THE PROPOSED ST. LAWRENCE LLOYDS.

One of the most important questions now before the Canadian public is that relating to the high cost of marine insurance on vessels navigating the St. Lawrence route. It is alleged that the present rates on cargoes and vessels coming to Quebec and Montreal are excessive and discriminating, and that, inasmuch, as business like water will seek the lowest level, a continuance of these rates will divert trade from the St. Lawrence and Canadian ports. It serves no worthy purpose to deny that there have been more mishaps to vessels on the St. Lawrence route than would have occurred had the channel been better lighted; its charts more up-to-date; all its pilots thoroughly skilled; the land marks more complete; better fog-signals and more buoys and all of them more carefully placed. In short, had everything possible been done to facilitate and safeguard the navigation of the river and its outlets to the ocean, fewer accidents would have occurred.

In this connection it is very significant and suggestive of enquiries, that for years, the oldest and most popular steamship line on the St. Lawrence roue has been exceptionally free from accidents. So continuous a record of immunity cannot be regarded as mere luck, and the conclusion is unavoidable that, had the vessels of all other lines been navigated with the same skill there would have been nothing said as to the dangers of the St. Lawrence route. The mishaps which have occurred have been largely to vessels that are not regular ocean liners between England and Canada. This fact and the absolute freedom from accidents of the vessels of one line, point to there being an opening for more careful, experienced, expert pilotage or seamanship on the vessels, as well as for improvements in the river they navigate.

There is unquestionable evidence that the losses of the St. Lawrence route have been excessive, and, no doubt, the marine underwriters can bring forward statistics to prove the accuracy of this statement. We would ask our readers to carefully study the excellent address given by the Hon. Geo. A. Cox, president of the Western Assurance Company, at the annual meeting of that office, and which appears on another page. It may be well to state that the Western transacts a large inland marine insurance business.

The proposal of Mr. Clergue and those associated with him to establish a St. Lawrence Lloyds, is being actively pushed, and it is announced that the business of the company will be commenced when $1,000,000 of capital is paid in, which, it is said, has already been provided. The promoters claim that, as their operations would be highly advantageous to the trade of Canada, the Government should provide a reserve fund of $1,000,000, and, unless the Government concedes this, the promoters, we understand, are not disposed to go on with their enterprise. The proposal to secure Government aid in carrying out a marine insurance company is certainly an innovation and a novelty. While we are in favour of any scheme being adopted which will tend to remove the disabilities under which the St. Lawrence route is labouring, the proposal that the Government of Canada should enter into the marine insurance business is scarcely commendable. If this $1,000,000 be expended in the improvements necessary in the Gulf and channel, it will be more beneficial and let competition regulate the marine insurance rates. We have no doubt whatever, but the rates will be decreased immediately upon the improvements being carried out. By-the-way, the new company is not at all bashful in the title it proposes to assume, namely, that of "Lloyds," for the English Lloyds has a world-wide reputation. We are in favour of a strong Canadian marine insurance company being organized on sound business principles, and there is no reason to doubt that such a company, if properly managed by experienced underwriters, could be made a profitable and successful one.

WESTERN ASSURANCE COMPANY.

The Fiftieth Annual Report of the Western Assurance Company, which we publish in full, on a later page, has excited widespread interest generally, more especially amongst those engaged in shipping, as the question of marine insurance is discussed at some length by the President, the Honourable Geo. A. Cox. The financial statement, as was anticipated, shows the ratio of losses to premiums to have been considerably higher than the general experience of the company, though it was exceeded in some past years. The premiums last year amounted to $2,918,786; the receipts from interest, $75,649. The fire and marine losses were $2,069,097, and general expenses, $912,514. The net amount of losses by the Hull-Ottawa fire was $124,608. The president pointed out that as the Western has a Canadian business representing about one-twentieth of the total premiums received by all the companies making returns to the Dominion Government, and the total insurance fire-loss by the Hull-Ottawa fire was $4,000,000, the Western's proportion of this total would have been $200,000, that is one-twentieth of four millions of dollars. As it was actually only $124,608, he concludes, that the fire loss at Hull-Ottawa "is an evidence of judicious distribution of risks on the part of the management." The above-named conflagration is made the basis of some very pointed and timely remarks by the president in regard to "the necessity for the adoption and enforcement of more stringent building regulations in our cities and towns." He affirmed that "the tax in the form of fire insurance premiums which the business community of this continent annually pays in excess of such