

CHANGING TRADE CHANNELS.

In the first ten months of the present year Canada purchased 5,858 tons of railway steel from Great Britain, which was valued at £25,154; in the same period of the previous year, Canadian purchases from the Mother Country amounted to 10,906 tons, valued at £45,788. The past two years have witnessed a marked revival in railway construction within the Dominion. Important railway building has taken place in Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia, and in view of the demand for railway material these importations from the United Kingdom are insignificant. This branch of the Canadian trade has passed almost entirely to the U. S. The American manufacturers have made phenomenal gains in extent of business the past few years. For the nine months ending September, 1898, their total foreign shipments were 222,973 tons, of the value of \$4,465,087. For the same period in 1897 the totals were 88,573 tons, of the value of \$1,891,724, while for the January to September period of 1896 the tonnage was 50,841, and the value \$1,189,106. The figures in detail show that in 1898 British North America was the principal customer of the American rail mills. Canada took 80,349 tons, of the value of \$1,483,388, as compared with 36,839 tons in the first nine months of 1897. In 1896 the exports of rails from the United States to Canada were so small as not to be separately mentioned in the Washington export statistics. After Canada, the next largest demand for steel rails in 1898 was from Japan, which up to the end of September had taken 42,417 tons, as compared with 27,466 tons in 1897.

In a staple article of standard quality the advantage lies with those who can carry on production at the lowest cost, and in railway material the American producers appear to have decidedly the best of it. As some of the more important steel rail plants in the U. S. are situated on the Great Lakes, freight rates on American rails coming into Canada are lower than on the British material. This is of special importance since recent railway construction in the Dominion has been carried on largely in central Canada and the West.

In addition to steel rails there is being brought into the Dominion from the United States large quantities of other railway materials, such as that utilized in bridge construction and the rolling stock of the road. The preferential tariff given to Great Britain apparently has little effect in staying a change in trade channels which has at its back deep set causes.

HOW IMPROVED SUBURBAN COMMUNICATION AFFECTS TRADE.

We have repeatedly pointed out the need for an improvement in the facilities of communication between the villages and towns of Canada. Within the past two decades the expense of carrying goods long distances has been wonderfully reduced; but the short haul remains unimproved. The building of electric railway systems to facilitate the carriage of goods and passengers between the cities, towns and villages which naturally group themselves into trade centres, has been already undertaken in a modest way and plans are made for more pretentious lines. These undertakings deserve the assistance of the residents in all the municipalities which they will serve; but, in some instances, instead of receiving support they are meeting with vigorous opposition. This opposition comes mainly from the country merchants, who see in these railways only channels by which their trade will be diverted citywards. The department stores have already made sad inroads upon

the trade of many country merchants, and an aggravation of this evil is naturally not viewed with pleasure.

But it must be remembered that the electric railways will do something besides carry bargain hunters to the city. They will carry farm produce to the city. The personal attendance of the farmer or his "hired help" on the wagon, will no longer be imperative when grain or produce is sent to the market. Easy access of business men and students to the city will attract families from urban to country life, and tend to stop the migration from the country to the city which has proven so serious a drain upon the wealth of Canadian villages and farming communities.

One of the most sensible articles that we have seen upon the subject has been printed in the Cayuga Advocate with reference to the proposed line from Hamilton to Caledonia, Cayuga and Selkirk. One feature of contact with the city to which we have not referred is dealt with as follows:

"Prudence will enable our merchants to successfully sustain the advancing position of Cayuga. Our people go to the cities—they note the freshness and cleanliness of everything; they learn the price of everything; they return to find the man at home has the same thing at the same price; they settle down happy. They travel and visit for pleasure, they shop at home. The Advocate tells them what bargains the live merchant has, and they go to get them. The interior of the store is immaculate in its cleanliness, the windows are tastefully dressed, the salesman politeness itself. If there is anything they wish for not in stock, 'permit us to telephone; the electric service will bring it out on approval this afternoon.'"

Still, if the country store is to have the effect so aptly described by this Cayuga journal, it must be carried on after the ideal supplied above. If the average country store were as clean, as well lighted, as tastefully decorated, as well officered, as the Advocate imagines his fanciful shop to be, and their prices right, we should not hear so much complaint of people deserting the village store for the departmental Moloch in the cities. Let the country storekeeper take the hint.

THE CASE OF BRANDON.

In writing, a fortnight ago, about the action of certain ratepayers of Brandon, Manitoba, which seemed to foreshadow something like repudiation of the municipal debt, we stated that we did not think the people of that thriving place desired to repudiate their just debt. It is pleasing to have this opinion confirmed by letters to hand this week. We had asked for a statement of the financial affairs of the town, and are told that no such statement for the present year is available. It was because the council of Brandon withheld from the public a statement of the actual position of the town financially, and because it was thought that the authorities of the town were trying to repudiate their just indebtedness without reason, that the Winnipeg bankers and the loan company managers protested to the Government of the province, successfully, against the appointment of a special assessor. As to the attitude assumed by the council towards their bank, what might have been expected has happened. The bank has entered suit for the \$61,000 advanced to the town.

We are advised from Winnipeg as well as from Brandon itself that the latter place is sound, not only as to ability to meet its obligations, but in respect of the sentiment of the townspeople towards payment. They do not, we are assured, mean to repudiate anything, but they were prejudiced by the action of a clique who aimed to reduce the annual interest burden of the town by a demonstration