

INSPECTION OF STEAMBOATS.

SOME terrible and ever-memorable accidents on our inland waters preceded the amended Inspection of Steamboats Act of last session, and other quite recent disasters have more than justified its passage. The loss of the *Asia* stands in every way foremost among these latter events, but others involving fatalities on a minor scale have unfortunately not been wanting. The mischief done, thorough official investigations have been made or are making into the cause of these so-called accidents. So far as they have gone they show that the excellent provisions of the late Act have somewhere been most criminally neglected. Whether the faults lie with the Government Inspectors, or with the captains or owners, or that the dereliction is parcelable between them, is not yet in all cases made clear. It is manifest, however, that vessels have been allowed to leave port with hulls totally unseaworthy, with defective boilers, and enormously overloaded with passengers. Now it was mainly to prevent all this sort of occurrences that the bill of last session was passed, yet it has proved so far ineffective. The pains and penalties incurable seem to have carried no terrors whether to the captains and owners or to the inspectors themselves. Investigations being still in progress, we do not desire to anticipate what the final decisions may be. We cannot help here remarking, parenthetically, that an extraordinary oversight appears to have taken place in the Act of 1882 in failing to make provision to test the competency of the captain himself. The engineer has to undergo an examination before he can obtain his certificate, the ability of the inspector himself requires to be established, but any one, however incompetent, may take the responsibility of command so far as there are any provisions in the new Act to the contrary. This is a matter so grave that the Department of Marine and Fisheries should see to it at once, for an incompetent captain will have to rely only on a panicky crew in any moment of supreme danger. Some exculpation of these so-called accidents is attempted to be made out of the fact that the appointment of Inspectors of Hulls and Equipments, provided for in the Act, had not been made up to the time of the occurrence of the late tragedies. This pretext may go for what it is worth, and that is not much. It cannot, however, be again advanced, the Government having at length made an appointment in the person of Mr. C. R. COKER. A more judicious selection could not possibly have been made, that gentleman's thorough fitness for the position being probably unequalled by any one in the Dominion. Mr. COKER has held the very responsible post of Lloyd's Surveyor in Canada for a period considerably exceeding a quarter of a century, and if he was found sufficiently competent to meet the critical requirements of such an important body of underwriters, that alone is full testimony of his ability.

It is, in fact, in itself the very highest certificate of merit, and we congratulate the Government as much on having secured his services as Mr. COKER himself on receiving the appointment. Accidents on our inland waters may again occur, and no doubt will. We think, however, we are safe in predicting that none such will arise through defects in such hulls and equipments as have undergone this gentleman's inspection. As a matter of professional seniority Mr. COKER will be chosen Chairman of the Board of Inspectors of course.

FIFTY-ONE PER CENTUM!—Such was the exaction practised upon the needy borrower last Monday, says the *New York Produce Exchange Bulletin*, and how much more frequently during the previous two weeks of stringent money is not named, but for that particular day the daily press of the following morning made special reference to. Fifty-one per cent., therefore, can be extorted on emergency from the man of business whose pressing need drives him into the den of the usurer! And another paper says:—"New York has been the scene of a demonstration to establish high rates for money, the movement being made possible by the low reserve of the New York banks, which had fallen last week to \$2,271,825 less than the legal reserve. On Monday the manipulators sent the rate for call loans on stocks up to plain 15 per cent. per annum, and Tuesday to 20 per cent., when they made loans among themselves at 1-16 per cent. per day. At this point the U. S. Treasury came in and ordered the prepayment each week, without rebate, of \$5,000,000 of called bonds, including the \$25,000,000 recently called for December 23, the prepayment to begin on the 27th instant. This broke up the plans of the money-squeezers, and the rate for call loans began to fall, though they have since recovered somewhat."

CUSTOMS' SEIZURES IN MONTREAL.

FOR some weeks past our local Customs' authorities have been developing an amount of vigilance not hitherto always perceptible here. The result has been many seizures in various branches of importation, and the subsequent investigations of the Departmental authorities at Ottawa have generally endorsed the action of their officers here. The *Mail* was the first fully to expose these frauds, which for some inscrutable reason our local papers denied altogether, or made light of, or endeavored to explain away. The *Toronto* journal has, however, thoroughly vindicated its assertions, and now vainly asks, Why these local endeavors to suppress such important facts? The principal seizures have been mainly in connection with frauds by importers of canvas and duck, American flour and pork, teas, sundries in which the Pullman Car Co. is under enquiry as delinquents, and, latest of all, fine Japanese ware. The confiscations so far have been very large and the fines heavy, and if the fraudulent importers

escape without indictment for perjury they may think themselves very lucky. We are quite unable to sympathise with those who would shield such offenders simply from a local sentiment. They are neither more nor less than thoroughly dishonest traders who are pushing our fair-dealing merchants to the wall. Our sympathies are wholly with the latter, and we trust that the *Toronto* paper will continue its exposures as fully and with as little regard as to what wrong-doers it offends as it has hitherto done.

THE FREE-CANAL AGITATION IN NEW YORK.

THE New York State elections come on next month, when the question of making the Erie Canal free of tolls will be submitted to the people. It is being made quite a party matter, and appearances indicate that the abolition of rates will carry. A strong organisation, known as the Free Canal Union, is vigorously active, and its President, Mr. FRANKLIN EDSON, thus sums up the *status quo*:—"I feel sure that the Canal has got to be made free or abandoned. It is not any contest between the railroads and Canal, but the issue has narrowed down to this—Can New York hold its commercial position against the free Mississippi River and the practically free St. Lawrence? It is one thing or the other. A vote against free canals is a vote in favor of permitting Canada to do the carrying trade of the North-West. And then, besides that, it is not a contest between the people of New York as to free canals, but between the people of this State and the people of Canada on one side and the people of Pennsylvania and Maryland on the other side. If the State of New York abandons its canal, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston and Montreal will be enormously benefited, because we are then placed on an equal footing with them." The result of the voting will be viewed with no common interest in this country.

U. S. GRAIN PORTS.—New Orleans and San Francisco are the ports showing the greatest changes in the volume of cereals shipped last year. At New Orleans there was an increase, comparatively small in amount, but large in percentage, of over a million dollars, and at San Francisco there was a decrease of \$169,000. Associating the two movements, the inference seems to be that the new route by rail to New Orleans is gaining favor in comparison with the all-water route from San Francisco. The lake ports almost uniformly show a decrease, in some cases of an important ratio.

CHINA AS A COTTON RIVAL.—Some excitement is visible in the British textile trade journals, owing to an announcement that the Chinese are preparing to manufacture cotton and silk piece goods. A cotton factory of an approved pattern will shortly be erected in Shanghai, and a factory to produce silk piece goods will be constructed in New Chiang. A blow at Lancashire and Cheshire commercial centres is feared.