

2.—Immigration Policy.

The crest of the wave of immigration into Canada occurred in the years preceding the Great War, when the total immigration ran as high as 402,432 in the fiscal year ended March 31, 1913. This movement was largely due to the policy of giving free government lands to those who would undertake to live upon them and perform certain residence and development duties. The homestead entries for the period of the fiscal years 1901 to 1914, inclusive, numbered 434,862, and represented the enormous area of more than seventy million acres of fertile land in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and certain portions of British Columbia, granted free to settlers as an inducement toward the development of the country.

The war interrupted the flow of immigration, and with the return of peace new conditions called for new policies. First and most pressing of these was the problem of re-absorbing into civil life the hundreds of thousands of returning soldiers. The realization that Canada had been somewhat optimistic in its railway undertakings had also been borne in upon the public, and immigration policies had to be so shaped as to avoid the necessity at any early date of further railway construction on a large scale. This meant that free government lands, of which millions of acres were still available, but mostly in districts remote from railway services, ceased to be a magnet. With the ordinary channels of employment filled with returning soldiers, and free government lands located at such distances from railways that settlement upon them could not be generally encouraged, the Department of Immigration and Colonization found it necessary to restrict its activities almost exclusively to those who were in a position to buy land, or were prepared to take farm employment, and to household workers. This strictly selective policy, combined with certain restrictive regulations which were a natural aftermath of the war, and other conditions, such as the high cost of transportation and the depreciation of European currencies, resulted in a relatively small movement of immigrants to Canada in comparison with the great numbers admitted during the years from 1910 to 1914.

During 1923, on account of the return of prosperity and the absorption of surplus labour, it became increasingly evident that popular opinion in Canada favoured a resumption of immigration activities on a considerable scale. The Government announced its intention of encouraging the migration of the largest possible number of those classes of settlers which Canada could absorb. This policy was embodied in a statement made by the Hon. J. A. Robb, shortly after his appointment as Minister of Immigration and Colonization, and elicited favourable comment in the British press, which welcomed a resumption of Canadian immigration activities. While, as the Minister pointed out, there are would-be immigrants into Canada who are not suited for the Dominion owing to physical, moral or industrial unfitness or because they belong to races that cannot be assimilated without social or economic loss to Canada, there are in Great Britain and Continental Europe tens of thousands of skilled workers and unskilled workers (not agriculturists) who would be an asset to Canada if steady employment could be found for them.

Recognition of the fact that there are many families in Great Britain and Ireland who would make good settlers in Canada but are hampered by the high cost of transportation, resulted in an arrangement being entered into with the British Government under which assistance in bearing the transportation expenses of selected immigrants by means of a loan in the case of adults, and an outright grant in the case of children, was provided. The agreement provides assistance to three