HOW THEY TRANSACT FIRE INSURANCE IN GERMANY.

However capable the present-day German mind when a quick reversion to savagery is required, its aptitude for the business of fire insurance does not appear particularly striking. A good deal of the business is transacted by public monopoly institutions, that of the city of Berlin being one of the largest. This institution has an absolute monopoly of the insurance of all immovable property in Greater Berlin, its outstanding insurances being considerably over $1,250,000,000. Its infantile methods are described by a Vienna journal, translated by the Market World and Chronicle of New York as follows :

"Monopolisation leads to ossification and to the rejection of every kind of progress. The Berlin Fire Association affords a primary school exemplification of this truth. Called into being two hundred years ago, the Association even to-day knows no better method of procedure than to assess one and the same rate for all the insurances it carries, without the slightest regard to the character of the risk. Whether it be a dwelling or a factory that is insured, whether the building have all the provisions for fire prevention or be primitive in all respects, the Association makes no difference at all in its premium rate, which at the present time is 6¼ pfennigs per 100 marks of insurance (equivalent to a rate of 13.875 cents. per $100)

"Fire insurance is to-day a branch of business in which the judgment of risks is scientifically conducted, and the private fire insurance companies maintain statistical bureaus for the purpose of investigating the fire hazard of every industrial structure. The Berlin Association has no need of all this; it plants itself firmly on the fire insurance science of the year 1718. All applicants for fire insurance in Berlin must come to the Association in any case; and, furthermore, modern innovations are just a botheration for the mind.

"The real property owners of Berlin have now come to the conclusion that the time is ripe to join battle with this anachronism. They have begun by addressing petitions to the Mayor of Berlin and to the city fathers, in which they demand the introduction of the classification of risks on the part of the Berlin Association."

WHAT CONSTITUTES PROOF OF DEATH.

A humourous interpretation of what does and does not constitute proof of death comes from the Shoreditch County Court in the east end of London. A claim was made against an English life company by the son of a lady who had died in Russia. Proof of death could not be obtained owing to the war. Eventually the signature of "two Christian ladies" was obtained, who said they knew "a lady had died." "That is not sufficient legal evidence of death," said Judge Cluer. Mr. Roch (for the plaintiff) : This is the sworn document of two Christian ladies. Judge Cluer : Yes, but Russia is a civilised country, and proper evidence must be obtained. If this had been Patagonia, say, and two Christian ladies had sworn that they had seen this lady killed and eaten that would have been reasonable proof of death. There must be a nonsuit with costs.

AIRCRAFT INSURANCE.

The new British Government scheme providing aircraft and bombardment insurance follows the recommendations of the committee, the members of which included Mr. E. Roger Owen (Commercial Union Assurance Company) and Sir Gerald Ryan (Phœnix Assurance Company), appointed to deal with the matter. The Committee found that the best practical method of coping with the problem was to invoke the assistance of the fire insurance companies. A number of these have agreed to act as agents for the Government in issuing policies, and the collection of premiums and in the initial proceedings in connection with loss assessments. A special State Insurance Office is also established to supplement the work of the fire offices.

The principle of the arrangement is that persons insured against fire in an approved company can take out through the same company a policy against aircraft and bombardment. A remuneration of 10 per cent. on the gross premiums would be paid to the companies to cover all expenses connected with the issue of the policies, the collection of premiums, and the expenses of the initial proceedings in connection with the adjustment of claims, with the exception of the assessor's fees, which would be paid by the State Insurance Office within thirty days of the adjustment of the claim. Any company which elects to act as agents for the Government may not accept risks on its own account.

THE STATE INSURANCE OFFICE.

The State Office will insure property which is insured against fire elsewhere than with the approved companies acting as agents for the Government, and it will also insure property which is not insured against fire at all, and also the property of the persons who elect to deal direct with the State Insurance Office. Brokers can go direct to the State Office, receiving a commission of 5 per cent.

The Office will be under the administration of a committee of experts, including representatives of Lloyd's, the fire insurance offices, and the Government. In addition to issuing policies of insurance, the State Office will receive the monthly accounts from the approved insurance companies, and will finally settle and pay all claims. The State Office will not accept re-insurance.

Flat rates of premium for the whole of England have been put in force. They range from 2s. aircraft only, and 3s. against aircraft and bombardment in the case of dwelling-houses, to 7s. 6d. and 10s. respectively in the case of merchandise at docks and in course of transit, etc., timber in the open and mineral oil tanks. The scheme does not make private insurance impossible, and it is still possible for Lloyd's underwriters to write this business at competitive rates.