

WHAT STARTED THE FIRE?

This is a question not always easily answered. Of the 5,054 fires listed in the pages of The Argus last year under the caption "Causes of Fires in Chicago," 1,890 were reported as of unknown origin. The current number of a leading electrical journal devotes some space to a discussion of the subject "How the Fire Started." The author of the article in question says that it is seldom that a "Cause unknown" fire reveals its secret, but that an instance of this rare kind occurred in Chicago recently, the facts in the case being as follows:

A fire broke out one day at the head of the entrance stairway on the second floor of an office building. The fire center was in the empty space underneath the floor, and, after the chopping away of a large section of the flooring, was soon extinguished. No cause for the fire being apparent, it was listed as "unknown." As, however, it is customary on this planet to find (at any rate invent) a cause for every effect, it was satisfactorily settled that this particular fire was clearly due to the pernicious activity of rats. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the assumption would have disposed of the question; this, however, happened to be the hundredth case. Shortly after the time of the fire, the owner of a restaurant on the first floor of the same building called in an inspector to look at one of his bracket lights that had been giving trouble. It turned out that this fixture had accidentally been broken off shortly before the time of the fire upstairs and had been replaced and repaired by the janitor, who, of course, was also an expert electrician (?). Somehow, however, his skilful treatment of the injured bracket did not prove entirely successful; the light burned dimly, and even died away altogether at times. The investigation of the inspector showed that the joints in the wires in the outlet box were very poorly made and quite innocent of solder; the tape was burned away, as was also some of the insulation. Fire was carried along the insulation through a hole in the top of the box left open by the wiremen, ignited the dust behind the wall and crept along, assisted by dust, shavings, etc., until it finally got under the floor at the head of the stairway and tried to break through. Only the circumstance that it attacked the floor in the daytime saved a heavy loss.

THE WALDMAN FIRE INVESTIGATION.

The investigation before the Fire Commissioners is still proceeding, as to the cause of the fire and explosion which took place on the premises occupied by J. H. Waldman & Co., St. Paul Street, Montreal, the particulars of which were duly reported in THE CHRONICLE. Expert evidence has been given on both sides. No definite conclusion has yet been arrived at.

The largest oil tank ever constructed in Canada is to be constructed by the Imperial Oil Company at Fort William, Ont. The company claim it will have a capacity of 1,000,000 gallons.

Personals

MR. B. HAL BROWN, general manager for Canada of the London & Lancashire Life Assurance Company, sailed on Wednesday from New York by the Lusitania. He is paying an official visit to the Head Office of the company in London. Mr. Brown expects to return to Montreal within three or four weeks.

MR. EDWARD W. S. MORREN, superintendent (Marine Department) Western Assurance Company, Toronto, visited the Montreal branch of his company this week.

MR. R. MCD. PATERSON, of the Phoenix of England, is expected to return to Montreal from Europe early in June. He is enjoying a well earned holiday.

MR. WILLIAM MACKAY, manager Royal and Queen insurance companies is visiting agencies of his companies through the West.

MR. T. D. RICHARDSON, manager for Canada New York Fire Underwriters, spent a few days in the city this week.

MR. J. W. MOLSON, Montreal, insurance broker, is at present enjoying a trip through Switzerland.

THE NEW GOLD AND SILVER PIECES.

Parliament has just passed the necessary legislation for the coinage of Canadian \$5 and \$10 gold pieces, and \$1 silver pieces. This will supply work for the new mint at Ottawa. While the existence of gold pieces with the Dominion arms upon them will be gratifying to the national pride of Canadians, it is not very likely that they will become very much in evidence in general circulation. Bank notes are more convenient as a medium of exchange; and the banks will continue, as heretofore, to push the circulation of their own notes. Likely enough a certain amount of the coins will find their way into the cash reserves of the banks and of the Dominion Treasury. No harm will be done by the new currency unless the Government makes special efforts to get them into circulation, and that it is not likely to do. The coins could only be pushed into circulation through displacing bank notes; and if they displaced bank notes they would lessen the ability of the banks to grant discounts. So far as the silver pieces are concerned it is said that there is a demand for silver dollars in British Columbia. In the rest of the country they will not meet with much favor.

TWO HUNDRED YEARS OLD.

The Sun Insurance Office, London, England, organized 1st April, 1610, will celebrate its 200th anniversary on 1st June next, in London, England. The foreign branches will be well represented on the occasion. The Canadian branch has been under the management of Mr. H. M. Blackburn, Toronto, for many years.