

## HOTEL FIRES ARE FREQUENT

There Was One Every Thirty Hours in North America  
Last Year

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During 1913, there was an hotel fire every thirty hours upon the North American Continent. Of the total number, 134 occurred in Canada. If the first four months portend the final figures of the present year, then indeed, all past records along this line will be surpassed. Already in 1914, 47 Canadian hotels have suffered from the ravages of the flames.

Human life must be cheap when buildings intended to be occupied as public hostelry are allowed to be constructed in such a manner as to imperil the lives of the occupants in the event of fire. Of the 395 hotel fires in Canada during the last four years, 31 resulted in death or serious injuries to guests or those connected with the establishments. Men, women and children perished and were crippled, and yet it is claimed that nearly every one of these disasters could have been averted.

## Safety of Life.

Safety of life should be the chief consideration in regulating the construction of buildings to be used for hotel purposes. It costs slightly more to secure safety of life, but in this class of structure the extra cost is a good investment. The time has now come when hotel proprietors cannot afford to take chances. The public, especially the great travelling public, is demanding reform. Buildings destroyed by fire can be replaced; human life cannot.

The hotel, whether it be the palace that exacts \$10 a day for its services or the less elaborate hostelry with its moderate charges, is a public utility and as such should be so rigidly regulated and safeguarded by the state, that danger to human beings would be impossible. While it is fortunate that there are a growing number of hotels in the country which are fire-proof, or substantially so, and while there is a still larger number which are not fire-proof, but which are well built structures as carefully guarded from outbreaks of fire as such buildings can be, it is to be deplored that a vast number of fire traps exist, flaunting the word "fireproof" on their registers and stationery as a bait to the unwary. Every one of these is a menace to the sojourners within its walls, and in a larger sense to the community of which it is a part.

## Summer Hotel Kindling.

The summer hotel especially is notorious kindling, and in a compilation of hotel fires for any one year, scores of buildings of the summer type are to be found. Investigations have shown that over 48 per cent. of hotel fires break out during the night when guests are asleep, and to this fact is largely due the many fatalities. Panic naturally follows, and more deaths are caused from ill-judged action in a crisis and by smoke suffocation, than by the actual fire itself.

Even when the word "fireproof" is truthfully applied to the materials entering into the construction of hotel walls, the expression does not include the furnishings and equipment, and is further no guarantee that the building has been designed along the lines of greatest resistance to fire. That some people are aware of this fact is evidenced by the frequent demand of guests for rooms "not too high up." The casual visitor, while perhaps attracted by the hackneyed announcement of "Unsurpassed cuisine and unrivalled view" may be forgiven by any who are conversant with the facts for exhibiting a certain amount of nervousness at the thoughts of fire.

## Principles of Fire Safety.

I am not disposed to believe that conditions as they exist in Canada are altogether due to the apathy of hotel proprietors who wilfully disregard the safety of their guests. Apart from all the considerations of humanity, that would be bad business. Ignorance of the first principles of fire safety is the root of the evil, and the public is not yet sufficiently awakened to demand that those who cater to its needs shall do so with a full sense of their responsibility in the matter.

The municipal authorities insist upon compliance with certain regulations when the erection of an hotel is undertaken, varying with local conditions, but as a rule the building code

is directed chiefly toward the constructional safety of the building and its sanitary features, rather than with the larger issue of human safety from the dangers of fire.

Hotels, as a public utility, should be under the strictest governmental supervision, and legislation governing them should not be hysterical or ill-considered, but designed by careful thought to safeguard those who patronize such places. It should be drastic and sure, regulation that regulates. When one gives the matter a thought it is anomalous that authorities are empowered to fine the proprietor of an hotel, or if needs be, take away his license for exceeding by five minutes the statutory hour for suspending the sale of liquors and yet he may herd unsuspecting guests into his fire-trap house, start a blaze and roast them to a cinder and be blameless in the sight of the law.

## How to Correct Faults.

While it is comparatively easy in new buildings to minimize the hazards due to construction it is often a problem of considerable magnitude to correct the many faults that exist in the older buildings. Leaving out of account frame structures, the use of which for hotel purposes should constitute an indictable offence, it is doubtful if the majority of buildings with external walls of brick are much better. To all appearances from the outside they are substantial enough, but besides being filled with combustible material there is usually an entire lack of sub-division of the floor area by anything else than inflammable partitions, and the floors are pierced every way by chutes, stairways, elevators and dumb waiters. That is the reason why hotel fires spread with such rapidity and why in hundreds of cases within a few seconds of the time of the discovery of fire the whole interior has been a blazing mass with stairways cut off by smoke and flame and the only means of exit destroyed.

Take the following instances from the record of the present year. "Province Quebec. Three-story hotel. Cause of fire—supposed overheated furnace. Discovered by watchman 3.16 a.m. Fire spread through hollow walls. Building entirely in flames 3.38. Total loss."

"Province Ontario. Four-story hotel. Fire caused by grease in vent shaft from kitchen range. Flames passed up through the building and entered between the ceiling finish of the first and second story. Building completely gutted in twenty minutes after the discovery of the fire."

## Heap of Smoking Ruins.

"Province Ontario. Four-story hotel, ordinary brick construction; hollow finish, unprotected floor openings. Fire caused by electric wiring in elevator shaft. Discovered by employee at 1.08 a.m., who ran to an alarm box in the street. Owing to the construction of the building the flames shot through the halls and ascended the stairways, cutting off all means of escape in that direction. Guests rescued from windows by firemen who arrived in the nick of time. Despite desperate efforts of the brigade, handicapped by a poor water supply, at 1.43 the only wall to remain standing slid down and the hotel was a heap of smoking ruins."

To recite further instances is unnecessary, for almost every issue of our daily papers contains somewhat similar occurrences. They serve to point out that hotel fires constitute a real peril which annually reaps a rich harvest of lives and property, and which might be obviated by a minimum of precaution in the design, construction and protection of such buildings. It is entirely feasible to protect elevator shafts and floor openings of every description, to guard against exposure fires by the adoption of wired glass, to have automatic detectors that never slumber or sleep in every room in the house, to have a sufficient water supply at hand to extinguish incipient fires and direct communication with the fire department so that their services can be obtained without an instant's delay.

As to the means of exit which should be installed, compulsorily if necessary, in every hotel in the land, I will say something further.

Five thousand acres of land in western Canada have been sold recently at prices ranging from \$14 to \$20 per acre by Messrs. Davidson and McRae, general agents for the Canadian Northern Railway. About half the property was bought by men who have already settled on the land and are doing so well, that an extension of acreage has become advisable. The other half was sold to people in the United States.