

New Customs Regulations.

The new regulation requiring that Americans, on their return to the United States from a tour in Europe, shall make a detailed declaration of the value of every purchase made when abroad, came into force on the 1st inst., and the outcry against those responsible for the framing of such a law is now taking the shape of columns of complaints in the New York "Evening Post." The examination of even the smallest article of luggage is rendered necessary, and great delay and annoyance is caused thereby. Trunks, carpet-bags, valises, band-boxes, anything used to contain clothing and other necessities or conveniences which a traveller carries with him on a journey must be searched in order to ascertain if aught made or bought in England, Germany, France or Spain has been omitted from the passenger's declaration. The regulation is said to have been framed through the influence of New York shop-keepers, and annoyed tourists are resenting this obnoxious interference with their boasted American liberty by pledging themselves to withdraw their patronage from these jealous tradesmen. Altogether, the enforcement of this new regulation has caused quite a hubbub among New Yorkers who have been in the habit of shopping in London and Paris, and who naturally find it annoying to be required to give a detailed statement of the value of even a toothbrush or an English accent if obtained when abroad.

Another Bank Amalgamation.

A meeting of the shareholders of the City of Birmingham Bank was held on the 6th inst., to consider a proposal for amalgamation with the London City and Midland Bank, Limited. In a circular to the shareholders the directors of the City of Birmingham Bank state:—"It will no doubt be within your recollection that the City Bank of London, which recently amalgamated with the London and Midland Bank, were the London agents of this bank. In the course of the amalgamation of those two banks, a desire was expressed by the London and Midland Bank to acquire the City of Birmingham Bank. An offer has now been made by the London City and Midland Bank to take over the City of Birmingham Bank at the sum of £120,000, which is equal to a bonus of 20 per cent. upon the £2 paid up in respect of each share, and to take over the staff, assets and liabilities of the bank and pay all the expenses of carrying through the amalgamation. This, therefore, means an offer of a clear payment of £2 8s. per share to each shareholder. Your directors, after most careful consideration, have decided to accept this offer, and advise its confirmation by the shareholders." At the meeting the following resolution was submitted: "That it is desirable that the undertaking and assets of the City of Birmingham Bank, Limited, be transferred to the London City and Midland Bank, Limited, and accordingly that the City of Birmingham Bank, Limited, be wound up voluntarily, and that Mr. John Green, the secretary of

the said bank, be, and he is hereby, appointed liquidator for the purposes of such winding up." The City of Birmingham Bank was formed in March, 1897, with a nominal capital of \$7,500,000, of which one-half was forthwith subscribed in shares of \$75 each; \$10 per share was paid-up. The purchase price shows a premium of \$100,000 for the connection formed by the local bank, apart from the return to the shareholders of all their subscribed capital.

Rebating.

The practice of giving away a large slice of the first premium as an inducement for a person to insure is becoming almost universal, and it is the cumulative evidence of its existence furnished by correspondents and subscribers, which has led us to refer to the evil as the Scandal of Modern Life Assurance. When the practice first attracted attention, no condemnation thereof was considered too strong, no criticism too harsh. But familiarity with the custom has bred indifference to its disgraceful unfairness.

Some ten years ago, one of the most influential and powerful writers on life insurance on this continent designated rebating as a crime. He said: "If a canvasser for a life insurance company receives applications for insurance from two persons, and gives one of them a rebate of fifty per cent., while charging the other full table rates, the transaction is dishonest, and, if dishonest, a crime." It seems reasonable to suppose that the whole of the premium is necessary to enable the company to carry a premium. Surely, it is wrong to demand so large a premium. Surely, it is dishonest to allow any member of an association, where the interests of all are so absolutely identical as in a life insurance company, an undoubted advantage over another member. Rebating is as unjust and indefensible as would be the admission of a new member to a club at a lower entrance fee than that paid by his companion joining at the same time.

The latest defence set up by those who practice rebating is embodied in the somewhat specious and plausible statement that the agent being paid by commission is merely giving away his own. This special pleading does not sweep away the miserable unfairness of the practice, nor does it assist those who, recognizing the proportions to which this scandal has grown, would gladly welcome any efforts being made to abolish a dishonest and dangerous method of obtaining business. We know that the agent must live by his labour, but it must be admitted that there is something very faulty in the mechanism and system of any life insurance company encouraging such a deviation from the path of rectitude as rebating has been shown to be. Even if all the statements made by those who have been almost forced to adopt the tactics of unscrupulous competitors were candid, they would not justify the scandalously unfair and discriminating practice of rebating.

There is neither economy, nor financial safety, nor decency of method, nor personal nor corporate self-respect in the rebate system.