Room Four: Surviving a City in Ruins

Nothing Has Changed...

Aid for victims of the San Francisco disaster poured in from all corners of the globe. Nearby towns and cities sent immediate necessities such as food, medicine, and clothing. Help also came from such far-flung places as New York, Chicago, Paris, and London – even the citizens of Manila, Philippines sponsored an opera to raise money for refugees. Mayor Schmitz’s city government was unable to handle all aspects of the aftermath, so he appointed a group of prominent citizens to supervise the relief effort. The members of the "Committee of Fifty" included former mayor James Phelan, who chaired the all-important Finance subcommittee in charge of the $9 million in donations that had been received by the city.

Due to the large number of refugees and the high degree of assistance they required, some level of dissatisfaction with relief administration was inevitable. The atmosphere of goodwill quickly dissipating, accusations of mismanagement and even embezzlement abounded. One of San Francisco's richest citizens, Phelan was not exactly popular with the type of people who comprised most of the refugee population. Rumors that he and his cohorts were wasting precious financial resources sparked public indignation. This broadside was just one expression of that anger.

The men the title referred to were Phelan, Dr. Edward Devine of the Red Cross, and Allan Pollock, manager of the St. Francis Hotel and member of the committee. Charges against them ranged from general shirking of their duties as relief officers to illegal speculation of foodstuffs. The class division prevalent throughout the document culminates in the authors' designation as "The Committee of..."
the Whole. The People of San Francisco," a populist play off the Committee of Fifty's elitism. It appeared that the brief period of social leveling was officially over – if it had existed at all.