PAYMENT OF LIFE CLAIMS IN QUEBEC PROVINCE.

Life insurance companies, and beneficiaries from life insurance policies in the province of Quebec, are being put to much inconvenience in regard to the settlement of claims through the following amendment to the Succession Duties Act, passed at the last session of the provincial Legislature:—

"And no insurer may make a valid payment of the amount due by reason of a death, unless the said (succession) duties have been paid, or unless a certificate has been delivered by the collector of provincial revenue to the effect that no duty is exigible."

There is sound reason for complaint regarding the manner in which this legislation was passed. It seems to have been introduced on the last day of the session, and rushed through without any attempt at consultation with parties interested, or having any knowledge of the subject. Whatever the intention of the author of the measure, he has succeeded in bringing about almost an *impasse*. The effect of this legislation in many cases is necessarily that the life companies are unable to pay their claims, beneficiaries are unable to pay their succession duties, and the Province is unable to collect those duties. In the case of the very poor, where succession duties are not payable, beneficiaries are subjected to tiresome and needless official requirements—no small trial in the cases of the ignorant and of foreigners—and, pending compliance with these requirements, the companies are not allowed to hand over cash, for which there is in most cases an urgent necessity. Beneficiaries of small estates amenable to the tax, who may not have facilities for securing bank accommodation, may easily find themselves, in the *impasse* already suggested, unable to collect the life insurance funds and unable to pay, without those funds, succession duties. Large estates will presumably generally have facilities for securing bank accommodation in anticipation of the settlement of life policies due. But at a time when many wealthy men are taking out insurance policies for the express purpose of providing cash for succession duties and similar charges, it is curious, to say the least, that the Province should enact legislation of this kind.

Under the circumstances of this legislation, both beneficiaries and the companies are being put to a great deal of needless trouble. The companies cannot pay their claims, and the beneficiaries either have not the means to pay the succession duties, or are in a hopeless mental muddle as to the requirements which must be complied with in order to obtain the necessary certificate that they are not liable. There is quite needless hardship all round. Probably also, as time goes on, the companies will find that this piece of legislative stupidity will be doing them harm in another way. Their inability to pay claims until legislative requirements have been complied with, will lead to gossip among the credulous poor, and others who are not poor but credulous, that this is another dodge of wealthy companies and organizations to keep poor folk out of their money a little longer. It is almost certain that there will be some developments of that kind. The infliction of such an injury by Government upon the business of life insurance is absolutely gratuitous and unnecessary. If the Government really wants to keep tab on life insurance payments in the province in order to check evasion of the Succession Duties Act, it can be done quite easily and simply, and without any hardship to anyone, except in the additional clerical labour involved, by requiring companies to make a periodical return to the Government of their payments for death claims, say monthly or quarterly.

DOMINION FIRE'S ANNUAL STATEMENT.

The statement of the Dominion Fire Insurance Company, of Toronto, published on another page, shows steady progress. Net premiums for 1917 totalled $325,748, of which $93,750 were derived from the hail department, compared with $237,137 in 1916, of which $24,598 were hail premiums. This substantial increase in premium income was accompanied by a favorable loss experience of 54.53 per cent., net losses calling for $177,603.

The Dominion Fire's assets totalled at December 31st last $426,858, a growth of about $66,000, and there is a cash surplus to policyholders of $162,337. The published statement indicates that the assets of the Company are of a negotiable character. Cash in banks and on hand is $96,519, agents' balances are normal and the investments are mainly comprised in War Loan bonds, municipal debentures and high-class stocks. The Company has acquired a desirable reputation for the prompt payment and adjustment of claims, and it is evidently being guided by the management along the right lines.

The Head Office of the Dominion Fire in Toronto has associated with it, the Northwestern National Insurance Company of Milwaukee, and the National-Ben Franklin Fire Insurance Company of Pittsburgh, both of which companies are in high repute. The Branch Office of these Companies for Quebec Province is situated in the Lewis Building, 17 St John Street, Montreal, and is in charge of Mr. C. C. Lawson.

AUTOMOBILE THIEVES GET OFF LIGHTLY.

The circumstances of a case of automobile theft, in which the National-Ben Franklin is interested, contain some curious features. A $1,500 McLaughlin car, insured by this company, was stolen in Montreal last September. Some weeks later, it was discovered in a barn at Joliette, it having been used by the two men who stole it, as a means of getting away with stolen goods, of which a store of some $8,000 worth was found by the police at Joliette. Arrangements were made to have the prisoners transferred to Montreal for trial, and at the trial they pleaded guilty. Subsequently, however, instead of their receiving a good stiff sentence, they were released on suspended sentence, and were immediately enlisted in overseas forces. Protests to the military authorities by the owner of the stolen car against men of this type being placed in the ranks along with gentlemen, brought the reply that "the law allows men to be granted suspended sentence provided they join the ranks for overseas, and it has frequently happened that men of that kind make first-class soldiers."

This may be so, but in view of the difficulties which the insurance companies experience in securing convictions for automobile theft, the companies are not likely to view the course taken by the authorities in this case as satisfactory. A good stiff sentence would have acted as a warning to the many other crooks, who now make themselves a nuisance along the same lines.