

were skalds at the courts of the Norwegian kings, they were Icelanders. At the same time they were careful farmers, daring seamen and enterprising traders. The traded regularly with all the neighboring countries, and thought little of an overland journey to Constantinople, where many of them served in the bodyguard of the Byzantine Emperor. At home, next to the necessary care of their herds and flocks, they were, above all, devoted to poetry, history, and the law. To be skilled in the latter was a sure title to respect at a time when law books were still unknown, and codes were carried in the head of the "Lawman," or declared by the "Law-speaker" at the meetings of the Althing, or yearly assembly. In the thirteenth century these laws of use and wont came to be written down, not officially, it would seem, as happened in other countries, but by persons interested in legal studies, and they are now preserved in a collection commonly known as *Gra-Gas*, or gray-goose (a name of doubtful origin), which is used as a general name for the laws of Iceland prior to its union with Norway in 1262.

It is in this collection of laws that the interesting item of compensation for loss by fire occurs, a section which is quoted by the editor of an Icelandic journal last year, in the first of a series of articles on the ancient civilization of Iceland. The editor, Dr. Valtyr Gurmundsson, is one of the best authorities on this subject, and uses the quotation as a text to point out to his countrymen the superior foresight of their ancestors in this respect. The modern Icclander has not yet realised the value of insurance, as shown by the fact that one of the foremost yeomen in the country had his farm burned down three times in succession without it being insured. It was otherwise in the old days, as Dr. Valtyr points out. In the time of the old republic, the golden age of Iceland, every yeoman farmer was by law compelled to be a member of a mutual insurance society. The method by which compensation for loss by fire was made is thus explained in *Gra-Gas*, and is a striking proof of the thoroughly practical views of the old Icelanders:

"There are three houses in every man's dwelling for which compensation may be obtained in event of their being burned down." (In Icelandic dwellings each room was a separate building, and so is called a "house.") "One is the women's sitting room, another the common sitting room, and the third the pantry where the women prepare the food. If a man has both a sitting room and a hall, then at the spring assembly he shall choose whether he will rather have the sitting room or the hall insured. If there is a church or chapel on any man's farm, then that is the fourth house liable for compensation, where it exists. If any of these houses afore-mentioned is burned down, the owner shall summon five of his neighbors, and get them to estimate the damage that has been done. They shall estimate the damage done to the house itself, and also that done to clothes and other valuables burned along with it; but only such clothes and valuables as the owner requires for daily use shall be reckoned for compensation. If a church is burned, There shall be reckoned along with it for compensation all the hangings, the choir, and the best bell that has been destroyed, if there were more than one, and all the furniture required for daily use; the same thing shall be done in the case of chapels."

When the damage had been valued by the neighbors, as above provided, one half of the loss had to be borne by the yeoman himself, and the other half

was made good by all the other yeomen in the district. From each of these a certain amount was levied in proportion to the value of his property, and if this were not paid within a specified time, it could be seized by law. At the same time it was provided that no one could be called upon to pay as his share more than one per cent. of his whole property, and it was not compulsory to compensate the same person for loss by fire more than three times.

Extract from Chambers' Journal.

FOLGER ON BEDDALL.

The following are the remarks of Herbert Folger on E. F. Beddall's recent paper on the foreign fire insurance company. Mr. Folger writes to the *Journal of Commerce and Commercial Bulletin*:

The recent noteworthy address by the United States manager of the Royal insurance company deserves more discussion than has been accorded to that portion which dealt with compulsory classification. If the underlying principle is sound, why leave the scheme to the whims of legislators, with neither time, knowledge or opportunity to determine the merits of a bill introduced to promote so novel an undertaking? Is there no good left in Boston, Atlanta, Chicago and San Francisco that no effort should first be made through rating organizations to accomplish the object?

Underwriters concede the difficulty of combining the experience recorded by companies under the various systems in vogue. If a new system be devised it should be consistent and as simple as practicable. One may readily see that a scheme dealing with \$100,000,000 premiums per annum may safely attempt features which would be valueless or impracticable in a record of \$5,000,000 per annum, covering the entire country; and accomplish better and more trustworthy results in five years than the smaller scheme in twenty years.

Mr. Beddall recommends that brick and frame risks be separately classed and that protected and unprotected business be segregated. To be scientific, the plan must sub-divide the so-called protected business carefully (i. e., with reference to the probability of salvage), for the differences in rating and results are marked among towns of 500,000, 50,000 and 5,000 population. All towns of the same size do not belong in the same class; nor all which possess two steam fire engines; nor all which supply water by the gravity system. Mr. Moore tells us that previous fire records must be considered; in which event Lynn, Syracuse, Milwaukee and Seattle may be associated with others of low degree. No single state in the Union could prescribe such a scheme by statute to equal one prepared and carried out by underwriters, based upon the transactions in similar cities and towns, without reference to the imaginary lines which divide the states. In Oregon and Washington, the difference between the climate east of the Cascade Mountains and that of the Willamette Valley and Puget Sound on the west, is almost indescribable, and effects the fire hazard materially. Doubtless similar differences exist within the limits of many eastern states.

The number of classes is not suggested, but as the loss cost is to be determined for every class separately, and the insurance superintendent "could make up a tariff of rates as well as the most skillful underwriter" therefrom, the classes must be comprehensive. The