

it impossible to procure a fair article of wine, hence the reputation for using nothing but manufactured articles given to the people of Lower Canada. We know, however, that matters are no better in the Province of Ontario, and, as a consequence, the people have discontinued their use altogether, preferring very reasonably their own home-made productions. The only remedy for this is a specific duty at so much per gallon for a certain strength, such as that established in the United States. Good French wines cannot be had at the lower tariff rate. What is imported at this rate is not pure wine; and no stronger argument could be put into the mouths of total abstinence orators than the use by the people of these deleterious compounds. It is not to be wondered that there are in our midst persons carrying on the business of providing retailers with the necessary ingredients for manufacturing from high-wines by means of certain chemicals a close imitation of these cheap and nasty importations. Germany abounds with "doctoring" establishments of this kind, and her sons in this country seem to be no less wise in their generation than their elders in Europe. It is a matter for surprise that the remedy for this state of things has not been more thoroughly insisted upon by our respectable importers.

HOLIDAY HINTS.

There is a trait in our humanity not generally recognized, but not the less real, that if a person wishes to secure the regard of anybody, get him to make a valuable present; and we suppose this is the reason why our greatest writer said that mercy was twice blessed. Another writer says, there is a faint tinge of selfishness about nearly all Christmas presents between grown people; nearly, but not quite all. There is at least one present which a husband can give to a wife, to which no such cavil can apply. We refer to a life insurance policy. Only in a state of society where woman is highly-honored and esteemed could life insurance in its best form be possible. It is the ripe outgrowth of a humane and Christian age. The man, pledging his earnings to build up a small competence for his family—a fortune which he can never share or enjoy—exercises a self-denial that may in some respects rank with the virtues of religion. The millions upon millions of dollars thus invested represent no wealth but that of affection. All other forms in which riches accumulate tell of some kind of selfishness.

This characteristic of the trust funds which life insurance companies hold,

makes the care of them a grave duty. Our laws have thrown around them a greater number of safeguards than are applied to almost any other kind of property; funds held by trustees for minor children are among the few instances of similar precaution, and it is only in rare cases that we hear of its abuse. The classes of investments in which insurance funds may be placed under our laws are exceedingly limited, and as secure as any that human foresight can select. The principles upon which the business of insuring lives is based are as trustworthy as a demonstration in Euclid. There is less real difference than is currently supposed in the ways of doing business among the leading insurance companies of this country, and the general tendency is to do away with this variation. It has frequently happened that companies that have tried peculiar plans of doing business, after a few years of experience, fall into the beaten track. The rates charged by these concerns, when all the circumstances of payment and dividend are considered, differ only in small fractions. In short, being insured is vastly more important than the mode of insurance, and among the prominent companies there is little danger of an applicant's going astray.

These concerns are now very busy in making up their accounts for the past year. The volume of all business is shrunken, theirs among the rest. But on the whole it has not been a bad year for them. There has been a falling off in the more speculative portion of the business; in obtaining large policies and "endowment" risks; but the number of small ones is notable, and indicates that canvassers have been pushing their labors among the people of slender means who need insurance most. Economy has been the rule, and we hear no instances of the extravagance of former years. The showing of the annual statements in this respect, it is believed, will be very marked. While in almost every other branch of business there have been defalcations, losses, suspensions, bankruptcy, among the life insurance companies there has been no prominent failure since the stringency began. One reason for this, doubtless, is that a weeding-out process took place among them shortly before, and the weaker ones had mostly gone out of business. But the chief reason why life insurance companies have not been numbered among the sufferers of the last two years, is that their funds have been safely invested and their management has been prudent and efficient. It has been shown that they ought to be safer in troubled times than other moneyed

corporations and it is a cause for satisfaction to find that they are.

We promise our readers a review of the conditions of the more prominent life companies, in the course of the coming months, and to give a few valid reasons why some are not so desirable as others.

THE LOCAL AGENT.

We extract the following suggestive and racy sketch from a paper read before the Association of the North-West at its recent sitting in Chicago, by W. B. Cornell, Western manager for the North British and Mercantile Insurance Company, regretting that the space at our disposal will not allow us to give it *in extenso*.

We once asked a new-boy what was in his papers, and he answered, "Plenty of common news, but nothin' good to holler." It is to be feared that the report of your "Committee on Local Agents" will not contain much more than the little news gamin's papers. In dealing with our subject we must beg, for this occasion, a relaxation of the rules of the National Board as to the manner we shall "write" thereon. We shall liken the companies to the boiler, the National Board to the engine, and the local agent to the machinery; for the boiler furnishes the power, the engine conveys it, and the machinery uses or applies it. The rules compel us to "write specific" upon the machinery, and allow us to "write blanket" upon engine and boiler. We ask permission to "write blanket" upon the boiler and machinery, they are so intimately related with and dependent upon each other by the reason of the "connections" between the same. What we have to "write" upon the engine will be "specific." That the "boiler" be well and substantially set up, and not exposed to the woodwork of unsound practices; that the engine be in charge of a competent engineer, with no other duties to perform but to see that it is run by the boiler, and conveys *properly* all the power given to it: of the purposes for which it was placed between the boiler and machinery it is not our permit or duty to speak, our mission is to attend to the machinery, that it run true, that its foundations be not sagged, that it run not too fast for safety, and that all its bearings be kept cool. Where to attack our subject we are left no choice. The boiler and engine are on hand here to-day by able representatives to defend themselves in case of injustice being done them at any one's hands. The machinery, we regret to say, is not and could not be, as they are a numerous body, and, besides, this does not seem to be any of their funeral, though they are called upon to furnish the corpse. We had much rather praise men behind their back and censure them at their face. We promise to censure not unkindly or unjustly. What of censure we may have, should it come to the local agents' attention, we trust will be kindly received, and not be thought unjust or excessive because it comes at once and all together. Had we this report to make in their presence, we might prefer the "installation plan" as easier and safer. We might question the propriety of dealing with them except when they can be attacked in front, but as no choice is left us, we must attack them in the rear. How to attack our subject is next in order. We never preached or got a call to such a performance before, and must draw upon our "hard-shell" friends for a lay-out of our subject. The text being given, we divide the subject-matter up into four heads, thus: Firstly. What is a local agent? Secondly. Where did he come from? Thirdly. What is he here for? Fourthly. Where will he go to?

What is a local agent? We rushed to our "Unabridged" (you don't find him in anything that's abridged) and found that Webster existed prior to their day, or had nothing to insure, and so never found them out, in either of which events we gather the main secret of his length of days, and peacefulness of mind. We found