

# Western Siberia

## Conditions of the Country and Trade Possibilities

(Extract from a recent report of Trade Commissioner L. D. Wilgress, to the Department of Trade and Commerce).

Siberia is one of the most interesting of the new developing countries which have been opened to colonization by the era of improved transportation facilities. From the point of view of trade development the country may be divided into three separate districts or "zones." The first is known as Western Siberia and consists of the territory stretching from the Ural Mountains to east of the Yenisei River. In this region the trade is more or less subject to the influences of European Russia and foreign supplies are imported in normal times either across the European frontier or through the Baltic and Black Sea ports. The central or what may be described as the "neutral" zone consists of the territory around Irkutsk and is chiefly important from the point of view of mineral development. The distance from export markets limits the production of agricultural and other products and this district does not offer as good prospects for future trade as other sections of the country. The eastern part of Asiatic Russia beyond lake Baikal is generally known as the Russian Far East and the trade in this territory is a specialized business distinct from that with the rest of the Empire. The bulk of the supplies for this region are imported by sea through the port of Vladivostok.

### The Development of Western Siberia.

For the present attention will be confined to the prospects for Canadian trade with Western Siberia or the first of the districts defined above. This is the most important section of the country agriculturally and is also the most thickly settled. Out of a total population for the whole of Siberia of about 11,500,000 persons, nearly 9,000,000 are settled on the plains of Western Siberia and in the foothills of the Altai. These plains stretch across the continent for nearly 1,200 miles without a break to the Altai Mountains and are watered by the great rivers of Siberia—the Obi, the Irtysh and the Yenisei—which flow in a north and south direction to the Arctic ocean. The Altai mountains cross Siberia from southwest to northeast, forming the northwest edge of the great Central Asiatic tableland. In the north the plains of Western Siberia are covered with a forest belt, rich in unexploited timber and furbearing animals, but much of which consists of impassable swamp. South of this forest zone there extends between latitudes 55 and 57 the Black Earth region of Siberia, the section most attractive for agricultural colonization. Further to the south are the dry steppes which are inhabited chiefly by nomadic tartar tribes with large flocks of cattle, horses, sheep and goats. In the foothills of the Altai and at higher altitudes there are also excellent agricultural lands and pastures of alpine meadow, including an area of black earth belt which is probably the richest in all Siberia. It has been estimated that the black-earth zone of the Western Siberian plains and the foothills of the Altai farther east could, if properly cultivated, support five times the present population of European Russia.

### The Trans-Siberian Railway.

The economic development of Western Siberia since the completion of the Trans-Siberian railway has been a notable one. During the ten years preceding the outbreak of the war the emigration to Siberia from European Russia was proceeding at the rate of nearly 300,000 persons per annum. This great influx of people naturally tended to enhance the growth of the riches of the country from year to year. The result was that the surplus of agricultural products available for distribution on the export and European Russian markets greatly increased and before the war had already attained large dimensions. The export of butter from Western Siberia for example which only began in 1897, amounted in 1913 to over 178,000,000 pounds.

### Railway Expansion.

The report goes on to state that one of the chief obstacles to the further economic progress of Siberia has been the great distance from export markets. Lack of transportation facilities has confined export trade to articles of small bulk, such as butter. The Trans-Siberian railway, supplemented by inland water transport during the summer months provided the only means of outlet, but railroad expansion

started just prior to the war will greatly improve the situation. During the present year three new important lines have been opened for traffic, and a fourth will soon be completed. These are:

1. The Altai Railway.—Important developments are expected to result from the construction of this railway since it serves the extremely fertile agricultural districts in the foothills of the Altai and also connects rich mineral areas with the main Siberian railway. The line is 514 miles in length and runs south from Novo-Nicolavsk to Semipalatinsk.

2. The Kulundin Railway.—From Tatarskoi, a point on the Siberian railway some 120 miles east of Omsk, the line runs south to Slavgorod, a distance of about 200 miles.

3. The Kolchugino Railway.—This railway will tap the Kuznetsk coalfields, which surpass all other Russian deposits in magnitude and variety of contents. The region is also rich in other minerals. The railway is being built by a private syndicate and already the section from the Siberian railway to Kolchugino (124 miles) has been completed.

4. The Minusinsk Railway.—The construction will be shortly completed of the railway running south from Achinsk on the main Siberian line to Minusinsk on the upper Yenisei river, a distance of 276 miles. The Minusinsk district is another of those agricultural areas of Siberia with a fertile soil and a sheltered location, which have been awaiting the advent of railway communication in order to be properly developed. The region has also valuable deposits of coal and iron.

The war has greatly emphasized the need for further railway development and the government has made provision for new lines to be built in the immediate future. The report states that when this railway programme has been carried out, Western Siberia will be well provided with railway facilities affording communication between different parts of the country and with outside markets. The entericresult of this railway construction should be a broader economic development for the whole country. There should no longer be the anomaly of a shortage of grain in some districts and low prices in others at one and the same time. The inducements for the investment of capital in Western Siberia should now be great, and with the opening up of new areas for settlement and the better utilization of mineral and other resources, the growth of the population and wealth of the country should be enhanced from year to year.

### Possibilities for Future Trade.

The provision of adequate railroad, cold storage and grain elevator facilities as outlined above should

bring about a new era of progress for Western Siberia. More advanced methods will be introduced for the exploitation of the mineral, forest and fishery resources of the country. Thus it is expected that the yield of gold from Siberia will soon be doubled, while it has been estimated that the closely connected iron and coal industry is in a position to yield during the first seven years as much as 960,000 tons of iron annually. With this development there will undoubtedly be established in time specialized industries catering to the growing demand of the local population for manufactured goods. The equipment for these factories will in most cases have to be imported from foreign countries. Developments may also be expected to take place in the export of agricultural products which have hitherto been shipped in only limited quantities or not at all. This together with the opening up of new areas for settlement should result in the renewal on an even larger scale of the emigration from European Russia which has been interrupted by the war. An increase of the agricultural population of Siberia may therefore be anticipated in addition to a further growth in the population of the towns and the mining districts. Moreover the purchasing power of the individual peasant should also be greater after the war. Owing to the opportunities afforded by the cultivation of a new land, the Siberian peasant is relatively more progressive and manifests a greater desire to improve his conditions of living than is the case with his brother in European Russia. In this connection it is difficult to overestimate the influence of the vodka prohibition on the welfare of the agricultural population. Firms distributing articles formerly considered as luxuries by the peasants already report great increases in their sales and attribute this to the increase of individual savings as a result of the prohibition of spirits. Western Siberia should therefore offer a wider and growing market for all sorts of manufactured articles, which since the country is practically without manufacturing industries, must in most cases be imported from abroad.

### Openings for Trial Orders.

The lines which present openings for Canadian firms to send trial shipments to Western Siberia after the manner described above will be dealt with in subsequent reports. For the present the following goods may be mentioned as among those for which the demand is great and which seem adaptable to parcel post consignment: Tools of all kinds, builders hardware, electric light fittings enamelled ironware, pumps (hand), razors, knitted goods, hosiery, handkerchiefs, paper and stationery.

The prospects for the supply of machinery and equipment in connection with the following undertakings will also be pointed out in later reports and should warrant careful study and if possible personal investigation on the part of Canadian manufacturers and contractors:

Construction of railways, grain elevators, refrigerators, refrigerating plants, railway car shops, flour mills, leather factories, meat-canning factories, ironworks, coal and other mine equipment.

## "It's Not Charity I Want"

### The Returned Soldier Wants a "Fair Chance," and Shall Have it.

A soldier limped into a restaurant in Quebec, where he had just landed with a big bunch of other wounded men. A civilian, about to dine, invited the soldier to join him.

"Thanks," said the man in khaki, sitting down. "but I'll pay for my own dinner." He evidently had a wholesome horror of being regarded as an object of charity.

"I respect your feeling," said the civilian, "but see here,—my boy's over there, and wounded like you. As I can't have him home for his Thanksgiving Dinner, won't you let me adopt you as my son for the occasion?"

Only then did the soldier give in.

He talked quite freely about his experience, though disposed to make light of his own trouble. Of all the remarkable things he had noticed, the most extraordinary, in his opinion, was the freedom of the army from that scourge of former wars, enteric fever,—owing, of course, to the scientific measures of prevention now in force.

But, after all, the war was now behind him, and he was thinking more of what lay before him.

"It's not charity I want," he declared, emphatically. "I just want a chance to make my own way. I've a wife and two children, and the sooner I can get

back and make a living for them the better I'll be pleased. Yet they tell me I must have two months more treatment; and even then I can't go back to my old work."

Fortunately the civilian knew what was being done, and was able to re-assure him.

"That's the job of the Military Hospitals Commission," he said. "It's not only at the front that up-to-date scientific methods are being used to keep the men in health. They are being used in the Convalescent Hospitals here, to give them back the health they have lost, and to find out what work they can do best, and fit them for it."

"And I hear," the soldier said, "that if I have to take up a new job, the Government will pay maintenance allowances for my wife and children while I'm getting trained?"

"That's true."

"Then it's all right," he said. "People say that jobs won't be as plentiful when all the boys come back. But once I've made a start and got a footing I know I can make good and keep my job. I'm not afraid. But, mind you, I want no charity, only a fair chance. And the other boys'll tell you the same thing."

They shall have it, these wounded boys of ours. "Not charity, but a fair chance."