

vailed throughout the world we are enabled to meet you with such a satisfactory report and balance sheet as has just been read. It would be unreasonable to expect, and futile for us to pretend, that occupying the position we do in transacting so large a share of the business of this and the adjoining colonies, we could pass through such an exceptionally severe depression without incurring our share of losses; but unless the depression becomes more pronounced, which we may reasonably hope will not prove the case, the provision we have been enabled to make out of profits should amply cover any deficiency. We have thought it well, however, in view of possibilities, instead of otherwise appropriating the very considerable balance of profit and loss, to continue to carry it forward in the meantime, that, in case of need, it may be available without disturbing our usual and long-continued dividend. We see no reason to adopt a pessimist view of the future, for although we are suffering now from a range of prices such as has not been experienced in the present generation, the factors for effecting a recovery are so numerous, and the fluctuations of trade so rapid, that relief from one source or another may be looked for at no distant date. In the case of nearly all our colonial products, stocks on hand have rarely been lighter, and any little revival in trade must necessarily enhance further values. The whole fabric of commerce is based on land and its products, and as soon as our farmers and graziers obtain profitable prices other branches of trade will quickly recover buoyancy, and the business of the Bank will not be slow to feel its effect. Meantime we are not disposed to aggravate matters by unduly restricting accommodation, believing that we both serve the interests of the Colony and the Bank by affording a liberal assistance to genuine and legitimate business. At the same time the policy of the Board at present favours the extension of our business in the other colonies rather than in New Zealand, which, meantime, does not offer so good a field for extension. The figures in the balance-sheet, as contrasted with the previous one, call for little remark. The liabilities remain practically the same, and the assets, while exhibiting a more active employment of our resources, show ample provision for maintenance of the Bank's position. With these remarks I beg to move the adoption of the report and balance-sheet.

MR J. C. FIRTH said: In seconding the adoption of the report which has just been submitted to the shareholders, there are one or two matters which it may be worth while to note. One of these—one to which I shall for a few moments endeavour to direct your attention—is the one referred to by the president—the depression in trade and agriculture, about which we all know more or less. In considering a matter of such grave importance as the depression in trade and industry, which is now afflicting, I may say, the world generally, it is some satisfaction to know that the sphere of our own operations—the Colony of New Zealand—is not the only place where this depression exists; for although one cannot feel any pleasure at the misfortunes of one's neighbours, still it is satisfactory to know that we are at any rate no worse off than they are. In point of fact, the causes of the depression are not themselves incidental to any particular location. As I have already observed, they are causes which affect trade and industry generally throughout the civilised world. If we look, say, at the ten principal raw materials which are indispensable for labour, industry, and life, we shall find that with scarcely an exception every one is at a much lower figure today than it has been at any time during the last century. I could go into details, but this is not the time to do it. Take wheat, for instance. Owing to the past additions to the means of transit produced by the enormous amount of steam shipping created within the last 10 or 15 years, facilities unknown before are now offered for transmitting rapidly grain and wheat from every market to the English market, which, under English policy, has become the depot of the world; and, in addition to these, there has been, within the last ten or a dozen years, a wonderful improvement in the transmission of intelligence by means of the adoption and extension of the telegraph system. These two things, it appears to me, operate in this way. So long as we had the old-fashioned means of postal communication and transmission in wooden vessels there was room left for speculation and speculation. There might be a failure at one side of the world and great scarcity at the other; but those having special means of knowing the fact were aware of it, and therefore we saw great fluctuations. Now the world are our neighbours. We know what are the prospects of crops in every corner and district of the world. Thus we can concentrate in advance the abundance of one point at another where scarcity is likely to exist. This sort of thing appears to have stimulated production, and to have created a general low average price. Everybody producing wheat and grain for the last 10 years has been in danger of making a loss—and so with all other products more or less—until growing wheat and grain is becoming extremely unpopular. In our own country, in America and England, and in every grain and wheat producing country, the area of product has been rapidly reduced, until probably the area has diminished by one-fourth, in some cases by one-third, and in a few cases by one-half. But while the production is being rapidly limited, the consumption is going on; population is not becoming less, but more. While less wheat is produced more is consumed, while the enormous stocks like a hydraulic ram, keep down prices. A few months ago the wheat sheet was 3,200,000 quarters, a stock so enormous as to prevent any elasticity in the wheat trade. The latest returns show 1,170,000 quarters, and in a short time we may look for a further diminution. Directly it is seen that wheat and other raw materials have touched what I may call their bottom prices, wheat and wool will advance, and everybody will make money instead of as at present, losing it. We shall find a more healthy condition of trade. I look forward at no distant date to a receding of this wave of depression—the wave of cheapness. With these remarks I have pleasure in seconding the adoption of the report and balance-sheet.

MR. MURDOCH, before the motion was put to the meeting, said that as he was more conversant with the figures of the balance-sheet than the members of the Board, he might be permitted to remark, with reference to the statement submitted to the meeting, that it had long been apparent to the Board that with the large resources, the large and increasing resources, and operations of the Bank, a wider field

than others in New Zealand would be necessary in the Bank's interests. With this view, many years ago they opened in Sydney; they afterwards opened in Newcastle, then in Melbourne, and more recently in Adelaide. Looking at the large amount of assets of the Bank, £14,800,000, it no doubt excited comment, when depression was talked about, to the effect that surely such a large amount could not be employed safely in New Zealand. But when he told them that over two and a-half millions were employed in Australia, and when they reckoned this in addition to what was held in London and in coin in the colonies—nearly four millions—they would see that they had over six millions not represented in New Zealand, or not represented except in coin. They would quite understand that he offered these remarks, not in the least doubting the perfect ability of things in New Zealand, but for the satisfaction of absent shareholders, who might not know the circumstances under which they were trading to the extent of 14 millions.

The motion was then put to the meeting, and carried unanimously.

ELECTION OF A DIRECTOR.

The CHAIRMAN said that he retired by rotation from the Board of Directors, and only one shareholder had offered himself for election in his stead—viz, Mr. William Scott Wilson, whom he had much pleasure in proposing as a director.

The Hon. Sir F. WHITAKER said he had great pleasure in seconding the nomination of Mr. Wilson. He was the son of one of Auckland's oldest settlers, and was, as his father had been before him, a prosperous man and sound man of business, and would make a very good director indeed. He had, therefore, much pleasure in seconding Mr. Wilson's nomination.

The motion was carried unanimously.

ELECTION OF AUDITORS.

On the motion of Mr. J. NANCARROW, seconded by Mr. F. L. PRIME, Messrs A. K. Taylor and R. Rose were elected auditors for the ensuing year.

VOTE OF THANKS.

Mr. P. COMTSKEY had much pleasure in proposing a vote of thanks to the directors and officers. In times like these, when the commercial and agricultural interests of the world were entirely out of joint, it was very satisfactory to those present to open their balance-sheets and see the very magnificent results which had been produced. These results had not, he was sure, been produced without considerable care and good management on the part of the directors and officers of the Bank, and therefore he had much pleasure in proposing a vote of thanks to them.

Mr. A. G. HOBTON said it afforded him very great pleasure indeed to second the motion which had just been proposed.

The motion having been carried unanimously,

The CHAIRMAN returned thanks on behalf of the directors. He said they did not treat these votes as a matter of course. They felt that the shareholders thought they had done their duty, and it was a great satisfaction to him that such was the feeling. In moving the adoption of the report he had referred to the depression existing. He had been a long time in New Zealand, and had seen the Colony pass through many depressions. It had to him been wonderful to notice the recovery the Colony had made from depressions, notably the one about 1866 or 1867. Well, since then they might say that they had had a continued tide of progress, and it was only in the nature of things that a reverse should be experienced. He had the same faith now in the Colony's ability to ride over the present depression, and again get into a time of prosperity. It must be within the knowledge of everyone that the population of the Old Country was now becoming so dense that it must have an outlet, and the improvements in the mode of moving populations were now so great that within a very little time they would see in the Colony here many seeking to establish a home which circumstances denied them in the Old Country. He looked to that as one of the causes which was sure to bring about a better state of things and prosperity in the Colony. He thanked them very much for the vote of thanks.

Mr. MURDOCH said it was again his privilege to return the very hearty thanks of the officers for the shareholders' appreciation of their services during the past half-year, and he would have very great pleasure in conveying their approval to the staff.

The scroll minutes were then read, and the proceedings terminated.

If people troubled with colds would take Ayer's Cherry Pectoral before going to church or places of entertainment, they would avoid coughing, greatly to the comfort of both speakers and hearers. Public speakers and singers find that the Pectoral wonderfully increases the power and flexibility of the voice.

The following sensible note, admitting the hollowness of the "never" cry of a certain school of English politicians of the Lord Hartington type, is taken from the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The Mr. Blunt referred to is an English Catholic who, as a Conservative, is seeking the suffrages of one of the London Parliamentary divisions:—"We have made no secret of our conviction of the hollowness of the 'never,' the 'impossible,' and the whole chorus of defiant apostrophes with which the English Press has received Mr. Parnell's declarations of what he means to have. It is common to assert that in their opposition to the demand for 'legislative independence' for Ireland both parties will be united with one another and in themselves. Yet the first Conservative utterance of any interest which has been made lately—Mr. Blunt's speech at Camberwell—is as direct a contradiction of all this and as plain an encouragement of Mr. Parnell as it would be possible to have. This is what Mr. Blunt said:—'The question of the Irish Parliament was a delicate question to enter upon. Mr. Parnell had put it forward that there should be a revival of the Irish Parliament. Will, he intended to examine and consult the wishes of the Irish people, and then leave them to carry out their wishes.' Can there be any reasonable doubt as to the conclusion to which the examination and consultation here foreshadowed will lead Mr. Blunt and other like-minded Conservatives?"