SCOTT BLOCK FIRE IN WINNIPEG.

SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS BY FIRE COMMISSIONER —PRACTICAL FAILURE OF HIGH PRESSURE SYSTEM—INFLAMMABLE CONSTRUCTION.

Provincial Fire Commissioner A. Lindback, of Manitoba, in his quarterly report makes serious allegations in regard to the recent fire in the Scott Block, Winnipeg. This building was a total loss to the underwriters of $55,000, apart from tenants' insurance. Mr. Lindback states that the high pressure system was a practical failure, and that the building was exceedingly inflammable in construction:—

"I refrained from going outside of the mere investigation report regarding this fire," the Fire Commissioner says, "until I had complete and authentic reports, and complete data as to the burning of that six-storey building, in the meantime expecting the city fire commission would by this time have seen fit to attempt to find out why for 35 minutes no water was available beyond the fourth floor, and not further than just inside the windows. Here was a six storey building with floors of double boards and wooden joists supported by unprotected cast iron columns; wooden ceilings sheeted with stamped metal; partitions of lath and plaster and varnished wood with thin glass divided into small offices, stock rooms, etc. Near the centre an unenclosed light well from first storey to roof, protected by ordinary heavy glass skylight, and containing a passenger elevator around which was wound a wooden stairway. In addition, there was in the south-west corner a freight elevator with antomatic wooden traps. The floors throughout were heavily oiled, so that through the above-mentioned openings the fire had control of the interior within ten minutes from the time it started, preventing escape both by the stairs, elevator or by the fire escape in the rear as soon as the ordinary glass in the windows burst.

FIRE DEPARTMENT DID NOT KNOW LOCATION.

"This building had been inspected shortly before the fire by the fire department, so they should have been fully aware of the exceedingly inflammable construction as well as of its location, and yet when the 'phone message came in that a fire had started in the Scott building, the same reply as regards to another serious fire four years ago came back, an inquiry): "Where is the Scott building?" Was it because they did not know, that the building was practically doomed before they got there? The first alarm reached the fire hall at 4.24, why was the second alarm not sent in till 12 minutes later, 4.36? Why was the high pressure not hooked up immediately, or the best apparatus the department possesses, the high water tower, put in commission until 35 minutes after the arrival of the department? Why were the mains so full of dirt and stones that with a record of 200 to 225 of pressure at the power house, not only was there inadequate pressure at the fire, but several hose were burst, further reducing the pressure where it was badly needed?

"Considering we have many buildings higher than the Scott building and many more not so high, but just as inflammable within the first fire limit and high pressure area—not to mention the many outside that area, where we have no million dollar plant as yet to fall back on, the public expect the city fire commission to look into these conditions and find an explanation and answer to these questions. Every property owner and tax-payer is entitled to know. In the meantime the necessity for intelligent inspections, the individual responsibility and thorough cleaning up of premises is more apparent than ever.

SERIOUS CONFLAGRATION POSSIBLE.

"Considering the acres upon acres of inflammable buildings and admittedly an insufficient or workable water supply, we may at any time be called upon to face the most serious conflagration, unless we employ the means we have to prevent fires from breaking out. It is a matter of individual care and responsibility. Even within our finest and late up-to-date buildings fires are apt to occur, when they are left for days and nights without any attention; as for example, the one in a warehouse January last, where a fire was eating its way during thirty odd hours before discovered. We have no buildings in this country not liable to sustain heavy loss by fire, if not properly kept and watched. On the other hand, we have within reach two agencies, both of which have proved their efficiency to give timely warning and preventing heavy losses—the sprinkler system and an automatic fire alarm system—the one will within a few minutes proceed to control an outbreak, while the other within as many seconds will give correct notice of the outbreak, and where it is, and in both cases provide and eradicate insurance expenses, thus reducing the costs of installation."

UNPROTECTED WINDOWS MADE EXITS INACCESSIBLE.

In a report on the Morton Building fire the New York Board of Fire Underwriters said:

"The need of more than one reliable means of exit from high buildings should not be overlooked. Although there were two stairways in this building, neither of them was accessible for a time to the occupants of the upper floors in the main portion of the building facing Nassau Street. . . . The occupants on the upper floors of the building at the time of the fire had considerable difficulty in escaping, owing to the excessive smoke and heat at the main stairway and elevators, which were closely exposed by the fire at windows near the angle of the court. The heat and smoke made it practically impossible to use the main stairway, and if the building had been filled with tenants, loss of life would probably have occurred. It was necessary to use scaling ladders in the rescue work."

BE PREPARED.

With the exception of catastrophes caused by explosions, by incendiarism, or by acts of nature, such as lightning, earthquakes, or storms, there are very few fires which could not be snuffed out in the first flash, if proper fire appliances were as accessible as they should be and if one person in ten knew what to do with them. It is a rare fire that is not discovered while it still could be extinguished at once by a single man properly trained and equipped. As for the losses of life, the great majority of them occur through panics, which are due to a lack of fire drills, and could be decreased almost to the point of elimination by the consistent instruction of all people in all sorts of buildings concerning what they should do in the case of fire. The next time you read of a lot of helpless factory girls trapped in a burning building, you may safely put it down that they never had been shown how to get out safely.