

AUSTRALIAN BANK FAILURES.

The cable announces another Australian bank failure. This time it is the Bank of Victoria, with liabilities away up in the millions. These failures have naturally directed attention to that part of the world, and financial men are investigating the banking methods which have prevailed in Australia. It appears that banking business in that country is very different from what would be considered conservative banking in Canada, inasmuch as the banks there promote speculation in land, building, etc., by making loans on real estate. The natural consequence is that building has been overdone and the rental does not even pay a fair interest on the cost. British capital has been lavishly invested in that country, especially since the failure of the Barings and the losses incurred in the Argentine collapse two or three years ago. The necessities of the hour do not appear to have been taken into consideration and the colonists have, without reflection as to the consequences, expended large sums on railroads and other improvements, which, while they may not prove ultimately unproductive, are beyond present requirements. Large sums have been spent in costly buildings, which have depreciated in value beyond all expectation. Public confidence has been impaired in the banks which are known to have advanced money to promote wild real estate schemes. Deposits have been withdrawn, and the consequence is the wholesale suspension of banks. Manitoba, in the early days, afforded another lesson of the evil consequences of attempting to inflate values of property by speculation, and increasing facilities beyond the requirements of the people.

THE ORIGIN OF LIFE INSURANCE.

It is a curious fact that the "doctrine of probabilities," or the scientific basis upon which all insurance rests, had its origin in a game of cards. That is to say, the foundation upon which this great economy depends, and upon which it owes its claims to the confidence and patronage of the community, originated from investigations regarding games of chance. It happened in this way: About the year 1650 the Chevalier de Mere, a Flemish nobleman, who was both a respectable mathematician and an ardent gamester, attempted to solve the problem of dividing equitably the stakes when a game of chance was interrupted. The problem was too difficult for him, and he sought the aid of the famous Abbe Blaise Pascal, a Jesuit priest, author of "Night Thoughts," and one of the most accomplished mathematicians of any age. Pascal solved the problem, and in doing so enunciated the "doctrine of probabilities," or laws governing so-called chances. Upon this depends not only the laws governing insurance of all kinds, but also the laws governing the motions of planet in space, and, in fact, all astronomical science. This doctrine or theory Pascal illustrated by the throwing of dice. When a single die is thrown the chance of turning up an ace is precisely one out of six, or one out of the

total number of sides or faces. But if a large number of throws are made, it will be found that each face will be turned up an equal number of times. From this Pascal laid down the proposition that results which have happened in any given number of observed cases will again happen under similar circumstances, provided the numbers be sufficient for the proper working of the law of average. Thus the duration of the life of a single individual is one of the greatest uncertainties, but the duration, or rate of mortality, of a large number of individuals may be predicted with great accuracy by comparison with the observed results among a sufficiently large number of persons of similar ages, occupations and climatic influences.

COST OF WAR.

The meeting of the peace congress at Berne, Switzerland, has served to call out facts in relation to the cost of wars in men and money. A member of the French academy has presented some interesting statistics in relation to the number of men France has lost in war during the century. During the fifteen years ending in the fall of Napoleon, a million of men died in the field and as many more in the hospitals. Of the 309,268 French soldiers who took part in the Crimean war, 10,210 died in battle and 82,375 in hospitals. In the Franco-Prussian war, 1,000,000 men were called from their homes, of which number 491,905 never returned. Sweden still suffers from the wars of Charles XII., as France does from those of Napoleon. In some of the small republics of South America, a much larger proportion of the people have been killed in wars than in any country in Europe. In times of peace, as the present, it is well not to prepare for war, as the old adage advises and so many countries are doing, but to take measures to settle difficulties without resort to arms. Publishing statistics like those presented to the peace congress may have a wholesome effect in hastening the time when nations "shall learn war no more."

SAN FRANCISCO COAL TRADE.

J. W. Harrison, under date May 6, reports as follows of the San Francisco coal market: "During the week there have been the following arrivals from the Northern mines, 9,619 tons, from Newcastle, N. S. W., 3,070 tons. The quantity coming to hand this week is very light, which leads to our reserve being eaten into, still there is a large fleet of vessels loading at our Coast mines, hence there is no possibility of a famine. Our imports of foreign coals have been but nominal for the past month, which has largely increased the demand for our local output, and has caused a hardening of values. Our jobbers are now receiving remunerative profits on their sales of cargoes contracted for by them a few months ago, this to them is somewhat of a novelty, as there is no branch of trade in the city, involving the handling of so much money, where the profits are cut so fine as in the coal trade. There is no unity of interests, the seeming ruinous desire of each, is to divert trade from a competitor, if to succeed it

is necessary to handle the coal at absolute cost. Prestige, not profits, is what is sought, volume of business, regardless of profit and loss account being benefitted. Latest cable freight rates from Australia are thirteen shillings from Newcastle, more vessels offering than are wanted. Liverpool and Cardiff rates are stiffer than last week. Owners will not charter unless they are paid fair rates for transporting coal, so long as present outward grain freights remain unchanged, the coal and grain rates added together must gross a certain amount."

GUIDES FOR THE WORLD'S FAIR.

The World's Fair management is arranging to provide guides for visitors. As yet the plan for the assignment of guides has not been completed, and, in fact, it is not likely to be until actual service shows what is most needed by the visitors to the fair. One plan contemplates that those who desire the service of a guide shall purchase a ticket entitling them to such a service. The rate for this ticket has not been determined, but it is thought this system will be adopted to avoid the pernicious system of tipping. A visitor who has such a ticket when he arrives at the terminal station, or at any of the main entrances to the ground, will find a detachment of guides under command of a sergeant. The visitor presents his guide ticket to the sergeant, who details a man to accompany him to any building that he may wish to visit. When they enter the building the guide will turn the visitor over to the sergeant in charge of the detachment of guides in that building, who will assign a man to show him through the building. At the conclusion of the visit to this building the visitor will be taken to the next building that he wishes to visit, and turned over to another sergeant at the entrance, who will assign one of the men of his detachment to take him through the building, and so on the plan will work the same in all parts of the grounds. This plan is subject to modifications and improvements, but in a general way it is determined that the guides who wait upon visitors shall be specialists in the particular department where they are on duty. By this method much better service will be given than if one man were detailed to explain the immense variety of exhibits that are to be seen.

A NEW INDUSTRY.

There is being erected at Lily Lake, Nova Scotia, a drying house heated with wooden furnaces, for the purpose of drying the water out of fossil fluor spar, a large deposit of which is found at the lake. The spar is a white powder, chemically is nearly pure silica, and is supposed to have an animal origin—the remains of animalcula. The spar is a valuable substance in the arts. It is an absorbent of water and other substances and a non-conductor of heat. It is used in the manufacture of explosives, in surgery, in place of asbestos, in place of whiting in rubber shoes and many other purposes. Should the attempt prove successful, large quantities of the mineral will be gathered and shipped to the United States.—*Chignecto Post*.