

But the amplest protection is given to the public interests by this step. It is not, however, favorable to the prospects of new telegraph companies in the Dominion, which have been unable to secure from the Legislature powers of amalgamation.

RECENT FIRES AND FIRE APPLIANCES.

Scarcely had we done talking about the great fire of 6th inst., at Racine, Wisconsin, than we have three costly fires at our own doors—Ridgetown, to wit, on the 10th; some twenty houses burned at Hastings on the 11th, and a sweeping fire at Danville, Que., on Sunday. The loss by the three forms a serious total, and it is well to examine into the conditions under which these fires obtained such headway.

Ridgetown, a thriving town of 2,000 inhabitants, on the C. S. R., near Chatham, possesses a fire brigade, a good steam fire engine, and is well supplied with water, eleven tanks being distributed over the town. Why, then, was the fire permitted to devastate the business portion of the place? Because the hose was rotten and burst under pressure, leaving the engine useless. Here is the weak spot in the liberal programme of the Ridgetown people. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link; and the weak link was in this case the hose. But for its bursting, the chances are that the fire would have been put out in an hour, with but slight loss. As it was, the flames, urged by an east wind, flew westward through wooden houses until stopped by Ross's brick hotel; then they leaped across the street into more frame or rough-cast buildings, reaching the Post-office and Molsons' Bank agency, brick structures, where they stopped.

In the case of Hastings, Ont., which was built of wood, with an abundance of water close at hand from the river Trent which affords the power for its factories, it was hardly surprising that a fire should spread, for there were no appliances whatever with which to put out a blaze. Fortunately, it was raining when the fire broke out, else the place might have been swept away in the high wind. As it is, loss will amount to \$40,000; and when, from its position, contiguous to an abundant head of water it was so easy to make provision for extinguishing fire by a water-wheel pumping into a natural reservoir, it is short-sighted policy not to have done so. One merchant is said to lose \$7000 over his insurance. This sum would have sufficed to equip the village with hose, hooks and ladders, etc.

It is saddening to think of the inhabitants of Danville Que., when on Sunday last, during a high north wind, their village was be-

ing swept out of existence by the flames, attempting to call by telegraph for help from Sherbrooke and Richmond, but in vain. When a messenger was sent to the latter place, 12 miles, its engine was not available, being under repair. There was it appears, at Danville a fire brigade with a small hand engine, meagre appliances of which the most was made. Even the women and children worked to save property and to stay the progress of the fire. But with the whole main street a mass of flame, and the few brick buildings in existence succumbing to the attack, it seemed hopeless enough. One circumstance seems strange, if correctly reported, that a storekeeper should have been allowed to keep in his store at one time four barrels of gunpowder. This exploded during the fire, happily without occasioning loss of life.

What has happened to the pretty village of Danville may happen to hundreds of villages of Canada, unless precaution be taken by modifying the plan of the place, insisting on fire walls or separation of blocks by distance, or by more adequate fire appliances. In manufacturing villages, where as in the present case, numbers of families are rendered destitute by the destruction of the factory which yields them bread, it is the more necessary to adopt such measures for protection against fire.

RETURNING GOODS.

It is, we are aware, an enticing custom in certain departments of retail trade, to send merchandise to customers "on approbation." A lady can get an assortment of mantles or bonnets sent to her house for trial, the one which pleases her to be retained and the rest returned. Or paterfamilias can, if he sees a carpet which he fancies for his billiard room, have it sent home for the approval of his wife, to be returned if her taste does not agree with his. This may be legitimate enough; and sales are often effected by such means.

But it is a very different thing for a retail merchant in a country town 150 miles distant, to visit Hamilton or Toronto in March, buy a parcel of goods from an importer, and in April or May return a portion of them under the pretext that he has overbought, or that trade is slack, or that he has "made a mistake." This may be a very convenient practice for the retailer, but is a nuisance to the wholesale dealer. Besides, it is not business. We have seen, in the letter-book of one wholesale house, a dozen transactions of this kind which have occurred this spring, and it appears as though, trade being slack, the country customer is taking advantage of the importer

to throw upon his hands odds and ends of surplus stock, for it is practised upon a number of houses here.

One man sends back, on the 10th of May, certain pieces of dress goods amounting to \$60, culled from a parcel bought by himself on 7th April. Another coolly returns some \$40 worth of fancy goods, which he professes to find "unsuited to his trade," as though his lack of judgment in buying them six weeks before could properly be visited upon the house which sold them. In isolated cases a merchant may take back a piece or two of stuff to oblige a customer; but that is a different matter from making a practice of returning goods at the whim of an inexperienced country dealer. The wholesale trade should not submit to it. The fact that the practice complained of exists appears to us to indicate over-trading, or an over-anxiety to humor the retail customer.

Retailers who know their business do not resort to such petty artifices. In the first place, they are unlikely to buy what they do not want; and if goods they have bought do not sell, common sense tells them that they must "grin and bear" the loss—not ask the importer to take a part of the load and do the grinning. He is much more likely to do something more demonstrative. If an order be "stuffed" it serves the seller rightly to have the goods not purchased returned, and it is the receiver's business to return them promptly. So, too, if merchandise be imperfect or not as requested. But we regret to find instances where goods, shipped precisely as bought, have been returned on the flimsiest pretexts, or without any complaint being made. This, too, after having been kept a month, damaged, fly-blown, the packages frayed or covering torn. Such a proceeding argues a reliance on the good nature of the wholesale dealer that is child-like. Indeed, such modes of doing business are too childish to be submitted to, and we trust they will not be longer encouraged.

THE QUEBEC BUDGET.

The Quebec Government finds itself with a floating debt of \$2,855,356.39. The deficit in the consolidated revenue fund is \$682,652.88; and the expenditure in railways, actual and what has to be made, exceeds by \$682,652.88, the amount borrowed for railway construction. Mr. Treasurer Wurtele proposes to consolidate the floating debt by means of a loan. The amount to be provided for is 2,855,356.39, besides any sums which may be awarded to Messrs. McGreevy and McDonald by the arbitrators who are to decide upon their claims, and