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REMARKS ON THE LATE FIRE, ST. URBAIN ST.

RESPONSIBILITY OF MUNICI-
PAL AUTHORITIES.

SCARCELY had the lamentable catastrophe of the burning of the St. Louis Hotel, in which so many of its inmates miserably perished in the flames, began to fade from our memory, and the horrors which attended the Brooklyn holocaust had ceased to cause a thrill of pain to pass through the mind at the still

vivid remembrance of the picture given of that dreadful night, and its heart-rending description of strong men, women and children struggling and writhing in their agony, still apparently ringing in our ears, when we are aroused one morning to be horrified—stupefied almost—with the dreadful intelligence that ten of our own citizens had been crushed under the red hot bricks and burning embers of a building in St. Urbain street.

Of the lamentable loss of human life that has been caused from fires during the past twelve months, this, in our city, has been the saddest—would we could say the last. It is the saddest because in such fires as those of the Brooklyn Theatre and St. Louis Hotel, the destroyed went to those places of their own accord and for their own pleasure or convenience; they knew that a certain risk must always obtain in such buildings, and that risk all who seek for pleasure in crowded edifices must, to a certain extent, be prepared to run. But in the St. Urbain Street fire it was different; duty called them there, and the building was known to be unsafe by many. The Building Inspector could not, or should not, have been unaware of the fact, and, therefore, it was his bounden duty to report the same, or to have taken such steps as would, so far as lay in his power, have averted the catastrophe.

Over two years since we warned the proprietor that his building was unsafe, not only in case of fire, but from

its imperfect construction; and we also warned the late lamented Chief of the Fire Brigade that should a fire take place in that building and gain sufficient headway to weaken the joists, so as to cause deflection, the walls would be sure to fall. We must do the proprietor the justice to say he felt perfectly convinced that the building was a safe one, and as strongly constructed as it was necessary to make it for the purpose for which it was erected. Deeply, very deeply has he felt for the unhappy result of this great error in judgment, for he is not a man of that kind who would risk human life for human gain. Neither he nor the architect can be held responsible, in one respect, for this lamentable loss of life; it is the result of a loose system of building that has been allowed to go on year after year unchecked, until hundreds of houses have been erected similar to this one that has fallen, under any of whose walls, in case of a fire happening, a whole Fire Brigade may be entombed. The odium and the responsibility should fall upon our city councillors for their imperfect administration of our civic laws, and to the apathy of those representatives of the people who stubbornly oppose the action of such of their conferees who are desirous of rendering more perfect the Sanitary and Building laws of this city. Upon such men rest a fearful responsibility for the loss of life that has taken place in Montreal during the past five years, from small-pox, fevers and diphtheria, and, now, in a form which appears more frightful still, because we can more readily realize the fact. Let the death of our brave firemen and citizens be laid at the proper door. Poor fellows! crushed and burned to death under the red-hot bricks of a building which should have been reported whilst being erected as unsafe, or, if permitted to be erected, the Fire Brigade should have been officially notified of the same.

Of what service will all this long inquiry which is taking place as to the cause of the fire and the construction of the building, be to the families of those who are dead? Of what service will it be to the city? To what good end will it tend? We fear to naught. A few words of censure, and, after a few weeks, all will be forgotten. Was it not known, yes, and well known, that the building was unsafe? What steps did the Building Inspector take at the time, to stop its erection in the form in which it was being built? Is it placed on record? Is there