

INCIDENTS OF THE GREAT CONFLAGRATION IN LONDON, AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE FIRE INSURANCE COMPANIES.

The circumstances of the recent conflagration in London give a most interesting exhibit of the British metropolis in a variety of aspects ranging from its ancient history to its prominence in the political and literary annals of the old land, its unrivalled distinction as a commercial and financial centre, its antique structural conditions and its stolid adherence to old fashioned customs. For many centuries the district in which the fire took place has been the heart of English commerce and of English life. In the 11th century a wave of religious revival swept over London, which then was famed for its over one hundred churches and the devotion of the citizens. Out of this revival sprang the church of St. Giles, Cripplegate, which was nearly burnt by the recent fire, the loss of which would have distressed London more than the monetary losses it caused, as it is not only a famous historic relic, but is sacred as the shrine of Milton's tomb. Herein also are registers of the marriage of Cromwell, and the burial of Frobisher, the great navigator, who in 1576 fitted out an expedition to discover a North West passage, antedating the exploits of Nansen by over 300 years. Though close to thoroughfares like the Strand and Cheapside, the burnt district is unknown to visitors to London save merchants, who could find in that congested area, north of the latter street, the largest and most varied stocks of the manufactures and other products of all climes in the world. The burnt district is an irregular parallelogram, 93 yards by 187 yards, embracing 4 1-2 acres, which were intersected though the centre by Jewin street. This street was the chord of an arc, 320 yards long by 100 at the widest point. The whole area enclosed in that arc was completely destroyed. The south of Jewin St. was like a child's puzzle, the lofty warehouses being divided up into blocks by streets running at various angles, and of irregular widths, the general form of the blocks being that of a crooked wedge. The topographical conditions were very obstructive to the work of the fire brigade. But the chief obstruction to the effectiveness of the brigade was the obstinacy of the London County Council in resisting efforts to adapt the equipment to modern conditions. When even some small towns in Canada have an electric fire alarm, with hydrants giving high pressure, the world's Metropolis, the richest emporium of valuable goods in existence, had no such equipments, nor even an arrangement for a prompt supply of coal for the fire engines, coal having to be hauled two miles while the fire was raging. When coal was needed supplies were offered from private stores, but these were rejected for a time as the rules of the service did not provide for such supplies being received. At length, however, the rules had to be ignored, or some of the engines would have become useless.

A PENNY, WISE AND POUND, FOOLISH SYSTEM.

Such rigid conservatism is almost incredible. The authorities it appears declined to bring the fire protection up to date, because they considered a conflagration so unlikely as not to warrant the expense of modern improvements in the way of high pressure hydrants, electric alarms, water towers and other fire fighting weapons. The recent fire cost as much as the installment and maintenance of adequate equipments would have done in a generation. At the time of the fire the citizens were wrangling over a question much like our Manitoba School affair, about which they showed an interest so intense as to afford a strange contrast to their indifference about their protection against so terrible a disaster as the recent conflagration by which hundreds have been deprived of work and several dozens of firms ruined, or financially crippled. Our much valued contemporary, *The Review*, states that "the salvage of one store was worth to the fire offices the cost of the maintenance of the Salvage Corps for many years, so a perfected fire brigade may pay for itself in the long run to the citizens of London." The net losses are now estimated at \$2,500,000. Much having been published in Canadian papers as to the serious effect of the conflagration on the British fire insurance companies established here it is well for the real facts to be known. "The London losses," says *The Review*, "are only one sixth of the actual cash on hand in banks or deposit at short notice. They are only one-thirty-seventh of the premium income of the companies, so that ten days' receipts of their ordinary income would be efficacious in meeting the loss by the recent conflagration." This shows how utterly baseless were the reports published by a number of the leading London papers that the fire insurance companies would be compelled to sell a large block of securities to raise funds to pay claims created by the fire. The effect of the disaster on

THE STOCKS OF THE FIRE INSURANCE COMPANIES

has also been grossly exaggerated, as the following comparison of the prices the day before and the day after the fire prove. We have adapted the stock list of our above-named contemporary to our currency at the rate of \$5. to the £ sterling. A column has been added showing the percentage of the fall in the prices of fire insurance company stocks caused by the fire. The prices quoted are those of one share.

Name of company.	PRICES.		
	Before Fire.	After Fire.	Percentage Fall.
Alliance	55	52.50	2.50
British Law.....	7.50	6.25	1.25
Commercial Union....	220.	215.	5
Guardian	62.50	60.25	1.25
Imperial	165.	160.	5.
L'pool & Lond. & Globe	282.50	280.	2.50
London	310.	307.50	2.50
London & Lancashire..	97.50	96.25	1.25
Northern.....	415.	410.	5.
N. Brit. & Mercantile..	217.50	207.50	10.
Norwich Union.....	642.50	637.50	5.
Palatine.....	18.75	17.50	1.25
Phoenix.....	225.	222.50	2.50
Royal Exchange.....	1850.	1825.	25.
Royal	190.	185.	5.
Sun	60.	57.50	2.50
Union.....	125.	122.50	2.50