

FIRE INSURANCE AND PROSPERITY.

"It is a peculiar fact," says the "Journal of Commerce," "that when the industrial interests of the United States are experiencing a wave of prosperity the fire insurance business usually is very unprofitable. This was never more clearly demonstrated than at the present time. Rates appear to have reached the lowest ebb, expenses are increasing and the fire losses show a serious advance over previous years. When the annual statements appear in January it will be found that company after company will show a decided loss in surplus, and probably at least half a dozen will be forced to the wall before spring.

Fire underwriting at present is a losing game. Higher rates are needed nearly everywhere, and could be readily secured in Philadelphia, Chicago and New York, where the losses have been abnormal. Each of these cities has cost the underwriters more than the net premium receipts. Just why fire insurance should not share in prosperity is not really known. It is theorized that good times mean less care and a "loose pulley" type of management in manufacturing and mercantile establishments, and also that plants are run at high pressure night and day to fill orders."

COMMERCIAL UNION ASSURANCE CO., LIMITED.

Mr. Richard Wickens, so long and favourably known as the General Agent in Toronto of the Commercial Union Assurance Co., Limited, is, we understand, retiring from active connection with the Company, on 1st January next. Mr. Wickens came to Canada in 1836 from Hants, England, and after spending a few years in mercantile business in Quebec, removed to Toronto in 1854, where he accepted a position with the British America Assurance Co. In 1873 he took the General Agency for Ontario of the Commercial Union, their business at that time in the Province being very small. In 1887 the Head Office of the Company was removed to Montreal, Mr. Wickens retaining the General Agency for the City of Toronto and county of York. During the 14 years in which he had charge of the Ontario business, the premium income of the company had, by his painstaking and judicious management, so increased that it had become one of the largest enjoyed by any of the fire insurance companies doing business in the Province. Recognizing the valuable services rendered by Mr. Wickens during the 26 years he has been their representative, the Head Office in England have, on his severing his connection with them, very properly made him a retiring annual allowance, which we, together with his many insurance friends, trust he may long be spared to enjoy.

Mr. George R. Hargraft who succeeds Mr. Wickens as General Agent at Toronto is the eldest son of the late William Hargraft, a widely known and much respected merchant of Cobourg, Ont. After a few years training with his father, Mr. Hargraft entered the service of the Bank of Toronto, and filled some important

positions in the Toronto and Montreal Offices of that institution. He went into the insurance business in 1889, becoming City Agent of the "Commercial Union." Since that time he has, by strict and careful attention, built up one of the largest insurance connections in the City of Toronto. Mr. Hargraft has always been more or less identified with athletic sports. He is a prominent member of the Granite Club, having just completed his term of office as President of the Curling Club. He is also Vice-President of the Granite Lawn Bowling Club, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club.

While the Commercial Union may deplore the fact that they are losing the services of so valued a servant as Mr. Wickens has been, we think they are at the same time to be congratulated on being able to retain as his successor so popular, and in every way capable an Agent as Mr. Hargraft.

THE HAZARD OF A DEPARTMENT STORE.

That the modern department store is not only in constant and eminent danger of loss by fire, but is a menace to adjacent property, has been demonstrated more than once, says the "Chronicle" (N.Y.) The recent fire in Philadelphia started in a department store and caused a property loss of about \$1,600,000. The burned property was in a "conflagration district" of Philadelphia, and the fire started presumably from a faulty electric wiring at a time in the morning when it was not likely to be promptly discovered. The time may come when the proprietors of department stores will be sufficiently impressed with the danger to their property to adopt adequate measures of prevention from fire. Vast quantities of inflammable material hung from ceilings and exposed on counters are inviting food for fire. It is unreasonable to expect sprinklers to confine a fire in such a place to a confined area. During the holiday season the danger from fire in these stores is greatly increased. A conflagration in a department store at a time when it was filled with shoppers is a ghastly thing to think of. Something should be done before it is too late.

ELECTRIC WIRES AND THE FIRE HAZARD.

The Royal Insurance Company has issued a leaflet containing many valuable hints on "Trolley Wires for Electrical Traction, and their Influence upon the General Fire Hazard." The telephone and telegraph wires may come into contact with the trolley wires, and protective measures are necessary to prevent the occurrence of fires in buildings containing telephone or other like electric instruments using small currents of low pressure, as such instruments and their connections are usually burnt up when a high pressure trolley current is introduced by contact with the telephone wire. The precautions recommended are: that the earth wire must be carried *outside* the building; all telephone wires must be substantially covered with