

CANADIAN BANKERS' ASSOCIATION.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

Not having room for the entire address of Mr. Wilkie at the meeting of the Association on Wednesday last, we give the following extracts:

My term of the important office to which you were good enough to elect me during my absence from the last annual meeting has been marked by a revival in Canada of trade and manufactures, by an improvement in the value of agricultural products, by the development of the gold areas in the Yukon District, by increased development in the mines of the Kootenay and Lake of the Woods Districts, and by the addition of many millions to the national wealth.

It may fairly be said that the Dominion has shaken itself free from the depression that followed upon a succession of years of low prices and poor markets. No better evidence of the progress that has been made can be given than may be found in the monthly returns of chartered banks to the Government. The average public deposits in the banks for the five years, 1883-87, amounted to (approx.) \$100,000,000; for the succeeding five years, 1888-92, they amounted to \$134,771,032; and for the five years, 1893-97, to \$184,000,000.

On 30th September, 1898, the amount on deposit was no less than \$238,573,704.

METALLIC MINERALS—KLONDYKE.

The successful exploitation of what is known as the Klondyke has added one other to the many attractions of the Dominion. It has furnished a vent for the venturesome and at the same time has created a new and profitable market for the agricultural products and the manufactures of our people. It has done much to set aside the arguments of the distorted bi-metallists by proving that the maintenance of the Gold Standard is no longer dependent upon the output of Australia, or Africa, or of the United States. The government of such a country entails very great responsibilities upon the Dominion, and it is gratifying to know that the fact is now being fully recognized by those in authority. The terra incognita of a few years back is now the Mecca of multitudes, and its development should bring with it immense wealth to the older sections of the Dominion.

The value of the total production of principal metallic minerals in Canada in 1887 is estimated at \$2,118,120; in 1897 the value amounted to \$13,996,234. It is estimated that the output of gold in the Yukon district alone will this year amount to \$8,500,000 (not including \$2,500,000—the product of 1897), and that the total output of metallic minerals during the year 1899, over the whole Dominion, will amount to \$25,000,000. It is impossible to estimate the probable output even five years hence without amazement. The production of non-metallic minerals amounted in 1887 to \$9,000,000, and in 1897 to \$14,500,000.

MINT.

I am not unmindful of the objections which have been raised within this association to the creation of a Canadian Gold Coinage, and as long as the gold product of the Dominion was comparatively insignificant no good reason could be brought forward for the establishment of a mint, but the growth in the output of gold from \$907,601 in 1892, to a probable output of at least \$18,000,000 in 1899, with every prospect of an ever increasing annual production, has brought with it changed conditions. Are we not throwing away our opportunities and underrating our importance in sending our banks and our miners to Seattle, San Francisco, or New York, past our own doors, to exchange their gold dust for coin of a foreign realm? An immense volume of trade is being and will be lost to Canada through returning Yukon miners being

forced to take their "clean up" to a foreign mint. A Canadian mint, or, to commence with, a branch of the Royal Mint at Vancouver or Victoria would bring both cities into increased prominence and would be the means of giving those cities the trade of the returned miner, and no one spends more freely, to supplement that of the out-going prospector.

Branches of the Royal Mint have been established in Australia—in Sydney (1855), Melbourne (1872), and Perth (1896), and entail little or no expense upon the colony, whereas their existence is of incalculable benefit to the gold miner and to local trade.

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR.

Although Canada was not, except through its sympathies, directly interested in the results of the Spanish-American war, it is impossible for us not to realize the fact that great changes in the foreign policy of the United States, which may affect our commercial relations with that country must, follow thereon. Sectionalism must give way to a recognition of trans-marine responsibilities. The ignorance and indifference of the agriculturist of the middle States, regarding the welfare of the outside world, will soon give place to a lasting interest in foreign conditions. Amongst other results that will follow—have followed I should say—upon the course of events, is the establishment of a bond of sympathy and good fellowship between the United States and the Mother Country, and the dissipation of the jealousies and misunderstandings of a century. The two nations should now go hand in hand, a support to each other in the struggle for wider markets and the spread of Anglo-American civilization. The effect of the acquisition of territory upon the trade and commerce of the United States will be phenomenal—the occupation of its new possessions will open immense fields for capital and labor. The manufacturer, the electrician, the scientist, the agriculturist, and, last but not least, the banker, all will be called upon to assist in the up-building of a great commercial empire. Are we in Canada to stand still? Are we not part and parcel of an empire that is world wide, with a population of nearly 400,000,000 of people, more than 25 per cent of the population of the whole world? Can we do nothing to stimulate and encourage trade within that empire? Are we forever to be told that the tie between one part of the empire and the other is to be sentimental and nothing more? Of what use is the shedding of our best blood on the sands of Africa or on the snows of the Himalayas, if nothing is to come of the sacrifice but military glory? The effort of Sir Wilfrid Laurier to awaken an interest in Canada on the part of Great Britain by granting the Mother Country and her other colonies a preference in Canada over foreign nations, is the first practical attempt on the part of either to create a union of commercial interests. Are we to rest satisfied with the good feeling that such a policy cannot but engender in the Mother Country, or should we look for reciprocal action throughout the empire?

A fourteen-foot channel from Lake Superior to the sea is promised for the season of navigation of 1899. The effects of that development may be far-reaching. In 1897 only one bushel of Manitoba wheat out of every five was shipped to tide water by the Canadian route—four bushels out of every five found their way to Europe via Buffalo and U. S. Atlantic ports. This year, owing to the unseasonable harvesting weather in Manitoba, the proportion that will go forward via Montreal will be still less. The fourteen-foot channel will enable vessels with a cargo of 75,000 bushels of wheat to sail from Fort William or Duluth to Montreal and Liverpool. To-day the largest cargo over the same route does not exceed 18,000

bushels. Canal tolls between Lake Superior and Montreal amount to 10 cents per ton; the total amount of tolls collected during the year 1897 on the Welland and St. Lawrence canals amounted to \$254,963.

The construction of those canals at the estimated cost of over \$50,000,000 was not undertaken with the idea that the tolls upon tonnage or cargo would do much more than provide for repairs and maintenance. The objects in view were the cheapening of transportation, the diversion to the St. Lawrence route of the products of the great west, the building up of our own ocean ports, and the encouragement of the Canadian carrying trade, coupled with the employment of Canadian seamen.

The toll system, although not onerous, may be sufficient to defeat the objects we had in view, and I am sure that the inauguration of a policy of free canals would raise the value of the main products of our western provinces, would encourage shipbuilding in Canada, would divert to the improved channels a very large proportion of the grain which now is forced to find an outlet to the sea via Buffalo, and could not but be approved of by the Canadian people.

CASH RESERVES OF BANKS.

The anxiety of bank officials to increase the earnings of their institutions with a view to the payment of dividends to shareholders, was never more in evidence than at present, and the question has been asked if in our laudable efforts some are not losing sight of the responsibility which rests upon them of maintaining proper cash reserves. An examination of the monthly report of the chartered banks in the Canada Gazette will show weak spots here and there that should be strengthened. The subject is a delicate one; at the same time, under our present system of bank note circulation, each bank is to a certain extent responsible for the administration of every other bank, and I consider the reference excusable. We are practically guarantors for each other to the extent of the authorized limit of circulation, and have a perfect right to criticize favorably or unfavorably the financial position of every institution whose name and statement appears in that report. It is most unfair that any one or more institutions should build up immense liabilities without providing an adequate cash reserve against even probable demands of depositors and note holders. What that reserve should be depends, of course, upon the nature of the liabilities and upon the character of the assets of the bank.

INSOLVENCY.

I commend to your attention what appears on the subject of insolvency legislation in the report of the Executive Council, and while disclaiming any opposition on the part of the banks as a class to such insolvency legislation, I would ask you to exercise every legitimate and a united influence in opposition to any proposals that seek to deprive us of our equitable rights as creditors, and to assist in preventing the dishonest or incapable insolvent from again becoming a menace to the business community.

COMPETITION.

Competition between banks is a matter for serious consideration. We all aim to do the best for our shareholders, but I feel convinced that there are times and opportunities when we could swell our business without cutting into that of a confrere. For example, there are yet many districts of Canada not adequately supplied with banking facilities. To find and locate in one of these would be more profitable to the bank and be of more service to the community than to crowd into a locality where banking facilities are already sufficient.

During the past year, seventy-two new branches of chartered banks were opened in the Dominion, of which no less than thirty-six were opened at points then served by chartered banks.