

in gold, as it is Canada. If that is made obligatory, the exact amount of such issues becomes a secondary question, as experience shows that a circulating medium redeemable on demand in gold regulates itself automatically according to the varying conditions of business. All hope of the States having as sound, as elastic, as easily worked a currency as Canada enjoys is vain until the fallacy we have exposed is abandoned, and the true secret of the excellence of the Canadian system recognized by legislation.

THE COST OF INCENDIARISM TO CANADA— AN ESTIMATE.

Of all the crimes which unprincipled men commit against the welfare and well-being of society with the least liability of detection, we think incendiarism and arson must rank first. Nor need we wonder at this, seeing that certain combustible and highly inflammable materials are nowadays so easily procurable and without suspicion, may even be kept in stock—also, that the intending incendiary has usually within his control all facilities of time and circumstance, so arranging matters that he shall enjoy a clear coast for his nefarious operations. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find such an one, when under accusation, successfully setting up an alibi which he himself has contrived, by the use of a slow burning fuse and combustibles, so that hours before the outbreak of a fire thus induced he is probably miles away. As regards most crimes, some evidences are nearly always obtainable, and some clues indicated by material matters and things connected with the deed where committed; but herein, the very fire itself provides the ready means of obliteration and effacement of the incendiary's work. Well has it been said that of all crimes known to the law, incendiarism most effectually baffles justice, and of all fraudulent agencies brought to bear upon insurance companies, it is the least liable to detection and the most seldom punished.

The *Review* of N. Y. says it is considered by conservative underwriters that at least 25 per cent. of the fire loss in Canada and the United States is attributable to criminally contrived fires, some of them started for "fun," some for revenge, but the majority in order to swindle the insurance companies. Now, if this be a reasonably correct estimate—and, somehow, we incline to think it is about right,—let us see what incendiarism has cost Canada for one year.

Taking the Government returns for 1893, we find that the fire losses amounted to \$5,052,690, and 25 per cent. of this gives us the immense sum of \$1,263,172. This of course represents only the loss inflicted on the insurance companies. We will not attempt to estimate the additional loss falling on those who were uninsured, or only partially insured. We take from the same reliable source the total of fire premiums paid in Canada during 1893, and find it to be \$6,793,595, therefore, according to the estimate, over 18 per cent. of these premiums was lost to the insurance companies by incendiarism in this country. This loss to the companies is after all the loss of the insuring public, because ultimately the latter must make it good to the former either by paying in-

creased rates for insurance, or by the longer continuance of the rates presently charged. Supposing the people of Canada possessed of very insufficient or no facilities for insuring their property, and that the fire loss of each year for the most part fell directly upon the individuals composing the suffering communities, would not the people themselves soon insist on having the protection afforded by thoroughly efficient fire appliances and equally efficient legal machinery for the crushing out of incendiarism? We think they soon would, and we also think one of the most valuable aids to the well known moral effect of ever-ready fire appliances and a smart brigade, would be found in the making sure, at whatever cost, of a coroner's inquest being held in every case where fire occurred, unless undoubted evidence was at hand showing the cause to be accidental. When a death occurs on one's premises, if from natural causes, a certificate to such effect must be given; if accidental, the coroner decides if an inquest be necessary. If there are "suspicious circumstances" the inquest is certain to follow.

Treat all fires in much the same way, and follow a suspect, or incendiary, as you would a murderer, as, indeed, he too often incidentally becomes, and we venture to predict for a community so protected a low loss ratio.

It is the custom to lean on the insurance companies. The companies will pay the losses. This belief or feeling is at the bottom of the resistance made by many town councils and corporations when invited to improve their fire plant, and do generally what the Fire Underwriters, who ought to know best, point out as for the benefit of all concerned in the reduction of the annual "fire waste," which was \$5,052,690 in 1893 alone. In the management of their civic affairs, citizens realize fast enough, that every outlay for parks, paving, sewers and so on, means for a time an increased tax rate, and are content to look to the future of their town for compensation.

Equally they realize that some outlays are really economies. Now, if they could come to regard the counsel and suggestions of the insurance companies in some such way, say as from a committee of their own, having insurance in charge, and give heed to their recommendations, not as given in the sole interests of the companies, but for the profit of all, much would be gained.

A bill has been brought before the Quebec Legislature, with the object of stopping coroners from holding fire inquests—very properly this has been opposed. Should it, however, become law, it will be a retrograde step, unless provision is made for some official with full powers to act in place of the coroner. To sum up, we would give as our best counsel and advice to all municipalities for 1895:

1. Provide for a proper thorough inquest into the cause of every fire however small, remembering that the small fire may have been extinguished too soon to fulfill its object, and may start up again, if you do not now ferret out its origin.