EDUCATION OF THE PUBLIC IN FIRE INSURANCE.

While something can, no doubt, be accomplished through well-arranged schemes of publicity, the education of the public in matters appertaining to fire insurance rests mainly with the agents. They are in close touch with their respective communities, whether those communities comprise a section of a large city population or almost the whole neighbourhood in a small town or the countryside. In their community, the agents personify the companies to their neighbours; and, acting up to this conception, the enlightened and conscientious agent will have the same regard for his company's or companies' interests as for his own.

* * *

The great bulk of the antagonism to the fire companies which appears in various places from time to time, may fairly be said to be the result of a lack of understanding on the part of the public of insurance matters, this lack of understanding being occasionally coupled with a prejudice that is fomented by outsiders for their own purposes. Take the matter of the profits and losses of the companies. It is a not uncommon belief among the Canadian public that uniformly fabulous profits are made by fire underwriters, this belief being associated in some minds with a kindred notion that these profits are secured partly through the charging of excessive rates maintained in force by an iniquitous and tyrannical "trust." Fallacies of this kind, the strength of whose hold upon the public is frequently in inverse proportion to their approach to reality, can only be dissipated by a process of education. That education can best be carried out by the agent, the trusted personification of fire insurance in his locality, the acknowledged expert in his line. In the agent's friendly talk with his clients, in his activities and influence in the public or social life of his community, there is a far greater potency towards the education of the public in fire insurance matters than in a vast quantity of commercialised publicity.

* * *

But if the agent is to play his part in the education of the public, he must himself be qualified for that task. He must be able to show by actual figures that the fire insurance business is by no means uniformly profitable, and that even in a normal year a proportion of the companies make a loss, instead of a profit, on their underwriting transactions. Similarly, he must be familiar with the sound, and, in fact, irrefutable arguments in favor of legitimate co-operation of fire insurance organisations. Here it is that the well-conducted insurance journal comes to the aid of the agent, is, in fact, a necessity to him. Tabulations of fire insurance results such as are published from time to time in THE CHRONICLE, furnish the whole of the essential facts of fire underwriting experience in the Dominion, and in editorial and news articles, the interests, policy and developments of the business are thoroughly discussed. In fact, it may be said that an important function of the well-conducted insurance journal is to render such service to the intelligent agent by keeping him well posted, that in turn, he may be able to give both to his clients and to his company the maximum of service, and exert in his community an enlightened influence, looking towards the education of his public in the understanding of insurance matters. In this way, the interests of the companies, the agents, the insurance journal and the public are linked together in mutual service, and a leavening of the public mind in regard to the real facts of fire insurance is being constantly achieved.

CO-OPERATION IN FIRE INSURANCE.

A feature of the recent St. Louis convention of the National Association of Local Agents was an address by Mr. Benjamin Rush, the esteemed president of the Insurance Company of North America, the oldest fire insurance company in the United States. In the course of his address, describing the rise of the local agency system, President Rush spoke very wisely in regard to the necessity for co-operation between all parties to the contract of insurance.

"To my mind," he said, "one of the crying needs of the day is the need for increased co-operation between all parties to the contract of insurance. Springing from the establishment of the local agency system, and developing co-incidently alongside of it, has been the steady increase of co-operation between insurance companies. As the number of insurance companies diminished in proportion to the number of inhabitants of the country through the operation of the local agency system, and as they increased in size and financial strength, and in wisdom and knowledge of insurance conditions, it has become possible for them to effect improvements and economies and reform in practice, which have been of untold value to the insuring public, and which never could have been achieved but by collective effort.

"I am aware that I am here treading on dangerous ground, as for many years it seems to have been the theory of the public, and through them of their representatives in the legislatures, that the utmost measure of free, unlimited, and destructive competition was absolutely necessary if the policyholder was not to be robbed by predatory insurance companies at every turn. The logical result of unrestricted competition in the insurance field would be exactly the same as that experienced in the packing house business or in the oil business, or in any other field of human endeavor, namely a few great corporations or trusts, occupying the whole field and squeezing out everybody else.

"I sincerely trust that we will never have such complete competition as will result in anything of this kind, in the field of insurance. I believe we should have enough co-operation to obtain the benefits due to co-operation, and enough competition to make that co-operation behave itself."

President Rush also pointed out the benefits derived from the co-operation of the fire insurance companies in their united efforts to reduce the scandalously great fire waste.

FRATERNAL TABLES INADEQUATE.

The question was brought up at the recent National Fraternal Congress held at Chicago, whether the N. F. C. mortality table adopted at the Mobile Convention of Insurance Commissioners is adequate. Some of the officials present admitted frankly that the rates adopted will not be permanently adequate, and may have to be readjusted at some time in the near future.