

passenger freight from the steamship companies, under the name of commissions. The Grand Trunk, it is complained, outbids its rivals, and gets more than its "legitimate" share of the business, the former paying \$6 a passenger and the latter \$1.50. When the passengers are carried beyond Chicago, the lines that carry them repay part of this commission. The steamship companies want to get the largest commission they can, and are said to be threatening to offer the whole business, which they can control, to that line which shall make the highest bid. Threats are made of boycotting the Grand Trunk, but the question is one of the highest bid, not of the loudest threat. The commissions paid by railways to steamships for passengers are a result of the railway competition, and so long as Montreal and New York can compete in this way the immigrant traffic ought to fare better than it would if no competition existed. Apparently the immigrants do not benefit by the commissions paid to the steamship companies, but the vessels getting these commissions can afford to carry at lower rates than they could without them. There is, however, no reason to conclude that, taking the whole journey by water and land, the commissions reduce the total amount payable in passenger fare. If the trunk lines have been less liberal than the Grand Trunk in commissions, they have only themselves to blame if they do not get a larger share of the business.

DEPARTMENTAL STORES.

For some time past, objections to departmental stores have been heard in different cities where they have got a footing, notably in New York and Toronto. Of the latter city, the municipal council is to-morrow to take these complaints into consideration; but what it can do, should it desire to discourage such establishments, is not very clear. It has no power over the regulation of commerce, and cannot visit these stores with discriminating taxes. Departmental stores have brought in a new plan of doing business, and their success has crowded to the wall a number of rivals which did business by the old methods. What are the peculiar features of the departmental stores? At first sight they may appear to run counter to the rule of the division of labor; but this superficial view would not be the true one. There is in them division of labor, each department having a special organization, just as complete, if not more so, as that which prevails in stores where only one kind of business is carried on. With this division of labor, there is concentration of capital and effort. A third feature is that business being done only for cash, no bad debts are made, and the percentage which has to be allowed for them in credit stores is an addition to the resources for competition. The quickness of the returns causes a saving of interest.

So far as they go, these stores represent a transition in the mode of doing business, and the question is whether the change is to become complete, involving the whole range of business. The change of method seems to bear some resemblance to a new invention in the arts, which gives a decided advantage to its possessors. If appearances are not deceptive, may not the revolution go on to completion, so that the time may come when business cannot be carried on in any other way? Whether we like it or not, the tendency is this way at present. The trouble is that only a few of those now in trade can take advantage of the new method: one great departmental store causes hundreds of small stores to disappear. The only chance is that some means of successfully contending against departmental stores may be found in a change of method which, while imitating, may even be an improvement on the methods of these formidable rivals of the old-fashioned stores.

ANOTHER GREAT FIRE.

A great fire occurred in Toronto on January 6th this year; another on January 10th; another on March 3rd. The destruction of property by these three burnings is not less than two millions of dollars. The insurance companies lost by the first fire \$445,000, by the second \$540,000, by the third \$570,000. All three took place in the business quarter, and they were all mercantile risks that burned.

The circumstances of these serious fires merit some attention. They all began in modern buildings of unusual height; the causes which produced them are not yet discovered, but indications point to incendiarism; they took place at a time when the city was—as unhappily it still is—poorly provided with modern fire-fighting apparatus. The feeling gains strength that there are incendiaries among us. Only on Wednesday evening last a fire was discovered in the basement of a Front street shop, in the heart of the wholesale quarter, which could not well have been other than incendiary. Luckily a chemical engine quenched it.

Let the city council then offer a reward of a thousand or two thousand dollars for the apprehension of these incendiaries, and so stimulate detectives and others to seek out the scoundrels who revel in destruction. It will be money well spent if it shall place even one of them in gaol for life. But will the council move? That ponderous body resolved in the middle of January last to buy steam fire engines, yet never a steam fire engine is in our midst to-day except the little one which, by the grace of a merchant who *lent it* to the city, saved, we are told, the whole Eaton departmental store, when Simpson's and other buildings were destroyed on Sunday last. An incendiary spirit in a town is bad enough, but to be further cursed with a set of municipal guardians who delay bringing the appliances to combat the incendiary's evil work, is even worse.

Torontonians will take what comfort they can out of the fact that a Merryweather steam fire engine has been ordered from London by cable, and that a Ronald steam fire engine is on its way from western Ontario. Also that a water tower and appurtenances, and 6,000 feet more hose, have been advertised for. All this is poor comfort to the people on Yonge and Queen streets whose stocks and premises are a ghastly heap of ruins for the lack of such engines on Sunday last. It should further be urged that if six and seven story buildings are to be the rule, Toronto should have more water pumping power and larger water mains. Two steam fire engines is not protection enough—a water tower will also require one of them. The conflagration hazard must not be ignored.

ONTARIO LOAN COMPANIES.

The general feeling among mortgage loan companies in Ontario, as reflected in their reports or in addresses at their recent annual meetings, is one of caution and economy. In view of untoward conditions in agriculture during the year consideration has often been extended by the companies, as a rule, to farmers who were borrowers. At the same time the Ontario farmer has shown himself quite as able as the average man in other walks of life to pay his way. The facts that confront the loan companies are a reduction in value of farm real estate and a lowered rate of interest. Their earnings are likely therefore to be upon a lower scale. The conservative policy outlined in the report of the Hamilton Provident & Loan Society for 1893 has evidently been pursued during the year just past. They have restricted their loans during the year, and at the same time have been repaid by their borrowers a sum which swells their balance of unused money in bank. It is the policy of the board,