

which has prevailed this winter, and when to this is added the actual stoppage of traffic by some storms, it is not to be wondered at that earnings show decreases. The freight thus delayed, and that to be shipped must come through some time, and we shall be very much mistaken if the advent of warmer weather does not bring an increase in earnings, which will largely offset the losses of the winter months. Technically, the facts and conditions warrant an improvement in the stock market, but just at present their influence is not felt, and it is impossible to say when it will be. That this is so is shown by the fact that many of the railroad companies have already ordered considerable amounts of rails and are also giving orders for new equipment, and to push some of the work that they contemplated doing last year. This they would not do if they thought the conditions of the country did not warrant it.

While the speculation in cotton is by no means over, that in wheat and corn has claimed a considerable share of attention, what particularly has shown great activity, and yesterday May wheat sold at 108½ per bushel in Chicago. Dollar wheat in Chicago means a very handsome profit to the producer, and as a strong foreign demand has sprung up, it means an influx of new wealth to the whole country.

The sudden decline in business in the second half of last year is clearly shown in the report of the Pressed Steel Car, for the year. While the increase in the first half year was 23 per cent., the reaction was violent and left the Company with \$7,000,000 less in gross earnings than in 1902. The Statement of the Delaware Lackawanna and Western, however, makes a very handsome showing, and shows that the road had the best year in its history and earned 23 per cent. upon its stock.

The market has been heavy all day upon reports of further failures in Paris and Berlin, and closes at about the lowest prices of the session.

T. C. DELAVAN.

20 Broad Street, New York City.

LONDON LETTER.

London, 11th Feb., 1904.

FINANCE.

Once more we have "war" markets. Despite the vociferous optimism of Germany and the Continent generally, peace has been broken, whether the duration of hostilities be long or short does not affect the fact that directly the attack on the Port Arthur vessels of war was announced, prices everywhere, through the department from consols down to the rubbishiest mining share sagged away. Consols made a fresh record for lowness at 86¼. Japanese bonds executed a tumble which must have brought fresh delight to the small army of bears. The Five per Cent. Scrip, which was up to 101¼ at one time last year, dropped sharply, touching 77 for a short while. There has, of course, been recovery later. The City, whilst persevering that the war must do incalculable injury to both combatants, is pro-Japanese and promises to live up to dealings upon every Japanese success.

Passing from matters of national importance to others, which do not take so large a canvas, it is interesting to note a case tried in the courts last week, in which "outside brokers" and a client were concerned. The client was induced by the perusal of a book published by Charles Bennet & Co., the advertising outside brokers in question—a book entitled, "Guide to Success"—to dabble in various stocks and shares on the cover system. He eventually stood a loser by \$750. Then, he backed Atchison for the rise, and to his delight they rose; but when he endeavoured to draw these winnings—his very first—Bennet & Co. laughed at him. When he sued them they pleaded the Gaming Act as a good reason for not paying him. The Judge upheld them, and it is agreed that no fairer man sits on the bench than His Honour Judge Rentoul. It is strictly legal, no doubt, but as se-

veral "bucket-shop keepers" had not succeeded when they had advanced that plea recently, some of us were beginning to hope that this unsatisfactory plea was dead and buried.

The electrical industry in the United Kingdom goes ahead rapidly. The best and latest list gives a total of 785 undertakings, with a total capitalization of \$887,500,000. The principal groups, according to capital invested, are: traction, manufacturing, telegraph, light and power, and telephone. These figures do not include municipal investments in publicly-controlled electrical industries. Municipal capital invested in such traction, supply, or telephone schemes, amounts to close upon \$250,000,000.

Of the private electrical trading companies, 35 per cent. paid dividends in 1903; this ratio showing a slight decrease on the previous year. The average dividend on the total capital (ordinary and preferred) was 5.24 per cent. in 1903, against 4.85 per cent. in 1902.

British railways seem to be hopeless. We now have all the dividends for the past half-year, and not only were expectations of advanced distribution disappointed in nearly every case, but many companies reduced their figures. Prices have (with a few insignificant exceptions) touched lower levels. The severe cold snap in the Dominion has had an ultimate result in lower prices for Trunks and Canadas. The only section where things are not at their worst is the one given over to Colonial bonds. Australian issues are better at last on the end of the drought.

INSURANCE.

The Royal Insurance Company announces a reduction in its rates for new insurances at public wharves and warehouses, and for floating insurances in the Port of London.

Whilst the big British friendly societies are making fair progress in their various methods of selling some forms of insurance, I am pleased to note that their financial position is improving more rapidly than the number of members.

The Manchester Unity of Oddfellows has published a new table of mortality experience, which shows a heavier sickness at practically all the ages of life, but an improved mortality. That these two things should go together is not to be wondered at, the increase in the average length of life means that people who formerly were too weak to last long now are just strong enough to last longer, but being materially ailing raise the sickness figures at 65 and over; the average sickness is found to be 12 per cent. in excess of the expenses in the previous period 1890-1900. The Oddfellows' experience is corroborated from various quarters.

At the meeting of the Thames and Mersey Marine Insurance Company held here this week, Mr. Robert C. Antrobus presiding, there were loud complaints of the bad effects of the low rates of premiums. There has also been the heavy depreciation in the market value of investment to further diminish the revenue of the marine underwriters. In the case of the Thames and Mersey this depreciation amounts to \$220,000.

Generally speaking, marine insurance company officers here are not able to give a very glowing promise with regard to the running account of 1903. They will hardly do as well as in 1902, owing partly to the weather and partly to the old old bugbear of low premiums.

But as a set off against these troubles there is the superior interest yielded by investments at present prices, as that which is being lost in old investment is being got back on new.

RECENT LEGAL DECISIONS.

INSURANCE, UNITED STATES FEDERAL JURISDICTION. One, Cable, a citizen of Illinois, carried a life policy for \$50,000 in a New York company, and after his death his administratrix commenced an action upon it in her own state. The company suspecting that the policy had been issued through fraud on the part of an agent of the assured, instead