Stock Fire Insurance Companies.

An irrepressible conflict goes on all the time between stock and mutual companies. It is not our purpose and perhaps it does not come within our province to do more than lay before our readers a few of the pleas entered by both parties to the war. We have been led to do this by seeing some remarks in an American exchange bearing on the subject, and to note especially a suggestion that cities and towns should do their fire insurance by means of a house tax.

Among the objections urged to stock companies is the self-evident fact that the business must be profitable or it would not be carried on, and further that it is immensely so and that therefore premiums are unduly large. The full force of this objection may be met by the certainty of competition always mitigating the evil, should it become oppressive, and also that these companies may show economy in the management of their business and moderation in their charges. On the other hand the mutual system, favorably looked upon as applied to life insurance, is deprecated in its extension to fire, and this opinion is predicted on the extensive conflagrations in Portland, Chicago, and Boston, which proved so disastrous to many companies of that character. It is argued that there is no safety for a company that has not a large rest, or stock capital to fall back upon in the event of great losses, and there seems some show of justice in the proposition. The creation of the "rest" naturally equalizes, so far as it goes, the terms on which insurance can be effected in both sorts of companies, and the dispute is thus left to be begun afresh. This argument is based mostly on liability to fires of great magnitude such as we have above referred to, and that element of the case is to be carefully considered. We do not see that the difficulty would be satisfactorily met by municipalities becoming their own insurers, as one great fire in a town would sweep the municipal insurance fund out of existence, and leave the losses completely unsatisfied. The whole question will be all the better for a thorough discussion, and we are glad to see indications of that being done.

New Insurance Bill.

Our American neighbors are much exercised at present over the provisions of Senator Session's Insurance Bill, which provides that "the amount of insurance written in a policy of insurance on all buildings insured after the passage of this act shall be taken and deemed the true value of the property at the time of the loss, and the amount of the loss sustained, and shall be the measure of damages, unless the insurance was procured by the fraud of the insured or the loss was caused by the criminal act of the assured. It shall be lawful for any insurance company liable to pay losses occasioned by fire to rebuild any structure or building, wholly or partially destroyed, of the same style and materials and of equal value with the one so wholly or partially destroyed but they shall make their election so to do within thirty days after notice of loss. In case there is a partial destruction of the property insured no greater amount shall be collected than the damages sustained."

That this is not satisfactory to the companies may easily be surmised, as it places on them the onus of valuation previous to insuring, instead of haggling over terms after a loss. We have no doubt that, if passed the tendency of this bill will be to prevent in a great measure, the culpable habit of over insurance, and while the companies may not reap the same amount of premiums to start with, as under the present system, yet they will be benefitted in the end by having the percentage of losses materially reduced. And should strict valuation interdict much of the fraudulent attempts to insure property for more than its worth, with a view to incendiarism, the measure will do good. The usual quantum of opposition may be expected, and already the proposed bill is accused of being liable to cause the very results, to prevent which it is being called into existence. It is said to interfere with the right of contract, and to put a premium on fire raising. As regards the first objection it seems to us merely to make the terms of the contract definite and final. As to the last, the companies have the matter in their own hands and are subject to no danger so long as they exercise ordinary care in the conduct of their business.

The Control of Fire Departments.

"The Insurance Companies do not like to see a Fire Department too efficient, and are consequently, in opposition to the best interests of the community, in this regard." Granting the premises there can be no dissent from the deduction. How far the Companies are open to the imputation is a matter of opinion, but those who hold the affirmative view of the question argue with a fair show of reason that, it is only the occurrence of fires which give to the Companies their "raison d'etre" and that they have naturally no inducement to be very anxious for the successful application of fire prevent-ions, but look to occasional fires for the means of extending their business.

It would thus seem that an antagonism of interest is established between the Fire Companies and the general public, so that the latter may expect from the former indifference, if not obstruction to the efforts made for securing a thoroughly efficient Fire Department. To what lengths this presumed feeling may develop itself in action might afford a curious field of speculation, but it is evident the Philadelphia underwriters are of opinion that improvements in protection from fire do not come within the sphere of their duties.

This expression of opinion was the result of a proposition to place the Philadelphia Department under the charge of the Insurance Companies of that city—and we do not see that any objection can be taken to their decision. If the Companies are engaged in the business of paying to insurers the losses sustained by fires, it is scarcely reasonable to ask them to try their best to make conflagrations impossible. The simplicity which made the proposition may be admirable, but the wisdom of it is not beyond question.

The duty under discussion belongs to no special class of the community, but is to be assumed by the whole and we maintain that no city, town, village or hamlet, is free from blame where this important matter is slighted, and where it has not become one of chief consequence and received an attention corresponding to the means of the locality. To what extent Canadians take this duty home is easily determined by the status of the various Fire Departments, and however well certain places have provided in this respect, there remains to be done a world of work compared to what has been achieved, and about this special work, let them remember that delays are particularly dangerous.

Efficient Firemen.

Time is the great requisite for building up valuable and efficient service in our Fire Department, given the qualities needful to the formation of good firemen, and you have yet but the basis of the desired end—nothing but close and continued training will utilize these qualities—and it is needful therefore to retain in the service those who prove to have their possession. For no slight cause should a department lose a capable man, and every exertion should be made by the authorities to render the position of such men, not only comfortable, but an object of emulation to be desired and striven for, so that an extensive choice may offer for the filling of vacancies in the ranks.

Let the men feel that their places are useful and honourable, that they are to be kept only by steady application and the attainment of a high standard in the execution of duty, and you cannot more forcible incite them to respect themselves and their work. To do this it will be needful to deal liberally with them regarding wages, lodgement, appointments and provision for sickness and wounds.

Much of the latter duty (the others being granted) will be done by the men themselves, and it is to such measures and these only that we are to look for the efficiency of that service, to which so momentous interests are committed.

A valuable improvement, a platform and appliances for raising heavy ladders has been introduced into the New York Fire Department by the Chief Engineer of the Washington Fire Department, Mr Martin Cronin. Chief Bates had the machine thoroughly tested Feb. 13th, at the corner of Elizabeth and Roanoke Streets. When truck one, upon which the apparatus is placed, was run up to a large two-story house, and in one minute and fifty seconds a heavy extension ladder was raised, and the firemen mounted on the roof of the building. The ladder was then lowered to the street and raised again. The time occupied in raising the ladder a second time, when everything was in readiness was only 20 seconds.