

UNIFORMITY OF PRACTICE.

The question of the desirability of uniform methods in the conduct of business enterprises, having like aims and purposes, has been a live and interesting one for a very long time. Those who have been its advocates have possessed strong characters. There is a great deal to be said upon both sides, for and against. It is plain to the observer that we are to-day living in the age of Combinations and Trusts; the unification of interests; the direction and control of competing industries, corporations and institutions by one central bureau, and having one uniform law regulating all their operations. This condition of affairs, not an unmixed good by any means, has been made possible by dominant men, through the assistance of associations; men being actuated in bringing about unity, mainly for purposes of increased influence and greater wealth.

The preparation and submission of a paper upon this subject, "Uniformity and Practice," has been suggested to me as affecting my own profession, not alone by the sign of the times above mentioned, but more directly by the constitution of the "Life Managers' Association." One of the articles of the constitution reads as follows:—

"The object of the aims of this Association shall be to advance the interests of Life Assurance Companies in Canada by promoting uniformity of practice among them in matters of general administration, by watching over all legislative measures bearing upon Life Assurance, and by affording opportunity for consultation and co-operation in all matters affecting the common interests of the companies represented in the Association."

The object of this paper will aim to be an enquiry into the partial meaning of the term "Uniformity" as it is used in the article just quoted, and its applications to the methods of life insurance companies at the present time; to glance at the condition of one or two corporations, other than those of life; and to offer suggestions, the adoption of which will advance wholesome uniformity and will inure to the benefit of all interested, both to the companies and to their clientele.

The paper will of necessity be limited, and deal in practical considerations, rather than in an attempt to embody a history of the changes introduced respecting the regulation of life business, from time to time, since it was first undertaken; and the results which these efforts, towards greater and desirable uniformity have produced. There is more than sufficient material for one paper in briefly referring to the fundamental principles which underlie the transaction of sound life insurance; and its preservation; to instancing some corporations where uniformity of practice is recognized and followed, and which produces advantages of a marked character, not enjoyed by other corporations in which they are strangers to uniformity.

MEANING OF UNIFORMITY.

There can be little doubt that the founders of the "Life Managers' Association" had the betterment of the general conduct of the business in mind when they framed the constitution, and meant the term "Uniformity" to apply upon such basis as would, while leaving the various companies all the individuality necessary to distinguish them from their competitors, evolve an understanding upon certain principles and practices in respect, for example, of the uniform rates to be charged for protection; the maximum cost of the business; the investment of funds; the obtaining of legislation, and the creation of a council in which questions of interest could be discussed, and a better knowledge acquired on the part of the executive officers respecting general governing conditions, and of the views held by each other.

The subject is of such importance as to command serious consideration, and to elicit earnest discussion; in which it is hoped the members of this institute will take an opportunity of adding their quota from their own experience, for, or against the ideas herein simply presented.

The underlying idea in the formation of associations has been in effect, to bring together men following similar avocations, in order that methods might be discussed and the best prevail. Certain weaknesses eradicated and provision made for the establishment of standards by which to judge those actively engaged, or about to become so, in the business especially known to the particular association.

One of the direct results in educational matters that we have lived to see is the establishment of uniform examinations for university matriculation, and the granting of degrees. A uniform minimum amount of knowledge is requisite before the practice of law, medicine, engineering, actuarial and other equally important professions can be publicly undertaken. The different schools and colleges maintain their distinct individuality, notwithstanding that the questions for finals are set by a central board of examiners, but the very fact of the system being uniform as to qualifications raises the whole educational system of the country to a high plane. It may be that there are many who believe that they have a heaven-born genius for practising one or more of the learned professions, and who regard the standards which have been fixed by law a hardship; but unquestionably it is better and safer for people of civilized communities to have associations of the men who are labouring for the perfection of their calling; of the men who have attained experience and wisdom through which standards of uniformity have been established and by compelling conformity to these standards, not only have their own ranks been kept purged of undesirable members, but the public have been guarded from being experimented upon. Incidentally, under this heading, I may remark that the medical association would do an immeasurable service to the citizens of