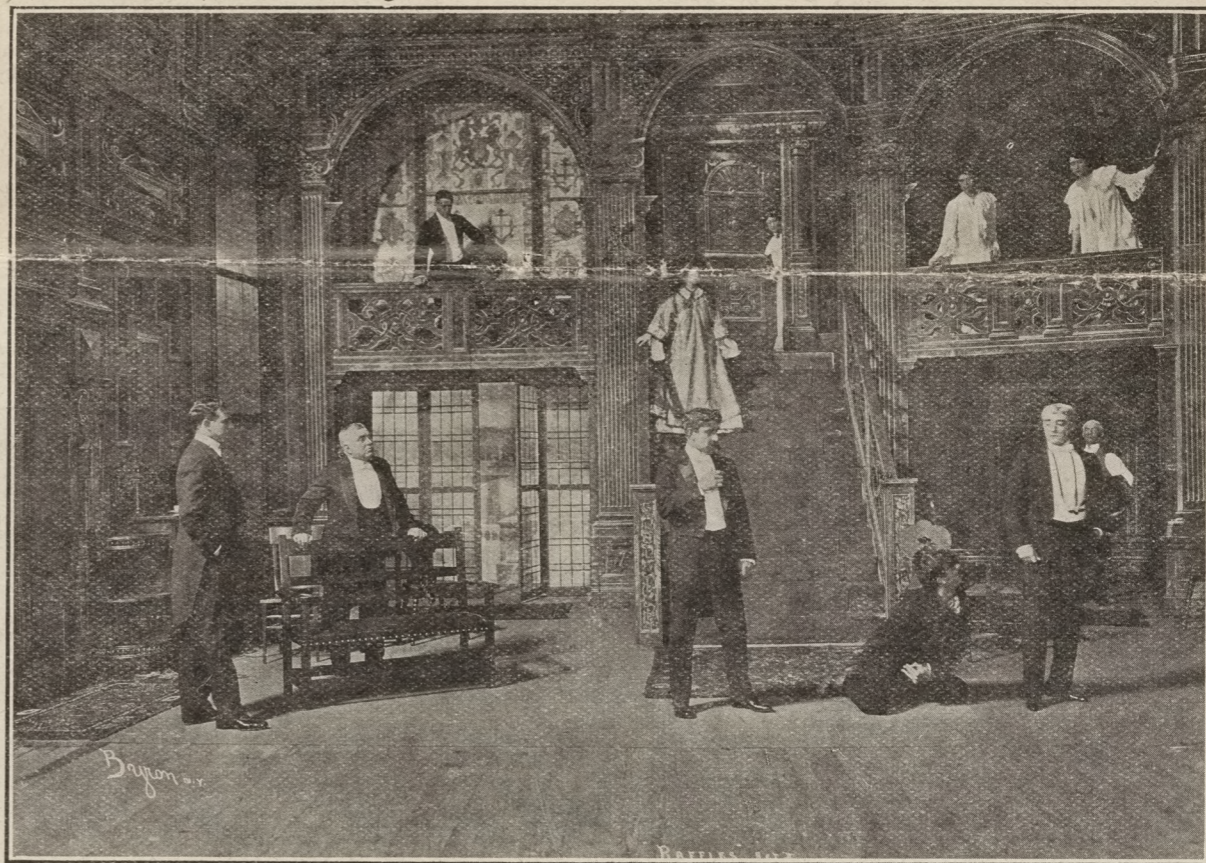
On Friday night of last week the picturesque studio of Mr. McGillivray Knowles was filled with an appreciative audience on the occasion of a Shakespearean recital by students of the School of Expression. To Mrs. Scott Raff was due the credit of training and management and the evening's performance was indicative of sincere and earnest study. There is, perhaps, no hall in the city that could provide such environment for dramatic presentation as was afforded by this studio, in which every object is of artistic interest. Scenes from *The Winter's Tale*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar* and *Henry V.* formed the varied programme, which was carried out in a most pleasing manner. The "reading" was excellent, especially when the youthfulness of most of the amateur players was taken into consideration. There was no flagging of interest, the closing scene in *King Henry's* wooing of *Katharine* being the most popular feature in the recital. Mrs. Burden made a bewitching French princess, whose broken English and coquettish French were thoroughly enjoyed. The first object of the School of Expression training is not to inculcate a fondness for stage productions, but to encourage a study of the Shakespearean dramas, and the increasing seriousness of the work is proof of the benefits already derived from the course.

The musical comedy, *The Tenderfoot*, has created much amusement at the Princess Theater this week. Mr. Oscar L. Figman being one of the most riotously funny comedians that Toronto has seen. His wit is of Texan unconventionality, but it never degenerates into vulgarity. Altogether, as *The Tenderfoot*, *Professor Zachary Pettibone*, he earns the enthusiastic gratitude of the audience for arousing such mirth as is seldom occasioned by the humor of the modern musical comedy. The setting and costumes are all of the free prairie life of the Lone Star State and give a breezy picturesqueness to the doings of

the outward and visible sign of a decadence too dreary to contemplate. Mr. G. K. Chesterton's remark on the Ibsen realism was recalled last week by those who have read the English essayist's *Heretics*. It is to the effect that Ibsen is a realist for the evil aspect only and that the realism of goodness frequently escapes him. More than any other man the dramatist needs "to see life steadily and see it whole."

## DRAMA

At the Princess Theater next week there will be two engagements of unusual interest. During the first half of the week, Mr. Kyrle Bellew will appear as *Raffles*, that most amusing and agile "amateur cracksman," whose adventures have been related by E. W. Hornung in narratives that have been equalled by few modern story-writers. *Raffles*, to be sure, is a gentleman of Robin Hood's profession who finds London more lucrative than Sherwood Forest could have been, and who "burgles" with a grace which places him far ahead of the common or garden variety of grafter. Mr. Frank Connor will take the part of *Bunny*, the blundering but faithful friend of the brilliant *Raffles*, and Mr. E. M. Holland as detective is said to be a most satisfactory exponent of the gentle art of finding out. During the last half of the week, Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe will present four Shakespearean plays, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Mr. Sothern's sumptuous taste is so well known that we shall expect



SCENE FROM RAFFLES AT THE PRINCESS THEATER NEXT WEEK.

vaster stage productions than have been. Such a dramatic alliance as Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe seems to give the lie to the Shakespearean sentiment: "Two stars hold not their motion in one sphere." The production of *The Taming of the Shrew* is not common, and the vivacity of *Kate the Curst* will be a welcome sauce after the love-making of *Juliet* and her *Romeo*. Mr. Sothern as the ardent young lover of Verona is easily imagined, but it is difficult to fit him into the part of *Shylock*. We have had several productions of *The Merchant of Venice* this year, we have been so "many a time and oft on the Rialto" that we might wish for some other comedy—*The Tempest*, for instance, in which the wizard robes of *Prospero* would well become the erstwhile *Proud Prince*. But the richness of the promised fare gives us assurance of a feast, and it would be running no risk to prophesy a crowded house for each production.

It is not often that plays at our leading theater meet with such severe censure as was excited by those in which Miss O'Neil appeared last week. If, instead of our general post-office, the said theater had been in ashes last Sunday morning there would not have been lacking authorities to declare that it was all owing to *The Fires of St. John*. That there were more objectionable performances in Toronto theaters during the last fortnight may be true; but they were not under the form of high dramatic art, and the people who went to see them were in search of the sordid. While it may not have been necessary to direct the attention of our morality department to the Sudermann play in question, most of the spectators considered it a nauseous exploiting of sensuality. The general opinion seemed to coincide with that of the evening paper calling it "a vicious drama." It was regarded as both nasty and inartistic, charges which could hardly be brought against *Magda*. Whatever may be the attitude of students towards Ibsen, the theatergoers of Anglo-Saxon communities find his sombre realism altogether too depressing to fulfil their dramatic requirements, and I frankly admit that I should rather have *A Pair of Spectacles* than a wilderness of *Hedda Gablers*, while *Rosmersholm* is enough to drive one to patent medicines. In the greatest dramas there is a sense of purification, of ennobling that is absent from several of the Ibsen tragedies. It may be old-fashioned to revert to Aristotle's treatise on the subject, but not many wiser reflections have been written since his day. *Rosmersholm* has been called symbolic, but it seems to be nothing but

cowboys and Texas Rangers. The music is bright and inspiring, although we seem to have heard some of it before. Miss Ruth White as the heiress, *Marion Worthington*, is extremely dainty and is even better suited with this role than with her part in *The Burgomaster*. Her clear soprano voice and her piquant prettiness win her instant popularity. Mr. Jethro Warner, a Canadian actor, who comes from Montreal, creates a favorable impression in the part of *Colonel Paul Winthrop*. For an attack of the blues or that forsaken feeling *The Tenderfoot* will prove a successful specific.

*Buster Brown* has been the attraction at the Grand this week. The piece, of course, is founded on that immensely popular series of sketches of the same name drawn by R. F. Outcault in the New York papers. This dramatization of cartoons is quite in keeping with the present methods of the American stage, but as Charles Dana Gibson has suffered the same fate R. F. Outcault should not repine. Every work of a novelist, poet, or artist which has found favor with the great American public is doomed henceforth to languish out its days before the footlights. The stage is the great bed of Procrustes on which American stage managers torture every work of American genius. If it is a novel they lop it off, and if a popular song, stretch it to the breaking point to meet requirements. The practice is so general that one is surprised that they have not already made a problem play out of *Emerson's Essays* or a musical comedy out of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*. *Buster Brown* has not, however, suffered by dramatization. All who enjoyed him in print will enjoy him still more in the play. In the part of *Buster*, Master Rice proved a very capable juvenile performer and was ably assisted by his faithful dog *Tige*, an exacting part taken by Arthur Hill. Of course *Buster* is the whole show, but there are many satellites who revolve around him with becoming celerity and grace. Adele Hinton and Alice Ainscoe, as the mother and sister respectively of *Buster Brown*, had the air of dignity befitting relationship with an infant prodigy, and George Hall and Harry West were entertaining in the comic roles. Then there were many spectacular effects, chorus after chorus of *Buster* girls, basket-ball girls, Red Riding Hoods, etc., all equally charming and weirdly costumed. In short the play is a bewildering but not unpalatable melange. If taken to London it might outrival the Christmas pantomime as an entertainment for children.

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Another interior view at the Seminary.