

PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY  
BY  
**HUGH C. MACLEAN, LIMITED**  
TORONTO, CANADA.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE:  
Canada and Great Britain, \$5.00 per annum,  
payable in advance.  
United States and all foreign countries embraced  
in the General Postal Union, \$5.00.

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### For a Higher Building Standard.

Almost invariably contractors' bids on a building exceed the architect's estimate of its cost and a bill of "extras" brings the final cost away above the contract price. Moreover, even where a building is completed under such circumstances it later becomes noticeable that this or that that should have been done is left undone. The question is asked why is it that so much of the cost of a building is wasted or misapplied in ornament to the neglect apparently of the first essentials of good construction, and in many cases the man who has built places the blame entirely on the architect. It would seem that there has been someone lacking in foresight.

Authorities tell us that nine-tenths of our enormous annual fire loss is directly attributable to imperfect construction, that even in our so-called great fireproof buildings architects make such blunders, as endanger the entire investment. The greatest care and much expense will be placed in the use of high class materials all through a building, but some window, for instance, will be left unprotected and in a particularly vulnerable place that offers easy ingress to external fire.

This may in some cases be true where an incompetent architect is employed, but certainly is not generally the case in our large cities. Only occasionally do we hear of serious errors from architectural incompetency.

On the other hand, instance are many where buildings in small towns are notoriously unsafe and have remained so for years. In such cases there is usually no one to take the initiative in forcing obviously necessary alterations and, until an unmistakable warning either with or without attendant loss of life occurs, no steps are taken to make improvements. An instance comes to mind of a theatre in a small Ontario town which is a notoriously unsubstantial structure, used only a score or so of times a year and for that reason deemed unworthy of serious attention. The building is a large brick structure, occupying the corner of the main street, and furnishing an ideal centre of conflagration for the demolition of the entire business section of the town. A retail liquor business is conducted on the main floor and adjoining it at one time was a bicycle repair shop furnished with the usual supply of oily rags and supplies of oil and gasoline. The theatre itself was on more than one occasion the scene of an incipient conflagration owing to defective chimneys—the building is heated with wood stoves.

It was on another point, however, that the builder or proprietor showed a lack of forethought. In the case of fire breaking out the only means of escape from the balcony of this theatre was through a narrow door and thence down a flight of winding stairs, into which, about half way down, opened the only means of egress from the main floor. In time of fire panic two streams of humanity would have poured down these two staircases, have met in full flight on a narrow platform, and there have been the victims of a tragedy similar to that which recently took place at Barnsley, England.

Action, we understand, has within the past month been taken by the town council in this particular instance, and the owner of the theatre instructed to provide better fire escape accommodation. Whether or not this will or can be done is problematical.

The instance cited is by no means without a parallel. The theatres, schools and churches throughout this

country have, in very few cases indeed, been so constructed as to permit of easy fire escape. The blame rests with the low standard of building that has ruled in our smaller municipalities and which apparently is only jolted into a more up-to-date form by occasional world-startling calamities. Here assuredly is a common meeting ground for architects and contractors and one on which much can be decided for the public weal.

### Scotch or Canadian Brick.

Considerable comment has been roused in Montreal over a report that the provincial government have decided that the material to be employed in the construction of the new Montreal jail shall be Scotch brick. Local brick makers have been taking a great deal of interest in the contract for this building, as it will be a large one, and are most indignant over the decision of the government. It is stated on good authority that the advisers of the provincial government have unanimously agreed that the brick produced in the neighborhood of Montreal is fully equal to the best Scotch brick in every respect, with the possible exception of that of colour, and that the local product is also the cheapest. If the building was to be located on an important street in Montreal the color question, it is argued, might be entitled to respect, but as the building is to be erected at the Back river this consideration counts but for little, especially as the color of the home article is not in the least displeasing. The color argument, it is further urged, must fall to the ground when the fact is taken into consideration that the employment of home brick would mean a great deal of employment for home labor at a time when it requires it, whereas the use of the Scotch article would leave the country just that much poorer. The hope is expressed that Mr. Gouin and his colleagues will alter their decision.