

Year.	Commissions.	Per cent.	Officers' Salaries.	Per cent.
1872.....	\$6,687,311	12.0	\$3,796,929	6.8
1873.....	8,347,535	14.5	4,228,935	7.4
1874.....	8,231,011	16.1	4,679,208	9.1
1875.....	7,787,133	14.6	4,672,573	8.8
1876.....	7,382,841	14.2	4,594,062	8.9
1877.....	6,808,519	13.6	4,416,955	8.8
1878.....	6,202,725	14.3	4,129,915	9.5
1879.....	6,199,385	13.5	3,920,753	8.5
1880.....	7,163,382	15.2	3,809,954	8.1
1881.....	7,979,951	15.6	3,824,749	7.5
1882.....	8,178,888	15.4	3,992,566	7.5
1883.....	9,748,507	16.5	4,158,334	7.1
1884.....	10,325,522	16.5	4,481,728	7.2
1885.....	10,976,081	17.0	4,849,185	7.5
1886.....	11,494,305	16.9	5,231,524	7.7
1887.....	11,892,692	16.7	5,397,342	7.6
1888.....	12,574,097	17.6	5,427,245	7.6
1889.....	13,148,207	16.9	5,880,083	7.5
1890.....	14,102,470	18.7	5,830,792	7.8
1891.....	14,647,926	17.9	5,744,326	7.1
1892.....	16,078,073	18.1	6,080,492	6.9
1893.....	16,259,273	16.9	6,271,080	6.6
1894.....	15,172,155	17.5	6,398,818	7.3
1895.....	15,644,846	18.4	6,522,441	7.8
1896.....	15,947,133	19.5	6,772,499	8.3
1897*.....	24,693,635	20.9	9,764,663	8.3
1898.....	25,748,878	19.5	10,607,826	8.0
1899.....	26,714,666	17.6	10,953,423	7.2
1900.....	29,898,184	19.1	10,654,298	6.8
1901.....	34,042,776	20.7	10,610,943	6.5
1902.....	37,744,740	20.2	11,305,780	6.4
Totals.....	\$447,722,847	17.7	\$188,008,421	7.4

\* From 1897 the figures of foreign fire companies are included in all columns except dividends.

† American companies only.

Up to 1897, the figures refer only to the American fire companies, reporting in New York. From 1897 onwards the figures include those of foreign fire companies operating in the United States. The table was compiled for, and appears in "The Insurance Age."

There are several features that are in contrast with each other in the tables. The fire loss ratio since 1872 has remained much the same. The average fire loss for the whole term of thirty-one years, works out as 51.5 per cent. In 16 of the years, it was above this average, and in 15 years, below the average. Each of the years from 1872 to 1886 had a loss ratio below the average of thirty-one years. If the secret of the low fire loss ratio in those twelve years could be disclosed, it might be a gold mine to the companies. It is a singular illustration of the erratic course of what reporters call the "fire fiend," that for ten successive years, the loss ratio of the fire companies in the United States ranged below 49.0 per cent., then in three further years, the ratio averaged only 50.0 per cent. After 1887 their experience changed, in only two years after 1887 did the average loss ratio go below 52 per cent. The range from 1872 to 1902 was 62.2 maximum, 41.6 minimum. The effect of the good and bad years was reflected in the dividends. For ten successive years the dividends were over 10 per cent., going to 15.5 per cent. in 1878. After the loss ratio rises as pointed

out, the dividends sink, these two features being like the balanced buckets of a well service, one up and one down. The lowest point was reached last year with an average dividend of 5.3 per cent., which is much too meagre for such a business as fire insurance.

The commissions' column tells the story of increasing competition. The year 1872 starts off with 12 per cent., then we find fluctuations, with a trend upwards, until 17 per cent. is reached in 1885, after that year the barometer rises, unsteadily, it is true, but still the advance is maintained, making the average of the last six years, 19.6 per cent., 1902's ratio being 20.2 per cent. Officers' salaries show trifling variations in thirty-one years, the percentage ranging all along as about 7.4 per cent. There has been a great outcry against increasing taxation imposed on insurance companies; but, since 1872, the average has been 2.5 per cent., which was also the average from 1873 to 1882. There has been an increase in the last six years, but, apparently to no serious extent. All other expenses are covered by an average percentage of 7.8. Taking, then, the average of commissions at 17.7 per cent.; salaries, 7.4 per cent.; taxes, 2.5 per cent.; sundries, 7.8 per cent., we arrive at 35.4 per cent., as the general average rate of the expenses of operating the fire companies in the United States.

#### PROMINENT TOPICS.

Speaking of the city sidewalks, what is to be said of their being mended by a block of wood, a foot or two square being nailed on the top of the plank to cover a rotten place! That patch becomes a very prominent topic and is likely to be a costly one as most persons stumble over this protruding block. In other places planks have been taken up, a piece taken about 10 inches by 12 and a piece inserted that was cut off from an old plank that had been rotten for years.

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A factory in this city, where about 1,000 women and girls are employed, needed the roof repairing last week. To reach the roof was found most difficult, as there were electric wires in elaborate bundles within a hand's breadth of the walls. In our informant's judgment those wires constitute one of the most dangerous of fire traps. No ladders could be set against the building; no outside means of escape were available; those hundreds of females were simply hemmed in by a net work of wires placed close to the windows.

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A civil engineer has pointed out to us a building in the course of erection in the very heart of the city that, he declares, would not be tolerated in any other city, the walls being erected are so dangerously liable to collapse. It certainly looks like courting death to be working where such a risk exists.