finally abandoned practically all of the West Indian territory except Cuba. In Cuba we did good business, charging a heavy rate to cover the increased mortality, and then accepting risks upon only the lives of acclimated persons. Of course, the war put an end to business there, and, before we undertake to push matters in that region again, we shall have to ascertain accurately all of the conditions. I know that in both Cuba and Porto Rico under favorable conditions business will improve, and the sanitary objections should become less and less. We have made it a rule not to press our business in doubtful quarters, and while things are in a disturbed state we shall not take definite action."—N. Y. Evening *Post*.

STAMP TAX ON BANK CHEQUES.

(A ruling of interest to Canadian bankers).

On Tuesday last a decision of considerable interest to Canadian bankers was received by the Internal Revenue Collector of New York from Commissioner Scott. The *Bulletin* says :—

The Commissioner holds that bank checks drawn in this country on a foreign bank or broker, payable at sight or on demand, are subject to the same stamp tax as bank checks drawn in this country upon a domestic bank. In other words, such checks must bear a two-cent stamp. It will be recalled that when the new law went into effect the National City Bank, under advice of counsel, issued checks upon balances to its credit with foreign bankers, offering only a two-cent revenue stamp. This was criticised, and the Collector held that such checks should be stamped as foreign bills of exchange, viz., at the rate of four cents per $100. The National City Bank thereafter stamped checks in accordance with this ruling, but asked a construction of the law from the department at Washington. The present decision of the Commissioner therefore sustains the bank.

The section of the war-revenue law on which the National City Bank based its position originally reads as follows :

"(Schedule A)—Bank checks, drafts or certificates of deposit not drawing interest, or order for the payment of any sum of money drawn upon or issued by any bank, trust company, or any person or persons, companies or corporations, at sight or on demand, two cents."

Many local bankers express the opinion that the decision of the Commissioner will have a far-reaching effect. One of the first results will, it is said, be to check the increase in sales of demand exchange through Canadian bankers, which followed a previous ruling of the Department. It is alleged that a number of banking houses, with foreign connections at once established agencies in Canada for the collection of Canadian bills, which should be exempt from taxation. These Canadian and other foreign bankers simply sold here demand exchange which was drawn out of the United States, and, consequently, under the act, was not liable to any stamp duty at all. This enabled them to undersell the United States dealers in foreign exchange by nearly a quarter of a cent on the pound sterling.

The ruling of the Commissioner is generally considered an admission that a bank check drawn here on a bank or firm in a foreign country is not a foreign bill of exchange or subject to the tax on foreign bills of exchange. A local bank officer expressed the opinion that if any element of credit entered into a check or demand draft so drawn, then it becomes a bill of exchange and is subject to the tax on foreign bills of exchange; but that if it is merely a check or draft, or, in other words, a specific order to pay the drawee a certain sum of money out of a balance to the credit of the drawer, then it is a check within the meaning of the clause in the act, and as such subject only to a tax of two cents. If demand drafts were drawn in sets of two or more on foreign banks or bankers, he said, they would be foreign exchange and subject to the tax of four cents per $100, and it is understood that all the foreign bankers drawing demand drafts in duplicate or triplicate will stamp them as foreign exchange, and the purchasers will have to pay the increased cost, which will be equal to about one-quarter of a cent in the pound sterling. For this reason it is said that the ruling will affect for the most part only exchange for small amounts, as, in the case of regular bills of exchange and large amounts, duplicate are desired as a measure of safety.

The decision will, it is estimated, result in a material addition to the revenue of the U. S. Government under the law.

The decision will also permit the sale of cable transfers, with only a 2-cent stamp thereon, instead of their requiring, as under the previous ruling, a tax in stamps at the rate of four cents for each $100. Under the previous ruling the abitrage business in exchange, especially that growing out of the purchase of gold all over Europe, was seriously threatened. The new ruling will remove all difficulties in that respect. Chicago, it is said, will largely benefit through the new rule. She has been a large purchaser of Southern foreign bills of exchange as well as a seller of her own bills. The former ruling would, therefore, have caused considerable loss and trouble, and Chicago banks will welcome the new decision.

THE JULY FIRE LOSS.

The fire loss of the United States and Canada for the month of July, as compiled from the daily records of the N. Y. *Commercial Bulletin*, amounts to $8,929,750. The following table will exhibit comparisons:

	1896.	1897.	1898.
January	$11,040,000	$12,049,700	$9,472,500
February	9,730,100	8,676,750	12,629,300
March	14,839,600	10,502,950	7,645,200
April	12,010,660	10,833,000	8,211,000
May	10,618,000	10,193,600	11,072,200
June	5,721,250	5,684,450	9,206,900
July	9,013,250	6,626,300	8,929,750
Total	$72,992,800	$64,566,750	$67,166,850

During July there were 171 fires of a greater destructiveness than $10,000 each, which may be classified as below:

$10,000 to $20,000	54
20,000 to 30,000	34
30,000 to 50,000	26
50,000 to 75,000	23
75,000 to 100,000	10
100,000 to 200,000	21
200,000 to 250,000	3
Total	171

The principal losses in July were these :

Boston, Mass., storage warehouse	$200,000
Allegheny, Pa., theatre and other	175,000
West Hammond, Ind., starch factory	250,000
Stevens Point, Wis., pulp paper mill	200,000
Oswego, N. Y., malt house	170,000
Pittsburgh, Pa., street railway barns	175,000
Escanaba, Mich., several business houses	150,000