

ings in this country, from continual contact with the warmth from never extinguished fire in the grates. Does not this fact justify the conclusion that carefully executed and prudently designed chimney brick work reduced the fire risk to a minimum?

In both those towns were a large number of small manufactories, which are regarded as especially risky, such as those for making chairs and japan ware, foundries, forges, and small shops for making metal goods, many of them forming part of buildings, portions of which were occupied as dwellings, or adjacent thereto.

There were also a considerable number of old structures into which wood entered largely for both external walls and internal partitions. Surely something beyond anything that climatic conditions affect must be considered as operative in protecting such properties from fire? We submit that the "something" was more efficient precautionary measures in building, that *efficiency* arising from better workmanship, less scamping, less sacrificing of safety to mere cheapness, and, generally, the following of old-fashioned methods which experience had taught builders to follow to avoid fire risks.

We may find evidence in this city corroborative of this view in the large number of dilapidated buildings which remain untouched by fire after half a century, or more, of occupation, when new buildings of great cost, handsome warehouses and stores, and the like, are so continually being burnt in Montreal. Look at many of the buildings in the far east of the city, and scores of old rickety tenements between Bleury and St. Denis streets, which seem as if a chance match would ignite. Their inmates cannot be cautious people, yet these places live on, when magnificent stone buildings, quite modern in style and equipments, seem to catch fire as readily as a tinder box. There are clearly some conditions which make the newer structures more productive of fire losses than the older ones, outside of those of climate or of internal fixings peculiar to the colder areas of this continent. Last year an English builder, who is a large property owner, visited this city, en route to Chicago. He was especially interested in our heating arrangements, hoping to get some valuable "pointers" from the great experience of those in his business in this city. He inspected a large number of buildings in course of erection or complete. When asked if he had acquired any information of service, he answered: "Well, to tell the truth, I have learnt how to save money in putting up buildings and how to lose a great deal more by having them burnt from bad work." He afterwards said: "If I owned property in Montreal, unless I built it myself, I should like it insured for what it cost; but at home, I never go beyond one-quarter its value, and I wouldn't go as high as that if my neighbors were as careful as myself." After a thorough inspection of a number of buildings, from the cheapest class of cottages and tenements to our large warehouses and stores, this experienced judge declared he saw no particular feature of exceptional danger in our heating arrangements,

except from gross carelessness, and none in the climatic conditions of the country worth mentioning, if builders and tenants exercised common sense and showed a decent respect for property.

We do not dogmatize in this matter. We have merely stated what is verifiable by observation and given facts which are beyond controversy.

The inference seems justified by the facts, that, in recent years, there has been a serious lowering of the standard of safety in structural designs and workmanship, and that it is largely owing to this carelessness, or recklessness, combined with the same faults in tenants, and not so much to climatic conditions, that the fire losses ratio of this continent is so large compared with that of the Old Country. Thus, by assuming our fire losses to be so much the result of climatic conditions which we cannot control, we have attention drawn away from those causes which are responsible and which are controllable.

IS LIFE INSURANCE REFORM COMING?

The life insurance record of 1893 has become history, and so far as we may judge of the details of that record at this moment does not differ materially in several important features from that of 1892, so far at least as the business on this continent is concerned. It is a significant fact that, notwithstanding the great financial depression prevailing, especially in the United States during more than half the year, a good many of the companies have secured a volume of new business equal to that of the previous year, some have exceeded it, and those falling behind still have a record which is not at all discouraging. This fact shows to what extent the life insurance idea has taken hold of the people, and that in an era of "hard times" men have come to appreciate the value of life insurance protection sufficiently to make sacrifices to obtain it. While many manufacturing and commercial interests have been paralyzed, and more than thirty thousand miles of railway placed in the hands of receivers, legitimate life insurance is as strong as ever and presents an unbroken front, without the wavering of a single company. The present financial disturbance only serves to bring out more clearly the fact that life insurance does not build for a single year but for all time.

All of this leads us to say that the more is the pity that an institution so grand and strong in its beneficence should be burdened by methods of administration which embody elements of weakness. The readers of the INSURANCE AND FINANCE CHRONICLE will have scanned its pages to little purpose if they have failed to see a frequent pointing out of these elements of weakness from time to time. Of the associated evils of rebate and abnormal expense, of reckless estimates and the use of defamatory literature, we have spoken in no uncertain way. As we stand on the threshold of a new year, looking backward and striving to look forward, the pertinent and important question which naturally presents itself to all thoughtful minds is: What are the prospects for reform in