

to a "happier country," but why, oh General Managers and General Agents, do ye not try and keep the best and the brightest? Is there not too much economy of brain as well as of pocket in this Dominion—false economy, parsimony we should rather say—and could ye not foster intelligence, lessen your own hard labors, and improve your own well-known ability, by actively and cordially supporting a Dominion of Canada Fire-Underwriters Association or Institute.

THE ENGLISH "SPECTATOR," ON LIFE INSURANCE.

There is an old saying that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing," but it is generally conceded that total ignorance is infinitely worse—more especially when that ignorance proceeds from a source whence wisdom is expected, and ordinarily not in vain. We have been grieved to notice upon several occasions both weekly and daily non-insurance journals, sound and sensible in their views upon social or political questions—which is their province—suddenly dash off at a tangent in a discourse on the merits of Fire or Life Insurance, where they speedily flounder, hopelessly beyond their depth, and exhibit such lamentable and utter want of knowledge of the subject they so rashly take in hand as to become objects of pity or ridicule to any underwriter. This, however, is not the worst, for these very journals may be so talented in handling their own topics that the outside public, who, like themselves, have not been brought up to the profession of underwriting, accept their arguments and annunciations—no matter how wild and erroneous—as worth listening to, if not absolute gospel, for the said arguments and annunciations are propounded with a kind of complacent infallibility, as though the writers exclaimed authoritatively: "I am Sir Oracle, and when I ope my lips let no dog bark!"

We are irresistibly compelled to make these remarks on reading an article from the English *Spectator* upon "The Progress of Life Insurance," which has been copied and commented on by some of our daily papers. *The Spectator* is an able paper, when it confines itself to the subjects for which its readers subscribe to it; and, though some may differ with its views upon religion or politics, most will admit that its arguments show undoubted talent, and that its articles are well worth perusal. It is therefore the more to be regretted that it should have been persuaded to insert in its pages a paper which is so false in its theories and conclusions as to be almost beneath criticism, and it is only on account of the high standing and wide publication of the journal that we deem it worth our while to notice the article at all.

The Spectator starts with asserting that the business of Life Insurance "does not develop as it should do," and that the "public still display a reluctance to insure," and goes on to say that it is convinced that the "main cause (for the above) is a desire on the part of the public for less trouble, more security and better terms." Now we are inclined to dispute both these propositions, and think, in the first place, if we look at the number of Life offices and the number of insured a hundred years ago and what those numbers are to-day, we are justified in stating that the progress of Life Insurance has been quite wonderful, and that progress attedly has been in the direction where it was most needed.

namely, among the poorer and the laboring classes. Life Insurance goes hand in-hand with education and thrift. it is the outcome of a man's desire to leave those behind him independent of the charity of friends or the poor-house; and we appeal to the "Prudential" of England, or companies on this side of the Atlantic, whether we are not correct, and, if so, to come to the second proposition, we do not think "trouble" would stand in the way, while, as for security we do not know how *The Spectator* can gravely set forth "that the Life Companies, as a rule, give no proof of solvency whatever." With just as much truth might it be said that banks "publish accounts which tell the public absolutely nothing at all." One set of accounts to the ordinary mind is just as intelligible as the other, and yet would *The Spectator* wish to insinuate that there is no security felt in banking! A few Life Companies may be unsound and finally collapse, like banks have done and will continue to do, but to use this as a wholesale argument against either Life Insurance or Banking is simply childish. Not many who bank understand the system of banking, and it would be just as reasonable to expect to have that system explained to every one who was contemplating making a deposit as that the actuary of a Life Company should undertake to prove the soundness of the 3 or 4 per cent. standard to every intending insurer.

The Spectator does not appear to grasp the idea that Life Insurance, like Fire, is a contract, or at any rate seems to imagine that it is a contract that can be easily altered, and that the calculations upon which it is based are very trivial and could be reconstructed without any difficulty. In fact, judging from *The Spectator's* arguments we can only conclude that the Insurer should be able to play the game of "heads I win, tails you lose"—though we confess this would not inspire us with confidence in the "security" of the Companies. "Are not the companies wrong," *The Spectator* seriously asks, "in demanding such a quantity of information as to insurer's health?" To this we reply emphatically, "No," and that if they did not do so they would not be worthy of the trust reposed in them or, in other words, they would understand their business as little as the *The Spectator* obviously does. *The Spectator* relates what it deems an amusing experience of the value of medical testimony regarding an invalid life, from which it would traduce that medical testimony is very worthless, or, at the best, liable to grievous mistakes. Can anything from an underwriter's point of view be more ridiculous. Of course, no one pretends the medical examiners are infallible in every instance, but Life, like Fire, Insurance, is based upon the law of average, and to upset that law because one or two invalids live to old age, while a healthy, robust man is cut short in his prime, is about as logical as to say that because a first-class brick dwelling-house burns a week after being insured against fire, while a saw mill lasts for years, therefore we should write the latter as cheaply as the former.

We have done: *The Spectator's* article is so replete with absurdities that we have scarcely had the patience to criticise it calmly, and as there is an old saying, "let the shoemaker stick to his last," so we would advise *The Spectator*, for its own reputation, in future to keep to religion, politics or literature, and leave Life Insurance alone.