

CUSTOMS FRAUDS.

The outrageous and disgraceful proceedings of certain "special agents" of the custom house in Montreal lately have shown conclusively that some amendment to the law is necessary for the protection of the property and reputation of our citizens. It must be at once settled whether this Dominion is a free country, or is ruled by a few detectives who will stop at no depth of meanness or dirtiness, and who laugh at the law of the land, and are ready to draw a revolver and threaten to shoot any person who attempts to uphold the mandates of a Court of Justice which has prohibited their unlawful proceedings. It is high time these relics of despotism, called "special customs agents," were abolished. They are a disgrace to our civilization.

It is exceedingly curious that no member of Parliament on either side of the house has yet had the manliness to demand a statement of the fines paid in the Dominion for violations of the customs law during the last three or four years. We have seen it stated that since 1st January 1885 alone there have been 201 seizures made: 73 in Ontario, 63 in Nova Scotia, 36 in New Brunswick, 26 in Quebec, and 3 in Prince Edward Island. There should be no compounding of felonies. Full details should be given in every case, if only as a warning to the public, and the matter should be tried before our regular courts and not settled by the accusing detectives themselves who receive two thirds of whatever fine they themselves see fit to impose.

NORTH BRITISH AND MERCANTILE INSURANCE COMPANY.

The seventy-sixth annual report of this strong and prosperous company is in every respect a most satisfactory one. The North British and Mercantile is one of the three largest fire offices in the world which transact the most extensive business and have the greatest amount of accumulated funds.

In the Fire Department while the premiums increased by £34,442 during 1885, the losses were less by £87,129. The total fire premiums for 1885 being £1,148,510, and losses £615,228. The following tabular statement shows the premiums and losses for the last quinquennium:—

	Fire Premiums.	Fire Losses.
1881.....	£ 958,654. 1. 2	£623,605. 6. 6
1882.....	1,086,566. 14. 8	677,562. 14. 6
1883.....	1,107,745. 9. 9	672,825. 13. 10
1884.....	1,114,068. 13. 0	704,557. 0. 2
1885.....	1,148,510. 14. 4	615,228. 11. 5
	£5,415,545. 12. 11	£3,295,579. 6. 5

The premiums received during the previous five years were £4,535,118, and losses £2,605,384. The percentage of losses to premiums for the five years ending 1880 was 57.5 while for the period ending 1885 it was 60.8. The North British, as usual, sets aside one-third of the net premiums for the year to provide for liabilities on current policies. The fire reserves now amount to £1,250,000 (which is exclusive of the premium reserve of £582,836 on current policies for 1885). The total fire funds aggregate £2,311,458, including the paid-up capital.

In the Life Branch the quinquennial investigation has just been completed, and clearly demonstrates that the business

is of a most satisfactory and remunerative character. The test applied in the valuation, viz., the Hm. table of the Institute of Actuaries, with interest at 3½ per cent., is a severe one. The balance of the accumulated life insurance fund has increased during the year from £3,458,595 to £3,592,628; and the annuity fund from £536,066 to £586,444.

The total assets in all branches as per balance sheet, amount to the magnificent total of £7,026,339 518. Great credit is due to the management for the truly satisfactory results achieved.

The Canadian Branch well sustains the character of the office under Mr. T. Davidson, Managing Director, who is ably assisted by first-class officers and agents, among whom we may specially mention: Mr. William Ewing, the inspector; Mr. Geo. U. Ahern, Sub-inspector; and Mr. R. N. Gooch, manager at Toronto and Western District Inspector.

AUSTRALIAN INVESTMENTS.

An interesting question is: At what rate will British life assurance funds find their way to the Australasian colonies? One thing is certain—that no office, however large, can suddenly change the form of its investments to any material extent. All steps of this kind must necessarily be of a gradual character, and although we may be entering upon an era in which English and Australian rates of interest will tend to approximate, the process can scarcely be so rapid as to tend to any serious perturbations.

In the matter of investing funds in Australian securities, the action of the Scottish Widows' Fund has been anticipated by the Scottish Provident, which has up to the present lent considerably over a quarter of a million sterling in the colonies at minimum current rates of interest. It is also rumored that the Scottish Equitable has commissioned an influential firm doing business in Melbourne to invest largely on its account.—*Australian Insurance and Banking Record.*

FINANCIAL AND GENERAL ITEMS.

The New Oxley Ranch Co., Limited, of Canada, has asked for subscriptions on the London market to its capital of £120,000 in 10,000 shares of £12 each. The lists are open till 1st June.

Where Did The Money Go? At a meeting of the English bond and shareholders of the New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio R.R. it was stated by Lord Bury that two prominent English railroad men, Sir James Allport and Mr. Swarbrick had gone to America to investigate the position of the Company in 1882. They reported that since 1871 "the nominal capital had been increased from \$60,000,000 to \$124,500,000, or possibly \$132,500,000. Of this increase of \$64,500,000, or possibly \$72,500,000, they were only able to trace \$8,500,000, which could by any possibility have added to the value of the property." An effort will be made to have the charges investigated.

The Manitoba and North Western Railway is endeavoring to place £525,000 first mortgage bonds to bear 5 per cent till 1890 and 6 per cent thereafter till 1933. This is part of a total issue of £540,000. The issue price is 95 per cent. One hundred and thirty miles of the road (from Portage la Prairie northwestward) have been built, and fifty more are in course of construction. The mortgage is equal to a charge of \$15,000 per mile of railroad, or if the land grant be deducted, at a valuation of \$2.50 per acre, the charge will be about \$3,500 per mile.