Holiday Reading.

LIFE ASSURANCE "IN THE FIELD."

Having the good fortune to come across Mr. Thomas Kerr, Chief Inspector for the Standard Life Assurance Company, while on his return trip of 1896 from the Maritime Provinces, a MONETARY TIMES man was regaled for the best part of a day with an assortment of that gentleman's experiences and observations. Fellow travellers are not always genial or companionable, but Mr. Kerr was both, and many a laugh he afforded me on that trip. If in the telling of some of his stories I fail to give them the flavor which he gave, readers must not be too hard upon me. It is probably not generally known—it was certainly news to the writer—that in Mr. Kerr we have the pioneer life assurance canvasser on the Old Sod. Another thing I found out, namely, that he is the same valuable sort of Irishman Saint Patrick was, namely, of Scottish descent, for, said Mr. Kerr, with becoming seriousness, "although I was born in the North of Ireland, my ancestors came from Scotland about two hundred years ago and settled in Ulster."

After serving his time to general business, Mr. Kerr took an agency for the Scottish Amicable Life Co., of Glasgow, of the central board of management of which the celebrated Rev. Dr. Norman McLeod was chairman. The company had a branch in Belfast under the management of W. D. Henderson & Sons, and there was a local board of management, with the Rev. Dr. Morgan, of Fisherwick Place Church, as chairman. In those days Dr. McLeod, of the Barony Church, was one of the most esteemed and influential ministers in Scotland, and a great champion of life assurance, while Rev. Dr. Morgan, in turn, was one of the most influential clergymen in Ireland.

At this time the business of life assurance was in a very crude state, and the system of personal canvassing for risks, now so common, almost unknown. There was indeed considerable prejudice against it for the better class of the community in Britain thought that if they wanted life assurance they should simply do as a merchant would do if he wanted 100 chests of tea or 50 hogsheads of sugar—go and ask for it. Mr. Kerr was the first to introduce the system of soliciting in the part of the country in which he lived, and was very successful at it too, as he is to-day.

In Canada Mr. Kerr has been connected with the "Union Mutual," the "London and Lancashire," "Reliance" and the "Standard." With the company last named he has been connected for nearly seventeen years, during which time life insurance has made great strides, not only in Ontario, but throughout the various provinces of the Dominion.

Before the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed Mr. Kerr visited British Columbia—then a prodigious distance off—going by the Union Pacific Railroad to San Francisco and up the coast. While in Victoria he reconstructed the local board of the company, which was the means of bringing in a large business, greatly owing to the energy and influence of Messrs. Robt. Ward & Co., the agents. In 1882 he visited Newfoundland and reconstructed the board in St. Johns, which step was followed by equally satisfactory results; and in these duties he was ably assisted by the resident secretary, Major Stabb, and the late Hon. Moses Monroe, an active member of the Newfoundland board. It is pleasing to know that, in appreciation of his services, the board of directors in Edinburgh, in the jubilee year, took the unusual step of presenting Mr. Kerr with a massive gold English lever watch, bearing an appropriate inscription.

The Standard has done a large business in Canada, where it has been established for more than 51 years, and continues to do so. Its success is in no small degree to be attributed to the manager, Mr William Miller Ramsay, who since boyhood has been connected with the company, and whose good judgment and careful attention to its interests have never been at fault.

"If I occupied a little of your time with my experiences in the field," said the Chief Inspector, "some of them might seem not encouraging to the 'Tenderfoot.' On one occasion I solicited an Irish, man to insure his life for £100. He at once agreed to my wishes—passed a good examination, and the good doctor in whose veins flowed the pure Milesian blood, patted my friend on the back and pronounced him a very healthy man. But Patrick, not heeding the little compliment and buttoning his well-worn frock, asked the doctor 'what bank he would draw his money at?' thinking he was going to get his £100 right off. The doctor replied, 'your wife will get this when you die.' Patrick retorted in the most emphatic manner, 'keep your insurance, I would not take it *for nothin'*.'

"Reverend Doctor McLeod, of whom the Scotch folk used affectionately to speak as 'Norman,' was wont to give some good advice to his young friends; he would tell them, 'If they would not insure until they became grey, they would assuredly have to pay for the grey hairs.'

"A prosperous merchant in a large city once took a fancy to try the business of life insurance, and at considerable sacrifice sold out his stock of merchandise, and took an agency for a large company. He noted down a number of the large manufacturers and merchants in the place; and well armed with literature, commenced with the determination to win. He had nice cards printed, and selecting a factory of which a friend of his was the principal partner, he sallied out, and requested permission to call on the hands. His friend, the employer, consented at once, and even offered to take him around the mill, an offer which was gratefully accepted. What we call the 'Boss' in these later days, kindly took the green insurance man around and introduced him as an insurance agent, and in the most polite manner asked each worker as he passed, 'Do you require any life insurance this morning?' and the answer in every case was NO, until the last man was canvassed. The Boss then asked the agent would he call again; with a significant shake of the head and a look of scorn, he replied '*no, not much*.' I need not say that this man was not long in the business.

"Such experiences are not rare, but whatever may be said against the character of some men in the field, and it must be admitted that some agents, partly from ignorance, and others in moments of weakness, might be guilty of exaggeration, still they have succeeded, as a class, in educating the public up to one point, and that is life insurance is not only a good thing, but the best thing that any man can have The fruits of forty years hard labor, sometimes under the most pressing difficulties and discouragements, convince me that this is so. The best scientific minds of the day do not consider the science beneath their study, and I think it may fairly be asserted that this form of indemnity is yearly growing in favor and importance."

One thing was pleasing to notice throughout Mr. Kerr's narration. He had no word of disparagement for other companies. Speaking of the development of the science and practice of life assurance in Canada, he said that a few names at once come to the front, and should its history ever be written it would be incomplete without them. "You will hear in all parts of Canada," he said, "aye, and beyond her borders, mention made of such men as A. G. Ramsay, manager of the Canada Life; W. M. Ramsay, his brother, manager of the Standard Life of Edinburgh; J. K Macdonald, of the Confederation, and Wm. McCabe, of the North American. And there are other worthy students of the science and exponents of the business, like Macaulay of the Sun Life of Canada, and Hendry of the Ontario Mutual, both members, I believe, as some of the others mentioned are, of the Actuarial Society of America, which is doing good work for the profession. And then," he added, "there is THE MONETARY TIMES, which has long been a consistent advocate of the benefits and blessings of life assurance of the kind that insures."

ROUGH TIMES GOLD HUNTING.

"Why, so you were," was the answer of Mr. H. G. McMicken, when asked by the editor of THE MONETARY TIMES if he remembered the latter being in Winnipeg in 1888. "And you found me that night washing gold-rock in a zinc wash-hand basin on the floor of my office."

This was the time when there was such excitement about the Rat Portage gold fields, then newly brought to notice, and what attracted more particular interest was the remarkably rich specimens found by Mr. McMicken and taken to Winnipeg. "Do you want to hear all about the original discoveries in that region?" said that gentleman. "Well, I might be accused of sounding my own trumpet too loudly if I were to tell you all the truth and nothing but the truth. But, in spite of my proverbial modesty, I consider that I did more than any one else to make known to the world the wonderful riches of that district. I don't mind telling you the facts, which I can substantiate by written documentary evidence." Here he laid down his pen, and with it, for a few minutes, the burden of the Great Northern Railroad apparently, for he smiled as he unlocked a desk and pulled out maps, fat-filled envelopes, extracts from statutes, and a dog's-eared scrap-book. Then he went on: "I have always been a kind of a crank, and have kept documents and memoranda of all kinds for years, hating to destroy them, and thinking that, like the old woman with the coffin, it might come handy to have them in the house." We shall let Mr. McMicken tell the story in his own words:

I was the first person who undertook to survey any land in the Lake of the Woods district for mining purposes. Although this may seem stange, I will explain, but to do so must go back a few years. In the course of my experiences in Manitoba, and varied ones they were,