

If it be said that life insurance is largely in the interest of the general prosperity, a boon to families and a foil to pauperism and want, we grant all that and more; but aside from the fact that private enterprise has for years abundantly provided this life insurance for all classes, the above is true of fire insurance and a hundred other beneficent enterprises, which private capital and enterprise are enlisted in to an extent more than ample for the demand. The true functions of government are to protect the rights and foster the interests of the people, to encourage industry and morality and general intelligence among all classes. When it becomes a vendor of any kind, in competition with its own subjects, and a manager of capital in rivalry with its citizen capitalists, it usurps functions which do not belong to it and injures instead of promoting the general prosperity. Insurance is abundantly cared for, as transportation is equally cared for by the people themselves, and the flat failure of the British government, after twenty-six years of experiment, as a competitor in the life insurance business, strikingly demonstrates its illegitimacy and the mistake of the "paternal" idea as applied to that business.

THE CANADIAN FIRE UNDERWRITERS ANNUAL MEETING.

The usual annual meeting of the Canadian Fire Underwriters Association was held in Montreal on Tuesday, the 17th ult., and the following three days. There are doubtless thousands in our city who never knew of such a meeting, nor would they have evinced any interest had they possessed that knowledge; and there is also another and by no means small class of citizens who regard the association with feelings either of antagonism, being firmly persuaded that it is a combination for unduly forcing up rates,—or of contempt as an utterly useless institution from a mercantile point of view. To both of these contentions we have always taken exception, maintaining, first, that equitable rates need not mean high rates; and second, that an institution, which by its rules and regulations encourages the erection of a better class of buildings and better fire protection, cannot fairly be stigmatized as useless.

As long ago as May of last year we drew attention to the curious fact that the average rate of the year 1889 was lower than for a number of years previous to that date, and the rate for 1890, as taken from the Government report, shows a further reduction, being 1.13 as against 1.16 for 1889, clearly proving that the members of the association are reasonable and perfectly willing to make concessions for improvements, thus completely refuting the theory that the companies combine together simply for the increase or maintenance of rates.

Following is a complete list of the members present and the companies they represented:—

ÆTNA: F. W. Evans, J. Hughes, Thos. R. Wood, W. F. King; AGRICULTURAL: Joseph Flynn, C. R. G. Johnson, H. M. Stevens; ATLAS, AND NATIONAL OF IRELAND: M. C. Linshaw; BRITISH AMERICA: W. H. Banks; CALEDONIAN: J. W. Taylor, A. M. Nairn; CITIZENS: E. P. Heaton; CITY OF LONDON: H. M. Blackburn, J. P. Bamford, Wm. Rowland, COMMERCIAL UNION: W. B. Evans; EASTERN: J. H. Ewart, C. R. G. Johnson; EMPLOYERS' LIABILITY: J. P. Sudbury; FIRE

ASSOCIATION: John Kennedy; GUARDIAN: A. J. Relton, gen'l manager, London, Eng., H. E. Bowers, U. S. manager, New York, Robt. Simms, G. A. Roberts; HARTFORD FIRE: Chas. E. Chase, president, Hartford, F. W. Evans, P. A. McCullum; IMPERIAL: E. D. Lacy; LANCASHIRE: J. P. Bamford; LIVERPOOL & LONDON & GLOBE: G. F. C. Smith; LONDON AND LANCASHIRE: W. A. Sims, F. W. Evans; LONDON ASSURANCE: E. A. Lally; MANCHESTER FIRE: Jas. Boomer, J. W. Molson; MERCANTILE: P. H. Sims; NORTH BRITISH: Thos. Davidson, Randall Davidson, J. C. Norworthy; NORTHERN: Robert W. Tyre; NORWICH UNION: Alex. Dixon, Walter Kavanagh; NORTH AMERICA: J. H. Carson; PHENIX, Brooklyn: L. C. Camp, J. C. Sinton; PHENIX, Hartford: Gerald E. Hart; PHENIX, London: A. T. Paterson, R. McD. Paterson; QUEBEC: J. H. Routh; QUEEN: P. M. Wickham; ROYAL: Wm. Tatley; SCOTTISH UNION: W. A. Medland, W. Kavanagh; UNION: T. L. Morrissey, WESTERN: J. J. Kenny, C. C. Foster, J. H. Routh, WATERLOO MUTUAL: J. Killer.

We will now proceed to consider the utility or otherwise of an association which has just concluded its eighth annual meeting.

Classification of Places.—One of the first great measures adopted by the offices was the classification of towns and villages, in accordance with the construction and fire protection afforded, the highest class being "A," the next "B," and so on down to "F." The various municipalities could always learn what to do in order to obtain a reduction in rates, and some have learned to their cost that the neglect to keep up the standard of protection, or that the enforcement of heavy taxes on the insurance companies, simply led to an increase of the rate, until the improvement in the protection or the removal of the taxes took place. As a result of this united action, we may cite that during the past twelve months alone the following changes have been made, viz.:—

Kingston raised from C to A	Mitchell raised from D to C
Brantford " B " A	Barrie " E " C
London East " F " A	Markham " D " C
Collingwood " D " B	Niagara " F " C
Napanee " D " B	Beauharnois " E " C
Ingersoll " C " B	Lachine " D " C
Kincardine " E " C	

Besides this, nine towns have been raised to class D from some lower letter, three towns from F to E, while on the other hand Port Perry was lowered from D to E, St. Johns and Richmond being also reduced in like manner. This surely of itself may be said to have been a fair amount of useful work, but it is only one of many things for which property owners have to thank the Underwriters Association.

Incendiarism.—This was a subject dealt with at the meeting; and while insurance companies have a horror of coming forward in the light of public prosecutors, they always desire as far as possible to so reduce the loss from incendiarism as to eliminate it as one of the factors in fixing rates. The companies have therefore appointed a committee authorized under certain rules to offer a reward up to \$500, for the conviction of an incendiary, which we hope may bear good fruit in the future.

Rating of 3 year risks in Western Ontario.—Owing rather to certain real or fancied diversity of interests than to the excuse given—the competition of the mutuals—three year business, comprising dwellings, churches and other such non-hazardous risks, have not