

fees on each county agent, property tax, etc. New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Wyoming are stated to appropriate the taxes in all or part towards fire departments, for this we take to be the meaning of special taxation where an organized fire department exists. The requisite data is not available for ascertaining the gross amount of taxation levied in the United States on the fire insurance companies, but that it amounts to several million dollars is evident. As the net premiums of 51 States amounted in 1895 to \$1,134,495, as stated in Mr. Hine's Tax Exhibit, we are disposed to think that the average ratio of the taxes charged the fire insurance companies to their net premiums will amount to not short of 15 or 20 per cent. The effect is to make the companies tax collectors for the State and municipalities for such imposts as they are subject to have to be reckoned as working expenses, and an adequate addition made to rates to cover such outlays.

A FATAL FIRE CATASTROPHE.

On the 16th of October a fire took place in this city, which is likely to be ever remembered, but we trust never paralleled. The destruction of property was serious, but to this the fire will owe no prominence in our annals. The feature which will make it memorable was the tragic death of three firemen—King, Laporte and Charpentier—while engaged in their ever arduous and often very perilous duties. This catastrophe left three wives husbandless, and sixteen children fatherless. About mid-day two girls were working on the third floor of a building on St. Peter street, opposite St. Ann's market, which was occupied by Messrs. Gilmour Bros. & Co., who carried a large stock of druggists' sundries, soaps and fancy goods. There was a small gas stove in use for making paste for labels. While at her work one of the girls was startled by a flash of flame behind her whereupon both ran downstairs to the office, and from which place an alarm was sent which brought down the fire brigade. In a few minutes the whole flat was blazing with a fury which put the firemen in great danger. To secure the water necessary to extinguish such a fire, the water tower was brought into play, which threw an enormous weight of water upon the floor, where sixteen of the brigade were engaged in a desperate struggle with flame. When success was in sight, without any warning, the floor broke, plunging a number of the firemen down to the lower storey, where the lives of three firemen were crushed out by beams, plaster, glass, burning planks and other debris. Several others were injured, who are happily recovering. On the news becoming known the death of those three brave men was felt by every citizen almost as keenly as a personal bereavement.

An inquest was held, which elicited no material facts other than those above stated. There was nothing in the room where the fire occurred to cause an explosion, nor any such outburst of flame as the girl swore to. The fire remains a great mystery. Instantly the fatality was known subscriptions were sent for the bereaved families with the liberality characteristic of this city.

The contributions to the fund amount to about \$15,000. This includes \$3,000 voted by the City Council—which requires ratification by the Legislature of the Province—also \$2,000 from the present inadequate Firemen's Benevolent Fund, the balance being subscribed by a number of citizens. A committee will be appointed to act with the Mayor, the Chairman of the Finance Committee and Chairman of the Fire Committee to administer the fund. This will probably be done in the form of annuities spread over a number of years for the maintenance of the bereaved families, who, under such an arrangement, could be paid \$500 a year during about 12 or more years. Some such scheme is very desirable. It is however earnestly to be hoped that the Firemen's Fund will be placed on such a solid basis that the Firemen would have the satisfaction of knowing that their families would be provided for in case of need caused by any future accidents. A suggestion has been made that each Fireman contribute 50 cents per month towards this permanent fund, which would be supplemented by a substantial grant from the City Council, and an annual contribution equal to the total annual amount contributed by the Firemen. Were this once done, there would be permanent provision made to meet emergencies of this sad character, which is a far more business like, and more charitable way of dealing with a matter of this nature than reliance upon an appeal for subscriptions. The firemen risk their limbs and lives in the public service, the public, therefore, may be justly expected to protect their families from destitution when the bread winner is stricken down in doing his duty in their interests.

The total loss includes damage to the building \$7,000 and losses on stocks as follows. Messrs. Gilmour Bros., \$25,000; Messrs. Goldstein & Co., \$6,500; Messrs. Kearney & Co., \$10,000.

The insurances were as follows: on the building \$7,000 in Royal and Liverpool & London & Globe; the Gilmour stock in Guardian, Northern, Mercantile and British America, the Goldstein stock in Alliance, North America, Queen, Royal & Western; the Kearney stock in Norwich Union & Scottish Union.

DEPOSITS OF INSURANCE COMPANIES WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

We understand that attempts have been made from time to time to induce the Government to modify to some extent the regulations of the Insurance Act in respect to the deposits of the insurance companies placed in the hands of the Government for the protection of the public.

The matter is one of vital importance. Only such securities that are beyond question should be received by the Department for this purpose. The first question to be considered is that of safety, and it is, we submit, questionable whether any securities except those of municipalities having a good financial reputation should be accepted. Unless this rule is strictly and in every case observed, it will be difficult to draw the line. Securities such as those of railways, manufacturing enterprises, or institutions that issue debentures for