

IS FIFTY PER CENT ENOUGH ?

The New York Fire Insurance Exchange on Wednesday raised the rates on department stores fifty per cent. This action was taken none too soon. The big department-store fire has not yet happened in New York, but it is pretty sure to come, and the same underwriter must take account of the probability. The managers of these enormous shops will no doubt complain of the increase and be voluble in their protestations that any fire on their premises is practically certain to be conquered before doing any great damage, so complete is their system of watch and safeguard, so ample and efficient their fire-fighting apparatus. If they were right in this claim they might well be their own insurers. They do not dare to carry the risk themselves, just because they know that in spite of their precautions—which may be admitted to be, in general, excellent—fire may prove their intractable master. They want insurance and must have it. Let them pay for it all that it is reasonably worth. It is our belief that before long it will be demonstrated that the just-advanced rates are insufficient, and a further and quite as large an increase will have to be made. In the end, in order that the insurance of department stores may be a fairly safe and fairly profitable business, it will be necessary that their vast open areas of floor space shall be broken by fire-proof partitions and something be done with the stairways and elevator openings to diminish materially the chances of flame leaping from floor to floor. That any such change will be strenuously resisted by the shop owners may be taken for granted, but the change will have to come, if not by the voluntary action of the owners, then by compulsion of law. As in these columns has often been said, the department-store fire-hazard is a matter of public concern, not alone nor chiefly by reason of its menace to property, but because of the peril in which every working day it puts thousands of human lives. Possibly the needed lesson of imminent danger that shall incite an irresistible public demand for reform, will come in the shape of a coroner's inquest over some scores or hundreds of charred corpses. With a continuance of present conditions, that lesson is likely to be administered.—"Insurance."

COMMERCIAL UNION PURCHASES THE PALATINE.

The Palatine has passed into the hands of the Commercial Union by a transfer of the former's stock. Cablegrams received on Tuesday conveyed the information that the Commercial Union had offered to take over the younger office on the basis of paying at the rate of £2, 2s. in Commercial Union stock for Palatine shares, which have been quoted at £1, 10s. A cablegram from General Manager Lane of the Palatine, received on Thursday, confirmed the news of the transfer, subject to the formal ratification of the company's stockholders.

The general opinion is that the Palatine will be continued just as was the Queen when purchased by the Royal some years ago. The Palatine has been extremely aggressive of late years in the West and in New England, and has also been prominent as a haven for retiring companies. Its southern department reports to Manchester, the managers having for years had a direct contract with the home office. William Wood is the general manager of the company for the eastern and middle states, and William M. Ballard, is assistant manager. George M. Fisher, of Chicago, is the western manager, Charles A. Laton, of San Francisco, controls the Pacific coast department, and Finley & Janvier, of New Orleans, control the southern territory.

The Palatine is one of the most progressive of the younger English companies—it was established in 1886—and by good management has built up a large premium income. It was subjected to a rather trying experience last year, however, both at home and on this side, so that while its 1899 premiums were £724,037, against £663,465 in 1898, its losses were £529,277, as against £445,442. The outcome of the year was a debit balance of £17,542, and the directors announced with regret the passing of the dividend. While the company still enjoyed the fullest public confidence, some of the shareholders seem to have missed that dividend and to have been unnecessarily dubious about future profits, which probably accounts for their acceptance of the Commercial Union's offer.—The Boston "Standard."

THE CUBAN SCANDAL.—An American exchange, in discussing the recent revelations of fraud in the newly organized postal department at Havana, says: "Each day brings its fresh contribution of irregularities in the postal service of Cuba. The Postmaster of Havana was suspended yesterday, two of his subordinates were arrested, half a dozen others are under the closest supervision and will be arrested as soon as their services can be spared, and it has been found that the frauds ramified in every direction, throughout the island. Nothing so serious and widespread in the way of a conspiracy to defraud has been known since the star route and whiskey frauds of Grant's day. The present scandal is more discreditable in one sense than the swindling of that period, because the United States is now acting as a trustee in Cuba, and was expected to set an example of efficient and honest administration to a people just learning to govern themselves. With each new disclosure of corruption, the Havana despatches report, the Cubans ridicule the more the assumption of the Americans that they are models of official honesty."

NOBLESSE OBLIGE.—Mr. D. O. Hunter Blair writes to the editor of "The Outlook" that there are at this moment at the front no less than four dukes, twenty-four earls, three viscounts, and twenty-eight barons, to say nothing of thirty-two baronets and upwards of fifty heirs (apparent or presumptive) to English, Scotch and Irish peerages. "This fact is, I venture to think, apart from any argument that can be founded on it, noteworthy in itself. I know no parallel to it since Flodden or the Wars of the Roses."