

Curiosities of Insurance Legislation.

There is considerable unrest at present among the law makers and insurance commissioners and their eccentric activities are being felt by both fire and life insurance organizations. Indeed from a survey of some of the enactments proposed and even adopted, it would appear to be the legislator's object to protect the policyholder from all sorts of horrible things except fire and loss of life.

One of the most common forms of school-boy ignorance displayed in insurance legislation, is the attempt to make all things right by arbitrary fixing of premium rates. To anyone who has read, even superficially, the history of legislation to restrict the rate of interest, the rate of personal expenditure or any other rate (except taxes), these bald and puerile efforts seem pitiable. Curiously enough the law-monger who generally makes it his business to fix a minimum rate for life insurance goes off unexpectedly with the other barrel and riddles the maximum for fire insurance. It is to the legislature of New Hampshire that we are indebted for the following gem :

"Section 11. Any person or persons who feel aggrieved by any rates charged by any fire insurance company doing business in the State, may complain to the Insurance Commissioner, who shall hear the parties, and if it appear to him that the rates charged are excessive, he shall fix a reasonable rate, and the rate so fixed shall be binding upon all such companies doing business in the State. If any such insurance company refuses to insure property at the rates fixed by the Insurance Commissioner it shall be fined \$200 for each offence."

The *Spectator* calls this "a most ridiculous law" and says :

"This is the kind of legislation that tends to complicate honest business methods and to load down the statute book with unenforceable laws."

We shall not waste our own indignation on such undeserving objects as Fire Companies. We pause, however, to shed a tear over the tribulations of Life Companies. From the same issue of the *Spectator* we clip the following :

"Our correspondent at Omaha calls attention to a very objectionable bill pending in the legislature of Nebraska, which promises to pass and become a law. Among other things it provides for annual examinations of life insurance companies, and requires them to file with their annual reports lists of their policyholders in the State, giving names, addresses, amounts and forms of policies issued. This is going into the private affairs of a company to an extent that no other State has by law attempted to

do. The Governor, it is reported, has expressed his willingness to sign the bill when passed, but what can be gained by having this information on file is not made apparent. Publicity given to such lists would be as offensive to policyholders as to the companies, and a betrayal of confidence regarding private matters that insurance companies have held sacred heretofore."

And again on the same page we find :

"A cattle-dealing legislator introduced a bill requiring life companies to insure live stock on substantially the same plans as they do human beings. A Texas steer rampaging over the prairies with a twenty-payment endowment policy strapped to his horns would be an entertaining sight. The name and location of the steer would, of course, have to be included in the list of policyholders furnished to the insurance department, which might assist the owners of lost or strayed cattle in recovering their wandering property. This bill, however, is not likely to become a law."

Now it does not appear as yet whether this bovine legislator purposes to bring fraternal organizations within his live-stock provisions. But if he does, we shall be forced, with all deference to his wisdom, to object. At present there is harmony in our midst and in such an enactment we could see only an insidious attempt to introduce "kick-err" into our ranks. It is time some of these trailing-footed legislators were dehorned.

But frail as are the law-makers, it sometimes happens that a more imminent danger proceeds from the Insurance Commissioners. The activities of the legislator are intermittent, and even during the sessions of his House are apt to be controlled or counteracted by other men's views and wishes. But the Insurance Commissioner, like the poor, we always have with us. His powers are extraordinary and autocratic. If he is a wise deliberate and conscientious public servant, he is in a position to do immense service to the people that employs him. If he is the opposite—well, there are ancient fables of silly people that handled the thunderbolts of Jove.

Some of our contemporaries pretend to see a cure or prevention for misunderstandings with legislators or commissioners, in the changing of our phraseology and the putting of one word for another ; as by saying "protection" when we mean insurance. This is, to our way of thinking, too slow and altogether too homeopathic a treatment. When a public man or a public servant deliberately harasses an organization, whether it be an old-line company or a fraternal society, it is not a word that needs to be changed, but a man.

An office-holder or a legislator or a governor that