this may be true, very similar results—or lack of results—will not unlikely be experienced when annuities are offered to the wage-earning class. There seems little doubt that—in Canada at any rate—the man who has $30 to $300 a year to lay by will continue, as in the past, devoting it to the payment of insurance premiums rather than to the buying of a deferred annuity. And it is doubtful whether the wage earner who can spare only 25 cents or 50 cents a week will not for his part go on choosing industrial insurance in preference to old age annuities.

The man who thinks at all seriously for the future is apt to combine unselfishness with foresight—for, speaking in the large, it is the thoughtless man who is self-centred. And this element of altruism tends to make an insurance policy more attractive than a personal annuity, simply because it seems to provide more directly for the future of others. So varied, too, are the options of a modern insurance contract—whether life or endowment—that the applicant feels confident as to its adaptability to almost any change in future circumstances. It can be made available for his own needs or for those of others, as may prove the more desirable in years to come.

But aside from this real, if sometimes unrecognized, bias in favour of insurance, account has to be taken of the general inertia of the public. The proposed plan does not appear to contemplate any form of agency canvassing. If it did, the cost would have to be materially higher. But without direct solicitation is it likely that practical results would warrant the carrying on of the plan? Here again an examination of life insurance experiences affords a probable reply. The post office life insurance business of Great Britain supposedly appeals to much the same class as do the industrial insurance companies—or, perhaps more nearly, as the friendly societies. But there is comparative indifference to the advantages thus offered by the Government. In our own country the Government offers its civil servants insurance below cost, but it still appears that the agents of the various Canadian life companies are able to obtain business from these "privileged few." The old proverb about leading to the water and inducing to drink is capable of a decided modification when it comes to the matter of partaking of life insurance. Here, it would seem that the desire to drink usually fails to make itself felt until there has been a tactful leading to the water. Whatever the faults of the agency system, no successful plan of carrying on life insurance without it has yet been put in practice. Even the blandishments of the mail-order ad-smith have failed to supersede the button-hole methods of the man with the rate book—*vide* the experiences of The Insurance Club of New York, referred to in THE CHRONICLE of last week. Just now there is a proposition before the Massachusetts legislature to provide for over-the-counter selling of industrial insurance by savings banks. Apparently the banks are at one with practical insurance men in believing the project a futile one. And, without any desire to wet-blanket, it is even less easy to see how Sir Richard Cartwright's over-the-counter annuity selling is going to prove successful. The Massachusetts enthusiasts base their hopes of success on the circumstance that people are already educated by the companies to the benefits of industrial insurance. But Sir Richard has frankly to admit that there is no present demand for the "article" he offers. Once it is on the market, however, he believes that the demand will appear. Supply may sometimes stimulate demand,—but only when the desire is at least latent if not evident. It will be interesting to discover whether Government old age annuities form a case in point.

TESTS OF LIFE INSURANCE ECONOMY.

Under the title of Test Sheets of Life Insurance Economy, Actuary Walter C. Wright, of Boston, annually issues a careful and detailed compilation of figures and ratios relating to leading United States and Canadian companies. Separate sheets are devoted to fifty-six companies, and in recapitulation a sheet of comparative ratios is given in which the companies are grouped in order of lowness: *First*, as to the percentage (on a 4 p.c. interest earning basis) of the net actual to the net expected cost at which each company could furnish insurance for the year by means of the distribution of all surplus earned, or taking account of all surplus lost; *second* as to the same percentage as modified by supposing no inventory change on account of gain or loss in the value of securities during the year, and *third* as to the percentage of net actual to expected cost of insurance as found by taking account only of gain or loss on the score of insurance expense. The compiler acknowledges that varying circumstances may make ratio comparisons somewhat unfair on occasions, but he considers that by taking into account all three columns of percentages, the careful student of his test sheets may gauge with practical accuracy the extravagance or economy of a company. He considers, too, in this connection that mere accidental good or bad fortune will not have displaced the position of any company more than five or ten lines in the second column of ratios.

Attention is drawn by way of foot notes to exceptional circumstances affecting ratios of certain companies—for example, the higher expense of industrial business, and the apparent depletion of surplus in the case of companies making quinquennial distributions of surplus. While all compilations of comparative ratios are open to the objection of possible unfair use in business competition, Mr. Wright's test sheets cannot but prove of interest and value to companies and agents who study them intelligently and use them aright. The conservatism of the compiler's insurance ideals is summed up in his concluding note to the effect that it "ought to be a far more prized ambition for a company to stand well at the top in columns of figures like the above, than to stand so in magnitude of operations."