

ding against another and whispers are heard of loss of credit and receiverships. The buildings erected or remodeled in the congested retail district are of cheap and temporary construction. They lack any arrangements for heating. Rents paid are abnormally high, and the whole section may be regarded as being of the 'experimental class.' The conditions invite fires, and in the present condition of the water supply, the streets and the fire departments, a fire once started means a conflagration.

"In the burned district and in the fire limits building regulations have been ignored. Frame buildings have sprung up in one continuous range. Factories and warehouses stand as exposures and are exposed by building after building of hazardous occupancy. Block after block, bounded on two sides by unpassable debris-filled streets, are filled with one and two story frame buildings in which is stored large stocks, and not a single fire wall in a mile.

"Fire Underwriting just now in San Francisco combines the two hazards—physical and moral. The strongest and most conservative companies are and possibly can afford to carry a small line in these sections. This is a gamble. It is not underwriting. However, the smaller companies writing their full lines tempted by the premium stand a good chance to be worse broke than many of them are now before 1907."

PERSONALS.

MR. S. S. DAVIS, inspector for the Standard Life Assurance Co., Ottawa District, has been appointed Provincial Manager for Alberta, with headquarters at Calgary. Mr. Davis has been with the Company for the past 17 years, thirteen of which have been spent in the Ottawa District.

MR. E. ROGER OWEN, general manager Commercial Union Assurance Co., who has been on this side of the water for some months, sailed from New York on the 9th inst. on the "Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse" for Europe.

MR. T. E. KENNY, Halifax President of the Royal Bank of Canada, spent some days in Montreal this week.

MR. JAMES HAMILTON, general manager Yorkshire Insurance Co., sailed for England per SS. "Caronia" from New York on the 9th instant.

MR. WILLIAM MACKAY, manager for Canada of the Royal and Queen Insurance Companies, who has been under the weather for a couple of weeks, is, we are glad to learn, very much better. He expects to leave for Atlantic City next week for a brief holiday. He is an incessant hard worker.

MR. ALEX. MACKAY, general manager Law, Union & Crown Insurance Company, who has been on this side of the water for some days, in connection with the Company's losses at San Francisco, arrived in New York yesterday from Chicago. He was met by Mr. J. E. E. Dickson, manager for Canada. Mr. MacKay is not expected to visit Canada before returning to England.

PROMINENT TOPICS.

WE ARE INFORMED that the Royal Commission on Insurance will commence the enquiry of the Sun Life of Canada, at Montreal, on Monday morning next. The Royal Victoria Life will follow the Sun Life. The commission will probably sit in the Court House.

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THE GAS AND ELECTRIC LIGHT QUESTION.—Signs are not wanting that the City and the Montreal Light, Heat & Power Company are getting closer together on this question. THE CHRONICLE has devoted considerable attention to this subject. It has been pointed out that the settlement of the gas question alone is only one incident of the whole problem, inasmuch as electric light and power are undoubtedly of more importance to the citizens generally, as well as to the future development of the city. The principle enunciated by this paper has been that the city should receive some financial consideration in return for valuable franchises granted. On the other hand it would be next to impossible to get companies to construct gas works, street railways, or electric light plants unless they got franchises. Companies would not take the risk involved in constructing such plants, were it not for future prospects. This side of the question seems to be lost sight of by most people. Municipalities which take the ground that no franchises should be granted, are, we feel convinced, behind the age, for few progressive cities to-day would have prospered to the extent they have, if companies had not undertaken these works. As to municipal ownership we have over and over again expressed our views, that on this continent at all events, the less there is of municipal ownership, the better for the citizens.

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THE QUESTION RESOLVES ITSELF INTO THIS: What arrangement is in the best interests of the city? Is the solution to be found, for instance, in cutting down the price of gas to 85 cents, or in the plan suggested in these columns, namely, that the city should share the profits derived by the company from the operation of its franchise? Thus if the electric light company's net earnings, for instance, are eight or ten per cent., it is only fair that the shareholders should receive dividends of say five per cent.—some say six—but we believe the former figure would be more just. After payment of this dividend, the net earnings should be divided with the city, the larger percentage going to the city. The profits could be used either in the reduction of the cost of electric light to the citizens, or better and more businesslike still, let it be used in the reduction of taxation. So far as the company is concerned it could either pay its share of the net earnings to its shareholders or apply it to the betterment of its plant. But whatever the company might do with its share the city should receive its share in cash.