

ance of liquor, and thus vastly improved in appearance. He was taken to a second hand clothing store, and emerged well clad. He next went to a barber shop, and when he presented himself before the doctor he was to all appearance a fit risk for any company. After the examination he was given twenty dollars, with which, as might be expected, he went on an awful spree. It was reported at the time, rightly or wrongly, that in some of the cases manipulated by this ring *carte blanche* was given the lives assured to get all the liquor they desired at certain saloons, the assignees agreeing to pay their scores. It is comforting to know that these frauds did not succeed, and that the conspirators made little or no profit on their proceedings, although they ran a great risk of forming an intimate acquaintance with the interior of the penitentiary. The companies owe it to themselves, to their policyholders, and to the public to sternly stamp out all attempts at crime of this kind, and it is pleasing to know that they almost invariably succeed in doing so.

PUBLIC INDIFFERENCE ABOUT FIRE LOSSES.

We are satisfied that a time will come, and probably before many years have gone by, when the disastrous losses by fire year after year will compel more serious consideration by the nation at large than they have yet received. Indeed, when we say "*more serious consideration*," we are doubtful if that is a correct expression, for it implies that there is some serious attention paid to these calamities—which is not very apparent. The extent of the annual fire losses is discussed universally amongst underwriters, who have a business and professional interest in them. The losses are debated as matters affecting the financial affairs of the insurance companies and the reputation of underwriters as those who adjust the rates of premiums charged to cover risks. If the companies find at the close of each year they have been paid a sufficient amount in premiums to reimburse them for losses, to pay expenses, and to provide a dividend, the extent of those losses is a matter of subordinate interest. It is only when the losses have shot over the mark calculated upon, so far as to trespass upon the expenses and dividend funds, that they become seriously important to insurance companies, and it is only therefore when this unfortunate excess of losses over income occurs that serious consideration is given to them by those engaged in underwriting. It is indeed amazing that, outside insurance circles, the public at large seem so indifferent to this terrible source of financial trouble. If those losses did not occur, and the government proposed to tax the people to the amount of one year's fire losses, to raise revenue for some vast national work of supreme importance—such, for instance, as would be the enlargement of our canals from the West to this port—there would be a discussion of the proposal at once started that would rouse the whole people of every class to great excitement, which would be kept up for years. But, year by year the people impose a tax on themselves, by heedlessness, by indifference, by downright stupidity, which if imposed by the government they would consider an unbearably oppressive burden. This indifference mainly arises from the incidence of the burthen falling so irregularly, as is thought, and with so much uncertainty that people look on the blows of the fire fiend as happening in as incalculable a way as the strokes of the evil powers that bring diseases and death. If every house, every year, were afflicted by a fire owing to the very same causes as now create fires, there would be a public movement to establish such reforms as would to some extent relieve the people from this annual curse. But when it is a case of only one or two fires to a street, or

a dozen or so to a ward, yearly, those who escape give the calamities of their neighbors no thought, or they say, "he is insured," and therefore there is no call for sympathy or concern. Let any house, however, or store, have the *experience* of a fire, the occupant then discovers that no insurance policy is big enough to cover the hole which that fire has made in his bank account. If his troubles move him to think the question over, such a sufferer may very soon find evidence enough to convince the most sceptical that the burthen of fire losses does not fall exclusively upon the direct victim or the insurance companies, but that they put a tax on the whole community.

The very large cost of our Fire Department is one item which proves this; another is the fact that every tenant pays more rent than he would if there were no such risks of fire losses as now exist; another is that every fire lessens the area of taxation for a time, which has to be made up by increased levies on other parts; another is that so much capital has been destroyed, by which the balance left has been made more costly to those needing its help. In the last eighteen years about two thousand million dollars worth of property were destroyed on this continent by fire. Will any rational person affirm that so enormous a clearing away by absolute extinguishment of this prodigious mass of stored wealth has had no effect on the public finances? Can such a sum have literally gone up in smoke without abstracting funds that were needed for sustaining the enterprises of the people? The amount is actually larger than the sum due to depositors by the whole of the banks of this continent. Can that sum have disappeared without making money dearer?

It has been recently shown in a paper read at Chicago by Mr. Webster, editor of the *New York Chronicle*, that the annual fire loss in the States is equal to the cost of all the public schools in the country. It comes well up to the amount of customs duties imposed yearly. The losses by defective flues alone would pay for free tickets for a million persons to a World's Fair. The value of dwelling houses destroyed last year was considerably over 20 millions of dollars in the U. S. and this country. How much more was lost that cannot be figured in money, those well know whose dwellings have been destroyed. Hundreds of lives are yearly sacrificed by direct means and by illnesses that follow from fright and distress. Is not public apathy on this matter then, as we have said, amazing? In many towns when a few extra robberies have taken place in them, meetings have been called to organize vigilance committees in order to repress such outrages. If the public could be equally roused over dangers from visits from the fire fiend and his confederates, that enemy to property might be curtailed in power and some of his allies destroyed. If the builder of a chimney that caused a fire from bad work, or bad design, were made to pay a considerable percentage of the loss, there would be an end at once put to defective fire flues and their 5 millions a year of losses.

Were proven carelessness, that led to a fire, made an offence punishable by a fine proportioned to the loss so caused, as in France, the annual fire loss would drop a large percentage. If warehouses were compelled to have night watchmen, and all buildings with a number of tenants to be thoroughly inspected by an expert at each renewal of the risk, there would be fewer disasters in such places.

But our object now is not to suggest such reforms, but to invite public attention to the subject of fire losses as a very grave element in the financial affairs of the country, as constituting one of the sources from which financial troubles arise, which the public might avert to a large extent were they so inclined.