second place. It has been a great year for life insurance, and the prosperity of the country and the easy movement of money will be reflected in the records of all the companies. The Canada Life, by the way, which has recently begun active operations in this State and city, is well regarded by our citizens; and while the competition is strong and the difficulties confronting a foreign life company great, we believe that our Canadian guest will, when better known, receive a hospitable welcome, and become a permanent resident, instead of a mere visitor.

The recent re-insurances, and the tendency of all fire companies to contract their lines, has resulted in so reducing the facilities for insurances that it is not always easy to obtain the needed supply. These are the conditions that foster wildcats and spurious mutuals, and especially in the West these feline monstrosities are developing great boldness and numbers, whose influence is already being felt in the East. The upshot will be the starting of a number of new and legitimate stock companies, which, however, will have little chance of success, unless managed with consummate skill until the times become more favourable.

Thursday, the 28th ult., was anything but a season of Thanksgiving for the fire insurance managers in this bailiwick. This city was visited on that day by several disastrous fires, swelling the sum total of the losses already sustained in a worrisome and surplus-depleting year.

The Equitable Life is being applauded for the shrewdness displayed in its recent large purchase of Paris real estate. The newly acquired property is so centrally located that it cannot fail to prove a most valuable possession, whether the Society chooses to use it as a site for a new and modern building, which is quite among the possibilities, or whether it simply holds the land against a certain and decided rise in value.

QUERIST.

LONDON LETTER.

21st Nov., 1901.

FINANCE.

I do not think anyone outside England has much conception of the way Stock Exchange values have fallen here. Writers on this side are always talking of the depression of the markets, but what people get used to hearing they get used to misunderstanding. Departing a little from my usual custom of giving current news, I want to lay before readers of the CHRONICLE certain figures. This year Consols have been down to 91. This shows a steady decline from 1897, when 110⅝ was the lowest figure touched. India Threes have been down 97¼, a fairly steady drop from the 116⅛ which was the lowest quotation of 1897. Cape Fours, whose lowest in 1897 was 114⅝ have worked down to a lower this year of 93¼. Canadian Fours have been down to par. In all these figures the lowest prices are about the present ruling prices.

Turning now to the great national investment favourite Home Rail, it is necessary to look further back than 1897 to get a fuller idea of the steady declines. In 1881, Furness stock went no lower than 137. The lowest this year has been 70. Great Easterns, unlike most railway stocks, steadily progressed in market valuation from a lower of 46⅝ in 1878 to a lowest of 120¼ in 1899. Since then the customary rule has been followed. The lowest this year so far has been 91½. The deferred ordinance of the Great Northern has fallen away from a 1891 lowest of 67½ to a 1901 lowest of 38¾. The Great Western lowest of 164½ in 1899 has been converted into a lowest of 131 this year. Midland preference ordinary shows a lowest of 86⅝ in 1897, shaping down to a lowest of 72 in 1901.

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And so the tale might be taken through all the markets. During the present year in a vast number of shares the falls have been unprecedented and the condition of the Stock markets is dull in the extreme. Despite the most ingenious temptation, Kaffirs are not being bought, and as for "jungles," well, some holders would almost pay to be relieved of their commitments. We expected that when mining development started on the West Coast there would be some startling news. It is coming with a vengeance! Where any gold at all is being found it dribbles out in a few pennyweights to the ton. The last report of all to hand is from the engineer of the Akropong concession, Gold Coast Colony. Without wrapping it up in the least he reports to his Board that the properties they have acquired are worthless, and that there is no gold either in the concession or in the surrounding district. There are lively readings for the shareholders in the four hundred new jungle companies, with a total nominal capitalisation of two hundred million dollars.

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As investors, we are sadly in need of being cheered up. The best news of all, it is agreed upon all sides, would be news of a real end to the Boer War. The only people who make any show at all of busy business are the company promoters. They are turning out companies for public subscription daily, but the response is very poor, the underwriters being landed nearly every time. The company is to promote an irrigation scheme in the Orange River colony, another to buy gold fields in Spain. All alike are over-capitalists, and have the scantiest prospect of any profits. All the same, however, the good old game of "making a market" goes on and unissued shares are rigged to an absurd premium before allotment.

INSURANCE.

I have had the pleasure of a chat with Mr. Meikle, the London manager of the Western of Toronto, and very interesting I found it. The company has been located over here for a couple of years and apparently has no reason to regret its action. The reduction in the number of British companies through amalgamations and absorptions gives an opportunity for any Colonial office that can provide its agents with substantial security to work up a fair share of the business.

Of course, the Tariff Rules make the early work rather hard, but gradually as the company becomes known and people find out that its checks for claims are as quickly in the claimant's hands as are those of the home companies, the elementary difficulties are overcome. There seems no reason why the Western of Toronto's branch over here—when it extends its connections, by means of local directorates, branches and agencies—should not be an important competitor.

Mr. Meikle seems to be of the opinion that the British insurance business would be greatly benefited if more Colonial or even American offices attacked the United Kingdom field. There would then be an opportunity of levelling the competition and breaking the special advantages which the old offices have secured, and which make it so hard for new companies to make way of recent years. It will perhaps interest Canadian insurance men to know that probably in the near future Mr. Meikle will visit the Dominion.

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Like assurance is undergoing quite a little boom just now, and before the end of the year most of the offices will have added substantially to their totals. In the fire department heavy conflagrations are perpetually coming in, and there seems little hope of December showing up any more favourably.