

per cent. of the total assets, whereas, some years ago, mortgages made up nearly one-half their assets. The money has been largely used for buying municipal bonds, which, for well-known seasons, have become a more available and popular investment than in earlier years. The British Government securities were increased in 1900 by \$4,723,000, doubtless by the companies taking a share in the war loans. The life assurance business in the United Kingdom is evidently progressing although hampered by the strain put on the people by the war. It is, however, remarkable that in spite of this and despite reports of the decay of British industries, the growth of industrial life assurance has been extraordinary. Another feature in the returns is the increasing popularity of endowment assurances, which, proportionately, show larger growth than for the whole-life term.

We must again ask our English contemporaries to do what they can to secure an earlier official issue of the life companies statements.

THE STANDARD LIFE ASSURANCE COMPANY.

On a later page we publish a synopsis of the 76th annual report of the above substantial and popular company, which goes on, from strength to strength, adding new business year after year with all the energy of youth and the wisdom of years reaching far on to a century. The annual meeting was held in Edinburgh on 22nd April last, the proceedings of which will be noticed when a full report arrives. Meanwhile it may be stated that the total existing assurance in force at close of last year was \$127,759,139, against \$124,452,863 in 1900, and the accumulated funds were \$50,135,197, which exceeds those of a year ago by \$1,743,546. The past year is the first complete one under the management in Canada of Mr. D. M. McGoun, whose record fulfills the anticipations we expressed when he took charge.

THE MARTINIQUE CATASTROPHE.

Language is wholly inadequate to describe the appalling disaster which, on the 7th of this month, swept the city of St. Pierre out of existence by a blast of fire, and killed in a few moments its population of 30,000 souls. The entire region where this catastrophe occurred has an unparralled record of volcanic disturbances. The West India islands appear to have been thrown up by cataclysms such as that which overwhelmed the population of St. Pierre. Since their discovery there have been successive earthquakes at short intervals which have shaken the entire area of the West Indies and the Isthmian peninsula. The recent disaster is being

compared with that which in A.D. 79 smothered Herculaneum with ashes. But, as De Quincy in one of his eloquent passages points out, while great events have points of marked similarity they are always so differentiated as to have distinct features. The Krakatoa volcanic explosion was the nearest in extent and circumstances to that at St. Pierre, about the same number were killed, but in the island in the eastern ocean most of them were destroyed by an inundation of the sea. Showers of ashes, hot mud, stones and lava are the general phenomena of such events. But at St. Pierre, so far history records, there was an unprecedented burst of flames which swept down the mountain that literally burnt the doomed city and calcined its inhabitants. Before such a calamity man stands helplessly dumb with horror. The survivors have the sympathy of the world. So far as human help can alleviate their agony they will have a generous supply, but for all time to come the Martinique tragedy will be a terrible memory.

THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE MARKET.

The present high rates prevailing for foreign exchange are drawing attention to the conditions which have caused them to be so high. Some existing conditions and those that have prevailed for a prolonged period are such as usually make exchange cheap. Were indeed the popular theory that exports and imports of merchandise are the main factors in the price of exchange as complete a statement as some suppose the existing rates would present an insoluble problem. The theorists who, from observing the enormous excess of American exports over imports, have been declaring that the London money market was fast losing its dominance in the world's financial affairs, are non-plussed at finding the vast balances of trade in favour of the United States in several past years to have left insufficient balances available for paying foreign exchange drafts. When regarded by themselves the returns of American exports and imports would indicate, what some writers in United States papers have averred to be a fact, that Great Britain was becoming hopelessly involved as a debtor to the States. Whether the old land could extricate itself from this embarrassment of debt has been discussed by the more prominent American journals, the universal judgment being that the flag of England's financial supremacy was about to be transferred from London to New York. The true situation reminds us of the surprise of Mother Hubbard of whom and her dog it is said:

"She went to the undertakers to buy him a coffin,
When she came back the dog was laughing!"