

**AN OLDEN TIME ANNUITY.**—Mr. James Sterling, F.F.A., president of the Scottish Imperial Insurance Co., in his recent address before the Glasgow Actuarial Society, alluded to annuities as probably the oldest form of life contingency, and referred to the incident of King Alexander III. of Scotland, in 1282, giving his daughter on her marriage a dowry of 14,000 marks, but retaining the option of giving an annuity of 720 marks for half the amount, as probably the earliest "option" on record.

**A NEW STEP** in the evolution of the life insurance business, in the opinion of "The Spectator," and one the ultimate results of which would be difficult to over-estimate, has now been taken by the Mutual Life of New York and the New York Life, by the establishment of branches of the home offices, to be located at Chicago. It has been known for two years past that such a move was contemplated by the New York Life, and that the subject was receiving minute investigation. Now, after mature consideration, the departure has been made public, the new offices to open the first of the year. An actuary, a medical examiner and assistants from the home offices will be placed in charge.

**MANAGER MADE A DIRECTOR.**—Sir Charles Rackham Gilman, the founder of the Norwich and London Accident Insurance Association in 1856, who is retiring from the position of manager, was at the 47th annual meeting of the shareholders, held on the 1st inst. elected to a seat on the board of directors. This is what should be done more generally. Who is so capable of revoking valuable services to a company as one of its directors as a manager retired after long years of service, and who is so entitled to the honour of a seat at the Board?

**THE MAGIC SQUARE** below will interest the youngsters during school vacation. It appeared in the "Insurance and Financial Gazette":—

Row	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	93	108	123	138	153	168	1	16	31	46	61	76	91
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3	121	136	151	166	12	14	29	44	59	74	89	104	106
4	135	150	165	11	26	28	43	58	73	88	103	118	120
5	149	164	10	25	27	42	57	72	87	102	117	119	134
6	163	9	24	39	41	56	71	86	101	116	118	133	148
7	8	23	38	49	55	70	85	100	115	130	132	147	162
8	22	37	52	54	69	84	99	114	129	131	146	161	7
9	36	51	53	68	83	98	113	128	143	145	160	6	21
10	50	65	67	82	97	112	127	142	144	159	5	20	35
11	64	66	81	96	111	126	141	156	158	4	19	34	49
12	78	80	95	110	125	140	155	157	3	18	33	48	63
13	79	94	109	124	139	154	169	2	17	32	47	62	77

The above so-called "Magic Square" contains 169 small squares or cells. Each column and each row of figures casts up 1,105; the numbers in the two diagonal rows, when added up, produce also that total.

**ACETYLENE GAS EXPLOSIONS.**—Two explosions of acetylene gas machines, with serious results, occurred during the past month. By the explosion at the Lozar House, Ridgetown, Ont., one person was killed, while the second explosion, at Kippen, Ont., destroyed St. Andrew's church and injured five persons. It is feared that the pastor, Rev. Mr. McLennan, may lose his sight. The fine new brick edifice was rent and torn as if by an earthquake. The floor bulged up and the walls collapsed. The congregation was enjoying a social and the disaster came without warning. During the supper an odour of escaping gas was detected a moment before the explosion. The pastor and caretaker rushed to the cellar to shut off the gas supply and were just approaching the generator when

the gas was ignited. It is not known definitely whether the explosion was due to the carelessness and negligence of those having charge of the machine or whether it was purely accidental.

The Queen's Hotel at Pilot Mound, Man., on November 30, was destroyed by fire, said to have been caused by the gas machine blowing up. A fourth explosion occurred in an hotel at Cornwall, Ont., but fortunately without serious results.—"Electrical News."

## Correspondence.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for views expressed by correspondents.

### NEW YORK STOCK LETTER.

New York, Dec. 22, 1903.

Dullness has been the chief characteristic of the past week, and the market has had alternating periods of weakness and strength, but not to any great extent in either direction. This is quite natural, considering that the present is a week broken by three holidays, and that the year is drawing to a close, and almost every one desires to make up their accounts for the year. So far, there are no indications of any disturbance, as the year draws to its close. Money is easy at 4 to 4½ per cent., but it would not be surprising if this should run up somewhat during the last few days; but whatever the increased rate may be, it cannot last long, because the January disbursements will be enormous this year, and funds are already coming back from the West in a steadily increasing volume. On almost every side is heard the remark that, "things will be better after the turn of the year." This should be so, and possibly it may prove to be true, but the only trouble is that too many are waiting for the so-called January rise, and it is a pretty safe proposition that when the entire community think one way, it is at least wise to provide for the reverse. Last September the general opinion was that rates for money during the crop moving season would be very high, and forthwith almost every one made preparations for such a condition of affairs with the result that when this period arrived, there was a much smaller demand for funds at the centre, and so far no stringency has been experienced. As a matter of fact the record shows that with very few exceptions, January booms have been short-lived and of not very great extent, and sometimes the declines have been considerable.

During the past month or two, there has been considerable discussion as to how severe the general contraction in business throughout the country would be considering the great decline which has occurred in Securities.

Iron and Steel already show material reduction in the volume of trade, and other lines of business show a falling off, but not to quite the same extent. We admit that mill hands and factory operatives have had wages reduced, but on the other hand, a vast amount of new wealth has come into the country, which will enable those receiving it to largely increase their purchasing power. In this connection the report of the comptroller of the currency of the condition of the National Banks for November 17, makes a very interesting showing. It states that the rates of reserve have fallen to a very low figure, only nine-tenths of 1 per cent. above the legal minimum. This is due partly to the \$18,000,000 decrease in reserves of Eastern Banks during the year, but chiefly to an enormous increase of individual deposits of interior banks; this increase over November, 1902, being \$34,000,000 in the South; \$42,000,000 in the middle West; \$13,000,000 in the further West, and \$17,000,000 on the Pacific Coast, or a total of