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OUR LONDON LETTER.

(Special to the CHRONICLE.)

LONDON, APRIL 6TH, 1898.

FINANCE.

The report of the death of our old friend, President Kruger, caused quite a sensation in Capel Court, and provided variation for the monotony there prevailing. The report lied, however, and all stocks fell back.

Westralians are weak, even the Bottomley group lacking support. "Wags," which is the term by which the happy mining operator knows the West Australian Goldfields, were quite dead.

The heavy weight of the war scare lays on many operators like a guilty conscience, and their movements are dispirited. Its malignant influence has adversely affected Home Rails, where many declines have been marked.

Spanish Fours are the plaything of the House as of most European Bourses, registering some days a relapse of three and four points.

Halfhearted rallies in American and Canadian Rails have mostly been followed by a sympathetic fall.

Central Argentine Railway stock, although the dividend went down to the 1894 level, namely, 1 3/4%, is being widely advised as a good speculative investment.

The figures of the Bank Return just issued would quite authorize a change in the Bank rate, as the proportion of reserves to liabilities has decreased 4.66% to 38.31%. However, no change has been made public, to the surprise of most of us.

The amount of capital offered for subscription by new companies during the first quarter of 1898 is \$200,000,000. This is the largest amount of any similar quarter for many years past, with the single exception of 1889, the boom year, when the total scaled \$283,750,000. Last year the amount was \$140,000,000; 1896, \$156,000,000; 1895, \$142,500,000; 1894, \$55,000,000, and 1893, \$38,750,000.

The Easter vacation will interfere with many joint stock flotations, but after Holy Week and the week following a big burst of business is expected. By that time the twenty-second Klondike baby should be due.

There are going to be developments at Spiers' & Pond's. This well-known firm of caterers, restaurateurs, etc., propose launching out in the light refreshment line. No shops are more popular in London than the A. B. C.'s, the cafés established by the Erated Bread Company, where winsome Hebes serve you with tea, coffee, cocoa and a fearful and wonderful variety of cake and pastry. The A. B. C.'s came as a boon and a blessing to city bookkeepers, clerks and the embryonic literateurs of Fleet Street, for in a room, the lightness and tastefulness of which cannot be excelled, they can buy a delicious cup of tea for four cents and other things proportionately. There the above genial folk rush in myriads, and the A. B. C. pays tremendous dividends. It is this department that Spiers' & Pond's proposes to invade, and a capital of \$100,000 is thought to be sufficient. The average man would take it that the demand is really over-supplied as the diminutive dividends of

the newer "bread-shops" would seem to indicate, but Messrs. F. Spiers, Cremien-Jeval and Leon can be trusted to bring water out of the rock.

Another great combination is rumoured. This time the paper-makers unite, and will have a backing of over seventeen million dollars. If any trust could arouse the enmity of the press, it would be this one should it attempt to raise the price of paper. The prospect is full of serious considerations, and the new combine would be wiser to find its extra revenue in economy than in extortion.

London loses heavily over the loss of the P. and O. steamer, "China." The insurances amounting to about \$2,500,000 are spread round pretty generally.

I see that there has been a meeting in New York over marine insurance rates, but without any definite result. The question over here is a serious one, rates being often cut by the very people who shout loudest for a general levelling up. The Thames & Mersey and the British & Foreign are two recent culprits.

The Life & Health with a capital of \$375,000 is now at work in Edinburgh, and is threatened with another rival ere many moons have passed by. The Health and Sickness Association, of London, is doing fairly well along a similar line, only it is having a lot of trouble with agents who have been drawing commission on bogus business.

"Fire inquests" was the topic spoken on by the City Solicitor at the Municipal Corporation's Banquet at the Guild Hall last week. The 1888 Act, which applied solely to the city, had had good effects in reducing the number of fires, and had led to improvements in the fire brigade and in many cases to better building. The prospect of a searching enquiry deters the man who would make up for a generally bad season by a brilliant blaze at the finish. The City Solicitor would like to see the Act promoting these inquests operating all over the country, and so would we.

Commanding universal popularity, the Scottish Provident gets business very easily. Last year it granted 2,177 policies, covering \$6,325,000. Its fund, which increased \$2,500,000 to \$52,315,000, earned over 4%. This office, established twelve quinquenniums back to provide with profits' insurance at non-profits' rates, has adhered to its special feature, and still sells cheap protection with a secure foundation.

The "Three Cities," known to outsiders as the London, Edinburgh & Glasgow Insurance Company, has had its annual, and the directors have presented a report which is excellent in every way. Congratulations have been showered upon Thomas Neill and the Board for the able management which has bulked so largely in forcing these big strides.

The Royal is the chief loser over the great fire which cost the Earl of Yarboro nearly half of his splendid country seat near Grimsby.

The Allan Steamship Company, Limited is issuing £350,000 in 4 per cent. debentures at par. The prospectus is only being privately circulated, and the money is required for the extension of the line, and to purchase modern vessels to meet increasing demands. There is no reason why these debentures should not be taken by investors who like the security.—*The Shareholder, (Eng.)*