

sickness and old age, marine and inland transit, burglary, license, leasehold, and every other form under which protection against unforeseen contingencies is sold by fin de siècle insurers.

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The British Workmen's and General Assurance Company is the first office to publicly announce that it has paid a death claim in connection with the war in China.

NEW YORK LETTER.

Slow Progress of New Fire Insurance Agreement—Tendency to Centralization—Failure of The Traders' Fire—Interesting Anniversaries—American Union Life Deal—Other Gotham Notes of Read Interest.

New York, August 8, 1900.

The fire insurance "Agreement of 1900," to produce which so much hard thought and labour was expended, and from which so much has been expected, has so far been very disappointing in developing its practical and useful features. It has always been difficult to secure unanimity of action among fire insurance men, and this case is no exception to the rule. It is not surprising that in a document covering so wide a range of thought and detail some things should be embraced upon which it would be difficult for a number of companies to agree, but it is rather strange that more eagerness and anxiety are not manifested for such a modification of the original agreement that it may be adopted and put into practical effect as soon as possible. It is a hard saying, and we make the statement with reluctance, but it must be confessed that it does not seem as if the fire insurance men of this country really pined for reform. There are some few earnest souls in the business who give their time and brains to the formation of plans for the betterment of fire insurance, and who use their best endeavours to get the companies together, but the rank and file of the managers show a most contemptuous indifference to their own interests by not assisting in this work, and lending it their moral support by their presence and suggestions. It would naturally be supposed that with the disastrous experiences of the past few years, and more especially of the past few months, the companies would all be anxious, even at some personal sacrifice, to avail themselves of means for the eventual improvement of their condition. That the opposite is true, is in itself a sufficient statement of, and comment upon, the real sentiment in fire insurance to-day.

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Following up this thought, we come to the inevitable consequence, which is shown by the present tendency of the business of the United States. Everything points towards centralization. The smaller and weaker companies simply cannot stand the strain of competing with the larger and older concerns, with their widespread business and small expense ratio. It is notorious that very few companies now successfully operating in the United States bear anything like a recent date of organization. Hundreds of companies have been organized in the past twenty years, only to secure some small

quota of business at an exorbitant rate of expense, and then be swallowed up by some larger and more successful company. The tendency certainly is for the large companies to grow larger, and for the smaller and struggling ones to disappear altogether. The many examples of failure and re-insurance which have occurred in recent years, and even months, are amply sufficient to illustrate our purpose.

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A curious situation is portrayed in the experience of the North British and Mercantile with the Traders' Fire Insurance Company, of this city, one of the young concerns which some months ago found it necessary to re-insure. The Traders' made a contract to re-insure its business in the North British and to pay over on or before August 3 a certain sum as a re-insurance fund. It was with this understanding that the North British assumed the Traders' risks. When the date arrived, however, the Traders' was unable to furnish the given amount of funds, and the North British last Friday notified the New York company's officers that it considered the contract null and void, and that the policyholders of the Traders' must look to that company and to it alone for reimbursement in case of loss. Hard times and indifferent management had succeeded in dissipating the capital of the Traders, and it now finds itself in very sore financial embarrassment.

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The increase in capital of the Western Assurance Company, of Toronto, was favourably commented upon in this city and country. The experience of the insurance public with this well-known Canadian concern has always been most favourable and gratifying, and this evidence that it will now increase in commercial importance is regarded everywhere with satisfaction.

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Some time ago it was reported that the American Union Life Insurance Company, of this city, one of the new and struggling capital stock concerns, was about to re-insure in the National Life Insurance Company, of Chicago. It seems now, however, that there will be a hitch in the proceedings which will prevent the deal from going through. In order to take over the policyholders of the New York company, it would be necessary for the Chicago concern to make a regular entrance in New York State. The Superintendent of Insurance, of New York State, however, has refused admittance to the National, and it looks now as if the American Union would be compelled to place the risks elsewhere in case it still finds it necessary to re-insure.

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Three life insurance companies of this country, namely: the Manhattan Life and the United States Life, both of New York; and the National Life, of Vermont; are all celebrating their fiftieth anniversaries this year. I mention this fact to emphasize the steadfastness of purpose, and the ability and integrity of a succession of managements, which have been able to bring these companies to their fiftieth year respected, honoured and useful component parts of the great financial and social fabric of this country.

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Mr. E. G. Richards, United States manager of the North British and Mercantile, has returned to the city after a somewhat extended trip in Europe.