

Monopoly Failures.

Our New York namesake points to the experience of the United States International Salt Company and the Amalgamated Copper Company as illustrating the difficulty of maintaining a monopoly. It remarks: "The way of the transgressor is hard, and this applies as well to Corporations as to individuals, and to those who violate economic laws as to those who violate moral laws." In two separate industries an erroneous and fatuous policy was pursued last year—in sharp contrast with the enlightened course followed by the United States Steel Corporation—and in each the concern chiefly responsible for the mistake is now finding it no easy matter to recover from the effects of its mistaken policy. We have reference to the salt industry and to the copper industry. In the first, the National Salt Company sought to establish a monopoly and to hold prices at an artificially high level; in the other, the Amalgamated Copper Company for a long time kept the quotation for copper at an arbitrary point, thereby checking the foreign purchases of the metal and making this country the dumping ground for foreign supplies, until finally the inevitable collapse came. The Salt Company had tried to corner the product and raise prices, in which amiable efforts it had failed, as there were too many producers and too many mines to be all controlled. The recent collapse of the corn corner in Chicago is another illustration of the difficulty of establishing a monopoly of any leading product. Though men may try to dam up the stream of production and use all of it for their own purposes, there are economic forces ever at work, which, sooner or later, will upset their plans. If prices are forced up artificially, that is, by creating a scarcity for a time, a reaction is certain to follow, which will, in a term of months or longer, make the average of prices the same as it would have been had no artificial conditions disturbed the natural course of the market.

Verdict re Fire in Toronto.

The jury empanelled to enquire into the late fatal fire in Toronto brought in a verdict which reads:

"We find that the system which the city inspection of buildings is conducted, especially in regard to interior alterations of buildings, is in a deplorable state, and we would recommend that the city authorities pass a proper building by-law or by-laws including a rigid inspection of all such buildings under proper regulations. We further recommend that the chief of the fire department be given full power by the City Council to have all buildings inspected by the district chiefs according to their regular locations. And that such inspections should be pasted in conspicuous places in all fire halls, where the result of such inspection shows any building to be unsafe."

The principal tenant, Mr. McIntosh, testified at the inquest that "There was no supporting or cross walls in the building. The firm had put in a double row of 8x10 supports on two floors. The building had been inspected last fall, and it was reported all right by the building inspector. There was no suggestion made for cross walls to be put in." This was confirmed by the city's building inspector, who swore that "he had inspected the building two years ago." The Crown Attorney then read the city by-laws, which provided that no warehouse containing more than 4,000 square feet should be erected without cross walls and dividing partitions of brick. To this the building inspector made this amazing reply: "The party wall law did not apply, as he understood it, to the alterations of an old building which might bring it within the operations of this law." So that, according to this view of the building laws of Toronto, the interior of any building may be pulled to pieces and wholly rebuilt so as to be highly dangerous, yet the building laws requirement of cross walls and brick partitions do not apply to these alterations so long as the exterior is left unchanged. It is reported that the city will be sued for damages based on the neglect of its building inspector, but, if he reads the law aright, he had no authority over the changes made in the interior of an old building.

Teaching Insurance. A Sceptic's Views.

In commenting upon the school for teaching the theory and practise of life assurance business, the "Banking and Insurance Review" asks, "Can life insurance be taught?" It proceeds to answer its own question as follows:

"Personally we doubt it. Its actuarial section must be taught, as a matter of course, and its book-keeping, etc., is just as much a matter of tuition and study as the acquirement of higher algebra or advanced chemistry. But before you can pay an actuary or a bookkeeper you must have somebody who, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, is not either, but who must possess the capability of inducing the public to pay the premiums, a portion of which will be required for the salaries of actuary, bookkeeper and everybody else concerned. If the Equitable succeeds in turning out such men from its class-room, it will have performed a feat the success of which will soon produce an abundant crop of imitators. But, will it succeed?"

"Our experience may be unique, but it is our experience nevertheless that, paradoxical though it may seem, the most successful producers of life business have been found amongst those who know least about the subject. Perhaps that was the reason why they were successful. Had they known more, their 'pictorial descriptive' would have been sadly handicapped and their sweet persuasiveness have become slightly acidulated—to the detriment of the business, of course. Fortunately they did not know, and had no summer session in a class-room to direct