

BANK OF BRITISH NORTH AMERICA.—Continued.

again worth par. I will now pass on, and make some observations on the balance sheet to December 31, 1904. Deposits and current accounts, compared with December, 1903, show an increase of £311,000; 77 per cent. of this increase is in the savings bank department, which is daily growing in favor in Canada. Bills payable and other liabilities show a decrease of £620,000. This decrease consists almost entirely in the bills payable, which are £550,000 less than at this time last year. This reduction does not signify any diminution of the bank's business generally, but it is the reflection of a long period of inactivity in New York, to which I shall have to refer again when I speak of our profits. Notes in circulation show an increase of £32,000 compared with this time last year. But here I must explain that the figures at December 31 do not represent in this or in any year the highest point of our circulation. It is in the months of October and November, when the harvest is being moved, that the circulation reaches its maximum, and by December 31 the ebb-tide has begun and made some progress.

ADDITION TO RESERVE FUND.

By an addition of £20,000 to our reserve fund the total is raised to £420,000. I would remind you that the whole of this sum has been saved out of profits, while the reserves of many of our friendly rivals have been largely augmented by the premiums obtained from the issue of new capital. On the other side of the account cash and specie are £67,000 less than this time last year; but cash at call and short notice is £125,000 larger, so that the total under these two headings shows an increase of £57,000. The cash and specie is 37 per cent. of our immediate liabilities, while the two items together amount to 35 per cent. of our total liabilities to the public. Investments, so far as regards our British Government stocks, show no change, while our Dominion of Canada Bonds, as already explained, now stand at 97 instead of 100. Other securities, at £133,000, show a decrease of £14,000. In Canada, as in the United Kingdom, the values of all high-class securities continued low during the half-year, but a strict revaluation of these securities shows that they stand in our books at less than actual values. Bills receivable, loans on security and other accounts show a decrease of £323,000 compared with this time last year; but I have nothing special to say respecting these figures, which are not due to any other cause than the ordinary fluctuations of our business.

NEW BANK PREMISES.

Bank premises show an increase of £21,000 during the year. Our actual expenditure has been £31,000, but, as you have seen, we have taken from the profits of the half-year the sum of £10,000 in reduction of this account. At December 31, 1901, our premises account stood £120,000, so that in these three years we have spent £70,000. Had it been possible, we should gladly have avoided this large increase in the account, but I have no hesitation in saying that we had no choice if we were to retain our position in Canada. The bulk of the money has been spent in Winnipeg, and although I am myself responsible for urging upon my colleagues the necessity of a proper banking house in that city, I am going to add that it has been well spent. The site, which we purchased in October, 1902, is one of the best in the business part of the city, and it is worth a great deal more to-day than it was then. The building which we have erected upon it is not only well adapted to all our banking requirements, but is also an ornament to the city, which is rapidly increasing in importance, population and wealth, and if we had been influenced chiefly by motives of economy in this matter we should have made a great mistake. At Toronto we have carried out extensive internal alterations, whereby we not only secure first-class banking accommodation, but also earn a considerable rental. At Ottawa our building was right enough, but the situation was wrong, and it was necessary to make a change or to be forgotten, so we made the change, and this was the next heaviest item. Then we had to build a manager's residence at Winnipeg, where the demand for houses is so great that it is almost impossible for a married officer to obtain accommodation, even at an exorbitant rental. At Rosthern until quite lately we conducted our business in a little wooden shanty, of which I had a photograph taken when I was there in 1903. If you will come and look at a print of that photograph after the meeting you will thoroughly appreciate that it was not a leaning to extravagance

which led us to purchase a modest brick building, where we might conduct our business in safety. The bank at Victoria has been practically rebuilt, and, although I have not seen it, I believe it is now a thoroughly modernized and suitable building. There has been other expenditure at other branches, but nothing of importance. I have spoken at some length on this point, so that you may thoroughly understand our reasons for the present transfer of £10,000, and for further transfers which will have to be made in the future—not because there is not ample value, and more than ample value in property, but because we do not wish to see this account remaining at so high a point.

PROFITS FOR YEAR £96,000.

Finally, I may point out that our profits this year, after making ample provision for all accounts which we consider to be in the least doubtful, amount to £96,000, exclusive of those sums which you so generously allow us to appropriate for the benefit of the staff, compared with £88,000 in 1903. We regard this as particularly satisfactory, because, as I have already stated, the year 1904 was one of inactivity in New York. As you are aware, we employ a large part of our resources at call and short notice in New York, and during 1904 the average rate for call money did not exceed 1 1/2 per cent., and for time money 3 per cent. Such were the general conditions of the money market in New York, over which we have no control, and the result was that the contribution of profit from that office was largely reduced. That need not trouble you at all, for these conditions will not be permanent, and a return to greater activity will certainly be seen, although I am not going to venture to predict the date. In the meantime, we consider that it is eminently satisfactory under such circumstances to see a substantial increase of £8,000 in the total profits of the year, compared with those of 1903.

INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS.

In general business, the year 1904 was not without its vicissitudes. The winter 1903-4 was of exceptional severity, so that traffic by road and railway was only carried on under great difficulties and expense. This interfered with the shipment of produce and the distribution of merchandise, and also had a serious effect upon agriculture in Eastern Canada. The lumber industry did not enjoy so much prosperity as during recent years, chiefly owing to a diminished demand from the United Kingdom, which was only partly compensated for by the steady consumption in the United States. The dairying industry, which is of such growing importance in the East, realized considerably less money for the producers than in 1903, ad had it of bee for the good harvest in the West, we should probably have seen a partial set-back in the growing prosperity of the Dominion.

THE WHEAT CROP.

Naturally, the progress of the crops in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories was watched by all in Canada and in the United Kingdom with anxiety, for the success or otherwise of the harvest in that great country is no longer a question of merely local interest. In certain parts of the country the crops were damaged by rust, and in consequence of this the grade of wheat was not so high as the hopes of the farmers had led them to anticipate. The crop was, however, bountiful, being estimated at sixty million bushels; while the inferiority in quality was more than made up by the higher price obtained, and it is estimated that the wheat alone will realize forty million dollars. The influx of settlers consequently continues, many still coming into the country from across the boundary, and bringing with them not only capital but valuable experience. New lands are being constantly taken up, while farmers already on the ground have been adding to their holdings. This is, perhaps, a weak spot at the present time, for, encouraged by the success of past seasons, and seeing the price of land steadily advancing in value, no doubt many have been tempted to make larger purchases than their capital justifies. That the price of land should advance under the influence of a constant stream of settlers is only natural; but there is reason to fear that the speculator has also contributed to this movement, and this is much to be regretted, for speculation of that sort actually retards the progress of the country. It is also noticeable that the number of commercial failures in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories has increased, although the total of such liabilities has not increased in like proportion. It is difficult for us who remain at home, or perhaps pay an occasional visit to the