

THE CITY OF FIRES.

On page 197, we give a sketch of the great fire at Quebec, which, on the afternoon of the 30th May, laid in ashes nearly 500 dwellings, and made over 3,000 persons houseless. The sketch only partially illustrates the extent of the fire, as it swept over a narrow strip, and terminated at the fortifications when it had no more inflammable material whereon to feed. To-day we have the news of another great conflagration in the town of St. Johns, about 24 miles from Montreal, which, in point of the value of property destroyed, exceeds even that of Quebec.

We consider it the duty of newspapers, and periodicals of a scientific nature, not only to record in their columns the occurrences of such terrible disasters, but to sift out the case, and if found attributable to negligence, want of forethought, parsimony, or apathy of the citizens, to pass upon those culpable the severest censure such conduct merits. The simple recordance of the fact that a large fire has taken place, the amount of property lost, and the sums of money insured in different insurance offices is not enough. The want of prudence and forethought in any community to provide efficient means to put out a fire before it has gained headway sufficient to be uncontrollable, is a crime against society; and the parties responsible should not only be exposed in the public papers, but should be made punishable by law. We have not before us any reliable statement as to the efficiency of the fire brigade and fire engines at St. Johns; but we well know that at Quebec, the inefficiency of the staff, and the whole machinery, was a disgrace to the city; and no censure, however severe, is strong enough to record the fact. We were an eye witness of the fire from its commencement to the end, and had not the wind changed, and lulled at the same time, no human effort could have saved the whole of the western suburbs above St. Rochs, the town inside the walls, and probably the lower town and shipping. The fire commenced within a few feet of a fire engine house, and not a drop of water could be obtained from the water works, or was any reserved on hand for an emergency; even the wells in the *immediate vicinity* seemed to have been forgotten, and were only brought into use at 10 o'clock at night.

It is now over twenty years since the water works were constructed at Quebec; at that time the engineer, Mr. Baldwin, strongly advised the construction of a reservoir on the highest point of land outside of the citadel. This advice was set aside on account of the cost, and before the works were fully completed, Mr. Baldwin was dismissed, because he received a salary of \$4000 a year, in order that his place might be filled by friends of members of the Corporation, who were totally unfit, both by education and practical experience, to superintend and manage such important duties. The inefficiency of the staff grew so apparent that proposals were shortly afterwards made to the late Mr. Chessell, C.E., of the Royal Engineer Staff, to accept the appointment of manager and chief engineer. This gentleman was well qualified for the important duty, but knowing the petty intrigues to which Mr. Baldwin had to submit by certain members of the Corporation, who, also, were constantly interfering with the work when their friends had contracts, he gave the City Council very plainly to understand that the first of its members who should attempt

to interfere with his superintendence, he would throw him into the excavation. Such an independent spirit was not desirable, and the negotiations there ended. We watched the progress of the laying down of the water pipes in Quebec, and do not hesitate to state that the construction was faulty in the extreme; but for much of this their engineer, Mr. Baldwin, was not to blame, but only for a want of sufficient independence in not throwing up the management of them at once, when the most essential points necessary to make them perfect was rejected by the Corporation. We cannot go into details as to the mass of ignorance displayed by the city authorities from the time the water works were commenced until the present day, and what large amounts of the public money have been squandered away in fruitless experiments; to our own knowledge, we know of a former mayor of the city, who, in the plenitude of his wisdom, caused an expenditure of several thousand dollars to carry out a theory of his own. So absurd was it, that we placed in his hands the opinion of the highest authorities on the subject of water works to deter him from a most useless expenditure of public money; the result was as foretold—the money was spent, and the pressure in the pipes reduced to less than it was before.

We know enough of these matters to assert that more money has been uselessly expended on the water works in Quebec since the first pipe was laid down, than would have built three reservoirs, and have given the city a Fire Establishment, equipped and disciplined as well as that of Montreal; and therefore upon its public men does the censure and responsibility now lie. To think that with a water head of nearly 480 feet, being considerably over the highest land in the city, the supply is so short that it can only be given to the city in sections, and at certain hours, is simply ridiculous. The deficiency of water cannot be set down altogether to the smallness of the main pipe and to loss of pressure from friction, but to other causes, such as imperfect workmanship, leakage and obstruction in the pipes, and engineering errors. It would come hard upon those who have for years paid for insurance and have never been burnt out, to be deprived of its advantages, but it is only by the withdrawal of the insurance offices altogether from such cities, that its citizens will awaken to their responsibilities and interests.

THE GREAT DOLWILYM CROMLECH.

(See page 224.)

The sketch given of this grand pre-historic structure is taken from the *London Builder*. It is said to be one of the most perfect and interesting of the Druidical remains in Wales. Originally it consisted of five or rather six stones. The tallest upright stone is 4 ft. 4 in. high, and the gigantic cap-stone measures 11 ft. 6 in., by 8 ft. 10 in.

When the chambers formed by the upright stones of cromlechs are examined for the first time, unquestionable evidence of burial is invariably found; it may therefore reasonably be inferred, that as all cromlechs are so much alike in general design, they have all been constructed over places of burial. It is also generally supposed that the interstices of the stones were originally filled up with rubble-work, and the whole structure covered with a mound of earth. The labour of erecting some of the dolmens found in this country must have been immense, and the honours of cromlech burial must have been extended to a very limited class, a class belonging to a past time so remote that, as far as present knowledge goes, no date can be assigned to it.