

A Reasonable Suggestion.

Referring to our editorial of May 13, on the trend of life insurance in the United States, as shown by the record of 1897, compared with the ten previous years, a friend prominently connected with a large life company of New York, after commending what we had to say, suggests that in accounting for the reduced ratio of surrenders in 1897, the growing practice of the companies in making loans to policyholders (on the reserve values of policies), may well be considered. There is much in the suggestion no doubt, for the large increase in this class of loans during the past few years, which we pointed out in an article in these columns a few months ago, has continued during 1897. When a policy-holder is given the privilege of borrowing from his company a part or all of the reserve value of his policy he is easily enabled to keep it in force during financial stress by the application of the loaned value to the payment of the current premium, and from this standpoint the practice commends the wisdom of granting policy loans. This fact as suggested by our correspondent, we believe, accounts in part for the decreased surrender ratio; but, as we stated in our article first above referred to, the improved financial condition of the country, enabling the insured to more easily pay premiums, is also to be taken into account as bringing about the improvement noted. Whether or not the decrease in the lapse ratio in 1897 indicates a partial abandonment of high-pressure fictitious methods in getting business is somewhat of a conundrum in the mind of our correspondent. So it is in ours, while hoping that the decrease really means reform.

Fire Fighting in Big Cities.

Melbourne, the chief city of Australia, recently appointed a Prevention of Fires Board which after holding fourteen sittings, and examining one hundred witnesses, has submitted a list of very important recommendations based on the result of their investigation.

It would appear that as in London, G. B., the facts elicited at the meetings of the board seemed to show that the fire brigade of Melbourne and their appliances for fighting an extensive fire are woefully inadequate. The suggestions of the board of enquiry are numerous, and embrace an increase of the permanent staff of the fire brigade; the purchase of more powerful steam fire engines and a chemical fire engine; a new system of fire alarms and telephones; the restriction in height of buildings to ninety feet in width and sixty-six feet in narrow streets; the tops of buildings to be flat and covered with asphalt, grit and cement; stairs and lifts to be isolated and have iron resisting shutters at every landing; sprinklers, connected with alarm bells, are to be universally used; and employees in warehouses to be drilled in the use of fire appliances.

Attention is also called to the water supply, and the laying of additional mains recommended. The report

also criticizes the fire plugs in the streets as being "inconveniently situated," and recommends that turn-cocks should be in closer communication with the fire stations, so that the full force of water may be readily available. The board closed their opinion by stating that the funds of the brigade should be very largely increased.

Altogether, the recent revelations of the insufficiency of the protection against extensive conflagrations in London and Melbourne, and the promised investigation at Glasgow on account of the recent great fire, is enough to startle insurance companies, especially those who indulge in rate cutting to an extent rendering loss almost unavoidable, even in cities where the fire service is first class. Viewing the result of the recent fire at Glasgow, some of the newspapers of that city are hinting at a possible weakness in its fire brigade and advocating the appointment of a court of enquiry.

Censorship of the Press.

The liberty of a much-too-free press, having been curtailed by an almost total suppression of information regarding the war, the newspapers of the United States are now beginning to repent them of their rash and inconsiderate conduct in publishing every scrap of information obtainable as to the movements of ships and soldiers. Even the *Commercial Bulletin* is constrained to mildly protest against too much reticence on the part of the Government, and asks, in the following article, for all information which "does not directly give aid and comfort to the enemy:"—

"No one will question the right and the duty of the Government to suppress all news regarding the future movements of the fleet; and there are some cases where the public interests require that a knowledge of where the fleets were twenty-four hours before shall also be withheld. But this certainly cannot be the case always, and in undertaking the prohibition of virtually all war news the Government is assuming a very serious responsibility.

The public is not unreasonable in its demands; but it does not expect to have its intense interest in these great events treated with indiscriminate reticence. It does not ask to know where the fleet is to be to-morrow; it does not ask where the fleet is now; it may ask very properly where the fleet was yesterday. The Government could give information enough to clear up this mystery without giving the Spanish Admiral any vitally important information. The public is not entitled to know and does not expect to know in detail how the Government is going to carry on the war, but it is entitled to know how the Government has been carrying on the war. It is important to the Government to maintain the confidence of the people, and if it shall appear by and by that an unnecessary degree of secrecy has been maintained for the purpose of concealing the blunders of a board of officers that is trying to conduct the war in all its details fifteen hun-