

ment is an encouraging feature. There is plenty of need for men with knowledge and ability in the new insurance world which is now developing in the old land.

United States Business below the Normal.

Insurance business in the United States has been much below the normal, is the British conclusion arrived at regarding the year 1908 in America. Premiums have decidedly fallen off, collections have been slow. Happily, the depression is gradually passing away. During and following the worst months, however, it was found increasingly difficult to maintain rates in some localities. Co-operation was hard to secure and agents have often shown a hostile front towards efforts to place rates on a paying basis. Non-Board competition has been keen. In California the 25 per cent. flat increase in rates, adopted in 1906 after the San Francisco disaster, has been abrogated, and rating is now done under a revised schedule which penalizes defects in construction and other increases of hazard. By this means the average rate may be 10 or 15 per cent. more than was obtained prior to the conflagration of 1906. This movement follows others of the same kind on the Pacific slope. Rate reductions have also been authorized in some districts of New York and Brooklyn, consequent on the introduction of high pressure water services. Some trouble has been experienced with local agents, who have been agitating for commission on profits, in addition to the ordinary commission; but the companies do not seem to have given the movement a cordial reception. Neither were the New York brokers successful in increasing the rate of brokerage on "Down Town" business, which was reduced in 1906.

Despite unfavourable conditions, several new companies have come into existence. On the other hand, a number of companies have failed, or re-insured their business and ceased operations largely as a result of the Chelsea conflagration.

Conditions as to Fire Prevention Show some Improvement in America.

The good work of the "National Board" appointed to inspect the conditions of water supply and fire defence in the chief towns and cities of the United States has been continued, and the detailed reports furnished to the municipal authorities interested have already led to marked improvement in the matter of high pressure systems, etc. In fact, the States are waking up to the enormous losses suffered through conflagrations in recent years.

It is indeed time that some drastic action was taken to reduce the tremendous waste from fire. During the past year the losses exceeded the normal by nearly \$25,000,000.

The Question of Earthquake Losses.

Mexico, too, stands out prominently for the frequency and serious character of its fires. Early in the year a conflagration broke out at Bahia, destroying property valued at £80,000. The trouble over the Kingston earthquake and conflagration has caused much anxiety and litigation, both in Jamaica and in Great Britain. In one of the cases submitted to the Privy Council it was decided that the verdict against the companies obtained in the Jamaica Courts could not be set aside, as in view of all the evidence submitted it could not be regarded as an impossible decision. A second case brought before the Privy Council

had not been heard when an arrangement was come to with the Policy-holders' Association on the other side, whereby the companies undertook to pay 85 per cent. of all claims and an agreed amount for costs. The only action tried in the English Courts was that of Tootal, Broadhurst, Lee & Co., in which the companies were successful. This trial lasted for twenty-three days and was one of the most memorable in the history of fire insurance, being exhaustively argued and keenly contested by eminent Counsel on both sides. On the verdict becoming known, other actions were abandoned. It is greatly to be hoped that the arrangement agreed upon in Jamaica will give satisfaction and in the end prove of benefit to the insurance offices concerned.

The Chilean Tariff Association has been doing some useful work in the course of the past twelve months, it is to be hoped will bear good. For some time after the earthquake the rebuilding of Valparaiso made very little progress. Recent advices, however, indicate that much activity is now being displayed in reconstruction. Native companies are for the most part severely strained by the heavy payments made in connection with the conflagration, and the general financial depression of Chili has not given them much chance of recovery. It is to be regretted that many parts of Valparaiso are still insufficiently supplied with water available for fires.

The Continent of Europe.

The worst fire on the Continent broke out in the Paris Telephone Exchange in September and caused enormous damage. Some reckon that the loss must have approached £1,000,000 sterling. A Saxony paper mill was consumed, with a loss of £30,000, and a serious fire at Frederickstadt, in Norway, destroyed £100,000 worth of property, while another at Altappen, in Sweden, created a loss of £30,000. The Committee of the Danish Tariff Union has been considering the adoption by all companies of uniform policy conditions, and there is every reason to believe that a satisfactory agreement will shortly be announced. Business has been much better in Spain, but continues very unfavourable in Constantinople. In the latter metropolis, however, there is every hope that when the Government reaches a condition of stability combined with reasonable freedom and just administration of the laws, business operations will also improve. Russian fire insurance is still suffering from the condition of the country and especially from the unsettled state of society. The Italian earthquake disaster did not affect British companies at all; Austrian and French offices, aside from domestic companies, being those chiefly interested.



MONTREAL STREET RAILWAY earnings for December were \$304,884, gross and \$99,065 net, making an increase of 3.48 p.c. and a decrease of 3.19 p.c. respectively from December, 1907. Surplus of \$71,030 was 3.99 p.c. less than for the month a year earlier. For the three months since October 1, earnings were \$935,071 gross and \$377,776 net, giving increases of 3.58 p.c. and 4.01 p.c. respectively over 1907. The surplus for the three months was \$205,307, a gain of 5.40 p.c. over the previous year's showing.