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Canada, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

By John W. Dafoe, LL.D., F.R.S.C.

Chairman Arscott: — Gentlemen, before proceeding with the introduction of the speaker, I would like to say we are very glad to have at the head table today, Mr. H. F. Patterson who was recently appointed General Manager of the Bank of Nova Scotia. It is very gratifying to have one of our members advance to that high position and I take this opportunity of extending congratulations and best wishes.

It is seven years in April since we had the opportunity of an address from our guest today. Since that time we have passed through a very trying period. I am glad to say that the outlook is better than it has been for some time and there is no question that a better sentiment exists today, as evidenced by the further improvement in business. Mr. Dafoe, as you are aware, is editor-in-chief of the *Winnipeg Free Press,* and, as you are also probably aware, that paper is one of the progressive group of Canadian papers published by the Siftons. I am sorry that Mr. Harry Sifton is unable to be here today to introduce the speaker. I may tell that he is now at home, moving around and progressing satisfactorily.

Mr. Dafoe has spent a very great part of his time in the West, having accepted his present position with *The Winnipeg Free Press* in 1901. We have not had an opportunity of hearing him on the platform but we have heard of him through the columns of his papers, discussing earnestly and sincerely major problems presenting themselves from day to day, with one object in view—the welfare of Canada. Apropos of his interest in this coun-

try and things Canadian he has chosen for the subject of his address, "Canada, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." We shall listen with great interest to what he has to say. Mr. Dafoe.

MR. DAFOE:—Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, I was a little surprised to hear the chairman say that you had escaped me for nearly seven years. I do not know how that really came to pass. However, I am really very glad to be here today to have an opportunity to speak to you for, I think, the fourth time. I am here, in a sense by accident. You were to have heard from a fellow-townsman of mine today. I know he had a statement of some importance to make to you. But he was unable to keep the engagement so I am pinchhitting for him, substituting for him in a physical capacity. You will have to put up with a subject of my own. I have been talking to Canadian Clubs steadily for a week boring various audiences but you are protected by the time limit. I had one evening meeting a few days ago and I really said some of the things that I had in my mind. You might think from the text of my address that I am going to indulge in prophecy but I am in agreement with George Eliot that prophecy is the most grievous form of error. What I am going to try to do is to estimate the development of trends which have long been established.

Now, I have been in the business of watching things in Canada, recording them and commenting upon them for fifty years. My experience in that time has taught me some things and one is to keep my judgment in reserve and not to be too enthusiastic about policies which put aside fundamental and continuing factors. Fifty years ago last month I went into the press gallery of the House of Commons. That was the fifth Parliament of Canada. The present is the seventeenth. I have given them all the once-over. I was down at Ottawa last week but I had already seen this parliament in action and I did not even come in to take a look at it. I feel that a parliament that is so degenerate that the leaders can only talk for four and a half hours is not really to be mentioned in comparison with the parliaments of my youth when it was a commonplace for leaders to discuss questions for seven and a half hours.

I now think of what parliament was like in 1882, which I recall so vividly as a boy. It was a very busy parliament of two hundred and fifteen ambitious men looking forward to great things. It is all gone. The building has gone and the men have gone, with one exception. So far as I know there is one survivor of that parliament and he lives in this town. I refer to Sir William Mulock. I suppose he has been mellowed by thirty years on the bench, but in those days, he was capable, on occasion, of putting up a pretty stiff fight with a fine command of indignant language. Fifty years ago this Summer, I was in this burg. I was doing a little job of reporting for *The Montreal Star,* a little show you were putting on, the semi-centennial celebration. I believe you are now about to have your centennial celebration. Toronto in those days had about forty per cent. of the population Winnipeg has now. In the interval this city has multiplied itself seven times at least. But the Winnipeg of today is fifteen times the size of the Winnipeg of that day. And in the interval the population of Canada has multiplied a little over three times. I wonder if that does not suggest that perhaps the economic condition of the country is a little out of balance?

An Australian newspaperman came to Winnipeg some years ago and in an address said, "While this is a great city, I would like to know what pillars are underneath it." A city of the size of Winnipeg has many pillars and they go deep down to bedrock. The pillars in Winnipeg are very obvious. They are the agricultural development, a development of the natural resources of Western Canada. I think some of your pillars in this town go to the same bedrock. In 1884 when I was here, there was no contact between this city and the West, no direct contact, except in the summer time up the Lakes. It was not until the following year, the railway was opened between Montreal and Winnipeg. And though it is a bit on the side, I might tell you something which has remained in my mind in connection with the opening of that railway. Those were very gaudy streamers and placards that adorned Montreal on the eve of that opening. They stick in the mind so it must have been a man who knew something about publicity

and advertising. To write an advertisement which can be remembered fifty years after is to do quite a job. It was known at that time that they were chosen by Sir William van Horne. One started, "Says the Prince to the Duke," and there was a description of the extraordinary luxury and comfort which was the lot of a person who travelled on the line. And a more striking one had in huge letters in black and white at the top, "Why To Thunder," and when you came up and read underneath you read, "Bay Runs the Railway from Montreal to Winnipeg." That was a little aside. It would not have done Toronto much good for she was without connection with the West in 1884, because there was no development there. And there was no development for many years after.

I have always thought there was some connection between the fact that the West was stagnant and empty and the depression of the nineties in Eastern Canada. I was a working journalist in Eastern Canada in the early nineties and talk of annexation was rife in Canada at that time. There was an assumption that Canada had failed and that fear was closely linked up with the failure of the expectations with respect to the development of Western Canada. Similarly the progress of Canada rose very largely from the development of the West.

I am going to give you some statistics. This report was made for me four years ago. I am not going to give you any statistics since 1930. They are based upon a careful compilation of available statistics, some of them official and some of them private, and some of them official estimates based not upon actual statistics but inference. Up to the year 1901, it was estimated that the total value of agricultural production in the West from the beginning of the growing of grain, amounted to $100,000,000. That contribution had been made to the wealth of Canada. In 1904, it had passed the $100,000,000 mark; in 1909 the $200,000,000 mark; by 1915 it had climbed to the half billion mark. It has never fallen below that, except in 1921. In 1927, it reached its peak figure of $863,000,000 and up till the end of 1930 the estimate is that the total value of agricultural production of all kinds in Western

Canada—and over eighty per cent. of that was wheat—amounted to thirteen billion dollars. Rather a large figure —all within thirty years.

When I think of recording the achievements of Canada of which we are so proud and about which people make speeches and write books, I do not think there is anything comparable to that achievement by a mere handful of men who tilled the soil in Western Canada. The men produced that wealth with the minimum of mechanical aid, by the application of their vigor to the native soil of the West. The whole Western development; the railway policy with its extravagance, real or charged; the building of the cities and elevators was based upon the assumption, which, in retrospect, looks absurd, that if we produce the best wheat in the world then the world shall be willing to buy it. During all these years I knew no one in the West or East who seemed to doubt we lived in a world of reasonable, moderately-sensible men, and that if they needed wheat they would buy in a country where they produced it best and cheapest. They could not foresee the time when it was an offence to grow cheap wheat and offer it to the world.

I was told by a public man in Western Canada, who was also an economist, that if you take the last four years and compare them with the four years before and take the value of the production in the West of all kinds and the production in the first four years that the difference amounts to the somewhat trifling sum of one billion eight hundred million dollars. He said with that billion eight hundred million dollars we could pay all our provincial debts, all municipal debts, all private debts and have a great big fund in reserve. And there you have the problem of the West. The country is there. It is true we have been suffering from climatic troubles, but the country is there and the people are there and the facilities are there. All that country wants is a chance and it will repeat this performance.

Now only once has the Bureau of Statistics at Ottawa ever undertaken to estimate the inter-provincial trade between the three prairie provinces, and the rest of Canada, and that was in 1923. That estimate showed that out

of a total net production of manufactures, not excluding manufacturers of foodstuffs, amounting to something over a billion dollars, the prairie provinces took $225,000,000. That is a somewhat substantial amount. Out of that movement of money, I think, came quite a considerable percentage of the prosperity of Eastern Canada. I do not think you can get along without it. I do not think that any reasonable effort to restore it should be passed by as of no account.

In my consideration of Canadian problems — of continuing Canadian problems—one thing had always weighed heavily upon me. You are all familiar with the doctrine of economic determinism, that everything is a result of economic forces. That is only true in a limited sense. It certainly is not true in the initial performance of certain things. For instance, countries are not made by economic determinism. All countries are a result, primarily, of political forces. But after a country is made, the economic factors, which never change, begin to operate. The difficulty seems to be overcome, but the years pass, the decades and the centuries pass and the economic factor works and, ultimately, it has to be accounted for.

Now, Canada, more than any country I know in history, is a product of political forces, not of economic pressure. Goldwin Smith said Canada was a child of political outlook. That was only true in a limited sense. Canada was a child of political apprehension as to what the United States, following the Civil War, would do to the country lying to the north. You will find that it was fear of being shut off from the sea, fear of being left in the wilderness, that made Confederation possible. It was not an economic union. It was a political union. Four years later, the little Dominion of Canada of just four provinces, with very limited population, took British Columbia into Confederation at the other side of the Continent for political reasons to save it from being sucked into the American maelstrom, taking in, too, what were then known as the territories of Rupertland and in a year Canada was multiplied seven times. So we have a country which has four distinct economic districts with economic divergencies of interest that first and

last, have created our problem in Canada — a problem which calls for all resources of statesmanship and patriotism. Sir John Macdonald used to say, Canada was a hard country to govern. I have heard Sir Wilfrid Laurier make that statement many times. I should imagine successors of Sir John and Sir Wilfrid would have pretty much the same opinion on that point.

Well now, what we have to do in Canada is to equate the economic interests of those four or five districts and find a common denominator, so that, in the long procession of the years, economic pressure will not overcome political demands. We are entering into a stage of the world when, it seems to me, that economic pressures will have much more to do with the shaping of nations than in the past; because our political policies, if you analyse them, are all tied up with considerations of prestige and back of them lies the possibility of war. The world has got to the point now, or is nearing the point, where it has to make up its mind whether it will cut out war or go ahead with it. If it goes ahead with it, everything I say to you, or anything anybody says to you, about national policies — policies of recovery and prosperity — you can throw them all overboard, because we shall all be in the cart, heading for some destination nobody can perceive. But assuming that this does not happen, assuming that political pressures come off, that economic considerations become increasingly powerful, I do not look too far to see the possibility of the strain that will come upon Canada, unless we can equate conditions and get the common denominator. It can be done only by calling in the outside world to balance conditions. We have to call in the outside world to equate economic conditions between districts.

When we bought $224,000,000 worth of manufactures in Eastern Canada ten years ago, it was not because of a barter of wheat for manufactures but we had these credits abroad for the sale of our wheat and the ordinary processes of business brought these orders to the factories in Eastern Canada. In view of this, I could hardly believe what is an undoubted fact, that we have in Canada a school which believes in absolute self-attainment, and the

still more astonishing fact that we find it in the West of all places in the world. I could give you the name of a Member of Parliament, a far more eloquent speaker than I, who will come here and tell you that what we need to be perfectly happy is to figure out the production that can be consumed at home and limit our production to that which will give us now a million bushels of wheat in Western Canada; and that external and internal trade should be done by the nation as a whole through export and import boards on the principles of barter.

It will be said: "well, you need a reciprocating world." I grant you that at once. There was a great controversy as to how it could be done. Finally somebody said the way to resume was to resume. Just as simple as that. We will get a reciprocating world when the nations are willing to reciprocate. I have been at some international conferences. I have watched others. I have heard everybody say they are willing to do something, if the other fellow will do something first. I would have no objection to Canada doing something first. I think the issue is joined all over the world, as to whether we are going to pursue this problem we are talking of, or whether we will get back to the nineteenth century idea of trade.

Economic pressure in ten years will do one of three things; it will bring about revolution or bring about war or it will put an end to this nonsense of trying to live to ourselves.

You think that there is no connection, (I do) between hungry mobs in Paris last week who were threatening the very basis of the French Republic, and the fact that it is a crime in France to sell wheat for less than one hundred and fifteen francs a quintel. I think the two things are tied up.

It is true we cannot do much in Canada, but we can understand. We can get in the right attitude of mind. Canada is no negligible country. In assisting to further the cause of peace, in trying to introduce a more rational view in international relations, we can make our contribution and, if we are willing to take a bit of chance our contribution might be much more effective than we think.

CHAIRMAN ARSCOTT:—Mr. Dafoe, you will be able to judge from the applause and the intense interest with which we listened to your address how much it was enjoyed and appreciated. I am sorry it was not longer, as I am satisfied Mr. Dafoe could have used the time to advantage. We are deeply indebted to you for the trouble you have taken in the preparation of your address and in coming here today. On behalf of the Club, I thank you.