

"And this in spite of the fact that America boasts the most efficient and daring fire departments to be found anywhere, and that in the central and most crowded areas of several of the largest cities the law compels the erection of 'fireproof' buildings of steel, concrete, and hollow tile. Yet New York alone has more fires every year than all the capitals of Europe put together. One American in every 250 has a fire each year, and the actual value of the property destroyed represents probably less than half the amount extracted from the people to pay for additional safeguards and the increased cost of insurance. Not less than £100,000,000 is the full tribute thus annually paid by Americans, directly and indirectly, to the fire fiend."

This wholesale destruction of property is not the work of isolated and independent incendiaries, still less the result of losses by fire which no precaution seems able entirely to prevent. Mr. McFarlane's conclusion is that from one-half to two-thirds of the fires in the United States are due to incendiarism. This means a destruction of property in the United States yearly of the value of \$1,125,000 besides an equal or somewhat larger sum as an insurance tax.

The writer from whom we quote goes on to say:—

"Matters, indeed, have come to such a pass that the fire statistics are a closer index to the prosperity of the country and to the condition of particular industries than either Wall street or the bankruptcy returns or the official trade figures. Every period of financial and commercial depression is not only accompanied but heralded by a sudden increase of fires. The panic of 1907 took Wall street by surprise. But the fire insurance companies knew what was coming months before, and many of them prepared for it by cancelling half their risks."

Strange to say that while the losses by fire of property insured falls ultimately upon the shareholders, the companies, or rather their managers and agents are, to some extent, responsible for this state of affairs, especially the larger companies. Were there no fires there would be no insurance. A good fire and a prompt settlement are often the best of advertisements.