

THE ASSURANCE OFFICE.

“I'll make assurance doubly sure,
And take a bond of fate.”—SHAKESPEARE.

To persons ignorant of commercial and financial mysteries, the notion of insuring life seems a strange one. How a house or a ship may be insured is easily comprehended; for the first may probably never be burnt, nor the second wrecked. But man must, at some time or other, die; and yet, against death, not only the young and vigorous, but the aged and valetudinary, find no difficulty in obtaining, on various conditions, what is technically called a policy of insurance. Is it not rather a sentence of execution, the term of which is not precisely defined?

Slanderers of human nature deny that there is such a thing as friendship. Even the less misanthropic consider themselves remarkably fortunate

if they possess one true friend. Shall I inform you how you may make yourself certain of having at least eight staunch hearty friends, who will feel the greatest interest in you during the whole course of your existence? Go, and insure your life, for a good round sum, at the office of one of the assurance companies. From the very moment of your doing so, the directors of that company will become your warm and sincere friends; friends, whom no neglect of yours, except neglecting to pay your annual premium, can alienate. The "how d'ye do?" of other people is merely the conventional phrase by which conversation is commenced, but with the gentlemen to whom I allude it is a *bonâ-fide* inquiry. To them your health is an object of constant solicitude. They watch with anxious sympathy the expression of your countenance; exult when your eye sparkles with vivacity, and are depressed when your cheek is invaded by "the pale cast" of sickness. And when at length the awful moment shall arrive,—

"For come it will, the day decreed by fate,"—

that is to terminate your earthly career, their

grief at your loss will be unmingled with the slightest hypocrisy. Why? The event which puts your nearest connexions in possession of twenty thousand pounds, takes exactly the same sum out of the pockets of these gentlemen. Yes, my dear madam; notwithstanding what you hasten to tell me about "the emotions of conjugal affection," and "the tears of filial sensibility," I maintain that the most inconsolable mourners over a man's grave are the directors of the company by whom his life has been insured.

There is no rule, however, without an exception. Among the conditions on which a policy of life assurance is granted, is generally one, which it is difficult to describe in terms of sufficient delicacy. The benefits of the policy are withheld from that particular casualty to which a want of due regard for the lives and property of others may unhappily subject any man. In plain English, the insurance company declare that if the person insured should be hanged, they will be hanged if they pay a farthing to his heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns. He and the

policy drop together. It is clear therefore that this unamiable reservation is likely to produce a little deviation from the otherwise uniformly warm tone of friendship to which I have been adverting. In fact, it must create an anomaly of feeling rather curious. "My dear sir, I have the highest regard for you, and put up daily prayers for your health and prosperity; I am delighted at the rudeness of your complexion, and the firmness of your step;—but it would give me infinite pleasure to hear of your making an exhibition, about eight o'clock one of these fine mornings, before the Debtors' Door, Newgate."—Such is not exactly the address one would wish from one's friends.

It has puzzled me for the last half-hour, and if you, my gentle reader, are not clearer-headed than I am, it will puzzle you for the next, to determine whether this awkward proviso be or be not advantageous to the interests of morality. They say, "and I believe the tale," that the love of money is a great temptation to crime. But here the love of money is a great temptation to

abstinence from crime. We may be tolerably certain that a person of any *nous*, who has insured his life at a life-insurance office, will take care not to be easily betrayed into the commission of burglary or murder; were it only that he would be ashamed of showing himself so deficient in worldly knowledge.—On the other hand, is that altogether fair towards the insurance company? Ought a humane and honourable man to check his evil propensities, because their indulgence would be beneficial to a certain portion of his fellow-creatures? Is it honest on his part to do all he can by his good conduct to disappoint calculations and expectations founded on a just view of the depravity of human nature? These are questions which I strongly recommend for discussion at the Westminster debating-club.

After all, and notwithstanding my nice scruples, I believe it must be conceded that the institution of these societies has been productive of great good. By a return which was laid on the table of the House of Commons during the last session of Parliament, it appears that the number of stamps

issued for policies of life assurance, has more than doubled during the last ten years. After making every proper allowance for the increase of population, this fact is a strong proof of the growth of kind and moral habits. That man cannot be a very worthless member of the community, whose natural affection induces him to deny himself all, or many of the luxuries of life, and in some cases even to abridge what the self-indulgent consider its absolute necessities, in order that, when he is cold in the grave, his wife, or his children, may be placed in circumstances of ease and independence. "Go, and do thou likewise."

W. H. W.

as more than
After making
of popula-
growth of
not be a
y, whose
elf all,
e cases
onsider
he is
may
de-