

LAPSES AND THE PERSONAL TOUCH.

The necessity of the personal touch in order to acquire policyholders is conceded. Nobody with any practical experience of the life insurance business, expects new business to be written without the personal touch of the agent with the prospect. Letters, circulars, canvassing literature of all kinds may have their uses in helping break up the fallow ground of a prospect's mind. But they will be of little service unless backed up by the personal contact of the agent with his man, through which method alone can life insurance be written on any large scale.

These are the merest truisms, universally accepted in reference to the writing of new business. But it is not so generally seen that the personal touch is as essential for keeping business in force when written as for writing it. There are a half-dozen or more perfectly good and valid reasons for the existing large lapse ratio. But it is probable that lack of the continuance of the personal touch between the agent and the policyholder is responsible for a larger proportion of lapses than any other single reason. It is only to be expected that the first feelings of keen satisfaction with which a prospect becomes a policyholder gradually wear off. They will wear off the faster if the company which has taken the policyholder's good money and the agent who persuaded him into parting with it, show absolutely no interest in him once the policy has been issued and paid for. Possibly enough, the policyholder will be at the mercy of any charlatan or ignoramus who tells him that he has made a bad bargain or that life insurance is no good any way. After having taken a great step by purchasing a life insurance policy, is it encouraging to him to hear or see nothing more of those connected therewith till twelve months later, a coldly formal notice requests payment of the second premium at due date. The fraternal societies know better than this, and benefit accordingly.

OFFICIALS AND AGENTS.

But if the agent is to keep in personal touch with the policyholder, using such methods as time and opportunity suggest, then it is equally necessary that the higher officials should keep in touch with the local agents—to instruct, to inspect, to act as guide, counsellor and friend. In this connection, it is particularly instructive to note the practise of one of the largest American companies, the company which has developed industrial insurance further than any other organisation in the world. Every year, the vice-president of that Company and half a dozen of the leading officials—big-salaried men, every one of them, travel through Canada and part of the States, for the express purpose of meeting the agents. Once a year, the humblest agent with a debit out in some shack suburb is able to realise himself as part of an immense organisation, that asks from him the best service he can give it. He gets a vision—and he passes on some part of that vision to the humble folk among whom he makes his daily rounds. The result is seen in an amazingly loyal and devoted body of agents, and probably, though it is not possible to dogmatise on the point, in a lapse ratio somewhat lower than it would be otherwise. The lapse problem will be in the way to solution when the higher officials are generally in close personal touch with local agents and the local agents similarly with their policyholders.

THE SUICIDE RECORD.

Mr. Frederick L. Hoffman's annual suicide statistics published in the New York Spectator, show the suicides in 1915 in 100 American cities to have been equal to 20.3 per 100,000 of population. This rate compares with 20.0 per 100,000 for the preceding quinquennial period and with 20.7 per 100,000 for the preceding year. The highest rate is in the cities of the Pacific Coast. Among men the maximum frequency of suicide results from the use of firearms, whereas among women the highest rate is due to the use of poison. Mr. Hoffman says that evidence is rapidly accumulating that a suicidal tendency is inherited or may be considered so for the practical requirements of life insurance companies, and with an increasing tendency, or at least a relatively high tendency to self-murder, the problem certainly demands more scientific consideration in view of the large amount of insurance obtainable without much difficulty in the case of those who, regardless of the one-year suicide clause, may anticipate the future possibilities of self-murder and provide sufficiently through insurance for the benefit of dependent survivors on that account. In Mr. Hoffman's opinion, also, the future experience of life insurance companies in reference to suicide will in all probability be quite materially at variance with their past experience, and adequate consideration should therefore be given to a problem in social pathology which has heretofore been chiefly the concern of those curiously interested in the abnormalities of crime.

LE PREVOYANCE GUARANTEE AND ACCIDENT.

This Montreal company, a Quebec provincial licensee, seems to be figuring too often in the Courts in disputes with its policyholders. Last week, the Montreal Court of Review, reversing the decision of a lower court, gave judgment against the Company on a sickness claim brought by Arthur Guay, a bank manager of St. Joseph de la Beauce. The company contested plaintiff's claim, first on the ground that his policy did not apply to the illness (namely, neurasthenia) from which he had suffered during the period claimed for; secondly, that as the illness had not confined him to the house, the claim could not in any event stand good. The Court of Review held that the disputed clause in the policy of plaintiff's insurance must be interpreted in an explanatory and not a rigorous sense; and that if the patient had actually been unable to follow his employment, then he had a right to an indemnity under the policy.

It was only six months ago that the Prevoyance lost another case in the Montreal courts in a dispute with a policyholder over a guarantee policy, on account of the vague wording of one of the clauses in that policy. The circumstances suggest that the Company should either re-draft its policies, or get a fresh viewpoint in their interpretation when claims arise.

The Bank of Toronto has opened a Branch at Sibbald, Alberta, under the management of Mr. James Murray, formerly manager at Kipling, Sask., branch. Mr. James Maguire, manager at Colonsay, Sask., has been transferred to the Kipling branch and Mr. Barry I. Meyer, the accountant at Colonsay, is made manager at that point.