

### THE FRENCH LANGUAGE . OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

We note with pleasure that the commissioners of the English schools in this province are at last awaking to the fact that in some respects they have been at least fifty years behind the age. They have been diligently serving up venerable but to most people valueless Latin and Greek to the boys entrusted to them, and neglecting the positive famine for French which exists.

A few years ago the proportion of time spent on the different subjects in the Montreal High School was, if we remember aright, as follows:

Latin and Greek—one hour and a half every day.

French—half an hour every second day.

What a farce this was in the province of Quebec! The relation should have been reversed at least. We are pleased, as we have said, to notice that a slight improvement has taken place of late. But we do not hesitate to say that the well intentioned but antiquated policy which formerly prevailed is responsible for driving hundreds, if not thousands, of our brightest young men to Ontario and the United States. Their school course had not qualified them for any of the host of positions among us, which none but a person speaking both languages can fill, and the result was that French Canadians were taken on and the Englishmen had to go to places where English is the sole language. We repeat the assertion, which we have made on more than one occasion, that every intelligent boy who completes a course in any of our public schools, and cannot then converse and write fluently in French, is a walking announcement of the failure of our school system to do what is expected of it.

### THE HARTFORD FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY.

The Hartford Fire, like some other good things, improves with age. It has just completed its eightieth year, and in its annual statement, which we print on another page of this issue, it furnishes the public with some very interesting reading. We have learned to expect "increase" written on the results attained by this company from year to year, but considering the unusually large fire loss of the country for 1889, we did not expect to see such a favorable showing as that which greets us for January 1st, 1890. We find that the total cash income was \$3,059,533, the total expenditures, excluding dividends, \$2,554,554, and the consequent resultant profit \$504,979. The total assets now amount to \$6,142,454, and the net surplus to \$2,456,079. It is a condition of affairs seldom met with to find a company in possession of a net surplus equal to almost 40 per cent. of its total assets, as is the case with the Hartford. The increase in the surplus during 1889 was pretty close to a quarter of a million, being \$222,096, while the increase in assets was \$392,374. Success in fire underwriting at the present day is not an accident but the result of skilful generalship. To know when not to do it is quite as important as when to do it to the winning company. Thorough knowledge of the business in all its details, a knowledge of men, the ability to discount the future by using the table of facts

which past experience furnishes, and a cool, even courage are among the qualities which must be found in the management of a successful company. These fortunately are qualities possessed by the long-time president of the Hartford, Mr Geo. L. Chase, and shared in no small degree by Secretary Royce and the office staff. The business of the company in Canada has been large, and it has been profitable, as might well be expected when committed to the management of such capable underwriters as have been chosen to represent it, among whom is Mr. Fred. W. Evans of this city.

### "SCRUTIN DE LISTE" ELECTIONS.

The fact that rumors are in circulation, to the effect that the Quebec Government propose to adopt the "*scrutin de liste*" plan of voting in the cities of Montreal and Quebec, has drawn attention to this system which is in use in France. Canadians have but a slight idea of what the plan really is. A prominent Montreal daily paper recently had an editorial describing its working, but unfortunately for its readers did not itself understand the question, and under the name of the *scrutin de liste* explained the details of an entirely different system, that of the "cumulative vote" as it is called in England.

The *scrutin de liste* is simply as follows: A city like Montreal is not divided into constituencies as at present, but is left as a whole. The number of members to which it is entitled are elected by the united body of voters, each man having as many votes as there are members to be elected. He cannot place more than one vote to any one candidate (as he could under the "cumulative" system), and whichever candidates receive the majority of all the votes cast are elected. It is very easily seen that the effect of such a method is to extinguish the minorities entirely. In Montreal, the East end voters would elect all the members which Montreal would send to Parliament, and the English-speaking section in the west and the south would be entirely unrepresented. The system is a glaringly unjust one, and in countries where it is in use it has caused great dissatisfaction. Of all the methods in the world it is the least suitable to a divided city like Montreal, and we do not for one moment suppose that those in authority would even think of adopting anything so notoriously unfair.

A new fire-proof floor has, according to *The Chronicle* (New York) been introduced into this country from Spain, where it has been used a number of years. Its general features are the use, to form the arches, of a hard, well-burned clay tile laid flat, with the several courses breaking joints. The composition of the mortar is a secret, but it adheres so closely to the tile and is so firm and solid, when it has fully hardened, that its strength is about equal to that of the tile. The arches are either cylindrical or domed, and in either case weigh but little more than half the weight of the ordinary brick arches. The principal saving, however, is in the reduced number of beams used, owing to the much greater span which may be made with the tile arch.