has been general. The annual report of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern shows that the total gross earnings for the year ending December 31, were $30,449,292, an increase of $1,176,617 over the previous year.

$2,200,000 more than the preceding year were charged to construction and betterments, and yet after the usual dividends it reports a surplus of 6.6 upon the capital stock.

The report of the New York, Chicago and St. Louis does not make as good a showing as the Lake Shore earnings from traffic decreased $276,795, or 4.56 per cent., due to the "strike" in the anthracite coal regions, and to the partial failure of the grape crop, but notwithstandnig these drawbacks, the Company paid its usual dividends, and carried $17,122 to surplus account. There have been no special features in the market to-day, except dullness; it has now declined fractionally for two or three days, and it should now advance about as much as it has fallen off. It closes quiet, with a somewhat better tone.

LONDON LETTER.

FINANCE.

April 30, 1903.

A gentleman of the now familiar genius "share pusher," is busily engaged endeavouring to give some unsuspecting British investors a bad opinion of Canada. I don't know his name, but as it is probably changed at intervals for purposes best known to himself, this is immaterial. His Tpublic name, however, is the "British Investors' Underwriting Corporation"—the pretentious appellation of an obscure ramp.

American and Canadian oil Campany shares are the articles usually peddled in by this corporation, and the particular scrip now being advised by circular is that of the Dominion Oil Company. The dollar shares are offered for two dollars (eight shillings, to be exact), and the insinuation is that buyers will receive enormous dividends out of the presumed profit of one million dollars per annum. The company claims to possess 1,530 acres in Canada, and control the Gurd gusher. Reasoning beings recognize its promises as impossible of achievement.

Turning to a more general topic, it is abundantly clear that the remission of taxes consequent upon the new Budget comes as a welcome relief to the large body of British taxpayers.

Consols have reached a distinct turning point, and the holders who were on the verge of being frightened, are now reassured. The increase in the Sinking Fund makes a very favourable impression upon this market. The whole matter of Government indebtedness is now being reduced, and it is estimated that the Transvaal loan will be the last issue of British Government stocks at a low price.

Valiant attempts are being made here to popularize the Transvaal as a diamond producer. One stone worth fifteen thousand dollars has been discovered, and finds at varying magnitude are occurring in several quarters. Consequently, the registration of Transvaal diamond companies is going on rapidly. The shares of the pioneers are also appreciatory. Take, for example, the Premier Mine, which has a capital of $400,000 in $5 shares. These shares had risen to $100 at the end of last year, and now figure at $160.

Apropos of some remarks I made some time ago anent the cold storage and meat company boom the report just issued by Messrs. James Nelson & Sons, is astounding. The trading profit, which sank to a little over forty thousand dollars for the year 1896, was no less than $426,000 last year. A dividend on the ordinary shares of 50 per cent. was paid, and the price of the shares would have responded at once to such opulent returns had not it done so in anticipation long before.

A competitor to Marconi has arisen in our midst, in the shape of the General International Wireless Telegraph and Telephone Company. It holds the Arling-Armstrong patents, which are acclaimed by the owners as superior to anything the Signor has yet issued. The methods of the promoters are, however, the methods of the blind-pool tout.

INSURANCE.

There seems some reason in the municipal insurance madness after all. One of the local authorities of London has withdrawn from the municipal insurance scheme, of which I have written before, and renewed its fire policies with the Atlas Insurance Company—at reduced premiums! How many more of the municipal insurance advocates are simply using their schemes to squeeze lower premiums out of the ordinary fire offices?

Russia and the Russian trade at one time were exceedingly lucrative avenues for London insurance organizations; but the usual trouble supervened, and the business got cut about till it wasn't worth carrying even as an advertisement. When fate had done its worst, sadder, but wiser men inaugurated a new style which has been worked very successfully, loss being reduced to a minimum. Now again it appears that trouble is brewing. The reinsurance houses have been hit very heavily by a big fire at Odessa.

A most enthusiastic meeting of London and Lancashire Life Assurance Company shareholders was held this week, and Col. Sir Nigel Kingscote, C.C.V.O., was in great form with the excellent results of the quinquennium as his motto. To the shareholders there is two dollars for share dividends, and bonuses during the five years against $1.75 per share during the previous quinquennial period.

A very interesting topic was broached by a shareholder in the discussion which followed. He was pleased at the reduction in the expenditure of 1 1-4 per cent. Said he: "In these days of keen competition that was a wonderful achievement." In the west country some of the old offices were giving as much as the whole of the first premium on commission to the introducer, whilst many paid over 50 per cent.

COST OF LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES.

It is doubtful whether any other subject is of such universal interest as the rise and fall of the cost of living. Production is a minor matter for the average man, because of the great specialization that is constantly becoming more pronounced in every branch of industry, but all are consumers of a great number of the articles produced. Consequently, all records of the course of prices are studied, not only by the economic student, but by the layman as well, who sees in the rise of prices his purchasing power decrease unless his income advances proportionately, and in cheapening of cost he finds greater returns and the possibility of saving something for the proverbial rainy day. Yet these fluctuations in prices cannot be considered instructively without due allowance for other highly important factors. A low range of quotations accompanied by idleness is obviously undesirable. On the