

carrying trade to Jamaica or Cuba! The question is really whether we can secure this carrying trade to those parts of the Dominion, whose geographical position renders it more economical for them to send their products by other routes. We own that we see no ground to believe that the sanguine expectations that Mr. Patterson, in common with many others, entertains are likely to be realized, and we should be sorry that any large expenditure should be incurred in pursuit of visionary projects. There is really no obstacle to trade with the British West Indies at the present time. Moreover there is a considerable trade already, which would be extended if there were adequate profits. We supply all the fish and a good deal of the lumber consumed in the Tropics. Halifax and St. John carry on a considerable direct trade both for imports and exports, and are always likely to command the import and export trade of the Maritime provinces. Mr. Patterson has gone very fully into the flour question, and admits that hitherto Canadian millers have not produced flour adapted for tropical markets. It may be doubted whether on the whole it is worth their while to manufacture the special article required, at all events it is in their power to do so when they please. The markets are all open, and the only question is as to the route, that is, whether the exports and imports shall be carried to and from West India ports by the St. Lawrence, or by the American seaports, and this question can only be satisfactorily solved by practical business men.

INSURANCE CONVENTIONS.

The meetings of the National Board of Fire Underwriters of the United States, of the Superintendents of Insurance, and of the Underwriters of the Northwest have each and all furnished subjects for discussion and for thought,—the general results of which have been that the Superintendents have been told that they have failed to furnish even an apology for their useless existence; the National Board that, whilst they have certainly done the country and the profession great service by systemizing, classifying, and schedule-rating, by insisting on proper fire appliances, and by various other means, yet they have wanted tact, administrative ability and good faith, so that, whilst they have deceived each other, they have not attracted to their body a large constituency of companies whose co-operation is necessary to the genuine success of the Board.

The proceedings of the Northwestern Association have, however, met with very general approval, very few adverse criti-

cisms having appeared, and these having mostly been dictated by personal resentments. In Canada we have no bodies or congregations answering to any of these conventions, consequently it may be wise to calmly consider the causes of the success or failure of these several meetings, and try if we cannot learn such lessons from them as will be of benefit to our own country and our own underwriters.

First, then, the Superintendents of Insurance: they are a set of very worthy gentlemen, appointed to their positions through political influences, and not on account of any particular qualifications or special training for their important duties; they are dressed in a little brief authority which they are, very naturally, anxious to display—very often before they comprehend its scope or limit; few of them have ever been known to promulgate a new idea for the benefit of the business whose operations they are supposed to superintend; one of them has been vehemently accused of availing himself of the calamity which befel the companies at Chicago to line his pockets with money, for which false certificates of solvency were issued; another of indulging old-time hatred and animosity, in conjunction with his confreres, in ruining a company by so continually examining it as to impede its operations, harass its executive with new requirements, destroy its business by leading the people to doubt its solvency, and, when their nefarious scheme resulted in their success, holding up their unrighteous hands and exclaiming, "I told you so"!!! having availed themselves of every means in their power to bring forth the results which their personal interests and hatreds led them to be determined upon.

Not once in their whole history have they saved a company from destruction by any measures of their own, nor have they ever saved either policyholders or stockholders from loss by any measure which has originated amongst themselves. Whatever good has been accomplished has been effected by the officers of the companies and by the insurance press, and we must state that these have too often acted from interested motives, which the Superintendents have neither controlled nor resisted.

There are too many of them, their authority is too brief, their training is defective, they are too open to crotchets, to interested motives, and to be made tools of for the furtherance of illegitimate designs; the theory of their existence is good, but the fact of it is a disgrace to the whole body of them, notwithstanding that some few of them have been, and some fewer of

them are, efficient capable men, though these, to their sorrow and chagrin, are impeded or nullified by their less efficient or less scrupulous confreres.

The difficulty with the National Board may be likened to that of the Superintendents, and may be summed up in the word, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." Had they cordially exerted themselves in amassing information and digesting it, so that the nature and extent of every shade or form of hazard could be known and determined, they would have been able to eliminate many forms of hazard from their general business;—this they undoubtedly have done in many localities, especially in New York city, and for this they deserve the encomiums of the general public and of all companies, whether in the board or not; they have brought communities like Chicago to a sense of the dangers and deficiencies existing amongst them, and have caused their removal, for which they have received ill-deserved approbrium instead of well-deserved blessings; they have arranged an intelligent system of rating which, whenever honestly applied, has benefited both the companies and the communities, by combining their interests as they should be; they have attempted a system of statistics which will never be useful, because lacking in uniformity of fundamental data, and they have split on the rock of "rates," "rates," "rates."

Had they been contented to follow the precept, "Be sure you're right, then go ahead," or dared to maintain what they believed to be right in a consistent manner, they might have pointed to higher things, and led the way; but, with uncertain data, they have made rigid rules which have galled and irritated both the companies whose officers helped to frame them and the agents on whom the application of them depends. Individually they have wanted the virtue which would have preserved them from temptation to transgress their own rules, and the philosophy which would have led them to cry "sour grapes" to the fruit which their rules placed beyond their reach.

There is just so much good or ill-fortune, so much uncertainty and so much unestimateable moral hazard in the business as to give room for successful or unsuccessful ventures, "if companies can" be found willing to go neck or nothing in quest of them, and there are just so many companies, whose existence and whose apparent success cannot be ignored, as to vex the "unco' guid and rigidly righteous", and tempt them into occasional follies which destroy the harmony of the board.