

THE PRESENT TRADE CONDITION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF HALIFAX.

There is no originality in and certainly no foundation for the statement that we hear on every side, and which is persistently dinned into our ears that "Ichabod" should be written over the doors and upon the lintels of our business houses. It is a matter of grave doubt whether at any time within the present century—to go no further back—if the common question "how's business," were asked of any merchant, not only in Halifax, but anywhere in the civilized world, the answer would not have been "dull."

Here, in Halifax, if after asking the above question and receiving the stereotyped answer, one has the curiosity to push the enquiry further, he is told that the Provinces West and North of us have absorbed all the profitable portion of our dry goods trade, that our West India business is dead beyond reasonable hope of resuscitation, that "the country districts" are becoming daily more and more independent of the Metropolis, and that our streets, once crowded with trucks and wagons conveying goods from one portion of the city to another, and our sidewalks once thronged with business men hurrying to and fro, are now nearly idle and unused.

Investigation shows, however, that these statements are more specious than exact, and we venture to assert that the volume of the trade of this port is not only now greater than ever before, but also that it has been and is steadily increasing with a healthy growth, and that it is quite as profitable as ever.

It is most easy to pick out certain lines of trade that have fallen off, but it is not fair to deduce therefrom a general decadence of business. If Upper Canada Proper supplies dry goods to the towns and villages of Nova Scotia which once looked to us for their stocks in that line, we supply her with sugar, molasses, and an infinite variety of other articles that she formerly obtained from other lands. If our business men do not spend a large portion of their working hours in rushing about the sidewalks, it is because the telephone saves them many a weary step and many precious moments which are employed to better advantage in their offices. If trucks, drays and wagons are not so largely employed in laboriously transferring goods from place to place, it is because the vessels carrying our merchandise are shifted from wharf to wharf, and discharge their contents or take in part cargoes at different points.

It is true that for some time our trade with the West Indies has appeared to decrease. We question the truth of the assertion that it has really done so. A considerable portion of the fish that in older days was sent hence to those markets in sailing vessels now goes in steamers—the latter being a cheaper, more expeditious, as a rule, and more reliable means of transportation. For West India products—rum, sugar, molasses, fruit, salt, etc.—Halifax is rapidly becoming the entrepot and the distributing point whence the whole Dominion obtains its supplies of these articles. For some years, it is true, the West India sugars labored under a disadvantage, as against the dirty Asiatic and Brazilian sugars, because the tariff was not arranged so as to properly recognize the difference in raw sugars. Experience, we are pleased to observe, in this instance, has taught wisdom. The polariscope gauge has been adopted, and hereafter raw sugar will be admitted to duty according to the degree of sweet matter that it actually contains. That this step is destined to infuse new and vigorous life into our trade relations with the West Indies is already evident, and the quantity of sugar that will reach Halifax for distribution by us throughout Canada will this season be very large.

That the "country districts" are becoming more independent of Halifax is true in a certain limited sense, and we do not know that the fact is to be regretted. The currents and conditions of trade have undergone a very remarkable change in this country within the past two decades. This change has been gradual and slow, but far-seeing men could have observed and did observe its trend long ago, and are aware that it is still in progress. The end is not yet. Instead of being the sole purveyors for these small but enterprising communities in a retail trade alone, we are rising to the proud position in which we will handle a very considerable portion of the incoming and outgoing freights of Canada. We could not, under our new conditions, existing and coming, afford to have our attention distracted and our energies expended in merely caring for a section when the whole country calls for our services; yet we retain a valuable portion of our country trade.

Still, though the possibilities—nay, the probabilities, the certainties—of the future are so brilliant, much yet is needed to put us in a position to fully avail ourselves of our natural and our acquired advantages. We want, and must have, closer communications with the rest of Canada than we now enjoy. When the Halifax dry dock, which is now under contract, is completed, it will in itself form a strong inducement to freighters to come to this port to discharge and to receive cargoes of goods for and from the interior in preference to any other port. Means as direct as possible must be provided to care for and to forward with despatch this freight. To do this the direct link of communication between the Intercolonial and the Canada Pacific railways—which involves the bridge across the St. Lawrence, near Quebec—will have to be established.

In order that Halifax shall obtain her full and legitimate share of trade the proper pressure must be brought to bear upon the government to reduce freight charges to the lowest possible figure. The country can better afford to lose on railway running expenses than to hazard losing the business to rival railways, and to have the trade diverted to United States channels.

Though it may not be generally known, it is a fact, that a large and increasing trade between this City and Quebec has recently sprung up, by which both places are profiting. This trade only requires more liberal facilities for intercommunication to develop wonderful proportions.

Quebec is the pass through which we can most readily reach the vast markets lying to the west of us, and it is, therefore, a matter of paramount, of vital importance, that our connections with her should be absolutely complete and facile.

In view of what the womb of the future holds for us, and of what the very near future will demand of us, it becomes us to reflect how we should prepare ourselves to grasp the good fortune before us, and how to meet the coming demands upon us. It will be but a short time before at least two, if not four or more lines of rails must be laid parallel to each other along the entire length of railway from Halifax, at least as far as Quebec, to accommodate the immense volume of freight and passenger traffic that must be moved over this road. We have one elevator already, which was erected by the government as an adjunct to, and a terminus of the Intercolonial Railway. It is true that it has been idle most of the time since it was built, but we shall be greatly surprised if within the next ten years facts do not demonstrate that it is too small to perform the work that it will be called upon to do, and if it will not have to be enlarged or others put up in addition.

It may be a trite remark, but we believe it to be none the less true, that Halifax with its deep, broad, sheltered harbor, open all the year round, its advanced position on the eastern shore of North America, and its ready, facile means of communication with all parts of this continent possesses advantages and has a future second to no city in America.

It is an indisputable fact that the population of this city is steadily growing. In spite of the emigration of some of our sons—many of whom go farther and fare worse—and in spite of the chronic alleged "dullness of the times," the inhabitants of Halifax increase in numbers year by year, and year after year new buildings are put up and occupied as fast as they are built. Our rate of taxation—municipal and other—will favorably compare with that of any other city of like size in America. Our climate is healthy. We are not subject to floods, tornadoes, and other grievous dispensations that afflict so many of our sister cities. Even heavy storms are almost unknown. We experience neither the extreme heats of summer, nor the terrible frosts of winter common elsewhere. Back of us lies a province rich in boundless natural resources. Magnificent stretches of unsurpassed farming and grazing lands are in every county, quarries of excellent building stone, and mines of coal, gold, silver, lead, manganese, copper, and other metals abound, and primeval forests of good timber cover a considerable portion of its surface. All invite man to take possession, and with ordinary health, diligence, and intelligence, he may become not only comfortable but wealthy. A more inviting field for capital, enterprise, or immigration, can scarcely be found in the world.

The principle business houses of Halifax will be found in another column.

NEW BRUNSWICK'S COMMERCIAL CAPITAL.

It was about the middle of the 18th century that St. John received its first English settlers, but the city dates its birth from the landing of the Loyalists, May 18, 1783. The growth of St. John, the site of which at the landing of the Loyalists, was little else than a barren waste, was continuous until the great fire of 1877, by which two-fifths of the city were laid in ashes in about nine hours' time, and more than sixteen hundred business establishments and dwellings were consumed.

Some of the best wooden ships ever constructed in America have been launched from yards in the immediate vicinity of St. John. The lumber business of the Province, which, with the exception of that conducted on the north shore, has St. John for its chief shipping port, gives employment to thousands of men, and promises to continue a great source of wealth for centuries to come. Great as the consumption of timber of Provincial growth has been during the last three-fourths of a century, there are those who contend that the supply is diminished only by the destruction caused by forest fires; in other words, that the annual growth of the timber is as large as the amount exported, and that used in ship-building and for other purposes at home.

The Province of New Brunswick is wonderfully favored with facilities for communication by water. The River St. John, at the mouth of which the City of St. John is situated, is navigable by steamers of large size to a distance of about 200 miles; the Kennebecasis, Bellefleur Bay, and Washademoak and Grand Lakes, which have their outlet into the St. John, are, during the summer, brought into daily communication with the city through the medium of elegant and fast sailing steamers and vessels of various descriptions. Other lines of steamers connect St. John with St. Andrews, St. Stephens, Eastport, Portland, and Boston. The Islands of Grand Manan and Campbell, Digby, Yarmouth and Annapolis, Nova Scotia, and the Counties of Albert and Westmoreland on the Bay of Fundy, are reached by lines of steamers and sailing packets. That part of St. John which has been re-built since the great fire of 1877, is noticeable on account of the elegance of its public and private buildings, which are mostly constructed of brick and stone; perhaps no city in America of its size and wealth can compete with it in the number and elegance of its churches, while its custom house, post office, banks, railway station, etc., compare favorably with any structures of the kind in Canada. Since the Provinces of British North America were formed into the Dominion of Canada, St. John has engaged largely in manufactures, and at present her factories in various lines of goods are fully employed, and their productions in some lines, aside from their sale throughout the length and breadth of the Dominion, are in constant demand in countries far remote.

The principle business houses of St. John will be found in another column.