

(February 19, 1934)

Western Extravagance

BY DR. G. G. SEDGEWICK.

CHAIRMAN ARSCOTT:—Dr. Sedgewick, our speaker today, is from Vancouver, but I think he should be described as another of the famous Bluenoses of Canada who has gone West and made good. We, in Toronto, know how many prominent citizens we have who were originally from Nova Scotia. Dr. Sedgewick is head of the English Department of the University of British Columbia and he is delivering the Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto this week. This famous course of lectures on English has been delivered by a number of famous scholars from different parts of the world. Dr. Sedgewick is the first Canadian to give this course. In British Columbia he is considered an authority on English. He is going to speak to us today on "Western Extravagance." Now, in Toronto, we have some ideas of government extravagance. I do not know whether he is going to talk about that or just extravagance in general. We have suffered from extravagance and we will see what the West is suffering. Dr. Sedgewick.

DR. SEDGEWICK:—Thank you, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, for your kind reception of me. The cue for this so-called address was given by no less a person than the Prime Minister some three weeks ago in Toronto. I am afraid, however, this is going from the sublime to the ridiculous. I was tempted for a moment to give the name to this so-called speech, "The Still Small Voice After the Earthquake." I suspect that is little compliment to Mr. Bennett and little compliment to myself. For the younger men present you will find the reference for that in 1st Kings, 19th Chapter. For the benefit of others you can name it "A Tune on Penny Whistle."

This is the first time, gentlemen and Mr. Chairman, that this Club has been so unfortunate as to hear a common garden man of the street talk to you. This is an unusual experience which, no doubt, you will never desire to have repeated. I speak with no knowledge whatsoever and no responsibility whatsoever. I am speaking just like a man on the street—ignorantly—about these things. This is how the other part of the world—the submerged tenth—think in the West. Mr. Bennett's speech, if I may extend a compliment from my humble position to so great a person—was a very timely speech—a speech in a very admirable tempo indeed. I utter these words of praise without a thought of any prejudice, because my political camp—if any—is very remote from Mr. Bennett's. But the speech gave me the cue for this man-in-the-street-address to you today. I would like to present to you just this very common opinion that the Western extravagance of which we hear very much in the West, is when you look into it, perhaps not so much extravagance as you might think. I am going to try to suggest to you two or three things which make a man-on-the-street, like myself, feel that way. What Mr. Bennett's motives were in talking I do not know but I suspect that he got some suggestion of his own from the Conference of Canadian Prime Ministers at Ottawa. His speech followed very closely on the heels of that Conference. I picked one thing from the newspaper that may possibly have given him a cue. It was an item on one of our elder statesmen who said something to this effect: that it is high time that the part of the Dominion which paid 80% of the taxes should have rather more considerable voice in how the money of the Dominion should be spent.

The second I read in a bank report—I pause here to say I read bank reports, but very much in the spirit of the Ethiopian minister who was approached by the Apostle Philip and said he was reading the Book of the Prophet Isaiah but did not understand what he read. You will find that reference in the 8th Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. At any rate a phrase went something like this in one bank report: "Wheat mining in the West must stop." I

know nothing at all about wheat, commerce, or trade. I know something about English style. These two things quite possibly gave Mr. Bennett his cue. Before I go on with my talk I would like to refer to these two things. Mr. Bennett told you in Toronto that the two million people of the West had succeeded in producing ten thousand million dollars of wealth during the last generation. I have not an inventory of what Mr. Bennett bases his figures on. It may have been given in the address and not reported. But the common man in the West wonders just where that wealth all is. He wonders whether or not part of that wealth is not controlled in districts east of Winnipeg. We wonder if a humble part of the eighty per cent. of taxes that you are fortunate enough to be able to pay here, does not come from districts west of Winnipeg. That is a gentle unprovocative suggestion. We suspect that a certain small amount of this 80% of taxes comes from the East. One of my friends in the West, who is an economist, says a great deal of the wealth of the East comes from the exploitation of the West. I am not going to use such offensive language but I am going to suggest that a certain small part of the 80% of taxes that comes from districts not very far away, may possibly have had its source in the not very remote past from districts west of Winnipeg—from the wheat fields, from the salmon fisheries, the logging camps and mines of British Columbia,

Eight or nine years ago I happened to be on a friend's ranch at Saskatchewan. He has been producing wheat—wheat mining—under pressure of bank mortgage. Now that case, no doubt, was unique. But I wonder how much of the pressure indulged in, in wheat mining is not Western shortsightedness but partly a product of gentle and unobtrusive pressure in the region of the banks.

Now, I am going to suggest, very briefly, very tentatively and very humbly, four or five things which help to show me, a prejudiced Westerner, that possibly Western extravagance is not quite as much extravagance as it really appears to be. I am going to make an admission, at once, that there is no doubt that the West has been extravagant. We have spent money like drunken sailors. I use that

word advisedly because I have seen that operation proceeding on the water fronts of Halifax and Vancouver. And I know how it is done. I have certain memories that charges of extravagance have been made against governments east of Winnipeg. I come very close home because this is an unprovocative and humble speech, but I have memories of extravagance, etc., playing a large part in the Ontario election of 1905 and of extravagance playing a part in the Quebec election in the middle nineties. You will all have forgotten the distressful details. I am not coming closer, gentlemen, except to remind you that the charge of extravagance has been levelled against governments and communities and institutions in the East as well.

I make that admission—we have spent money extravagantly and we are paying the price for it, and no doubt, you, out of the 80% of the taxes you are paying, are likewise helping us to bear that burden. I want to suggest four or five things which, at any rate, help me to mitigate that term extravagance, when I use it about ourselves in the West. First, the so-called extravagance is a small part, perhaps, of inheritance of our history in British Columbia. It is not so very long ago that money in Vancouver, Victoria, in British Columbia—I speak of British Columbia because I know it best—did not mean the same thing that money meant in Toronto and Montreal. Now, I cannot speak in big figures you are accustomed to. I am only a school teacher. I speak in the terms of monthly board and the running of a Ford car and that sort of thing.

Let me give you a humble illustration. I went out West in 1905 to teach school at Nanaimo. I wrote back home and said I had got board and lodging for \$30 a month and I got a telegram from home in Nova Scotia. Now, telegrams were never sent from Nova Scotia in 1905 except under dire compulsion or moving passion. The telegram read: "Change boarding house. Outrageous. Letter following." The telegram could be read in two ways. I read it in the latter and the letter was sent. But the point of the telegram was well taken for in Nova Scotia I had very good board and lodgings for \$2.50 a week, and in 1905 in Toronto, you could get very com-

fortable lodgings for between \$20 and \$25 a month. The point was well taken. But perhaps in Nanaimo that was not extravagant. It was very good board and lodgings. Or another small example. In 1905 I returned to Toronto. It was my only contact in a long life with genuine civilization. I came to Toronto for a brief term as a school teacher and the morning I got off the train at the old Union Station in front of the Queen's Hotel, a newsboy sold me three newspapers. In my large Western way, not feeling I was doing much, I gave the boy three nickles. The newsboy stopped, startled for a moment, then ran after me and said—this is a mark of dire passion in Toronto in 1907—he said, "God, sir, don't you want your change?" Now, these are just little signs of this suggestion I am trying to make to you that money in British Columbia in 1905 did not mean what money meant here. It was, so to speak, as if British Columbia were a foreign country as compared with this, and between those two countries there was an exchange rate. I used to enquire of a bookseller in Vancouver why I had to pay \$2 for a book I got in Toronto for \$1.50. He made the reply that it was on account of freight rates. I am not going to discuss this. "That way madness lies." (Laughter).

I want to point out just this, that money spent in Vancouver, up to a comparatively late date, did not mean the same as money expended in Montreal, Toronto and Halifax—that the level of money was different. That you can take into account. The expenditure of a million dollars in 1900 or 1910 in Vancouver did not have the same meaning as an expenditure of a million in Toronto.

Now, this is a very simple proposition. I put it out just as a suggestion. It is very closely connected with my second suggestion. That is this. That expenditures in British Columbia are really greater than they are in Toronto, in Ontario.

When a road has to be built, it costs more money, even when there is no difference of exchange, so to speak. But building in British Columbia is to this day more expensive than building in Ontario. For what reason I do not know.

But it is so. The physical conditions make an expensive building very much costlier than an expensive building here. A hundred miles of road in the neighborhood of Vancouver costs more money than a hundred miles of road in any part of Ontario except the new northern parts, I dare say. Take that into consideration when you are thinking of Western extravagance. If we have to have roads, and they are a necessity, they are going to cost more than similar necessities do here.

There is still another suggestion I would like to make: Western community life is very much more transient than community life is in Ontario and the Maritimes. Communities grow more rapidly and they disappear with equal rapidity. British Columbia is only a generation and a half old, but the Province is dotted over with deserted mining and logging camps. I have experience of that. In 1905 I drove from Nanaimo to a deserted mining town called Wellington, which had been deserted five or six years. It had been a town of one thousand five hundred to two thousand people and just vanished from off the face of the map. The coal mine had proven unprofitable and the people went away. Wellington went out of business as an income producer, and that is true all the Province over. All of you have heard of the town of Roslyn. It is famous for minning the world over. I rather suspect that Roslyn, in its prosperous days, contributed to the 80% of the taxes which Toronto and Montreal are still paying. It is possible. I do not know. Roslyn is now only a shadow—a shade of a shadow. There is nothing in Roslyn except a few houses and a few people. The mines are closed. Roslyn was a town of three thousand to four thousand in its heyday. It was the town where famous Joe Martin, addressing the citizens in the Allan Hotel, referred to them in his kindly fashion as a bunch of dress-suit hoboes—the dress-suit for extravagance and the hoboes for the transients. That is the sort of thing that is happening and it is going to continue to happen. Now, I suggest that this has a bearing possibly upon the question of Western extravagance. A big town is built and, in the course of twenty years, in order to keep

its head above water, it has got to come through with very large expenditures for school buildings, roads, etc., and the twenty years of its life are not nearly sufficient to give any chance for that capital expenditure to be recouped. And that is caused by necessity, not from wastefulness or extravagance, but again, let me repeat, necessity.

Now, there is a third suggestion that I push out tentatively which perhaps may mitigate the idea of British Columbia extravagance. I approach this one with considerable trepidation. It is possible that some part, a small part, no doubt, of Western extravagance, has been due to a certain amount of what I have referred to already as gentle unobtrusive pressure from interests east of Winnipeg. Let me take a hypothetical case. The town X where a big mine is being developed. Or another hypothetical case, a fishing village which is convenient for a cannery. I cannot name specific towns. I am just suggesting this might be possible. The mining camp or fishing village is fifty, sixty, one hundred and fifty miles away from anywhere. That mining camp is going to have invested in it many millions of dollars from New York or British money and quite rightly so—the great beneficence of the Province—each taxpayer bearing the torch of civilization into the wilds—interests that have great claims upon our attention. But a road has to be built over the mountain gorge into that mining camp or into that fishing village. There is one village I can name right now, Powell River. It is isolated. There are no roads leading into or out of Powell River. If you have a motor car your complete range would be about fifteen miles. A road to Powell River would cost more millions than I would dare try to name. Let us come back to our camps. The road has to be built over this mountain peak—over the gorge. And the company contributes this amount no doubt. At any rate, it gives to that road its moral support. But you know, I do not have to tell you that roads, after all, are public interests and they are used not only by the great mining or fishing companies, but they are used by the people in general. They are quite rightly a part of governmental expenditure. Here again, let me repeat the

phrase, because of gentle, unobtrusive pressures from the mining interests or fishing interests, they have that road built and have it built with reasonable haste and have it built with reasonable security. Those roads, as I have already pointed out, cost a great amount of money and the building of them, perhaps, has been a little hastened and a little extravagant because of the gentle, unobtrusive pressure of interests from without—interests using their power and pressure quite righteously—make no mistake about my meaning.

There is the fourth suggestion. Look into that and see if it does not account, in some small way for what we call Western extravagance. There is one other suggestion I would like to make apropos to the subject, *viz.* that the people of British Columbia are not riff-raff from all four corners of the earth. They came from the Maritimes and Ontario, and they came for the most part from the conservative elements (I use that word with a small letter) in the Maritimes and Ontario. These people, after all, are not drunken sailors. Really they are people of the same steady, sound, dependable impulses that control you men here at present. Naturally they have not been given to wastefulness or extravagance. It is hardly likely they would be transformed into wasters over night by going across the Rocky Mountains. Anyone who knows British Columbia and the British Columbia Englishman knows he is a high Tory, very far removed from wastefulness and extravagance. I want to suggest to you that the body of our population is a population which, you would surely grant, is not liable to be any more extravagant than the population of the Maritimes or Ontario from which British Columbia people spring.

Now, these are five suggestions that I would throw to you very tentatively out of my ignorance and lack of responsibility. Add them all together and see if they do not account, in some historical and even scientific way, for what has been called Western extravagance. In other words, when you make all the subtractions these things demand, you will probably find that British Columbia and Saskatchewan have not been essentially more extravagant

than Nova Scotia, Quebec and Ontario. It does not need an angel from Heaven to come down and tell you that. Far less does it need a humble school teacher to come from Vancouver to tell you. But these are things which a great many wiser people than myself sometimes forget.

Now, there is a serious side. I have been talking with great flippancy. There is a serious side to the business. It is this. I am offering only my personal opinion. I am talking as one who has no particular breadth of knowledge about things to base his opinion upon, but there appears to be a possibility of a very serious political cleavage as between the East and West. A possibility I say. I do not think that it is probable. I do not think it is menacing, but I think the possibility is there. We hear a great deal of talk in the West. We have heard it for a long time, but I hear more lately than I have ever heard in my twenty-eight years connection with the West, of the formation of a Western Party or the formation of a Western political *bloc*, or the gathering together of Western influences to make themselves felt and to bring pressure on the recalcitrant East. If that possibility comes to any sort of cleavage it certainly would be a very unfortunate thing to happen. It is surely the sort of thing these Clubs are formed to prevent. That is the very meaning surely of Canadian Clubs. It is to prevent any sort of cleavage as between one part of the country and the other. It is something that members of Canadian Clubs and all people who are proud to call themselves Canadians should wish to prevent.

What are the cures for these things? Well, I heard one in the train, at least I overheard it. Two people from the Peace River district were talking and I could not avoid hearing. One proposed that our men in public life in Canada should be compelled (*compelled*, he used the word) to spend two years travelling all over this country. I presume he meant Members of Parliament. Well, that is not a bad idea, but I rather imagine we would be running up against the British North American Act which is quoted so often lately. I rather imagine it is a young man's suggestion. It is obviously foolish. It is too poetic.

There is no doubt that one would like to see public men a little less provincial. I cannot quote names. That would be extremely wrong.

I saw a news item last week which stated that the Hon. Member for Antigonish-Guysborough asked the Hon. the Minister of Finance, how he expected to win an election if he did not do something for Antigonish-Guysborough? I wish we could take a little bit less of the local attitude and a little bit less of the attitude revealed in the Nova Scotia story to the effect that an Hon. Member who was slightly deaf rose to his feet to address the Speaker when a new motion came, asking, "Mr. Speaker, has this motion anything to do with the County of Inverness?" A little less of that possibly would be helpful for public men both from the East and the West. At any rate, if we must preach local interests, could we not preach them under cover so that they won't be heard and excite ill will? I have been reading a story in the last few days about a soldier by the name of Sir Richard Ramshackle. By some chance that honorable soldier was compelled to listen—really listen—for the first time in his life to a recital of the Ten Commandments. After they were finished, "By Gad," he said, "they will do a lot of harm in India if they leak out." I am just suggesting that these local interests, like the Ten Commandments, might be kept more or less under cover.

I have one last suggestion, Mr. Chairman, that a cure for all this (I am a school teacher) is in wiser education. If you ask me how that wiser education is going to be effected, I am quite well-equipped, for the first time in this speech, to make reply. My reply is this: I do not know. Now, Mr. Chairman, and gentlemen, having arrived at the point where I started, it is my cue to sit down.

CHAIRMAN ARSCOTT:—When Dr. Sedgewick was described on the card as a witty speaker, I think that was putting it mildly. I am going to ask Principal Wallace of University College to move a vote of thanks.

PRINCIPAL WALLACE:—Mr. President, gentlemen, I feel very much honored in being asked to move a vote of thanks to Professor Sedgewick, and I suppose that my chief qualification for the task is that I am a school

teacher. It is evidently school teachers' day at the Canadian Club. I could not help thinking as I listened to Professor Sedgewick that it was a great pity that he was not better equipped to talk about this subject. Because when you consider how exceedingly well he did without information on the subject, we might have had a very genuine treat if he had had information about it. I feel that perhaps it is my duty to warn you that it is not altogether safe to take Professor Sedgewick at his own estimate—at the estimate which he professes in public. I hear rumors of an election held recently in one of the Provinces of Canada, in which Professor Sedgewick, a man without any political convictions, felt himself compelled or impelled to take part. I understand that the hecklers in British Columbia have been seeking cover ever since. I should like to say that there is nothing more desirable in Canada today than men from British Columbia, like Professor Sedgewick, should interpret British Columbia, and visit us and we should visit British Columbia. In the midst of his flippancy there was very much of genuine, substantial, political thought for all of us. He pointed out to you that the people of British Columbia were not radically different from us. I remember a visit I paid to that Province very vividly. I remember the people I met in Vancouver. I like Americans. Many of my best friends are Americans. I like to travel in the United States, but I am always slightly conscious of the fact that I am away from home. I am not conscious of any feeling of that sort in Vancouver. I feel I am among "my ain folk." I beg your pardon, Mr. Chairman, I am making a speech. I am very pleased to move that we extend to Professor Sedgewick a warm vote of thanks for his most interesting address.