

THE CANADIAN BANK OF COMMERCE

Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the shareholders of The Canadian Bank of Commerce was held in Toronto on the 12th instant. After the Report of the Directors had been read the President asked the General Manager to address the shareholders. He spoke in part as follows:

GENERAL MANAGER'S ADDRESS

When we had the pleasure of addressing you on the occasion of our annual meeting for 1913, we had every reason to look forward with apparently well-founded expectations that the year just ended would prove not less favorable than the preceding one. There was a movement during the first months of the year so world-wide in its scope as to lead many to infer that the drift of financial affairs towards a moderate prosperity had become unmistakable. The uneasiness regarding the settlement of the Balkan question had almost disappeared, and with the gradual adjustment of other political and international difficulties there was an apparent readiness to return to normal conditions. This enabled a large volume of securities to be marketed, which did much to relieve a very acute situation. As the season advanced the prospect of satisfactory crops and of fairly good returns from every legitimate enterprise should have assured a financial and industrial revival. Then came the outbreak of the European war, an event so tremendous in its import that at first we failed to realize the extent of the dislocation of business that it would entail, and the consequent hardship and loss to every conceivable interest the world over; yet we have stood the shock with remarkable fortitude and courage.

Considering all these untoward circumstances, the report and statements now presented to you bring us the satisfaction that we have not labored in vain. In consequence of the extraordinary depreciation in the prices of all securities, we have made a careful revaluation on very strict lines; and having in the past been conservative and prudent with the disposition of our returns from this source, we were enabled to make all our adjustments without interfering with current profits. Our usual care has been exercised in providing for bad and doubtful debts, and with the return of more propitious times we should derive very important recoveries.

The net profits for the year were \$2,668,233.29, a decrease of \$324,717 from last year, and amounted to 9.36 per cent. on the Capital and Rest combined. We were enabled to pay dividends amounting to \$1,800,000, these being at the usual rate of 10 per cent. per annum, with extra bonus dividends of 2 per cent. The regular appropriation for the Pension Fund required \$80,000 and subscriptions to Patriotic Funds amounted to \$55,000. We are carrying forward in Profit and Loss Account a balance of \$1,117,763.27, as against \$384,529.98 a year ago.

You will notice that no appropriation has been made in Bank Premises Account, which shows an increase over last year of \$405,510. This increase is mainly accounted for by the final payments on some of our larger

buildings and by the sums expended in purchasing sites for a number of the smaller offices. As we indicated in the report presented to you in January, 1910, we have in the past endeavored to keep the figures of this account within 50 per cent. of the value of the properties which it covers. During the past year we obtained from reliable outside experts an appraisal of all the premises belong to or controlled by the Bank, instead of relying, as formerly, upon the best information available through our various managers; and the result of this indicates that the figures given in our balance sheet are well below the limit of 50 per cent. just referred to. This is a source of much gratification to us, emphasizing, as it does, the conservative estimates of our managers. In this connection we may add that the Bank owns and controls the stock of The Dominion Realty Co. Limited, by which Company our smaller buildings are erected and owned. This stock is carried on our books at the nominal value of \$1. The last annual statement of this Company, bearing even date with our own, shows a surplus of \$3,240,411.78.

The Bank's notes in circulation stood at \$14,942,557 at the close of our year, this account showing important fluctuations during the period under review, from a minimum in July of \$11,934,000 to a maximum in October of \$16,679,038. Our deposits decreased \$11,304,905, accounted for by a general reduction in current account balances, which is not unnatural under the circumstances; the ordinary deposits bearing interest show a decrease of only \$197,211, a remarkable exhibit when we consider the probable requirements of small depositors under existing conditions and the extraordinary opportunities which have offered for investing in first-class securities at remunerative rates. Bills Payable Account, representing participation in international exchange transactions, amounted to \$3,924,151, being a reduction of \$5,591,636 from the figures of our last report. We wish to place on record that in accordance with an understanding acted upon by all the Canadian banks in London as to the moratorium in respect of bills of exchange, we adopted this policy agreed upon by the clearing banks, and re-accepted, with a few trifling exceptions, all our bills which matured in August, although during the whole period we were carrying bank balances more than sufficient to meet these commitments. At the expiration of the thirty days we resumed paying all our bills without exception. We did not take advantage of the moratorium in any other respect, and did so in respect of our bills merely to join in a united front to the public.

Call and Short Loans were \$27,677,386 and other Current Loans and Discounts \$142,588,076, as compared with \$25,764,910 and \$154,576,889 in our last report, the total being \$170,265,463, a decrease of \$10,076,337 for the year. Government and other securities were \$21,191,247, a decrease of \$2,766,571. The percentage of quick assets to liabilities to the public was 43.20. In thus strengthening our position we have the satisfaction of knowing that no credit usually granted to

any of our customers was curtailed during this very trying year.

The members of the staff now number 3,536, a slight decrease from the figures of last year, but with the decline of business, sufficient to equip every department efficiently. We include in this number those on our Honor Roll who have temporarily left our service at the call of duty. We have given leave of absence to these officers on terms which should be very satisfactory to them, and it will be our pleasure and duty as far as possible to reinstate them when they return. Between 325 and 350 of our men have volunteered for military service of various kinds at home and abroad, besides very many others who are preparing for any emergency during the continuance of the war. This contribution of men and money and, what is more important, the loyal spirit manifested throughout our service, are creditable alike to our staff and to the Bank.

In reviewing the past year, we cannot but be impressed with the fact that Canada has had a remarkable escape from untoward disaster in financial matters, and we should realize that worse might have been our fate. With a courage begotten of experience, we shall face the future with full confidence that much good will eventually come out of the present situation.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

The President then said:

The war has so changed all business conditions that it may seem unnecessary to describe those previously existing, and yet without doing so it is difficult to estimate our present position. We have passed a period of trade expansion throughout the world which, in our case, had been sharply exemplified by our foreign trade returns for the year ending in March, 1913, when the excess of our imports over exports fell just short of 300 million dollars, and in addition to this we had to provide interest and dividends on securities sold abroad of from 100 to 125 millions. To meet this we can trace the sale of securities during the year 1913 to the extent of at least 350 millions. In the sharp contraction throughout the world which followed, the question confronting us was how well we could bear the loss of power to sell securities and the shrinkage of trade caused by the stoppage of the building operations based upon our sales of securities.

The more important of our public and private improvements were nearing completion, and the fact that we must in any event pause to demonstrate, by increased production, the wisdom of building them, was clear to many, but the enforced contraction, though it naturally went too far in the other direction, was necessary to bring us to a halt. The world had gone through the severer phases of this contraction, and had entered upon the year 1914 with distinct hopes for improvement in many countries, notably in Canada. The great banks of Europe were able to increase their reserves, money was growing easier, the market for securities was improving, and, indeed, by February, many issues which had been held back for some time, were successfully placed. In the United States the new tariff legislation and the new Bank Act were events of the highest importance, and if the effects of these were still somewhat uncertain, at least a great deal of painful doubt had been removed. Later on the prospect of a great crop left the question of improved rates for railroad freights the main point to be settled in order to put the United States again on the highroad to prosperity. In Canada, while trade was still lessening in activity, and money still hard to obtain, and the prospect for our crops less hopeful than that of the United States, we felt that in order to make our future secure, we had only to lessen our pace and to

turn our minds more to immediate production than to permanent improvements. Elsewhere, in France, in the Balkans, and in the Latin American republics, there was still much financial trouble to overcome, but conditions in London continued steadily to improve, and with that improvement the power to sell our securities seemed to be rapidly returning. It was, therefore, to a somewhat chastened but distinctly hopeful business community in Canada that the rumors of war at the end of July came with portents of evil in every direction.

It is not my part today to speak of what war means to us in its effect on our lives, on our hopes for our beloved Empire, or on the happiness of our families—I may speak of it only in its less important effect, that on our material prosperity. As we know, the first effect on finance and trade was the closing of almost all the Stock and Merchandise Exchanges in the world, the cessation of the enormous trade, not only between the countries now engaged in the war, but to a very large degree between neutral countries and those at war which were blockaded by the fleets of the Allies, and the breaking down for the moment of all dealings in foreign exchange, letters of credit, and in the vast number of credit arrangements existing between banks in different countries throughout the world. This paralysis affecting for the moment a large part of the international trade of the world estimated at about forty billions of dollars annually and also disturbing countless millions of domestic trade in all leading countries, was nearly universal in its effect merely because London, the great power house of the world, had to pause for a few days in order to consider how the new conditions were to be faced. I need not tell you what was accomplished in the way of remedial measures by the wisdom of the British Government and the leading bankers, merchants and men of affairs generally, but the few words which make the sufficient defence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer are pregnant with a meaning which cannot escape the historian of British affairs for centuries to come. He said, "There is no doubt that we have, I will not say, departed from any principles which have been accepted in this country, but that we have undertaken responsibilities which no Government has ever been called upon to undertake in the past." In the report of our London manager, which appears in our Review of Business Conditions, a most admirable summary is made of the various events in London bearing on the finance and trade of the world. In our own country, while the issues were smaller, they were of the most profound importance to us, and we can never be too thankful for the high intelligence and the quickness of action of our Minister of Finance. Our gold supply is not important in amount as compared with that of the greater nations, but its preservation is vitally important to us. To convince people that the hoarding of gold was unnecessary, and in any event to make it nearly impossible, was part of the task here, as it was in England. One of the most effective means of accomplishing this was, as far as possible, to make sure that the inevitable result of war in curtailing business would not be intensified by a lack of currency with which to carry on our daily affairs. The arrangements proposed by the Minister of Finance, approved by his Government and put into operation, all within twenty-four hours, were as follows:

1. For the first time in the history of Canada banks were empowered to pay their debts in their own notes. When these notes reached the clearing house, however, they were redeemed in Government legal tenders or in gold. The notes were not, as many people suppose, made a legal tender as between individuals, and the main object of this arrangement was to prevent people from securing actual gold coin in order to hoard it, a process which would have been ruinous to the nation as a whole, although comforting to the individual who secured the gold.
2. The banks would have been able under the Bank Act to issue the usual emergency circulation for dropping in September and this date was set back to August.
3. The Government raised somewhat the limit for that part of its legal tender issues which is not entirely based on gold.
4. The Government undertook to make loans to banks on approved security in order to aid them in carrying on the business of the country.