

THE ENVIRONMENT AND HABITS.

(John Ferguson, M.D., L.R.C.P., in the *Excelsior Life Banner*.)

From the agent's standpoint, there are few things in life insurance field work of more importance than the environment and habits of the prospective applicant. They should receive the most careful attention from the agent, and it should be his endeavor on all occasions to furnish to the company the fullest and the most reliable information possible.

The volume of business should never be the sole aim of the agent. If he desires to make his agency a really good one, he must have regard to the quality as well as the quantity of business that comes from it. A high mortality rate very seriously adds to the cost of his district, and can never be pleasing to the representative of the company in that district.

CHARACTER OF BUSINESS.

There are many things to be thought of in the matter of the environment. First of all comes the character of the business. This may be of such a kind as to lead to irregular hours and habits. Persons employed around a hotel and in the livery business are examples of this. There is an added risk of such persons drinking too much and being exposed to all sorts of weather, and keeping late hours.

Then, again, the occupation may not be objectionable, but the shop in which the person is employed may be very unsanitary, or small and overcrowded, with vitiated air all day long. Or, the trade may be an unhealthy one. File-making, glass-blowing, stone-cutting in a shop, and working in a lead factory, are of this class.

Then, here again, comes in some points that should be noted. Cutting marble is not so injurious as working on sandstone and granite; and those who handle metal lead do not suffer, while those who work among the lead colors are very apt to do so. Those who make lead pipes or sheet lead are not in danger, while those who make lead powders, as the oxides and carbonates, are exposed to much risk.

HOME LIFE.

Another feature of the environment that should receive attention is the home life of the applicant. Those who live in squalid rooms, and with few comforts, are not desirable from the company's standpoint. They are more liable to sickness than those who live in better quarters, and are less able to get proper care when they do become ill. Then, further, they are apt, in the struggle of life, to "drown care with drink." In this way poverty leads to bad habits. Another feature of the home life of importance is how the home is kept. The wife may be indigent, thriftless, wasteful, and negligent of the welfare of her husband. This usually leads to disaster in many ways.

EXTRA HAZARD.

Certain occupations carry with them an extra hazard. Of these might be mentioned sailors, fishermen, some classes of railway employees, handling explosives, linemen working with wires that may conduct a strong current, etc. The agent should take the utmost pains to find out the facts in such cases, and, if there is any doubt, refer them to the head office before having the applicant examined. The plan and premium could in this way be first adjusted.

This would avoid disappointments, expenses, and sometimes ill-feeling. Where there is any doubt about the acceptability of the occupation, the agent should secure the facts and communicate with the head office. Always remember that the company must take to itself the benefit of the doubt, for this is the only safe rule; and it is the best one for the agent also.

Coming to the habits, it should be borne in mind that drink is not the only bad habit, from the company's viewpoint. The applicant may be negligent of health, and he may be slovenly, dirty and lazy. He may be of loose habits in many ways, a sort of Bohemian or of roaming tendency. Such are not good "risks" for a company to stake its thousands on as against the premiums from these applicants.

The lesson from all this is, that when there is any doubt on the question of habits, occupation, or environment, communicate with the head office for advice.

FOREIGN FIRE COMPANIES' RECORD IN UNITED STATES.

Statistics compiled by the *Insurance Age* (N.Y.), show the following figures regarding the record of fifty-four fire insurance companies operating in the United States since their entry in that field:—United States assets, \$137,672,457; risks in force, \$15,248,327,813; income since entry, \$1,682,115,464; expenditures since entry, \$1,508,786,201; premiums since entry, \$1,492,399,472; losses since entry, \$900,156,919.

So hazardous has been the business of fire underwriting in the United States that capital has not been greedy to venture upon this branch of business, says the *Insurance Age*. In the majority of cases, where it has done so, during the past twenty-five years, the ventures have been disastrous and the companies formed have been forced out of business by excessive loss, or by inexperience, or both. Thus it is true that the large majority of the successful fire insurance companies of the United States have been in business now for nearly half a century, and these are not depending for their profit upon their underwriting operations, but more upon the returns which they may secure from interest upon the funds which they may have been fortunate enough to accumulate.

NOT ENOUGH HOME CAPITAL.

It was long ago demonstrated that enough capital could not be enlisted in the fire insurance business to take care of the commercial interests of this country, and this led to the entry into the United States of a number of foreign insurance companies, many of which have made large expenditures to establish their business here, and have waited for years for a chance to return a profit to their shareholders in their native lands.

The strength of the great rank and file of the foreign companies, says the *Age*, has been in the magnitude of their operations, which has enabled them to do business at a smaller expense and consequently at a reasonable combined loss and expense ratio.

The Canadian Bank of Commerce has opened a new branch at Madoc, Ont., under the supervision of the Belleville manager. The Dale private bank at Madoc has apparently got into difficulties, it is stated.