

The free quick assets practically all show a reduction amounting altogether to about \$5,500,000. No doubt the net liquidation of loans and discounts, some three and three-quarter millions, was enforced reluctantly.

### SERIOUS HAZARD FROM OVERHEAD WIRES.

#### Detailed Report Upon Montreal Conditions.

Much more than local interest attaches to the finding of the Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association regarding dangers from overhead street wires in the city of Montreal. In last week's issue of THE CHRONICLE editorial reference was made to the matter, but space did not permit of any detailed extracts from the exhaustive report prepared for the Association by C. P. Choquette, professor of science, College of St. Hyacinthe; J. E. Cole, chief electrician, wire department, city of Boston, and Robert G. Ross, E. E., chairman of commission.

During the present week, there was read before the City Council the letter from the underwriters which accompanied the Commission's report. The letter referred especially to the great number of heavy fires of the past winter, destroying property valued at from two to three millions; an amount equal to the total real estate tax of Montreal, and over \$7 per head of the population. It stated that the insurance companies had long been of the opinion that there was good reason to believe many fires were of electrical origin, primarily due to outside overhead wires. As far back as 1902 they had brought the matter to the attention of the city, but nothing had been done to remedy the conditions existing. At the present time, in spite of the insurance rates in the congested district, it was becoming difficult, if not impossible, for the interested companies to conduct a profitable general business in Montreal. The underwriters had, therefore, decided to have an authoritative report prepared on the first risk of outside electrical equipment. They decided on this so as to place an unbiased statement of facts before the public, with the hope that such action would be taken by the municipal authorities as would remove the cause, which, it is believed, contributes tremendously to the fire losses of Montreal.

In conclusion the letter expressed the earnest hope that the council would give this report the thought and careful consideration which the importance and the gravity of the situation demand, with the result that such action will be taken as will cause the wires to be placed underground and thus relieve the public and the underwriters from a continuation of this cause of loss of life and property.

The general finding of the commission is summed up as follows in the formal report:

As a result of our survey of the existing conditions in the streets, we are of the opinion that in no other city does there exist such hazard to property and life through street construction for electrical purposes

as in the city of Montreal; for the following reasons:

1—Montreal is the city which uses the greatest amount of power transmitted from a distance.

2—The power demands are met from three water power developments operating voltages from 5,000 to 45,000, connected to a number of sub-stations and to several auxiliary steam stations, involving complicated wiring connections.

3—The transmission of power at 10,000 volts on six wires through the heart of the city, viz., McGill street, Victoria square, Beaver Hall Hill, St. Catherine street and Park avenue.

4—The unnecessary duplication of poles and wires by reason of the fact that the Power Company is made up of six subsidiary companies, whose lines are to a great extent still in existence, involving great complexities of wiring and street construction, and which might largely be dispensed with.

5—The large number of Street Railway feeder cables necessitated by the density of traffic in the central districts, and the heavy grades between the lower and upper city levels.

6—The large number of telephone, telegraph and signal wires which are still in existence overhead, which may become a menace at any time through contact with high voltage wires.

7—The narrowness of streets and heights of buildings in the business district, which considered in conjunction with the existing wiring complications, cannot as a fire hazard and as an obstruction to firemen when on duty be matched elsewhere.

As regards the remedy for the above conditions of things here, no middle course can be pursued.

In the interests of property and life, the wires of all companies should be placed underground in the central districts at once, and consecutively thereafter in the less congested districts.

Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

1—To at once place all wires underground within the central district, bounded approximately by the river, Windsor street, St. Catherine street and St. Denis street, except the trolley wires of the Montreal Street Railway Company.

2—To extend the underground district as rapidly as practicable thereafter.

3—It is suggested, in view of the serious conditions at present existing, and the immediate necessity of action, that the civic authorities be urged to appoint a superintendent of wires, who shall be empowered to deal with all matters relating to electrical construction, whether overhead or underground.

EDMONTON RATE-PAYERS have endorsed the exclusive twenty-year artificial gas franchise to the International Heating & Lighting Company of Cleveland, and rejected the exclusive natural gas franchise of the Northwest Gas & Oil Company. The vote on the artificial gas franchise was, for 973, against 274; on the natural gas franchise, for 325, against 670.