The accidental fact that Liverpool's fire loss in 1896 was £45,000, and in 1897 £39,000 will not induce a fire insurance manager to forget that the averages of the past may again become the averages of the future, and that, *in the interests of the public*, funds must be provided in proportion to the highest, not the lowest, possible realisation of accepted liabilities by charging adequate rates. There is at present nothing on earth to make it impossible for the fire offices to be let in at Liverpool or Manchester, or both cities together, for a loss next year of £200,000 or even £300,000, and it is for this contingency, though extreme, that they must be at all times provided with the money in hand. They must be prepared to pay, in fact, according to their actual "book," and not base their calculations upon any unwarranted assumption of a run of luck. But as a matter of fact, twenty-five million pounds cannot be accepted as the total sum insured on Liverpool property, and the combined rates (from 1s. 6d. upwards) will not constitute a representative ruling rate of anything like 12s. per cent. It is officially known that the value of the insured property of the Metropolis is returned at nearly £900,000,000. Making all allowances, therefore, for difference in size, nature of trades and values at risk, we cannot see how Liverpool's insurances can be so disproportionate not only to those of London but to the totals of such cities as Manchester and Glasgow, with which latter it can be more closely compared. Can the Liverpool municipal authorities supply particulars of the data on which the calculations published in the Manchester "City News" are based? If so we shall gladly publish them.

Our contemporary concludes as follows:

It is pointed out that *the great Cripplegate fire*, which was put forward by the companies as a great disaster demanding a re-organization of rates, *did not in any way interfere with their dividends or the value of their shares.*

As to which we would merely briefly remark that the annual premiums received on account of London business have been estimated at £2,500,000. Of this, at least £1,350,000 goes annually in payment of normal losses and about £750,000 in necessary and very economically dispensed expenses, a term which is indiscriminatingly applied to administration expenses and to the large and increasing cost of skilled inspection making for the prevention of fires. The balance of £400,000 is a "trading margin," held to meet current liabilities, and which only permits of dividends being paid from the interest thereon, supplemented by the interest on the other investments of the companies. But the Cripplegate fire ran up London's fire insurance loss for 1897 to over £2,000,000, so that even the usual "trading margin" was swept away, being replaced by a net estimated loss on the year's London trading of at least a quarter-of-a-million. That such a reverse did not injure the credit of the Fire Offices by lowering the value of their shares is surely a matter to rejoice at in the interests of the insuring public.

With regard to what is alleged to have been done at Hamburg and Berlin, our contemporary will find, upon enquiry, that it is only a small proportion of non-hazardous property which has been insured in the manner described. When the New Zealand Government Fire Insurance scheme was first proposed, there was a clause drawn up providing for the compulsory insurance of all non-hazardous property with the Government, whilst the existing Fire Offices were to be compelled to confine their operations to hazardous business at a fixed uniform rate. One of the many alternative schemes proposed at Toronto had, for its leading feature, the prohibition of Insurance Companies to decline any risk whatever. It was proved, also, that in order to accumulate out of the local taxes a Reserve Fund which would bear a true proportion to the current liability on the risks covered, a run of one hundred and thirty years, without a single claim for fire damage, would have to be the (impossible) experience of the City of Toronto. And Alderman Carter, of the City of Melbourne, has estimated that it would take Melbourne 800 years to accumulate a Fire Insurance Fund out of the Municipal annual surplus without an increase in local taxes! On the other hand, if a special local tax is levied upon the ratepayers to organize and maintain an Insurance department, where does "cheap Insurance" come in? Of course, it will be answered that any such special rate would only be equivalent to "cost price" Insurance. But we should like our friends to clearly define the meaning they wish to convey by the use of that phrase. No doubt, amongst other things, they are counting upon abolishing the agents' 15 per cent. commission. But would not compulsory Municipal Insurance imply the employment of an army of paid inspectors and surveyors?—*Post Magazine.*

INTERESTING FIRE FIGURES.

The aggregate property loss in the United States for 1897, according to the abridged edition of the *Chronicle* (N.Y.) Fire tables, was $116,354,570, and the average insurance loss was $66,722,140; which was less than the loss of the previous year by $2,382,850 and $7,181,660 respectively. These figures mark the smallest fire and insurance loss since 1890, when the property loss was $108,993,792 and the insurance loss $65,015,465. For the first time in 23 years, the yearly loss in the State of New York is exceeded. The State of Pennsylvania leads in loss with figures of $13,706,315 in fire loss and $8,674,980 in insurance. The number of fires reported was 55,779, which exceeds the number reported in 1896 by 13,234. There were only two fires during the year where the loss exceeded $1,000,000.

THE STAMP TAX AND INSURANCE COMPANIES

The collector of Internal Revenue, New York district, has expressed the opinion that binders issued in advance of fire policies are not subject to the stamp tax. The life companies have been considering whether to charge the new policy-holder direct with the value of the stamp upon his policy or pay the same out of the funds. It has been computed upon the basis of the returns made to the State of New York for 1897 that the life companies of the United States will be taxed upwards of $2,000,000 for stamps. The new insured in the following companies will have to pay for the stamps: Mutual Life, Equitable, New York Life, Provident Savings, Union Mutual Life, Travelers, Union Central Life, Northwestern Mutual, Prudential, Brooklyn Life, Germania Life, United States Life, Home Life of New York. The following companies will charge the stamps up to general expenses: John Hancock, Metropolitan, Washington Life, Penn. Mutual, Mutual Benefit Life, Phoenix Mutual, Berkshire Life, National Life of Vermont, Connecticut General, Connecticut Mutual, Massachusetts Mutual, Provident Life and Trust, Aetna Life, New England Life.