

## OUR AUSTRALIAN LETTER.

Up to the beginning of this month, there was very much concern over the fact of the absence of the usual monsoonal rains in January, February and March. In the state of Victoria, the churches proposed a general prayer for rain. In New South Wales the railway commissioners, after making a trip of observation to the west, thought that in that section not one-fifth the area put under crop last year would be seeded this year. However, a change set in, and over a large portion of New South Wales there has been an unusual downpour. The other states have had some but not so bountifully. The Australian farmer is accustomed not to plough until after the rains have softened his land. With the poor ploughs he once had, this was a necessity in many places, but with the implements supplied, largely from Canada, he can do his work at any time. Unfortunately, he has not yet risen to his opportunities. It is not too late even now to cultivate and get a good crop, if the after conditions should be favorable.

The rains ensure a pretty good pastoral season. It is a little too late for much effect on the herbage in the elevated districts, but plenty of water is ensured, and there is fair feed for the stock which the country holds.

The number of sheep in New South Wales on 1st January last were returned as 33,838,571, an increase of 5,182,070. This is gratifying, but is not a remarkable increase, and the total number is but little more than one-half of what it was in 1891, but then the land was overstocked, and the overstocking accentuated the effects of the drought. Queensland, too, is gradually strengthening its herds and flocks, and the pastoralists of a large part of the state have fair prospects before them.

With the exception of wool and wheat, the exports are being well sustained. The decrease in wool was due to shipments being pushed last year, and that of wheat to the lesser yield of the last harvest. The imports are declining, the collection for this state for the first three months of 1905 show a decrease of eight per cent. as compared with a similar period of last year.

The Pacific cable is reported to have another deficiency last year of nearly ninety thousand pounds. This is scandalous. Sir Horace Tozer, the Agent-General of Queensland, at London, who has been home on a visit, has been talking plainly upon the subject and says the deficit is due to the absence of management. It is claimed that the Pacific cable gets but one-fourth the Australian business, and that while it did more work in 1904 than in 1903, yet the rival line's increase was more than three times as much. The loss to Australia is about thirty thousand pounds, but it more than recoups itself by charging an extra terminal rate of three pence per word over and above the ordinary rate and calmly pocketing it. In addition, Australian business is saving nearly two hundred thousand pounds per annum in the reduction in the price of its cable messages effected through the laying of the Pacific cable. The United Kingdom and Canada are out of pocket fifty thousand pounds per annum. The worst of it is that the small share of the business done by the Pacific cable is due in a large measure to the scandalous agreement made by a Government of this state with the rival Eastern Extension Company. In addition the Commonwealth also levies a fee on all cable addresses, though it does not touch most of the messages sent over the Eastern Extension. The patience which Canada displays under these circumstances is angelic.

Dr. Montague, of your city, is getting a little more notoriety. He is represented to have delivered a speech in Vancouver in which he is reported to have sneered at the Australian Federation, said that the Australians spoke music hall English and walked with short steps because their fathers were convicts. As they can't get at the Doctor, the papers are coupling him with the Independent Order of Foresters, in whose employment he is said to be, and raking up reminiscences that the Order wishes should be buried. There is, however, a more serious aspect which has been called to my attention by one interested in Canadian business. He said: "No one would mind what that man may say, but if it were believed here that decent Canadian audiences would listen to such malicious rubbish, it would not tend to strengthen the sentiment that helps us to sell Canadian goods, and I tell you we need all the sentiment to help us just now; for what with disappointments, delays in filling orders, when they are filled

at all, and poor goods, some of us are getting pretty well filled up with Canada." The Canadian Commissioner refused to criticize the speech, as he has not evidence of the correctness of the report. Perhaps stirred up by this incident, the opponents of Dr. Montague are again urging the Victorian Government to have a full enquiry into his conduct of the I.O.F. affairs, while he was in charge, and claim they have a promise that this will be done. This is very doubtful. The Government is disinclined to reopen the matter.

One of the unhappy occurrences of recent date is the conviction of the Hon. Mr. Slattery of fraudulent conversion of his client's money, and his sentence to imprisonment for three years and a half. He was Minister of Justice in three Governments and an ex-speaker of the New South Wales House of Assembly. His downfall was due to racing and betting. Three days afterwards, the treasurer of a powerful labor union was sentenced for fraud. The union's money went in the same way. These incidents have stirred up a demand for repression of one of the worst evils of Australian life. A Melbourne man, who has been writing upon a recent visit to Canada, said that one of the things there that struck him with special force was the comparatively little attention paid to racing. Canadians will do well to keep it so.

Mr. Larke, the Canadian Commissioner, has arranged to leave for a trip to Canada in June next. The State Governments are furnishing him with lantern slides of the beauty spots of Australia, which he will take over, as he has intimations that he will be expected to speak upon Australia and its people.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce, at its recent session, has taken up the Pacific cable deficit and demands better and more energetic management, but it did not include in the demand better treatment on the part of its own Government.

Sydney, N.S.W., 17th April, 1905.

F. W.

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### HALIFAX LETTER.

A proposition of much interest and importance to the fishermen of this Province is contained in the arrangements now being made by the French firm of Beust et Fils. They are preparing to put in operation at North Sydney a bait-preserving plant, such as is operated by the same firm in France. Their system is claimed to have great advantages over the cold storage plan, as vessels can remain on the fishing grounds as long as necessary, and keep the bait fit for use. The trouble and expense of carrying ice is also by this means avoided.

The well-known Halifax book and stationery firm of Connolly & Davidson has dissolved partnership; the business will be conducted at the present premises, on Barrington Street, by J. L. Connolly. Mr. Davidson has purchased the Ruggles bookstore on the same street.

The Nova Scotia Milling Company, Limited, will take over the business carried on by the late D. Gunn, they having secured the lease of Matheson's mills from the owner.

Blanchard & Co. offer for sale their dry goods business, which they have carried on in Windsor for the past nine years.

M. Scanlon, Sr., has disposed of his interest in the dry goods firm of M. Scanlon & Sons, to M. Scanlon, Jr. The business has been long established here, and will be continued in the same place.

It was generally expected that the meeting of shareholders, held last week to ratify the merger of the People's Bank with the Bank of Montreal, would present some interesting developments, but the meeting proved to be entirely devoid of excitement. As we have already stated, out of the 50,000 votes, 48,891 were polled in favor of the merger. One of the leading shareholders had announced his intention of registering objections to the deal, but before the meeting took place he was pacified. The president, J. J. Stewart, was chairman of the meeting, and he made a lengthy statement showing the desirability of the merger. Under the agreement, the Bank of Montreal will take over the People's at once, but the branches in this city will be maintained by the bank for a year.

It is expected that the Halifax and Southwestern Railway, of which eighty miles remains to be built, will be completed this year. There has been some delay as to a question of