

pay the bulk of municipal taxes, there is no margin left for new exceptions of land. But here, again, in the case of these companies, it might be a question of rate. It is so unusual to see anyone come forward and propose a new scheme of taxation to press upon themselves, that the proposition now made should not be unceremoniously rejected without full enquiry, examination and discussion; always keeping in mind what the proposed substitute is.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

If any proof were needed that the holiday season is upon us, it would only be necessary to take a short walk in the sections of our cities where stores, which retail articles suitable for presentation, do most abound. We wish each one of our readers, individually, as much prosperity as the men engaged in this business seem to be enjoying generally. A round amongst the vendors of fancy goods, novelties, gift-books, toys, jewellery, and the like, makes us think that more presents are to make their recipients and their donors happy this year than ever before. Certainly, the shop-attendants are having an arduous time of it these days.

In such fancy goods as albums, workboxes, ornamental clocks, artistic wares, painted china, etc., which by the way, are largely imported from France, Germany and Austria, as well as from England, the business transacted has been, we are told, without precedent, especially on country orders. One feature that strikes many dealers in these lines this year is that the quality asked for is far above the average. While the best and most expensive articles have been eagerly taken up, poorer qualities of the same goods still remain unsold, which proves, even beyond the question of quantity of such things sold, that people have the money and expect to be getting more for a long time to come. This class of business, as is generally known, is usually done on the import-order basis, and goods brought in, in accordance with samples as required. There is by this means no speculation on the part of the wholesaler, and the risk is taken by the retail merchant. Christmas stocks in the big importing houses were mostly cleaned out long ago, and new stocks are expected to be in place some time next month. Most of the leading novelties this year were of a patriotic character, in accordance with the times, and comparatively few articles failed to introduce in some part or other of their composition, a bit of the old flag or a reminiscence of Johnny Canuck or Tommy Atkins.

The dry goods stores are by no means forgotten in the all-overturning search for presentable articles. From Montreal, we heard some time ago that business in fur goods, jewellery, and women's dress was showing the improved state of men's purses. And the cold weather of last week and the present has given a decided fillip to Christmas trade there. Gloves, mitts, shawls, umbrellas, are all in strong demand in various cities, and the rush for fancy handkerchiefs proves that lots of people, both of the gentler and of the other sex, are going to be, about next Tuesday, the proud possessors of more of those articles than they are at present. Jewellery stores also are eagerly patronized. In many, the privilege has been offered to customers for some weeks past of paying a small deposit on any

article chosen, and of completing the purchase any time before Christmas Day. This convenience has been made use of by thousands.

Perhaps in no class of establishment has the holiday boom made itself so keenly felt as in the larger book stores. Some of them, we hear, have had to double the usual number of their attendants, so eager has been the public demand for literature. It does not follow that the buyers of these books intend to read them—they are bought for Christmas-boxes mainly. Still, the popularity of books, as holiday-gifts, shows something; they are bound to be read by someone, and the taste for high-class reading will grow, let us hope, with what it feeds on.

WINTER NAVIGATION.

A second letter, on this subject, comes to us from Mr. H. Calcutt, of the Peterboro Navigation Company, who thus discusses the difficulties suggested in our article of 7th December:

The first objection raised by the gentlemen mentioned in your article of 7th inst. is, that the ice breakers on Lake Erie were stuck in the ice for nearly a week. Such a thing would not have occurred if they had a vessel built after the style of the "Ermack," mentioned in the magazine referred to in my letter. She broke through 20 feet of ice and relieved twelve steamers blocked in near Cronstadt in the Baltic Sea, and towed them out.

As to the second, namely, snow-storms, I cannot see that they would be any impediment if the boat carried a compass.

Third, regarding the operating of the canal lock gates. I have a plan, which if applied, is simple and cheap in comparison with the benefit, and would keep the water in the locks and the gates from freezing.

The railways are in competition as much in summer as they would be in winter. And as to insurance. If boats were constantly running, and the underwriters found they could obtain increased premiums in winter they would be glad to take the risk. How is it that ocean vessels overdue can always find companies ready to accept the risk on them. Should it be found practical to keep the lakes and canals open in winter, boat-owners would build boats suitable for the purposes. If there are not some steps taken to keep open the St. Lawrence route, and they should get one of the Baltic ice breakers to work on Hudson's Bay, then good-bye to the several million bushels of grain grown in the Northwest and Manitoba. We of this company, are going to prepare our boats so as to keep the Otonabee River open next season, and if successful intend to try Rice Lake the season after.

Mr. Calcutt being about to prove his faith by works, we congratulate him on his enterprise, and shall be very glad if he can demonstrate by an object-lesson, on Rice lake and the Otonabee, the workable nature of his proposal. Still it is to be remembered that what may be possible on a small scale on inland Ontario lakes, must be vastly more hazardous on lakes 200 to 500 miles in length, and 50 to 150 miles in width, subject to such violent gales and snowstorms as have proved the destruction of many a gallant vessel. We are a little surprised, by the way, at Mr. Calcutt's flippant manner in dismissing snowstorms on the Great Lakes. Surely he must be lacking in experience of them. As to the plan which he thinks would keep the water in the lock gates from freezing, he cannot submit it too soon to some competent authority, to be pronounced upon. The marine insurance companies can, if they are sufficiently interested in the subject, answer for themselves the allusions made to them.