

the solidity with which not only the houses but factories are constructed.

This, however, is not alone accountable for the vast difference in the loss ratio per capita between these countries and Canada. In European countries we are safe in saying that more care is taken to prevent fires than in either Canada or the United States. Another matter of the deepest importance to continental countries is the fact that practically every fire is investigated in the most minute manner, and some explanation has to be given before the amount of the policy is paid. In Canada and the United States, heretofore, the public has been prone to build for a few years; they think nothing of erecting a building and, in ten or fifteen years, of pulling it down to make place for a more substantial one, or one more in keeping with the growth of the country. So long as these conditions continue, so long will we have a large loss ratio per capita, and so long must the rates which insurance companies charge be kept at about the figure they are to-day.

During the last twenty years we have had many a large fire. We have only to instance Baltimore and San Francisco, two of the largest conflagrations in the United States in recent years. In Canada we have had the Hull fire, and the St. John and Toronto fires. To-day, these are practically forgotten, and the lesson which should have been taught by these catastrophes is no more remembered.

IN the year 1912 Canadian fire losses were approximately \$23,000,000, and to this should be added the enormous upkeep of the fire departments of the various cities, towns and villages throughout the Dominion. When one takes into consideration the fact that during the past year fully one-quarter of the fire losses throughout the Dominion could have been averted had there been an adequate water supply available for fire-fighting purposes, one cannot charge the companies with excessive rates to meet these circumstances.

We need only mention a few of these cases to illustrate this point, one of which occurred towards the end of the year, when \$300,000 went up in smoke in Montreal when the plants of the Consumers Cordage Company and the Canadian Bag Company were burned in November. The total destruction of these plants can, in a large measure, be attributed to insufficient water force. Practically no water was in sight, as, coincident with the breaking out of the fire, the fire main intake pipe had burst. Another instance was in October, when the Galt Bros. Company's premises were burned, with a total loss of \$150,000, and it has been said that had sufficient water been available the loss would have been slight. In this case the failure of the supply of water was attributable to the fact that some repairs had been made to one of the water mains, a section of which was buried and no force was available. Early in the year Toronto suffered some serious losses, reaching a total of about \$350,000. In both cases, frozen hydrants and an unaccountable delay in bringing the high pressure system into force, were the causes of the great loss. Winnipeg, also, was made to suffer from the inadequate water supply. The losses on the Brown & Rutherford building totalled \$250,000. We might instance other cases which came to our notice during the year, and while fires were checked in time to save serious conflagrations, it was only through the heroic efforts of the firemen, the water supply in every instance proving inadequate to meet the exigencies of the cases.

FROM the instances quoted it is evident that the water question is the cause of a large number of our fires, and as this reflects directly on the different cities, towns, and villages, the public should not blame fire insurance companies if they have to keep up rates to meet the cost of the carelessness of the public throughout the length and breadth of the Dominion. Fire insurance companies are nothing more or less than distributors of money col-

lected in Canada, and the percentage of underwriting profits of any company, if the trouble is taken to analyze them, will be found to be very small indeed, and the record of most Canadian companies has been that in place of a profit from underwriting, there has been, year after year, a deficit.

One need only look over the list of companies which have been operating in Canada to find out the unprofitableness of this field from an underwriting standpoint. We know of no instance where a city, town, or village in Canada, which has lived up to the requirements called for by the Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association, has not had a rate of insurance which was distinctly low. Tens of thousands of dollars are expended yearly by the Fire Underwriters' Association, making plans, surveys, etc., of the different cities and towns, and any defects which are found in the system of fire-fighting appliances, or in the water-works, are brought to the attention of the municipality, notification being given them that if certain suggested reforms are carried out, rates will be decreased, but should they not comply with the requirements, as laid down by men who had had lifelong experience in this question, there is only one thing that can happen to them, and that is that their fire premium rate must remain stationary, if it is not advanced. Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, London, Winnipeg and Vancouver have all had the question put up to them, and in almost every instance they have endeavoured to comply with the requirements of the Fire Underwriters. In every instance there has been a decrease in the rates charged, but notwithstanding the attempts made to better the conditions, year after year, we find possible, not through any fault of the cities themselves, but on account of climatic conditions, frozen hydrants and low water pressure. Once a fire attains a good headway it is often left to burn itself out.

NO doubt Fire Preventive Associations which have been established in Canada will do much towards lessening the fire cost, but reforms are not going to be brought about in a month or a year. They can only be accomplished by constant hammering at the subject and by all parts of the Dominion working in unison. More stringent building restrictions will have to be complied with, and it would be well if a universal building law could be adopted by the various cities, towns, and villages. As a general rule, the men who draw up the building codes for the municipalities know little or nothing about the subject. The councils are often composed of lawyers, doctors, druggists, a few business men, seldom, or never, a builder, because if he has much work to do he has not the time to give to municipal matters, and the building codes, as a result, are anything but what you would expect sensible men to adopt.

The United States Fire Preventive Association has drawn up a building code which, if adopted throughout Canada, would do much towards ameliorating the sufferings of people through fire losses, and would have a most desired effect of decreasing fire rates. The gentlemen who prepared the building code to which we refer are some of the most eminent men in building, engineering, architecture, and the various other branches which have a direct bearing on this question. As copies of this code can be obtained for nothing, we cannot see why men, who admittedly know nothing about it, should not avail themselves of the assembled wisdom of men who have spent a lifetime in the business.

It may be thought that these are strong words, but we feel strongly on the subject, and as it is one of the most burdensome taxes which Canadian people have to bear, it behooves them to pay a little more attention to practical matters and not to be everlastingly finding fault with fire underwriters and fire insurance companies for the rates which they are forced to charge to protect themselves on account of the carelessness which is practically the root of the evil.

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