

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

April 19, 1906

Dear Father:

I suppose that by this time the South is well aware of the frightful devastation that has swept over San Francisco and the surrounding country. If the report is true that Los Angeles has only received a slight shock without much damage, I am certainly more than glad to hear it as I was very much worried. At first I thought the whole state was laid in ruins, in fact, the whole world for a while.

Stanford University is in ruins. Pres. Jordan estimated the loss at Three Million Dollars at least. Two were killed and a dozen injured. Imagine the feeling I experienced on being awakened to find the chiffonier waltzing around the room, the pictures doing their best to hit me and the chimney falling just outside my window. The noise was deafening and I really thought the world had come to an end. Almost all the boys were out on the lawn in their pajamas—in fact all the people on the campus were in their summer negligee, but I could not venture by that capricious piece of furniture. At last it fell over in the corner and I joined the other boys. I thought I had felt before this quakes that were bad but they were barely audible compared to this. On turning our eyes toward the quadrangle, we beheld a very disheartening sight. The beautiful Memorial Church which cost over a million was razed to the ground, as was also the new library and gymnasium. The arch was half torn down, the outer quadrangle was practically demolished and none of the buildings left intact. Then the crowd looked toward Encinia Hall and on seeing the boys yelling and running about realized that something more than a ruined building was at stake—human lives of the 350 inmates of the big dormitory. In less than ten minutes eight hundred students were on the scene. In the center of the dormitory four floors had fallen through to the basement and the students were pinioned under the wreckage. Axes, ropes, crow-bars and every available kind of a tool was put into use and the work of extricating began. The students worked hard and the work was done in the quickest possible manner, otherwise, the seven students successfully rescued with a few broken limbs, would now be corpses. As it is some of them may not pull through. But one poor unfortunate by the name of Manna, a sophomore whom I knew very well and who was a fellow well worth knowing, was far down in the ruins. He was traced by the blood flowing in the water from the broken pipes. When he was found his neck was broken and he only lived a few minutes. For the moment, our own grief obliterated all thought of the outside world, but on sober second thought we realized what frightful things must have happened to San Francisco with its tall buildings and filled in land.

Two of our fraternity boys were in San Francisco and our first thought was of them. We soon dressed and with cameras in our pockets, we were off for the city. At 7:10 we caught a north bound train filled with anxious mothers, brothers, sisters, husbands and wives little thinking how powerless we would be to render any assistance in the holocaust. But we were only able to get as far as San Bruno, 14 miles from our destination. Beyond, great holes were torn in the earth and the track was almost twisted into a knot. It did not take us long to decide what to do. We would walk. At a little road house on the way, the restaurant sign reminded us that we had not yet eaten so we

approached the proprietor with enquiries for sandwiches (sic). What an expression of sheer bewilderment came over his face. Then cursing roundly, he said NO. It was evident we were not going to view any fire from a reserved seat, but were to be a living, breathing part of the incidents of the most pitiful day I ever hope to see. Four miles further we trudged and then caught a drunken cabman who agreed to take us to the city limits for a dollar a piece. We were fortunate about the price for all along the road they were charging two and three dollars to get a back seat in a dump cart. Then the sights began. The road was packed with families with household goods fleeing from the fire. The flames were plainly discernable for miles around. The screaming of women and children and the noise of dynamited buildings made it hard to decide whether you were yourself or someone else. As we worked into town it became worse. Up to the fire ropes we went, there to be roughly pushed back by the soldiers, who under the martial law had been placed in charge of the city. We were within a block of the burning City Hall. Dynamited buildings were falling all around. The earthquake had broken the water mains and dynamite was the only resource left with which to fight the fire, and a very unsuccessful method it proved at that for the fierce wind that was raging seemed to change every five minutes. O, I cannot begin to describe the terrible sights I witnessed—stores broken into and looted, ghouls shot down by the soldiers, a building sunken two stories in a wide fissure in the earth and twenty families buried beneath it, firemen piling corpses on huge drays and carrying them away, patients of the hospital in cots on the sidewalk, inmates of the insane asylum loose among the crowd; sewers, drug stores and chemical concerns wrecked and the stench lent horror to the occasion, men run over and thrown on the tram that passed over them in a matter of fact way and people praying. These were a few of the horrible spectacles we witnessed. It is almost sacrilegious to speak of the humorous side of a catastrophe like that, but nevertheless there were some amusing incidents. We saw one woman escape from a burning building with a phonograph and a camera; out into the hungry, homeless populace where food and covering alone were worth considering and food came at about 25¢ per doughnut, etc. A camera or phonograph would not have brought 5¢ from men who were millionaires yesterday but paupers today. One woman was running down the street with a parrot that was screeching at the top of its voice, “What the h---‘s a matter?” Even the panic stricken ruined people paused and smiled. In fact, I was surprised to see how many stared ruin in the face without a murmur; in some cases with a grim smile. First to see their businesses go and then their homes was indeed a tough proposition. All day long we wandered about the streets trying to get through the ropes to find the boys, but it was no use. Market St. from 20<sup>th</sup> St. to the Ferry and five or six blocks either side was razed to the ground. There were no trains as the S.P. depot was on the edge of the fire and all rolling stock had been moved 4 or 5 miles out. We thought we were doomed to a night in the city; in the midst of ghouls, criminals, insane and the hitherto honest poor who had every reason to succumb to temptation with their families homeless and starving. Then for the first time we wished we had not come, for a night in that city would have been as near hell as any mundane spot could be. We ran down to the water-front trying to beg, borrow or steal a boat to get across to Berkeley, but nothing doing. Our lucky star hovered over us at 8:30 when the superintendent of the S. P. gave orders that a train should be made up a short way out of the city to get some of the people away. After a rather risky journey, we arrived home, footsore and very weary at 11 o’clock after one of

the most strenuous days of my almost 21 years. All of the people on the campus were sleeping on the lawn fearing another shock. The University buildings were being guarded against thieves. Altogether there wasn't much sleeping going on. This morning it became evident that the peninsula would be subject to a terrible famine. We could not get any provisions for love or money. Thousands of poor and criminals are heading toward the towns along this way, getting drunk, stealing, etc. In Palo Alto a volunteer militia has been called for. All of the road houses have been ordered to close to stem the tide of drunkenness.

The University is closed until Aug. 23. We will hope that everything comes out all right. I understand that Chicago and Los Angeles have subscribed liberally and that the latter is sending relief trains. The sooner, the better. Please send me twenty dollars besides money to get home on, and send it in a post office order as a check is not worth the powder to blow it up. Please send the twenty anyway at once.

With love,

From your loving son,

*Arthur*

Arthur R. Maass  
attended "Stanford" at time of  
San Francisco Earthquake.  
(Later graduated (Stanford) with  
the highest honors ever in Chemistry)