

MONTREAL NOTES.

Several circumstances have combined of late to bring the office of City Building Inspector prominently before the public. When on the 3rd of April a newly erected water tank on the top of a building in St. Paul Street collapsed, resulting in the death of a young woman employed in the building, many indignant protests were heard on all sides regarding the looseness with which such operations were controlled. A little previously another tank had collapsed in somewhat similar circumstances, though without any fatal effects. Two such accidents within a few days make a strong appeal for public control. If care for their own reputation and for the lives and properties of their employers is not sufficient to compel constructors to make safe their work, then the civic authorities may very well be expected to step in. The Building Inspector, when appealed to in the matter, points out that his department consists of himself and one assistant; and it is obvious that a department of this size cannot be expected to keep touch with all operations, including the construction of buildings, and the installation of sprinkler and other plant therein; to calculate the strain on every stick and stone which builders propose to employ, and finally to see that, when rightly calculated, the members of structures are according to all the calculations and requirements of the case. In connection with the tank trouble, the Builders' Exchange has come forward with the suggestion that the erection and inspection of these tanks should be undertaken somewhat on the lines of boiler inspection, and this may be the right and proper solution of this particular difficulty; but it does not touch the general weakness of the present state of affairs, which leaves it till some such tragedy as the present has occurred before there is any reasonable chance of proper precautions being observed or compelled in such cases.

Another matter in this connection that has been much before us lately is the question of dark rooms in dwelling houses. It is stated that houses with rooms that have no direct communication with the outer air are being erected by hundreds. If in such an important and obvious matter as this the laws of hygiene are being so completely set at naught, what hope can we have that in lesser matters the poorer class of tenants are given a chance for healthy living. We pass by-laws prohibiting spitting on the sidewalk, and at the same time permit consumption and other mortal diseases to be forced upon the poor man by the airless rooms he must rent. Again, the Building Inspector points to the extent of his staff, and to the fact that fire risks and not sanitation are his special department. There is a Health Department to which he reports cases of unsanitary arrangement. The civic health officer declares he can take no action because the by-laws only demand that "habitable" rooms be properly ventilated, and the city attorneys' interpret "habitable" as meaning "actually inhabited." Meanwhile in all ordinary rational walks of life "habitable" can only mean "capable of being inhabited," and the difference of interpretation is responsible for the ill-health and premature death of hundreds.

Now towards the efficient inspection and care of buildings there is one very obvious initial step which, simple as it is, would go a long way towards improving the present unsatisfactory state of things. This is the deposition at the Building Inspector's office of plans of all buildings about to be erected or altered. Considering how often this has been advocated by individuals, by the Province of Quebec Association of Archi-

itects, and by the Building Inspector himself, it seems amazing that it has never been put in force. According to the present system plans are expected to be approved by the Building Inspector at sight. They are not left in his hands. Nothing more than a most superficial inspection is possible. The plans not being in his safe-keeping are not available to him to refer to at short notice, and they are liable to be lost or destroyed at any time. Any system of inspection which claims to be thorough must surely have some tangible basis to work from. To have all plans carefully under review would mean that the Building Inspector would have an opportunity to give deliberate consideration to novel features, such as the construction of over-roof sprinkler tanks or anything else; and competent officials could be called in to pass upon them. Opportunity would be given to architects or builders presenting plans to have their attention called to by-laws, greater or less, old or new, which they might have deliberately or inadvertently been about to transgress. The systematic operation of such a system would naturally tend to more thorough and general acquaintance with and observance of the city's by-laws. With copies of all plans in their possession, the civic authorities would be in a position to form some idea of the scope and requirements of an inspector's department and to employ a staff capable of overtaking all the duties.

The Builders' Exchange, of Montreal, are taking steps with a view to establishing greater uniformity of practice in regard to methods of obtaining tenders and of making out conditions of contract. There can be little doubt that a uniform form of contract for the generality of work could be drawn up in such a way as to meet with general acceptance both by architects and builders. In the matter of obtaining tenders, however, there exists such divergence of practice and of sentiment, in regard to many points, that it will be difficult to introduce uniform rules. This, however, is probably a good reason for making the endeavor. The sooner the discussion of the subject is undertaken, the sooner will a satisfactory practice be arrived at. A sub-committee of the Province of Quebec Association of Architects has been appointed to confer with representatives of the Builders' Exchange on the subject.

At the twenty-third spring exhibition of pictures held in the Art Gallery, in Philip Square, from March 23rd to April 14th, the exhibit of architectural drawings seemed this year to be rather smaller than it was last year. The principal position was given to a pleasant water color drawing of the Nurses Home at the Royal Victoria Hospital, by Messrs. Ed. and W. S. Maxwell. The building maintains the Scottish Baronial style of the hospital buildings, with a little less severity of aspect. Prof. Nobbs exhibits sketches of three pleasant little houses and a drawing of the interior of the lounging room of the McGill University Students' Union. As drawings these all possess something of the combination of crispness and tenderness that is the special beauty of water color work. Messrs. Finley and Spence show five large drawings of different buildings. Besides some that have been referred to before in these notes, they represent the Molson's Bank, Toronto, and the Federal Life Assurance Co.'s premises, Hamilton. Most of these drawings are signed J. Fitzpatrick, and look solid and faithful renderings of the buildings. Messrs. Saxe and Archibald entered the competitive drawings for Emmanuel Congregational Church, which, in black and white wash, looks ghostly amongst the surrounding color.