

	No. of Traders.	Percentage failed.		Average liabilities per failure.	
		1877.	1878.	1877.	1878.
Ont.	26,924	3.6	2.9	\$11,750	\$12,411
Que.	19,874	3.2	2.5	17,291	18,456
N. S.	5,149	2.3	3.2	10,227	12,367
N. B.	3,471	4.0	4.0	9,961	10,995
P. E. I. .	707	3.2	2.4	10,477	30,647
Man.	359	1.7	1.4	10,966	5,622

The failures per head of business people are thus most numerous in New Brunswick, which keeps up its relative percentage exactly, though there was no St. John fire this year. Nova Scotia almost changes places with Quebec this year, showing 3.2 against 2.3 the previous year. Ontario and Quebec each lessen their proportion of failures by .7 in 1000. Prince Edward Island's average liabilities are abnormally large because of the failure of an extensive shipping house there.

Comparing these percentages and averages with similar calculations made from like data by the *New York Public*, we find only California and South Carolina credited of late years with so high a ratio of failure as Canada. New York city, it is true, exceeded our ratio in 1877, but in 1878 no one State, except the Golden State with 3.1 per cent. even equalled our average. Massachusetts and Rhode Island, in 1878, and Connecticut in 1877, manufacturing States, show almost exactly the ratio of our Province of Quebec for last year; while Nebraska and Tennessee approach more nearly Ontario figures. But the percentage of failure over the whole Union, with some 675,000 traders in business, was in 1878 but 1.55: in 1877, only 1.36; in 1876, 1.43; in 1875, 1.30; declining in the respective years thence to 1870 in such wise that the average of the nine years is but 1.10 per cent.

Compare the fifteen failures and thirteen failures to the thousand in the States in the last two years, with the twenty-eight and thirty-three failures to the thousand in Canada, and how does it look? Badly for us, we must confess. However much the country may be congratulated upon the slight improvement of the latest year, the total is something startling. Whatever else it indicates, it certainly means that the number of people in business is still too great. The excessive credit which three years ago was to be reduced, has not yet reached a normal state; and when we consider the shrinkage in value of commodities, the \$23,000,000 owed by our failed traders last year represents as much value as the \$25,000,000 of the previous year, therefore we need not be puffed up about the apparent improvement.

Fewer traders and shorter credit all round, will lessen this frightful yearly list of insolvencies and losses. Unless this

root of the trouble be wrenched out, doing away with the Insolvent Act will effect no good.

In the enhanced economy of the passing day, profits may be expected to be yearly closer; the less room therefore, for superfluous traders. In the decreased importations which are *promised* by our wholesale merchants, there is no chance for the usual number of retailers to divide up the trade. If 56,000 traders were too many to live in 1876, they will assuredly be too many in 1879.

PREVENTABLE DISASTERS.

The Dry Goods Row, on Water Street, at St. Stephens, New Brunswick, was occupied by persons of undoubted moral character; the buildings were substantial wooden buildings, free from exposure in front and in rear; it is an arrangement between the authorities of Calais and those of St. Stephens that their combined fire departments shall operate in any emergency which may arise in either place; whilst the River St. Croix furnishes unlimited water supply constantly available. Wooden buildings could not exist with circumstances more favourable to their permanency and safety, and yet no one is greatly surprised to learn that a fire, arising from causes apparently natural, at any rate not suspected to be of incendiary origin, has, at one swoop, destroyed the whole line of buildings from the toll bridge to Cullinan's block in that town.

We are aware of the exceptional circumstances of cold and wind under which the fire had to be fought; but we are also aware that in at least two of the four seasons of every year exceptional circumstances of either cold and wind or dryness and wind may be expected to be encountered. Consequently, we do not make any allowance for circumstances which are not *really* exceptional when considering the hazard to which most of the towns and cities of the Maritime Provinces, and many of those in the Upper Provinces, are exposed by the senseless erection of wooden buildings.

So long as the regulation of the building laws remains in the hands of local authorities, so long will local influences prevail over the common sense of the committees, and so long will wooden buildings, wooden additions to rears of brick and stone buildings, wooden roofs—Mansards—and such like abominations continue to expose the lives and properties of communities to the dangers of conflagrations. So long, too, will the waste of property continue which creates a void in the public purse, no matter how it may result to the fortunes of the individuals who suffer or benefit from the fire or the insurance.

That these periodical conflagrations are avoidable is shewn by the fact that at St. Stephen, whilst it was feared that the whole of Water Street would be swept by the flames, this catastrophe was only averted by the fact that Messrs. Cullinan had erected a barrier of stone and brick to protect their block, known as the Golden Fleece, and had covered the buildings with tin roofing—by means of which the fire was stayed until it exhausted itself—showing that the only devices of man which will prevent the extension of conflagrations is the erection of *fire proof barriers*.

Rivers of water, hosts of men, powerful engines, all contend in vain against one fire, well under way, in a wooden row. Such a fire may arise from a cause as ridiculous as Mrs. O'Leary's cow, or in a building which a puff of wind would level with the ground—such causes are at work every moment in one or other of the rear exposures in any town or village in Canada, yet they are neglected until they assert themselves in a way which appalls and startles a world.

Can any one overlook the possibility, or indeed the great probability of the occurrence of two such fires occurring *simultaneously* in Halifax, or Moncton, or Portland; on the Esplanade or in the Queen street district at Toronto; or in Hull or in Quebec, in Griffintown or the Quebec suburbs of Montreal, under the perpetually recurring circumstances which are said to be so exceptional. And is it possible to imagine local influences being so exerted as to prevent, by precautionary measures of fire guard walls and tin roofs, the possibility of the spread of such fires, so that they would be individually isolated on their occurrence.

The St. Stephen fire of 1877 heralded the succession of fires which devastated the province—the circumstances of every place, except St. John alone, may be said to present features as favourable to conflagrations as existed in 1877—the wooden buildings destroyed in St. Stephen in 1877 were, in some cases, replaced by others of wood; so we cannot congratulate ourselves on a decrease of general hazard.

The St. Stephen fire presents other features worthy of consideration. The first is the amount of property at risk over and above the amount of insurance; the second is the insurances, of which the St. John *Sun* states as follows: "Besides these there is a considerable amount of insurance in obscure American companies, which do business on a cheap scale." The first experience of these two is becoming very general in Canada, and arises partly from the conservatism of the companies, for which they are to be commended; and fur-