

THE GRESHAM LIFE ASSURANCE SOCIETY.

The 48th Annual Report of the Gresham Life Assurance Society, though, as the Chairman said at the meeting, "not a startling or sensational record," is one eminently gratifying to all its connections, as it evidences steady progressive volume of business and financial strength. The new sums assured in 1896 were \$16,115,000, carrying new premiums amounting to \$688,800. The total income of the Gresham is now \$5,734,000. The death claims of the past year were \$2,089,000, which left a very handsome margin over the income, the result of which is shown by the assets having been increased in 1896 by \$2,049,900; the total assets being now \$31,560,000. The rate of interest on the mean assets, productive and non-productive, was 3.81 per cent., a slight reduction on the 1895 rate, which the Report states to have been the general "experience of insurance companies and financial corporations." An excellent feature in the Report is the statement that, the ratio of expenditure upon the renewal income of the Company has been brought down to 10.9 per cent., the ratio a few years ago having been 14.5. This means a yearly saving of \$150,000, which is about equal to the income from \$400,000 of assets. This economy has been effected, "without in any way curtailing the extent or impairing the efficiency of the Society's widespread organization." Another pleasant feature is the large increase of the consideration money paid for annuities, last year the amount being \$1,220,000. The growing business; the expanding assets; the increasing evidence of public confidence; combined with marked reduction in current expenses, all prove with what energy and talent the affairs of the Gresham Life Assurance Society are being administered by Mr. James H. Scott, the General Manager and Secretary.

THE SOCIAL LESSON OF THE PARIS FIRE.

A more horrible catastrophe than the recent fire at Paris cannot be conceived. That city of splendor and gaiety has had terrible experiences, but none so awful as the last. The street scenes in Paris, of February, 1848, July, 1850, December, 1852, were shocking enough, when, as we can testify, human blood was seen in the gutters, and men shot in revolutionary conflicts were carried dead or wounded into stores and private dwellings. Another tragedy arose from the burning of a theatre, when the loss of life was large, mainly, however, from suffocation and crushing. The dynamite explosion in a café caused a frightful scene. But the recent fire owes its supreme horror to the roasting of scores of women, whose clothing furnished fuel for their torture by flames. The scene of the fire was a fashionable bazaar, such as can only be seen in Paris, where the decorative, artistic genius of the French creates a scene of indescribable beauty. The bazaar was held on behalf of a blind asylum, the

stalls were served by the leaders of the Royalist section of Parisian society, the company present being largely made up of the same class. We at once ask: Why were not special precautions taken against fire? The answer has deep significance. Paris, like some other cities, is composed of two communities, the "old" set and the "new," who do not mingle, who are mutually jealous and antagonistic. The Prefect of Police explains that he, and his staff, deliberately abstained from interfering with the bazaar arrangements in order to keep one social set from resenting interference as being inspired by the other set, and the other social set, composed of those not directly interested in the bazaar, from blaming the Prefect for showing favors to the Royalist aristocracy by whom the bazaar was organized. Had the authorities supervised and been in charge of the bazaar, in order to ensure the safety of the building, the contents, and the visitors, there would have been no dangerous lamps allowed, nor any equipment nor surroundings liable to create a fire or other disaster. But the Bazaar Committee was left free from that police watchfulness, which is often so irritating, yet so protective in Paris, and the result was, the agonizing death of over one hundred victims of fire. Looking more deeply, we must regard the sufferers as victims of the social and political animosities which divide society in Paris, probably by a more sharply defined line of cleavage than in any other great city. The feeling of intense sorrow for the noble women and their friends, who met so horrible a death when busy in a work of charity, should serve to bring society in Paris into unity. It should also be a general warning against inciting, or cherishing, such sentiments as weaken the social bond in any community.

In all cities and towns where gas or electric lights are available, the use of coal oil lamps should be forbidden for any purpose in public buildings, more especially in places where audiences assemble. As in our larger cities there are temporary exhibitions continually going on of the bazaar order, where the fittings are flimsy and makeshift, where the risk of fire is great, and a repetition of the Paris tragedy possible, there ought to be an inspection of such places before opening, by a competent official, and every needful precaution enforced to ensure safety. It is a stale cry, but none the less needful, to call for more adequate means of egress being provided for audience rooms. Civic Councils pass by-laws to regulate this, but architects care nothing for them, nor do those who attend halls where the exit arrangements are dangerous, until their own indifference leads to a fatality. The Paris tragedy will, we trust, arouse municipal action everywhere, for our village halls need reform as well as city ones. The warning is surely stern enough, without waiting for a score or two of local citizens to be roasted, or crushed to death, before protective measures being enforced to ensure the safety of public audiences.