

TORONTO CONFLAGRATION.

BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS DESTROYED, 123; LOSS ON BUILDINGS, ABOUT \$3,500,000; LOSS ON STOCKS, ABOUT \$8,500,000; LARGEST WHOLESALE HOUSES IN CITY BURNED; AREA BURNED OVER, EXTENDS TO WEST AND EAST OF BAY STREET, FROM ESPLANADE TO KING.

On Tuesday night last a fire broke out in the centre of the business district, Toronto, which rapidly developed into a conflagration of appalling magnitude.

The area burnt over in Toronto may be described as the wholesale warehouse district, extending from Wellington Street, southwards, to Front Street. At the eastern extremity of the area where the fire raged is the Bank of Montreal, and at the western end the Queen's Hotel, both of which escaped.

The old Queen's Hotel owes its immunity to a lawn on the east side, but its danger was so great that the guests fled in alarm. The Custom House was also menaced, and the Board of Trade building, but, fortunately, the fire did not cross Yonge Street, or the calamity would have been greatly intensified.

The wholesale trade of the Queen City has been struck in a vital part; the injurious effects of which blow will be felt for years. The capital destroyed, which was invested in buildings and stocks, will be partially restored to the proprietor by the insurance companies. Still, the loss in these forms of property will be very extensive, and probably to some merchants not a little embarrassing. A very serious element in the conflagration loss is the suspension of business and the confusion into which it is thrown by the impossibility of continuing the routine operations of the establishment.

Regarded from the insurance standpoint, every conflagration is such an object lesson in regard to the necessity of rates being sufficient to provide for such contingencies as cannot but be learnt by all who exercise an intelligent judgment on the question. None, however, are so blind as those who will not see, and those who do not see that insurance companies require to impose such rates as provide for the hazard of conflagration, must have deliberately refused to look at the facts. In another column in this issue, as in many previous ones, data is given showing that in the last thirty-five years, 1869 to 1903 inclusive, the premiums received by the fire companies have been swept away on such a scale as left the insignificant balance of only 2 to 2 1-2 per cent. after paying the expenses of the business.

The district which the conflagration devastated was the scene of fires on the 6th and the 10th January, 1895, by which property valued at \$600,000 to \$700,000 was destroyed, the insurance loss having been about \$400,000. When that conflagration occurred it was deplorably manifest that the water supply and general equipments of the fire protection service were wholly inadequate to cope with fires on a large scale. Some improvements were made, but the recent conflagration proved that the water supply was most defective. The citizens recently voted \$1,000,000 to put the city in a better condition in

this respect, the necessity for which was demonstrated by the recent disasters.

Montreal has had several sharp and costly lessons in regard to the necessity of a more adequate fire protection service, especially as regards the supply and pressure of water to meet an extensive fire. The cost of the improvements needed has been far exceeded, and will continue to be exceeded every year, by the amount of property destroyed, that would be protected by an adequate water service and other improvements. We can but hope that the experience of Toronto will be such a warning to municipal authorities as will cause them to raise local fire protection services to the standard of adequacy, in view of the ever-present danger of a conflagration.

Amongst the conflagrations that have occurred in Canada, may be named the following: In 1852 a conflagration at Montreal involved a loss of \$5,000,000; in 1866, at Quebec, a loss of \$3,000,000; in 1876 at St. John, Que., a loss of \$2,500,000, and in 1877, a conflagration at St. John, N.B., inflicted a loss on the fire insurance companies of over \$6,000,000. In 1877 the fire companies in Canada paid losses to extent of \$8,490,919, while their premiums for the year were only \$3,764,000. In 1897 there were conflagrations at New Westminster, B.C., and Windsor, N.S. In 1900 the Hull-Ottawa fires caused a loss to the companies of \$3,662,098, and in 1901, by a conflagration in this city, they lost over \$2,000,000.

Representatives of the companies are now in session at Toronto regarding material advances in rates over the whole Dominion, particularly in towns with congested areas.

A schedule of the losses, as far as ascertained, appears on another page.

LIFE INSURANCE IN CANADA, 1903.

We present in this issue an abstract of life insurance in Canada for the year 1903, from the preliminary statement of the Superintendent of Insurance for the Dominion. There was a general impression prevalent in the later months of last year that the business was not progressing as well as it was in 1902. Taking the result of the entire year, however, there was a very large increase made in the amount of policies, new and taken up, the gross amount being \$11,024,839, which is much larger than the increase made in any year since 1899, when there was \$12,052,430 recorded as the increase in that year.

As compared with four previous years, 1903 shows as follows, for the whole of the companies:—

	Canadian. \$	British. \$	American \$
Premiums, 1903.	10,883,174	1,435,317	5,924,608
Increase or decrease in year..	i. 834,970	i. 20,044	i. 310,525
Premiums, 1902.	10,048,204	1,415,273	5,614,083
Increase or decrease in year..	i. 914,314	i. 68,607	i. 904,785
Premiums, 1901.	9,133,890	1,346,666	4,709,298
Increase or decrease in year..	d. 239,515	d. 25,689	i. 448,117
Premiums, 1900.	9,374,405	1,372,355	4,261,181
Increase or decrease in year..	i. 1,568,231	i. 96,126	i. 304,877
Premiums, 1899.	7,805,174	1,276,229	3,957,304
Increase or decrease in year..	i. 674,977	i. 65,628	i. 280,814

Gross increase since 1899. i. \$3,078,000 i. \$159,088 i. \$1,967,304