

LONDON LETTER.

February 28, 1901.

FINANCE.

Two years ago Mr. Joseph Chamberlain made a speech in which he extolled in general terms the natural wealth of that neglected portion of the Empire, the West Coast of Africa. Since then, we have witnessed the beginning of the West African boom and nearly two hundred companies have been formed or are on the stocks for the exploitation of the mineral (especially the gold) resources of the Gold Coast Cinderella. I don't know whether I can fairly say that three out of every four of these companies are foredoomed to failure, but it is obvious that the mortality will be great. Absolute evidences are by no means infrequent in the list.

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But to return to the Colonial Secretary. Quotations from his old speech were given on the front of the prospectus of the Gold Coast Corporation, a concern asking for a public subscription of no less than £750,000.

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The Right Honourable Joseph couldn't stand his name being coupled even in a general way with this last atrocious "steal." He protested in a published letter that any use of his name on any prospectus was entirely unauthorized, and that nobody should be induced to invest money on the strength of this quotation. He believed that much of the present speculation would only tend to retard the real development of the Gold Coast Colony.

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Result—An instant decline all the way round in Jungle stocks, and a market which is as limp and lifeless as a wet rag. Added to the Chamberlain letter is a revival in South African mining shares owing to what I am afraid is an unwarranted belief that De Wet is about to be really wiped up.

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A Kaffir revival will always mean a set-back in the Jungle market. Jobbers now alternate between the two markets, choosing as their particular location at any hour the one which, for the time being, shows the greater activity.

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It is a relief to turn from the trials and troubles of Kaffirs and Jungles to an Indian gold mine whose dividend for the past year amounts to 135 per cent. I mean the Mysore Company.

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What is the truth with regard to the Siberian Goldfields Development Company? The facts are entirely in conflict. The Russian Government is alleged to have given a concession for mining and other rights over Siberia to a certain Perschine, who passed it over to one Slade, who passed it on to the Siberian Goldfields Syndicate. The gentlemen composing the latter formed the Siberian Goldfields Development Company with a capital of \$5,000,000 and transferred all the original Perschine rights and obligations to it.

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Big developments are promised in regard to the affair, and somebody has netted or stands to net

two or three fortunes out of the affair. Yet denials, first from the representative here of the Russian Finance Minister, and later and still more definitely from M. de Witte himself, have been given to the company's statement that it possesses any concession or right at all.

INSURANCE.

The Metropolitan Asylums Board has cut the Gordian knot at one blow. The members have decided that from June 24 next, they will no longer insure the Board property against fire except in a few particular cases in which they are compelled to or deem it wise to in the light of certain facts. Their properties are at present insured for \$12,500,000 and by ceasing to pay the premiums upon most of this there will be a saving of \$6,000 per annum. No reserve is to be created for meeting any claims which may fall due on the insurance portion; it being proposed to meet each fire loss in whatever manner may be determined by the recommendation of the Finance Committee of the Board. All these resolutions are subject to the approval of the Local Government Board. Any comment would be superfluous—the M. A. B. is going to gamble on its chance of immunity from conflagrations.

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Liverpool marine underwriters feel very strongly on the question of losses occurring through vessels sailing with insufficient and improperly fixed ballast. They want legislation on the subject and are backing up Lord Muskerry's Light Load Line Bill with all the energy they know so well how to put forth. Muskerry is of the Irish Fitz-Maurice-Deane-Morgan family, and, with Celtic enthusiasm, has made the subject of proper load-lines his own. Legislation on the question is urgently needed. Quite recently three vessels in ballast have been lost on the high seas.

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There are occasionally additions to the Stock Exchange Official List of quotations which had better have been left off, but when I find the committee ordering the quoting of the General Accident Assurance Company's new issue of 50,000 \$5, I haven't an adverse word to say. The company is one of the most progressive and substantial in the world, and will yet rank with the best and biggest.

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Now that London is sub-divided into a long list of "boroughs," and, with its own outfit of mayors, aldermen, etc., there has been a quickening of the "regalia" trade. Each mayor lords it with the best with massive and valuable chains of office. It is alleged that several of the pushing burglary and unforeseen-contingency companies are quoting terms for the insurance of these valuables against all risks.

A WIND INSURANCE COMPANY is called for by a correspondent of the "Commercial World," whereupon a contemporary remarks that "the matter needs explaining." The value of wind in the cultivation of a life assurance agency is undoubted. Is this to be an Agents' Help Society? And are the phonograph and gramophone to be necessary adjuncts to the agents' travelling outfit? Or, will natural gas do? Or, is the correspondent in somewhat unscientific language, simply clamouring for insurance against hurricanes and windstorms generally?"