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CURRENT TOPICS

CALAMITOUS in many respects was the great fire which swept to utter destruction so many of Toronto's largest warehouses on the night of April 19. Businesses, which have been built up by the arduous labors of half a century and more, have been completely wiped out. Buildings, but lately erected and the pride of their owners, have fallen a prey to the fire fiend and now lie a desolate mass of charred ruins. Merchandise, the product of the brains and hands of workmen all over the world, has vanished to nothingness. Millions of dollars worth of property have been wiped out never to be replaced.

From the sentimental standpoint, the fire is viewed with varied feelings. Especially do we think of the older warehouses which have seen the faces and heard the footsteps of many of Toronto's oldest and most honored merchants. Each corner of the old buildings has its associations, dear to the heart of those whose daily round of duty called them there. And to the merchants and ex-merchants throughout Canada, who have done business in the burnt district, the loss will occasion deep feelings of regret.

Sympathy with those who have lost their business homes is everywhere expressed and is genuine. Even among their keenest rivals a feeling for the suffering firms has been evinced, which would never have been manifested twenty years ago. Not one firm can be pointed at which can be said to have taken an unfair advantage of the misfortunes of a rival. And the sympathy has not been entirely a sympathy of words. It has been a sympathy of deeds as well. Rival firms have come forward voluntarily to the assistance of the sufferers, with offers of accommodation and supplies. This kindness and consideration in a time of loss is and will be appreciated.

One cannot help referring to the character of the firms who have been thus visited with destruction. They are one and all upright, worthy companies. Their principals are numbered among Toronto's most honorable citizens. The firms who lost most heavily have been long established in the city and have attained a world-wide reputation for reliability and stability. Their loss is doubly deplorable under these circumstances.

In the stationery trade, the blow has been especially heavy. Other trades have suffered and some, like the fancy goods trade, very heavily, but the stationery trade has suffered most of all. At least six important manufacturing stationery firms have been destroyed and scarcely a survivor exists to carry on the work. These firms were all housed in substantial, modern warehouses and factory

buildings, in which were installed the most modern of machinery. Their stocks were large and varied and of proportions sufficient to supply nearly the whole of Canada.

But while there is a dark side to the picture, there is also a bright side. The property destroyed was fairly well insured and none of the firms seem to be financially embarrassed. The work of building new factories and warehouses is already beginning. In the meantime the management of the several concerns have secured temporary offices and are doing all in their power to keep business moving.

It might be noted that the book business and the fancy goods business are in fairly good condition. Two stocks of books were destroyed in the conflagration but the work of replacing them is unattended by any serious difficulties. The fancy goods business lost valuable stocks in one or two warehouses, but a large proportion of the business was untouched.

Some speculation is heard as to whether the destruction of the wholesale stationery trade of Toronto will not lead to a transfer of the business to Montreal. Prominent business men of Montreal have been interviewed in this connection, and we can but accept as correct their comments on the situation. They admit that for a time the Montreal houses will materially benefit by the burning of the Toronto stocks. But all seem to agree that the benefit will be purely temporary and will only cover sorting orders. The increase in insurance rates will hit the Montreal dealers along with other Canadian interests and, owing to the rapidity with which the Toronto houses are recovering from their losses, there will be but little opportunity for the Montreal dealers to cut into their permanent trade.

A remarkable feature of the case is the energy which has been manifested by the losers in recovering lost ground. Not a moment seems to have been lost and even before their buildings had been quite destroyed, firms were actively engaged in securing new quarters and telegraphing for fresh stocks. Announcements were immediately sent out to the trade by the principal firms, making known their new locations and explaining their prospects.

Bookseller and Stationer can but mute with the trade throughout the whole country in expressing its sincere sympathy for the stricken firms. These firms have been loyal supporters of this paper in the past and we look to see them soon restored to their former successful status in the commercial world.