The days when a farmer could leave his farm, the sailor his vessel, the carpenter his bench, and "go into business," as a storekeeper, with a good prospect of success, are past and gone. Unhappily, the days when he could get credit to enable him to take the step are still with us—such is the easy-going folly of our wholesale dealers and large manufacturers. If a man, artisan or farmer, who has saved up money chooses to buy goods with it and start as a trader, selling at sensible prices, the risk is nobody's but his own. For an importer to sell a man goods *on credit*, however, to go into competition with a dozen or a hundred other customers of that importer, and sell at slaughter prices through ignorance or need, is to lessen the chances for the dozen or the hundred, and to impair the value of every promissory note given by his customers.

THE MUTUAL RESERVE FUND LIFE.

At the recent annual meeting of this well-known assessment society, held in New York a couple of weeks ago, it was reported that the new business obtained by the society during the past year amounted to $56,234,785, bringing the total amount in force up to $301,567,101. This shows a serious reduction compared with previous years, when the amount of business written, and the amount in force at the end of the year were as follows:—

December 31st.	New Written.	Total in Force.
In 1894	$66,408,225	$293,366,166
In 1895	59,738,790	308,659,371
In 1896	73,026,330	325,026,061
In 1897	56,234,785	301,567,101
This year's loss	$16,791,545	$23,458,960

To put on $56,234,785 of new business and yet have what was previously on drop down by so large a sum as $23,458,960, shows a fearful condition of lapse. Here is how the account stands:

Insurance in force December 31st, 1896	$325,026,061
New insurance added in 1897	56,234,785
Total insurance to be accounted for	381,260,846
" " in force, 1898	301,567,101
" disappeared somewhere	79,693,745
The death losses in 1897 were	4,162,603
Balance disappeared somewhere	$75,531,142

If this is the result of one year's operations, how long will it take to use up the whole $301,567,101 of business now claimed to be in existence on the books of this old-time braggadocio concern? If $4,162,603 was paid for death losses in one short year (in 1887, we notice that $1,378,681 paid the losses) how long will the $5,402,688 of total assets, now claimed, stand the drain, if that fund has to be called upon for deficiencies in the collections?

We learn from the 14th annual statement, which was issued in January, 1895, that the society was then certified by four State commissioners to have on hand surplus assets and gross assets much in excess of what it is now reported to possess, as follows:—

Year ending.	Assets.	Liabilities.	Surplus.
December 31, 1894	$5,568,611	$1,850,809	$3,717,802
" " 1897	5,462,688	2,330,237	3,072,451
Change in 3 years	—$165,923	+$479,428	—$645,351

This means that with an increase of total insurance to be paid, from $293,366,166 in 1894 to $301,567,101 in 1897, there has come a decrease in surplus cash assets of nearly three quarters of a million dollars.

With such a condition of things in the society as a whole, it might be expected that the officers would feel exceedingly reluctant to announce another jump in the assessments. We suppose every effort has been made to conceal the fact that a tremendous addition is now again being made to the bi-monthly calls upon the old members. These members have borne the burden and the heat of many previous assessments, and some double assessments, without having their faith and patience strained to the snapping point. But a further test is now forthcoming.

"What's the matter with the Mutual Life of New York?" said one old-time assessment payer. "Nothing," we answered. "Well," said he, "what do they want to double my assessment for now?" We answered that the Mutual Life of New York was all right, but he must be in some counterfeit concern, for no life insurance company worthy of the name ever doubled its rates. So he confessed to using the wrong name, and wanted to know why the Mutual Reserve Fund did not carry out its contract with the P.P.I. of St. Thomas (meaning the Provincial Provident Institution which the Mutual Reserve absorbed), and continue the members at the old figures. We answered him that they could not carry out such a contract, if it was ever made. They had to pay the death losses, and old men like him must expect to pay, not merely double, but treble and quadruple what the P.P.I. had been charging, or lose every cent paid in. He said he was paying about $32 for a certificate of $2,000, and we showed him that the natural premium at his age was $53, and next year would be $58; and five years hence, $80; and ten years hence, $125; and in fifteen years $188 a year. He went away feeling comforted with the idea that he would not live long enough to be assessed so high as that, and also expressing a hope that "she will hold out a little longer, and not go to smash so suddenly as the Massachusetts Mutual Benefit did."

Another elderly gentleman complains that he has now had a second rise in his assessment in the short space of two years. For some years after joining, his certificate cost him $235 per annum, then it rose to $348, and now he is mulcted in $611.20 for the year 1898. He naturally wants to know where the end of this thing is to be. We may suppose there are a good many friends of our late Mayor Kennedy, who boomed "this thing" when he was in office some years ago, who would be glad to get some enlightenment on that subject.

Still another party joined in 1887 for $5,000 at age 56, and paid, as per advertisement in that good religious paper the *Christian Guardian*, only $105 a year, apart from $15 for expenses. Two years ago he had this $105 raised on him to $158.40, and he is now blessed with calls for $360.90. Is he not a happy man? It takes all the Christian virtue he can command, to prevent boiling over with gratitude toward the gentlemen who are responsible for the fix he now finds himself in at 67 years of age. He holds one of the promised "bonds" that were advertised five years ago with such a costly flourish, good for not two hundred dollars if he pays fifteen years. But what is it worth in the face of the fact that instead of another being sent him now, at the close of his second five years, as promised, actuary Eldridge writes him Feb. 1st, 1898, that there is "no margin of accumulation in the later years, but a gradual absorption of the accumulations." And worse than all, the table of rates on the back of his calls shows that his payments the next five years will run this way:—Age 68, $405; age 69, $440.70; age 70, $480; at age 71, $522.60; at age 72, $570.10. And if he is unfortunate enough to live to 75, it will be $722.70; and at 80 the call is $1,098.55. He has already paid $2,084, and by that time $6,416 more of his hard earnings will have disappeared in the sink-hole, making a total of $8,450 and interest thereon, for $5,000 of insurance. And no certainty of that being the end of it.