

PROGRESS OF CANADA

Interesting Addresses by the President and General Manager of The Canadian Bank of Commerce at the Annual Meeting of the Bank

WE have grown accustomed to look to Sir Edmund Walker's address at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Bank of Commerce for a comprehensive review of the history of the year, and instructive comment upon prevailing conditions. In his recent address we note the following passages of general interest:

President's Address

I shall not apologize as I did a year ago for asking you to devote your attention to the material affairs of Canada at a time when the Empire and its Allies are fighting for the greatest of all causes—the liberty of the world. Canada has in that short time so enlarged her sphere of action that only the blind could fail to see that every detail of our national life which aids or hinders our power to serve in the great conflict is of supreme importance. In the terrible winter of 1914-15 we did not realize that our aid was to count for much in the struggle, greatly as we desired to help. We did not really believe, despite the warning of Kitchener, that the war would still be raging in 1917 with the end not nearly in sight. Now we do not talk of any definite time for the end; we only know that the last man, the last gun, the last dollar, may be needed, but that we shall win beyond any peradventure if the people in all the allied countries can be made to understand what is required of them.

EXPORTS EXCEED IMPORTS.

Turning at once to our trade with other countries, that being the best indication of the tendency of affairs at the moment, we find that, leaving out the shipments of gold and bullion, both inwards and outwards, our exports for the fiscal year ending 31st March, 1916, exceeded our imports by \$249,088,274, and that for the six months ending 30th September, 1916, the excess was \$141,100,898. We cannot keep in mind too clearly what has happened since the end of our period of expansion in 1913, and a repetition of the figures given last year will aid us to do so.

Fiscal Year.	Imports.	Exports.	Excess Imports.	Excess Exports.
1912-13.	\$686,515,536	\$377,068,355	\$309,447,181	
1913-14.	635,383,222	455,437,224	179,945,998	
1914-15.	497,376,961	461,442,509	35,934,452	
1915-16.	530,211,796	779,300,070		\$249,088,274
6 mos. ending Sept.	405,901,765	547,002,663		141,100,898

The improvement from year to year is as follows:

1913 to 1914	\$129,501,183
1914 to 1915	144,011,546
1915 to 1916	285,022,726
1913 to 1916	\$558,535,455

For the six months of the present year the gain over the astonishing figures for the first half of last year is nearly another 100 millions.

The gain of 285 millions in our foreign trade as compared with March, 1915, is almost all due to the increase in the value of the exports, the increase in the imports being only 32 millions.

EFFECTIVE ECONOMY.

If we are really to exercise an effective economy we should be very jealous as to the nature of any imports not necessary for the production of war supplies or for our national existence. There is some improvement in this respect, but it is not pleasant to see about 10 millions sent abroad for motors and about as much more for silk goods and velvets. The chief increases are in iron and steel bars and goods, and in iron ores, in machinery, in wool, cotton and jute and goods made therefrom, in raw rubber, in various chemicals, oils, explosives, etc., needed for making munitions, in various articles for the army and navy, and to a considerable extent in foodstuffs, so that apparently the chief increases are in necessary articles, although we regret that many of them were not made in Canada. There is a large increase in our exports under every general heading, especially under manufactures, mining, agriculture and animals and their products. The total of our imports and exports of merchandise in the fiscal year ending March, 1916, was \$1,309,511,866, against \$241,025,360 in 1896, that being also a period of excess exports. This enormous foreign trade is of course coincident with a great decline in all domestic trade not connected with the war, and is swollen largely by purchases of steel and other material imported from the United States to be used here in making munitions; the money result is abnormal because of the high price of almost every known commodity. I am not putting forward the figures, however, as a guide to what may be possible after the war, I am putting them forward as an indication of what may be accomplished

when we are spurred by great events. The financial ideal for us at the moment is to pay interest on our foreign indebtedness, to provide our share of the cost of the war, and to lend as much as possible to Great Britain to pay for munitions made for her by Canada. We are apparently accomplishing this, but in the absence of figures we cannot estimate what amount of profit from our home trade is eventually invested in war securities. We are, however, being helped to accomplish this result, in a manner which may deceive us, by the large market in the United States for our securities, and also by the many subscriptions received from our wealthy neighbours when issues of our own war loans are made in Canada.

UNITED STATES GOLD STOCK.

The affairs of the United States are necessarily always of great interest to us, but never more so than at the present time, and I hope that every shareholder will read attentively the carefully prepared report of our New York Agent. During the past year the United States has added to her gold stock, after deducting exports, about 400 millions in gold and is now estimated to possess the huge sum of about \$2,750,000,000 in that metal. From information obtained in the United States we learn that the imports of gold from Canada for the ten months ending October were 385 millions of dollars. This was, of course, almost entirely on Imperial Government account. With the enormous volume of war business, the increase of credit made possible by the new Federal Reserve Bank Act and this influx of gold, trade has so increased that in many lines of business each month establishes a new record. An estimate of the foreign trade of the United States, given by our New York Agent, places the excess of exports over imports from August, 1914, to September, 1916, at \$4,153,000,000. This is said to be almost equivalent to the amount of United States securities held abroad before the war, and it is estimated that by the end of September securities of all kinds had been returned to the value of \$2,400,000,000, so roughly about \$1,600,000,000 remained abroad. Of this remainder the proportion which can be made available for British war finance is too uncertain to form a basis for an opinion of any value. Great Britain, however, holds a vast amount in the securities of countries other than the United States. I have seen the statement that about ninety per cent. of the present exports from the United States arises from war requirements. If this is even approximately correct we can imagine the vast additional increase in wealth if the war continues much longer, and the extent of the collapse in trade if it does not.

UNITED STATES WAR TRADE.

The receipts of gold, therefore, have been huge, notwithstanding the acquiring of so large an amount of United States securities. Co-incidental with this there has been such an expansion of credit that bank reserves are not as comfortable as they were a year ago, and the Federal Reserve Board has sounded a note of warning which takes the form of a caution against the purchase of British and French Treasury Bills. This was immediately followed by the withdrawal of an issue at that moment about to be offered to the public. The United States has benefited more by the sale of war supplies of all kinds than any other nation, and because of this they ought to be the main source of credit for such supplies. Where merchandise is produced credit as a rule must be extended, otherwise trade will decline. Great Britain, because of the enormous production of gold within the Empire, is the only country that can buy largely for cash, although she also must have liberal credit extended to her while the war lasts. The United States for the time being, however, will sell goods to the Allied countries for cash or will lend against collateral, but will not grant credit in the ordinary sense. What they fear is a sudden collapse of the trade in war supplies, but such a collapse would be the natural result if the advice of the Federal Reserve Board is literally followed.

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION.

The only direction in which the tide of prosperity in the United States is not at the full is in agricultural production. In a year when the world is facing the highest prices of recent times, the great decrease in the wheat crop, the moderate yields of corn and oats, the small yields of minor products, and the adverse effect of high-priced feed on the live stock situation, are matters of deep concern. The individual producer may be compensated, at least partially, for the low yield by the higher price, but no comfort for the consumer, weary of high prices, can be found in a world short of food and of almost every commodity that enters into his daily needs.

A matter of supreme importance to Canada, and for the frequent reference to which no excuse is needed, is that we must as far as possible provide the cost of the war at home.

COST OF THE WAR.

At the end of October the war had cost us a little over 350 millions and at our present rate of spending 300 millions more may be added during the coming year. From the excess of revenue over expenditure we may at the end of the fiscal year have 50 millions, or even more, to apply on war charges. To provide for so great a proportion of the total cost of the war in this manner reflects great credit on those who are responsible for Dominion finance. We have managed to finance the remainder of the cost thus far partly by an account with the Imperial Government for overseas and other disbursements, and partly by loans floated in Canada. Over 100 millions of the amount due the Imperial Government has been funded permanently and most of the balance is offset by payments on Great Britain's account. Some loans for ordinary capital expenditures which could not be deferred were made in New York in 1915. In March, 1916, a second loan was placed in New York amounting to 75 millions, of which 25 millions was used to take up a corresponding amount of the 45 millions borrowed in July, 1915. In September a second loan in Canada was offered. This time the finance minister asked for 100 millions and the subscriptions exceeded 200 millions, the banks receiving nothing on their underwriting of a portion of the loan. These are such notable achievements that I am sure they cannot have escaped the memory of any Canadian, but I mention them for the benefit of the very large number of people outside Canada who read our annual reports.

WAR FINANCE.

In this review of the finances of the year it is necessary to recall that the proceeds of the first war loan of November, 1915, 100 millions, were used mainly, if not altogether, in the year 1916. There is one feature in Canadian war finance which differs in a marked degree from that of Great Britain. Our Finance Minister has as far as possible funded the debt as it has been incurred, with maturities neither so long as to involve present rates of interest for too many years, nor so short as to trouble the Government during a period of some years beyond any probable duration of the war. One of the disturbing features of the finance of Great Britain is the enormous quantity of Treasury Bills which must be renewed at very short intervals.

THRIFT FOR THE EMPIRE.

Thrift for the individual is excellent, but just now that is of minor importance. Thrift for the sake of Canada, thrift for the sake of the Empire, thrift to win the war should be our cry. We shall not fail for men, difficult as enlistment may be. We shall not fail because of inability to make or to procure war supplies. If we fail it will be because we have wasted on unnecessary things the money that would have won the war. The man or woman who works hard at making shells may take much comfort in helping to win the war, but the man or woman who, in addition, saves a part of the present high wages due to the war and buys a war security, or helps a bank to do so, has helped twice, and the second kind of help is the most vital. The manufacturers of the United States will make war supplies for money. We are doing better only if we supply them on credit.

In addition to the credits for munitions, the Canadian banks are at the moment giving credits to the British Government for the purchase of wheat to the extent of 20 millions, but the transactions are for a shorter duration than the obligations already mentioned.

PROSPERITY GENERAL.

The Review of Business Conditions which accompanies our annual report records prosperity beyond anything we have ever known in almost every part of Canada. This results from the existence of a market which needs almost everything we produce and which must pay almost anything the seller asks. If it is true that ninety per cent. of the exports of the United States are a result of the war, much the same must be true of Canada, and in addition a large part of our home consumption is due to the requirements of the Canadian army. As individuals, almost all are gaining by the war, except those with more or less fixed incomes and without power to adjust the same when prices are high, and those who are engaged in business not connected with war supplies. The money made by the individual, however, has, so far as the nation is concerned, to be provided by a war debt incurred partly by Canada and partly by Great Britain. We do not, like the United States, receive gold in exchange for a large part of our products, we even borrow from the United States part of the cost of the war.

THE DOLLAR SAVED.

If we could free ourselves from the habit of thinking of commodities merely in the terms of their money value,