it in advance, and having more money in hand than we know what to do with, he thought it would not be amiss to anticipate the Sinking Fund knowing that next year we would have to provide for it, but he thought it but right this sum should be put in as an estimate for the year. Yet being on hand of course it augmented our cash balance at the close of the year.

THE CANADIAN MONETARY TIMES AND INSURANCE CHRONICLE *is printed every Thursday evening and distributed to Subscribers on the following morning.*

Publishing office, No. 60 Church-street, 3 doors north of Court-street.

Subscription price—

Canada $2.00 *per annum.*

England, stg. 10*s. per annum.*

United States (U.S.Cy.) $3.00 *per annum.*

Casual advertisements will be charged at the rate of ten cents per line, each insertion.

Address all letters to "THE MONETARY TIMES."

Cheques, money orders, &c. should be made payable to J. M. TROUT, *Business Manager, who alone is authorized to issue receipts for money.*

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The Canadian Monetary Times.

THURSDAY, MAY 20, 1869.

USURY.*

The time was when to receive interest upon money, no matter at how trifling a rate, was held to be an offence against the law of nature and the law of God. For upwards of 1500 years this was the universally accredited doctrine throughout Europe. It was a sin to borrow money at interest; it was a far greater to lend it. The fathers of the Church, its Popes and Councils, its theologians, and its law, as embodied in the Canon, were unanimous in denouncing this thing as a species of robbery, as a crime which like murder, &c. was palpably contrary to the law of nature. It was condemned by 17 Popes, and 28 Councils of the Church. Money-lenders were subject to legal penalties, were put to the torture and were held up to public odium as infamous persons. In the year 1179, the third Lateran Council, convened by Pope Alexander III., decreed that money-lenders, unless they repented of their crime, should not be admitted to the altar, nor be absolved at the hour of death, nor receive Christian burial. Any one who denied that the receiving of interest on money was a sin was denounced as a vile heretic, the proper expiation of whose offence was to be burnt alive, a sentence which was executed upon more than one poor wretch, who was afflicted in this way by the malady of thought. In some countries the property of money-lenders was subject, after their death, to confiscation by the crown. This arrangement was eminently satisfactory, for, as an acute writer remarks, it enabled the government to obtain a loan from a money-lender, while he was living, and to rob his children when he was dead. The Act of 3 Henry VII. c. 6 (1486) provided that "all brokers of such bargains shall be set on the pillory, put to open shame, be half a-year imprisoned and pay £20." Traces of the same feeling are to be found in comparatively recent times. Thus, in the preamble to the Act of 5 & 6 Edward VI. c. 20, (1552) it is recited that the charging of interest is a vice most odious and detestable, and contrary to the word of God. Again in sec. 5 of 13 Eliz. c. 8 (1570) we find these words, "And forasmuch as all usury, being forbidden by the law of God, is sin and detestable." The Act of 21 James I. c. 17, (1623) while allowing as a commercial necessity the taking of interest at the rate fixed by it, was careful to add as a proviso (sec. 6) "That no words in this law contained shall be construed or expounded to allow the practice of usury in point of religion and conscience." Even so late as 1745 Pope Benedict XIV. (in many respects a great and enlightened man) issued an encyclical letter, in which the doctrine of the Church was authoritatively laid down, that the taking of interest on money is always a sin, and that its amount being small, or exacted from rich men only, or to further commercial undertakings, does not alter its character in the least. The superstition which we have above sketched has now happily almost disappeared, being found to any great extent only in Russia, where, according to Storch, a well known political economist of that country, some sects of dissenters from the national Church, still hold that it is sinful to lend money at interest. This happy change is due to the influence partly of the reformation, and partly of the works of speculative writers on the subject, principally political economists. But though the original feeling is thus almost extinct, there is ample evidence that some relics of it still linger in our midst. We need go no further than our legislative halls to find it. In late years, however, it has taken a new form, which objects, not to the receiving of any interest, but to the receiving of what is considered too much.

Since the almost total abolition in Canada of the usury laws, about ten years ago, our Parliament, annually, has had inflicted upon it, bills to re-enact such a law with more or less stringency. This session the flood comes stronger than ever. Not less than three members have introduced such bills. One proposes to limit the rate of interest to eight per cent., the penalty for infringement to be the forfeiture of all interest if sued for within one year. Another proposes to limit the rate to seven per cent. If more is received, the contract to be void; all interest and one-half the principal to be recoverable on suit by any one; one half the amount recovered to go to the informer, the other half to local schools. The third bill makes the limit eight per cent., the penalty being forfeiture of treble the value of the subject of the contract; one-half to go to any one who will sue as informer, the other half to the Receiver General. This last is substantially the same as the old Act of 51 Geo. III., c. 9, which was abolished in 1859, except that in that act the limit was six per cent. If there had been a prospect that these bills, like those in former years, would be consigned to merited oblivion, we should not have thought it worth while to notice the subject. However, as there is an evident determination on the part of a considerable section of the Commons to force through the House a bill of some kind on the subject, and as the pressure has become so strong as to induce the Government to give way, and itself to introduce a bill, we deem it our duty to protest, in the strongest manner, against the meditated wrong. When the greater part of the world is steadily advancing towards perfect freedom in all matters of trade and commerce between both men and nations; when even countries so backward on these subjects as Austria and Spain are joining in the general movement; it would be no other than a great misfortune that Canada, which has so often set an enlightened example to other nations, should now betake herself to the crab-like motion of going backwards. We do not wish to question the motives of those who introduce such measures; doubtless they mean well. Their mistake is that, through want of sufficient knowledge of the operation of such laws, they do not know that it is impossible to put a stop, by legal penalties, to things of the kind; that, no

* This word is used throughout the article as meaning the receiving of any interest whatever.