

BENEFIT ASSOCIATIONS.

An Interesting Paper read to the Brethren of his Lodge, by M. W. Bro. Otto Klotz, P. G. M.

Notwithstanding the numerous published statements and calculations by competent men, actuaries and others, showing the utter inability of all those benefit associations which are not like regular life insurance companies based upon the only true principle upon which stability can be attained; notwithstanding the long published lists of broken up and defunct benefit associations, with an exposition of the rottenness of those concerns from the very commencement of their operations, giving unquestionable proof of the correctness of the statements of actuaries; notwithstanding the published particulars of the many and gross swindles perpetrated upon a too credulous public, yet benefit associations not only continue to be largely supported but new ones continually are being formed, and membership increases to an amazing extent.

Which are the causes, that notwithstanding all those expositions, render it comparatively easy to start new benefit associations and to continue so many already established?

As a first cause may be mentioned the enormous profits made by regular life insurance companies, the statements of their accumulated profits, the handsome dividends paid to stockholders and the palatial buildings erected by those companies—all these facts are made use of as arguments in favour of benefit associations, to show that the rate of premium for insurance claimed by those companies must necessarily be larger than is actually required to pay for the insurance of life, and that a large portion of the money paid by the insured goes to enrich those companies. Managers and agents of benefit associations impress these arguments so strongly upon the mind of a credulous public, and at the same time assure them that by a more economic management, upon a really mutual principle an equal amount of life insurance can be obtained for a premium or assessment at about one half of that in a regular life insurance company, and the public believes them.

Secondly.—All these benefit associations are each composed of a certain so called chosen or selected class of people, who before they can obtain an insurance upon their lives must first become members of that particular association. They are given to understand that some vital and valuable secrets are held by that association, which are only imparted to members; that members enjoy great social benefits, and that their closely guarded meetings are sources of great pleasure and of valuable information. These assurances carry with them a certain charm, an anxiety to see, know and enjoy such advantages which no ordinary life insurance company offers, that it is comparatively an easy matter to obtain converts. To this charm may be added the favourable impression often produced upon the mind of young men especially, seeing one of the numerous processions of benefit associations with their banners, insignia and other decorations either accompanying the body of a deceased member to his last place of rest, or for the purpose of attending divine service in a church, or with a band of music ahead for the purpose of social enjoyment. Young men see all this, they notice one or more of their shopmates or friends

in such a procession, they meet afterwards, talk over it and the result is an addition of one or more converts.

Another peculiar charm is the prospect of office and of rank in a new branch of a benefit association.

The agent of the association whose business it is to procure new members and, where the prospects appear favourable, to establish new branches, generally secures, with little difficulty, the assistance of a person who is particularly anxious for office and to whom he promises the chief office in the new local branch upon the condition that he helps him to secure a certain number of applications for membership. The town, village or hamlet is thoroughly canvassed, the required number of applications is secured and in due course of time a new branch is established. Some twenty or thirty new members are enrolled, all in possession of those grand secrets, all pay readily and willingly their entrance fees and dues, all feel nappy and proud, the agent pockets his commission, and another association proclaims its prosperity by increase of membership.

Thirdly.—The actual fact that a large number of death-claims have been readily and promptly paid by those benefit associations, and have brought comfort and plenty to many homes where formerly want, disorder and semi-wretchedness held sway. The widow after her first emotions of grief for the loss of her husband have subsided, finds herself in possession of a sum of money far larger than that which ever her husband owned; if she is judicious, as many widows are, she soon arranges her household in such a manner that comfort is shown as one of its chief characteristics; with maternal love she cares for her children, and it has often been shown that under her care and example children conduct themselves with more decorum than while under the control of both parents. During the life of the husband the family lived, so to say, from hand to mouth; no earnings were saved, all was spent, bills for the necessities of life were often presented for payment and frequently could not be met for want of funds; now all is different, no debts are contracted, economy is practised judiciously, earnings are carefully invested, the widow ranks among the small money-lenders, her children grow up, commence to earn some wages, the mother employs her time in earning some money by work of hand; quietness, peace, order and comfort reign in her home. She no longer needs to sit up late at nights to wait for the return of her husband from his nightly associations where he spent time and money; her sleep is not disturbed by the late arrival of her husband from his debauch, no breath of tobacco smoke and liquor gases offend her olfactory nerves, and she has gained the full conviction that she is really better off in every respect as a widow than while she was the wife of a man; and that he never was worth as much while alive as when dead. Modesty does not admit her to express this conviction in words, but every person who has known her during her married life and who sees her, her children and her nice home after her husband's death needs no further assurance of those facts.

It is not the actual drunkard only who does not save any of his earnings, whose wife is constantly bothered with the

cares and sorrows of domestic life, in whose life there is rarely any sunshine but only drudgery; but it is that large class of men who are generally known as jolly good fellows, always ready to treat or to be treated, always found in the company of their associates, spending their time and money foolishly if not recklessly; hardly ever able to make both ends meet, depending upon the next pay day to meet the claims of the butcher, baker, grocer and others for the necessities of life which have been consumed by the family before being earned and paid for; but who will always manage to have some money to spend at the bar, at evening meetings or for some kind or other of the many enjoyments for men and of which poor wives are excluded. What wonder that even married women, having seen such comfortable homes and contented lives of widows, are not only in favour of their husbands becoming members of those benefit associations, but actually encourage them to join the same.

And as a fourth factor may be mentioned the fact that a large number of Freemasons are members of and generally occupy high offices in numerous Benefit Associations which have no connection with the Craft. It appears as if those associations were especially anxious to obtain the membership of Freemasons, particularly those who occupy high offices in the Craft, and that these when once admitted to membership are, as it were, pitchforked from one office to another until they reach the highest office attainable, and become their chief rulers. This fact is rather surprising when it is remembered that in former years the Masonic fraternity looked with contempt upon the first association of that kind. It was styled spurious Masonry, imitation Masonry and the like, and some Grand Lodges went so far in their contempt that they forbade, under heavy penalties, any of its members to join the same.

How different are the views and opinions of the present time regarding those associations; there may be some old conservative Masons, members of the old school, who still look, if not with contempt, at least with great indifference upon those benefit associations, but the great majority of Masons, whether wisely or not no matter, they not only look upon them favourably, but a great many Masons are actual and active members of one or more of them. That those associations are more or less modelled after the Masonic system of membership, admission thereto, of rules of management and otherwise cannot be denied, as ample proof could be readily furnished not only that those paragraphs have been copied by them from Masonic ceremonies, but in many other respects; and it would, therefore, not be surprising were it ascertained that the founders of the first of those benefit associations and probably of numerous others were themselves Freemasons who changed, mutilated and altered the Masonic system to give the product the colour of originality.

But apart from all that charm, from all anxiety for office, even apart from the fact that man, being a social creature, wants company, diversion and enjoyment, which, for want of better opportunities, he seeks to find in one or the other of those associations, there is the fifth cause and factor which renders it comparatively easy to start new benefit associations and to continue so many