

PROTECT THE FIRE BRIGADE.

The inquest held in Toronto to enquire into the circumstances of the recent fatal fire in that city brought out evidence regarding the structural condition of the building where fire members of the fire brigade were crushed to death which is very painful reading. The premises occupy a large area in the eastern section of Toronto near the Don river. They were erected by the Street Railway Company for barns and stables. The walls were never intended to bear the lateral thrust caused by heavy weights being placed on the upper floors. When the Company abandoned the use of horses the large stables were converted into storage warehouses, but there was no evidence tendered that the walls were strengthened to adapt them to their new conditions. Witnesses at the inquest swore that the men of the fire brigade knew the place would be a death trap in case of fire. One fireman had warned them to abandon the building if it caught fire when it had reached a certain point. Another fireman declared he knew the building was dangerous as he had inspected it in December last. He testified that "there were no cross supports in the building to prevent its collapse." He had talked the matter over with the Chief, but had made no written report as the custom was not to make written reports, but to inform the men what buildings were dangerous. Another fireman had inspected the building, but only in order to find "the best means of getting in and out in case of fire." He told the men at the time "if the building ever caught fire they could not hope to save anything, he knew the place was dangerous." He swore that he would not have sent the men under him down the street where the unfortunate men were killed. Another fireman said: "I knew the building was unsafe for I had inspected it, the extra weight in the upper floors made it unsafe." A builder testified that the building was only fit for stabling horses. Another fireman said, "I thought the wall a very dangerous structure." Other witnesses confirmed this testimony respecting the weakness of the walls which "buckled" and fell in a mass over the bodies of six firemen, one of whom was saved by being sheltered by a truck. Now, while it is impracticable to prevent fatal accidents at fires it is practicable to minimise the danger caused by walls collapsing. The firemen are servants of the municipality, their duties under ordinary conditions involve risk of life or limb, it is manifest, therefore, that the municipal authorities are bound to take every reasonable precaution to protect these men from the danger incident to their calling. A General, who, knowing that some of his troops were in imminent danger which he could easily obviate,

but who neglected to guard them, would be severely condemned. To protect firemen by expert inspection of buildings and enforcement of wise building laws is a very easy matter for municipal authorities, it is a duty that cannot be ignored without incurring grave responsibility. The inspection of this barrack-like structure appears to have been wholly ineffectual in causing it to be made safe and fit for the purposes for which it was used.

The Board of Trade, Toronto, the Fire Underwriters' Association and other citizens have interviewed the Mayor and Board of Control to secure a grant to supplement a public subscription in aid of the bereaved families. The sum of \$50,000 will be raised for this purpose and to provide for future contingencies of a like distressing nature, the risk of which would be greatly reduced by the building laws being made more stringent as regards their safety from and in case of fire, and the insistence upon observance of the laws by builders and proprietors.

CANADA AND NEWFOUNDLAND.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CONFEDERATION NOW RIPE.

The time is now opportune for practical steps being taken to consummate the union of Newfoundland's destinies with those of Canada. No insuperable difficulty now exists; the course is clear for earnest action. Statesmanship, which means broad-minded views, liberal provision for contingencies, quick perception of present opportunities, and promptness in seizing them, will carry the day. Indifference on the part of those interested is giving place to earnest consideration.

At last the people of Newfoundland are awakening to the vital importance of the question of confederation with this Dominion. The Premier of the Island, Sir Robert Bond, by declaring that the matter is only one relating to terms has put the question in a practical and feasible form, which is the topic of the day in Newfoundland. Sir Wilfrid Laurier will have had, or will have, the opportunity of discussing the matter with Mr. Chamberlain, whose views will have great weight; indeed, the Island could not be annexed to Canada without the consent of the Crown, which, in this case, means the Colonial Secretary. As both this country and the Island are enjoying great prosperity, the finances of both being exceptionally favourable, the time is opportune for their destinies being linked and their fortunes being mingled by confederation. This golden opportunity will, we trust, be realized by the Premier and his colleagues, and negotiations promptly opened looking to the entrance of Newfoundland into confederation where the Island will be received with a hearty welcome.