BANK OF COMMERCE.

To give a conspectus of Canada's activities and progress; to present the leading features of her advancement; to dwell upon the incidents of the trade of each province or each district in which his bank does business, and to indicate how these various circumstances bear one upon the other, or upon the prosperity of Canada as a whole—such is the duty which it has grown common to consider is imposed upon the president of the Canadian Bank of Commerce from year to year. It is himself who has imposed this duty, however. And he has done it for many years with faithfulness and with distinguished ability.

In dealing with the year 1910, Sir Edmund Walker had a story to relate of uncommon and almost all-pervading prosperity throughout Canada. The partial failure of crop in portions of the prairie provinces and the circumstances which modified the success of districts elsewhere, either industrially or otherwise, should not prevent our realizing that the country as a whole has been very prosperous. The ascertained value of yields from farm and mine, the intelligent estimates made as to our other sources of wealth in land and sea, the additions to population and resources made by our newer population and the money they brought with them, the returns from the vast activity of our railways and other carriers—all these things point to a degree of flourishing activity on the part of our people not exceeded probably by any other community. The remarkable record of almost seven hundred millions ($693,161,000) of foreign trade—three times the volume of 1880—is an outstanding proof of our enterprise as well as of our realized resources.

The presentation of such an array of gratifying facts is a pleasant task for any man, banker or publicist. It is less pleasant and far less popular to place in the limelight defects in method, faults in economy, negligences of opportunity to do better. Yet it is to the credit of Sir Edmund Walker that he had the courage to point out specifically such blemishes. And he has been at the pains to show how and with what comparative ease error or neglect can be repaired. For a poor crop of apples, the remedy is plain in the adoption of scientific methods; the results he gives of intelligent fruit, flower and vegetable cultivation border on the marvellous. In the North-West, where restoration of the soil overtaxed by too constant wheat cropping has been neglected, it is the plain duty of the farmer to fertilize the soil, to keep down weeds, and to adopt mixed farming and stock-raising. Canada East, too, can do more than it has done. Ontario and Quebec form, said the speaker, "a land of neglected opportunity" for the farmer. A more modern system, regard for the errors of the past, and the valuable lessons to be learned from the results of our excellent agricultural colleges and farms will increase in enormous degree the already creditable yield of our farms. Of intensive farming we know but little. To quote from the address: "Canada is somewhat like a man who, having a rich inheritance in land, borrows to develop it, and, confident of its future value, spends freely for his present gratification, while he does not make effort enough to create the needed present revenue from his property."

Several other of the items in the address are well fitted to arouse wonder. The enormous probable extent and value of the halibut fishery on the Pacific coast, for instance, and the striking fact that production of minerals and metals last year in Canada exceeded ninety millions of dollars. Of the world's production of silver in 1910, say $107,000,000 in all, Cobalt's percentage was 11.6.

The statements of the general manager with respect to the conditions of the year and the bank's profits as a result of the general prosperity were apt. His recognition of a duty to the country at large, to the authority whence bank charters emanate, and to the bank's customers, as well as to the pockets of shareholders, indicate broad-mindedness. The great figures which the Bank of Commerce has now reached—$10,000,000 paid capital, $7,000,000 rest, $126,000,000 deposits, $154,000,000 loans, 202 branches, 1,700 employees—and the variety of countries in which it is represented gave point to his statement that "Our quick assets equal 45 per cent. of our liabilities, excluding capital and surplus."

The audience upon the occasion was largely one of business and professional men, such as always attend these gatherings, with the expectation of hearing an intellectual treat. They listened to both president and general manager with exemplary attention. It may be pardonable at the same time to record that when Mr. Laird reached the sentence in which he announced the recommendation of an increased dividend, a ripple of pleasing emotion passed over the countenances and changed the attitudes of most of the auditors. It was evident that the sentence in question created unusual warmth in the vote of thanks to Mr. Laird, who probably knows to a nicety to what degree the prospect of "a little mair o' ye're siller," as Mr. Blaikie anecdotically put it, can stimulate the imagination, even of a roomful of listening philosophers.

Nothing more creditable to the general administration of the bank could have been announced than the remarks and the resolution of Mr. Lash, the vice-president, as to the generous terms of the arrangement enlarging the pension fund of the bank so as to include provision for widows and orphans of deceased employees. The fund is placed upon an actuarial basis, and the amount of its funds exceeds $1,200,000, a most handsome sum.

TEST OF THE COMBINES ACT.

If present signs do not fail, the first investigation under Canada's new Combines Act will shortly be commenced. Certain Quebec citizens presented a lengthy petition to Judge Cannon, of Quebec, stating that the United Shoe Machinery Company of Canada was acting in restraint of trade. Judge Cannon has considered the allegations, and has given judgment that there is according to the affidavit sufficient ground for an inquiry under the Act, which he ordered to be held in Quebec. The investigation might have been comparatively simple had it concerned only a Canadian company. But the United Shoe Machinery Company of Canada is the Canadian branch of a big American concern, which supplies manufacturers with machinery on a lease basis, obtaining a certain percentage of the price of every shoe sold.

A Washington despatch states that in view of the proposed suit of the United States Government against the electrical trust, there is much interest in the litigation now in progress in Canada against the United Shoe Machinery Company. The suit there and that in Canada seem closely related in that both hinge on the validity of patent rights.

The United States Government will charge that the electrical trust fixes prices from the factory to the consumer, and also restricts competition by utilizing the protection afforded by patent rights. The agreements, contracts, and licenses of the General Electric Company, the Westinghouse Company, and the National Electric Lamp Company will all be attacked by the government. The complaint will allege that prices are maintained according to a schedule; that only customers who will charge the agreed price can get the electrical appliances for sale; that in general the entire arrangement is a combination in restraint of trade as outlined by the Sherman law, but protected by the intricacies of our patent laws.

The validity of these patents is to be attacked, and there is a belief that, if the government fails in its present suit, an organized attempt will be made to have Congress enact a measure drafted along the line of the more drastic Canadian measure.