

THE BANK OF BRITISH NORTH AMERICA-Continued.

same time the appetite of the English investing public is not unlimited, and there are at present signs of an attack of indigestion. In quite a number of cases lately the investing public has failed to come forward to the relief of the underwriters, and the latter have been left with a big proportion of the stock on their hands. Conditions also are at present very unfavorable to all fresh capital creations, and seem likely to continue so owing, firstly, to the fact of the great activity of trade in this country which is keeping money dear; and, secondly, to the large probable requirements of foreign Governments which may have to be met by the London market, in addition to the usual demands of railways, municipalities, etc., in the new and developing countries of the world. We have a fairly wide acquaintance among those who undertake these new issues, i.e., bankers, stock brokers and underwriters, and we think it will be only prudent for those intending to embark on schemes involving application to the London market not to do so without first realizing the difficulties they may have to meet and the high rates they are likely to be required to pay. As to the prospects for the present year, prophecy is always a rash and dangerous business, but there is good reason for thinking that a larger area than ever before will this year be under crop, since a greater acreage was summer fallowed last year than in the previous year. Moreover, it is hardly to be expected that we shall see a repetition of the unusually unfavorable weather conditions which prevailed last spring, and which no doubt prevented the seeding of a considerable area. Meanwhile immigration continues on an enormous scale and from the figures at present to hand it appears likely that the total for the fiscal year ending 31st inst. will amount to 400,000 persons, as against 354,000 in the year ending March 31, 1912. It is of interest to note that immigration into the United States only came up to the figure of 400,000 when the total population in that country was 40 millions. The population of Canada is now only just 8 millions, which goes to show how extremely rapid is the growth of Canada at the present time even when compared with the large growth of the United States in an earlier period of that country's history. It also brings home to us how enormous a development is required in every sort of direction, both public and private, when a country has to provide for an annual increase of population by immigration alone of 5 per cent. that increase consisting, too, in the main of men and women in the prime of life. During the past year Mr. Hoare and Mr. Mayne Campbell have both visited Canada, and have done much valuable work in the Bank's interests, for which we are extremely indebted. I now beg to move that the report and accounts be adopted.

Mr. E. A. Hoare—I beg to second the adoption of the report.

The Chairman—If any shareholder has any questions to ask on the subject of the bank's business I shall be very pleased to do my best to answer him.

Mr. Theodore Ellis Williams—Mr. Chairman, your speech has been so complete that I have little to ask you in connection with the report before us; in fact, you have already referred to certain points on which I would have asked for an explanation. First let me say, however, that it is generally considered an ominous sign when many shareholders attend a public meeting; on the other hand, it is a sign that the shareholders are absolutely satisfied with the conduct of the business of a company by the directors when but few attend. No such idea has weighed with me in coming here to-day. I know that during the considerable number of years that I have been a shareholder in the Bank you have had but very small meetings, but I have uniformly received such courteous consideration as a shareholder from the board and also as a small customer from the officials of the Bank, both in London and New York, and at one or two other branches, that I feel it a pleasing duty to come to see you if I possibly can. You have already explained about the reserve fund and the reserve from bank premises. You referred to the building at Edmonton. I have always thought that you were extremely wise in having your buildings, although of a very useful, substantial and pleasing elevation, somewhat lower than most of the buildings around you, because it has occurred to me that in these Canadian

cities which grow so rapidly you have acquired some of the best possible sites with capabilities for the extension of your business premises, should occasion arise, upwards towards heaven. I am only sorry, although I have no doubt you have acted very wisely, that you have put your building at Edmonton as high as four storeys.

I think that in most of your banks there are only one or two storeys, but if you have made them sufficiently substantial, and if Edmonton grows, you can easily extend your building, if you think it more desirable to do so, rather than obtain a fresh site. It strikes me, sir, that you have rather a small proportion of branches in Alberta, but I daresay that has been carefully considered by you. Alberta seems to be going ahead at the present time, and I know that some of the banks have branches in one or two other places, such as Lethbridge and Red Deer, but that is a matter which, no doubt, you have not overlooked. I was extremely pleased to hear from you that your late general manager, having felt obliged to retire after so many years of useful service to the Bank, has been succeeded by Mr. Mackenzie. I am extremely glad that your choice fell upon him, for when I made his acquaintance in Victoria some years ago—it must be six or seven—I was particularly struck with him. I regarded him as a man of extraordinary capabilities and of boundless energy, always extending the greatest courtesy to all those with whom he came in contact. There are one or two matters, if I am not taking up your time too much, on which I should like to draw an opinion from you, if you see your way to give one, as being indirectly, at any rate, connected with the business of the Bank. You probably observed in The Times of last Saturday an article on "Canadian Banking," and a telegram from The Times correspondent on the subject. He seems to think that there is a disposition to oppose the extension of charters except on certain conditions. That is a matter which affects this Bank, although it will not do so for some years, as we have just had the charter renewed. Amongst those proposals that seem likely to be objectionable, but on which you will be better able to form an opinion, are limitation of reserves, inspection by Government inspectors, land banks, rural credit, and interference with the rates of interest. It seems to me that in a new and prosperous country, especially one so fortunate as Canada, there is a great desire to obtain capital; but when that capital has been obtained there are a large number of people who are ready to consider only their own interests, rather regardless of those who have provided the capital. Any such action must be very deterrent to the continued inflow of capital to a country. Already I believe your bank, in common with others, meets all the legitimate requirements of those who wish to borrow. It is just possible that banks may see their way to advance on some other kind of security more easily produced by the borrowers, but I do not think that Government ought to interfere in a matter of that kind. It seems to me to be rather a matter for the lenders to satisfy themselves that they are really having adequate security, and we may trust them to be perfectly ready to advance money, it being their business, that from which they obtain most of their dividends, whenever they can see their way to a very good security. This Bank has always had the credit of exacting—I must not go into comparisons, therefore, I will say of exacting—a security which would be satisfactory to the board of directors and to the shareholders. The same applies to the rates of interest. Those matters seem to me to be questions of supply and demand as in the case of other goods, and I hope that the Canadians will not press forward any legislation which may hamper the banks to such an extent as to check the flow of capital, which is absolutely necessary for the continuous development of that large and growing country. I do not think, sir, I need take up your time with any more remarks on that subject. Perhaps you can see your way to enlighten us a little.

The Chairman: As regards the various questions that Mr. Williams has raised, I think with reference to Edmonton I may inform him that although our building is only planned for four storeys at the present time, the foundations are being constructed in such a manner that we can always increase it in height if we wish to do so in future. Then, as to the extension of branches in Alberta, I think Mr. Williams may rest assured that we