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## Bankers' Views.

The incidence of annual meetings of bank shareholders has made available within a week the views on conditions in Canada and the outlook, of the executives of three of the important banks. In passing it may be said that the attention which is widely given in Canada to the utterances of the bank executives at these annual gatherings is an interesting and important indication of the high place which the bankers hold in the esteem of the community. Possibly in no other country is attention more generally directed to utterances of this kind, and probably so, because they are recognised as being based not only upon the best possible information, but also upon the matured and deliberate judgment of the able men who make them. What is the purport of the views which have lately been expressed? Summed up in the briefest possible way, their purport may be said to be a sober optimism, with an undercurrent of caution. The outlook is fair but there are clouds on the horizon whose development is problematical, and it is necessary to be cautious in carrying sail lest they should develop into storm-clouds. Mr. Holt, the president of the Royal Bank, especially drew attention to the dependence of Canada as a borrowing country upon exterior developments. "The present outlook," he said, "could hardly be better. At the same time we should be cautious in our optimism. It must not be forgotten that the most influential factor in our progress is the investment of foreign capital, and that the interruption of this flow would have adverse results, especially if anticipated." Mr. Coulson, president of the Bank of Toronto, emphasised the point that prosperity caused by the expenditure of money borrowed from abroad is not always on a sound basis and warned prospective borrowers that in the present condition of the foreign financial markets they should proceed cautiously. Mr. Pease, the general manager of the Royal Bank, came out as a forthright advocate of economy. "While the outlook in Canada is exceedingly bright," he said, "there are evidences on many sides that we are straining our prosperity. There is too much inflation. It would be the part of prudence to retrench in our expenditure until we have harvested another crop." Mr. Laird, the general manager of the Bank of Commerce, thinks that the evidence affords excellent grounds for the assumption that the unusual prosperity we are now enjoying is on a sound basis. "There is, therefore, some warrant," he said, "for the belief that with reasonable care and judgment in measuring our commitments there will

be a continuance of prosperous conditions for the coming year." Finally, Sir Edmund Walker, the president of the Bank of Commerce, in his always interesting and suggestive annual survey, called attention, *inter alia*, to several failings which cannot be contemplated with equanimity, the extravagance that is prevalent in some quarters, the poor roads, inefficiency of labour, and waste of food which increase the high cost of living.

It will be seen that these bankers' reasons for caution divide themselves into two categories—those beyond our control, and those for which we are directly responsible. The condition of the financial markets abroad is not of our making. As a borrowing country, we can merely bow to the inevitable in that connection and endeavor to be careful (as we have not been always) to suit the convenience of those from whom we borrow and incline even to their whims. Inefficiency of labour, extravagance of expenditure and waste of food and other materials, on the other hand, are matters which it is for ourselves to deal with. It is gratifying to find a Canadian of the prominence of Sir Edmund Walker calling attention to evils which if allowed to continue and develop will in their growth strike at the root of our national prosperity. The problem of the provision of really skilled labour in Canada at the present time calls for immediate and grave consideration. In every direction we are handicapped by the utter inefficiency of the labour in our industries. Wages are high, and Trades Unions are careful to see that they keep going higher, but there is not apparent any corresponding improvement in the quality of the service rendered, as the wages move up. Habits of wastefulness, unfortunately, are not confined to the use of food—the point which Sir Edmund specifically mentioned—but are evident in other directions, notably in regard to loss by fire. It is true that at length a certain amount of interest in the fire prevention campaign is being aroused among certain classes, but the general public is still lamentably ignorant, and it would seem almost entirely indifferent to the great urgency of the matter of reducing the fire waste. Sir Edmund's reference to the fact that our imports are to some extent unwisely increased by the extravagance of an unusually prosperous people, suggests the thought that not a little of the free spending which is now going on is not only extravagant but foolish. The reason probably is that a certain number of people who in the present prosperous period have acquired wealth with great rapidity don't know how to spend their money.