LESSONS OF ADVERSITY.

The sweeping conflagration that wiped the business part of Bridgewater out of existence has been made the text of various warnings and reminders from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick journals, addressed to other places in those provinces which are still imperfectly, if at all, protected by appliances to fight fire. "There is," says the Springhill Tribune, "a moral lesson for the citizens of Springhill to learn from the disaster which has overtaken Bridgewater. Springhill is far from being able to cope with a fire such as worked havoc in that flourishing town. No doubt Springhill will learn a lesson when it will be too late." And the Bear River Telephone, quoting a reference by another journal to the Bridgewater fire, and the need of an efficient water service, adds: "Our sister town seems to have learned a lesson from the fiery ordeal through which she has passed. Can Bear River profit by it or must she learn it also from a similar experience?"

For a number of years past THE MONETARY TIMES has urged upon the authorities of towns, villages and cities the reality of the conflagration risk. And we have given, from time to time, lists of the towns and villages in Canada that have been swept by conflagrations. It is so far satisfactory to know that an awakening has been caused by these articles, various places being stirred up to take measures for protection against fire. Many a place, however, in any province one likes to mention, is still an open prey to the flames. We see it stated that Bridgewater, N.S., is another instance of a conflagration taking place with the wind from the northwest. St. John, N.B., St. John's, Nfld., and Windsor were other such instances. If there are places peculiarly exposed to a northwest wind, such places in particular may well set their houses in order and prepare for a visit from the fire-fiend. He comes when he is least expected. Those places which possess fire appliances need to be reminded to keep them in order.

Since the above paragraphs were written, word has come of the sweeping fire which laid in ashes most of the business quarter of Digby, Nova Scotia, and which was mentioned in our columns last week. The loss by this fire was much exaggerated in the excitement of early accounts, but it is quite serious enough to show how real and constant is the danger of fires in high winds to towns wholly or mainly built of wood. The severe cold weather of this month over most of the American continent has brought to notice an element of risk in fire protection which is apt to be too little regarded, namely, the effect of frost on fire appliances. We do not here refer especially to the difficulties of fire brigades in winter fires in large cities, as exemplified by recent Montreal and Toronto fires, but rather to the risk that the source of water supply in smaller places may be closed up by frost. A private letter from Nelson, British Columbia, dated February 12th, says, "We are suffering miserably from the unusual cold weather. The flume that brings our water supply has frozen up, and there is very little water in the reservoir. People are peddling about town in barrels, water from the river." It was reported last week that the gates on the water supply lakes near Digby, N. S were frozen so solidly that they could not be opened at the time of the fire, but this is contradicted by the chairman at a public meeting held in Digby since the fire. He says the supply gates were opened, but after some little delay.

Following the Boston bank fashion, the Hide and Leather and New England national banks now talk of a consolidation, during which it is proposed to liquidate the Hide and Leather and to increase the capital stock of the New England to $1,500,000.

THE MANITOBA HOTEL FIRE.

In writing last week about the Winnipeg hotel fire, it seemed to us peculiar that the chief engineer of that city should say, in describing the condition and working of the different steam fire engines, "the Waterous, although in perfect condition, did no work at all, owing to a defect caused by its not having been in use for some time." The contradiction in the above two statements that the engine was "in perfect condition" and yet showed "a defect" which prevented its doing any work, is striking. Still, we printed the words as we found them in The Free Press, without pretending to decide where the fault lay. Now we have a letter from Winnipeg about the fire, which throws light upon the matter in question. ". . . Here is a curious thing. One of the fire engines, the Waterous engine, was standing on the corner of Portage avenue and Main street, and beside it was the engine from the North fire hall. After steam was gotten up the Brantford engine was started, but two or three minutes afterwards the fire was dumped as the engine would not take its water. On investigating the matter, however, and pulling up the suction hose, they found that in place of putting the suction hose down through the ice into the water. it was slid on top of the ice, and never touched the water. This, of course, was no fault of the engine." This is curious, as our correspondent says; it would be ludicrous if it were not serious. We recommend that the authorities find out whose was the fault that such a thing should occur.

WELLINGTON MUTUAL FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY.

The tables of causes of fires, compiled from year to year by some of our Canadian mutual companies, are interesting contributions to fire insurance literature. If the lessons they teach were learned and regarded something would be done to lessen the fire waste. An example comes to hand in the report of the inspector of the Wellington Mutual, who reports 34 out of the 91 fires of the year to have been caused by lamps, by carelessness in the use of matches, and by defective chimneys or heating apparatus. Six of the fires were supposed to be incendiary, and 19 were from unknown causes, "many of these," Mr. Ross thinks, "from carelessness and incendiarism."

It has been the policy of the directors for a year or two past to reduce the business of the company in certain directions. For example, they withdrew from Toronto and from Essex county, because unprofitable, and they also ceased to write farm risks; further, they have so reduced their lines that the company cannot lose more than $2,000 on any one risk. A reduction of losses from $31,000 in 1897 to $20,000 in 1898 is doubtless a result of this procedure. In accordance with a resolution passed a year ago a call was made on the members during 1898 for the creation of a reserve, which now amounts to $23,000, while the premium note capital intact is close upon $40,000. A stock capital of $125,000 has been subscribed and partly paid. Mr. George Sleeman is the new president of the Wellington; and Mr. John Davidson, formerly secretary, has been appointed manager, to succeed his much lamented deceased father, Mr. Chas. Davidson.

OWEN SOUND BOARD OF TRADE.

The Owen Sound Board of Trade held its annual meeting on February 6th, the president, Mr. Wright, was in the chair. His annual report indicated deep study of commercial affairs in the province. The grain crops throughout the northern district, he said, have been a good average, the prices fair for wheat, oats and barley, and much above the average for peas. During the past year all our manufacturing establishments have been fairly well employed. The C.P.R. and G.T.R. in so far as their Owen Sound branches are concerned have largely increased both tonnage and earnings. There had been a large increase of tonnage handled by the C.P.R. Co.'s boats, in both east and west bound freight during the season of 1898, notwithstanding that new and competing lines for this same trade were operated for the first time during the past year.

By the secretary's report it was shown that the grain handled amounts in round numbers to 425,00 bushels, of which