

Prominent Topics.

Railway Responsibility for Fires.

The Quebec Minister of Public Works, the Hon. Mr. Taschereau, has given notice of a Bill regarding the responsibility of railways for fires caused by their locomotives. Under recent legislation at Ottawa the companies are held responsible for damages up to \$5,000 if proof is made that the fire is caused by their engines. The Quebec Act will be on the same lines.

Death of Mr. Labouchere.

Mr. Henry Labouchere, who died in Florence, on Tuesday, will be missed, not only by the many people who knew him personally, but by the many more who only knew him by his work. As the representative of personal journalism he stood alone in England. He had many imitators, but there was only one "Labby," daring, original, caustic public-spirited, a little mischievous, but almost invariably well-meaning. He has exposed more frauds and scarified more humbugs and hypocrites than any other hundred men in England. It is hard to conceive of Truth without Labouchere.

Efficiency and Economy.

The United States Government is spending a good deal of money to save money and promote efficiency and the expenditure appears to be justified by results. In a message to Congress, President Taft recommends increasing the appropriation for the Efficiency Commission to \$200,000 for the current year and \$50,000 more for publication. Last year it cost \$130,000. He says: Operations of the Government affect the interest of every person living within the jurisdiction of the United States. Its gross expenditures amount to nearly \$1,000,000,000 annually. Including military and naval establishments, more than 400,000 persons are required to do the work imposed by law. The Efficiency Commission recommends that the Revenue Cutter Service be abolished and its work performed by other services, thus effecting a saving of \$1,000,000 annually. For the handling of incoming mail in Government departments the averages of cost by departments vary from \$5.84 to \$84.40 per 1,000; for outgoing mail, from \$5.94 to \$69.89 per 1,000.

The annual cost of travel to the Government is about \$12,000,000, an amount which seems to allow lots of room for economy.

Government Ownership of U. S. Telegraphs.

Postmaster General Hitchcock has proposed that the United States Government shall take over all the telegraph lines in the country and run them as part

of the Post Office business as they do in Great Britain. Mr. Clarence H. Mackay being interviewed on the subject said: "This would lead to taking over the telephone lines also. The British Government found this to be so and two weeks ago it took over the telephone lines in England at an enormous expense. The telegraph and telephone lines in this country are worth from \$2,000,000,000 to \$3,000,000,000. This would include the independent telephone companies, owning nearly \$500,000,000 of property and having some 450,000 stockholders. I venture to say that they would be operated by the Government at great annual loss, just as in Great Britain where the losses on the telegraphs alone up to date are figured at \$175,000,000. Moreover, the Government would then be employing hundreds of thousands of clerks, telephone girls, telegraph operators, managers, etc. It would be a colossal political machine."

He added: "The English government paid out enormous sums for the telegraph lines and then found to its surprise that it had to settle with the railroads with which the telegraph companies had contracts. I happen to know that this disturbed the government very much, but the government was in for it and had to carry it through—always at the expense of the taxpayer. The Western Union has thousands of contracts with railroads in this country, and if the Government should take over the telegraph lines it would have to settle for those also. On the whole I guess the American government will not buy the telegraph lines so long as the Postal keeps up competition. The Postal lines are not for sale."

The annual report of the Medical Health Officer for 1911 shows that the death rate has fallen to 21.39 per 1000 or 1.01 less than the previous year. There were 9,974 deaths, 5,110 male and 4,864 female. Infant mortality has been 5,355 for children under 5 years of age, giving a percentage of 53.69 per 100 of the general mortality, which is a decrease of 0.50 per 100 over 1910. Statistics of mortality from contagious diseases are as follows:—

	1910.	1911.	Decrease.
Measles	155	74	81
Scarlet fever	118	76	42
Diphtheria	136	133	3
Typhoid fever	192	124	68
Phthisis	785	736	49

Value of Real Estate in Toronto.

We referred last week to the sale of the Manufacturers Life building and site at the corner of King and Yonge streets, Toronto for \$800,000. We now learn that the value of the building alone was \$75,000, and the property having a frontage of 60 feet on King street and 90 feet on Yonge street, this makes a price of \$134 per square foot for the site. This is largely in excess of any prices on St. James Street, Montreal.