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Carving Out a New North-West

By Mr. John M. Imrie

Vice-President G. M. Smith:—Gentlemen, our guest of honor today has honored us in two ways. First of all he was good enough to consent to address us; second, he has chosen his thirty-fifth birthday or thereabouts, as the occasion on which to do so. Mr. Imrie we welcome first of all as a former Torontonian. He was born and brought up here and it was only some eight or nine years ago he left here to take charge of one of Canada's leading newspapers in Edmonton. At one time he was a member of the Canadian Club so he has, I am sure, a fellow-feeling for us. He has honored us also in addressing us once before on the Peace River district belonging to his adopted province. He is, I believe, going to tell us something more of that wonderful district which has made such rapid progress in recent years, also something of the northern districts of Saskatchewan and Manitoba which are just now beginning to yield some of their resources. I have great pleasure in introducing Mr. Imrie.

Mr. Imrie:—Mr. President and members of the Canadian Club of Toronto, My first word to you today must be one of warm appreciation for the kind invitation that brought me here, and, for the way in which you have received the president's introduction. Coming to Toronto, as you will gather from what the president has said, is coming home. Here I was born, although a few years further back than thirty-five. Coming east twice a year, it is still possible for me to keep pace with the strides of this city of my nativity. It seems a far cry in civic development, much farther than the elapsed time from the days when as a youngster I played rugby and similar games in the clergy reserves in the area between Harbord and Bloor.

At that time I think Dundas street was the western limit of the College street car line. It is a far cry from that stage in your civic development to that which you now enjoy and which from the building standpoint is typified by the magnificent luxuriousness of this hotel. It is also a particular pleasure at this time to come to you because I have met here again many with whom I travelled into the Peace River country only a few weeks ago on my sixth trip, this time as a member of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. I have been rather disappointed at some of the inquiries of these gentlemen. I thought they were greatly impressed, but from the nature of the inquiries I think the ladies of our province made the deepest impression.

However, it is not of civic development nor of the foibles of any of your citizens I would speak. It is rather of the pushing back of national frontiers and the resultant broadening of national horizons and quickening of national spirit. For such a gathering as this it is quite unnecessary to recall that these three processes have been at work, correlated and interdependent throughout Canadian history. Indeed I might say the story of Canada's development, the geographical, economic and national spirit, is largely one of successive movements, north and west, of peoples and trade and transportation and public services, and the cumulative reaction of these and the new spirit they created upon the country as a whole. Now, today, another of these great movements is under way. Its lure is not the profits of the fur trade, as when early explorers and traders discovered the Great Lakes and the great West beyond. Nor is it primarily that of repatriation under the British flag which gave to old Upper Canada its first substantial settlement in the migration of United Empire Loyalists. It is not due to adverse conditions in other countries, as when a potato famine in Ireland brought thousands of settlers to New Brunswick. Nor is it preeminently a land settlement movement like the immigration wave of the last pre-war decade. Much broader than any of these is the basis of the present movement to the north and west of Canada. It embraces the lure of mineral as well as agricultural wealth. It has to do with new discoveries of oil and gas, with new trade routes and new foreign markets, and with economic changes that are

making for decentralization of industry. To these may be added many other factors such as enlarged markets for forest products, new uses for metals, new processes in mining and metallurgy, and new facilities for exploratory work through aviation.

In area of operation also this new movement is on a larger scale than any of its predecessors. It extends from northern Quebec to northern British Columbia and still farther north into the districts of Keewatin and MacKenzie.

With what is happening in the north of eastern Canada you are probably more familiar than I. It is for me to give you the highlights of a concurrent development in the new north-west beyond Superior.

Allow me to emphasize that term "The New North-West". For there is now in process of rapid development a North-West that is new in its geographical dimensions, new in the variety and extent of its known wealth, new in the character and number of its vocational opportunities, new in its distinctive types of men and women, new in its self-consciousness of economic value and national importance, and new also in the measure of its early reactive effect upon Canada and Canadians as a whole.

No longer may the prairie provinces be considered agricultural only. Today's concept and outlook must include many other productive elements.

Premier Bracken has predicted that by 1933 Manitoba's mineral production will exceed in value her wheat crop. Saskatchewan has more than half of the proven Flin Flon field, where large development is presently taking place, and farther north several areas where recent discoveries and known geological formations give promise of mineral wealth. Alberta, with 14% of the world's coal reserves, is running neck to neck with Nova Scotia in coal production, and has quickly jumped into first place as an oil producer with new wells, coming in so fast as to foreshadow a large oil industry there.

And in the still father north, in the Barren Lands of Keewatin, around Great Slave Lake and in the far watershed of the MacKenzie hundreds of engineers and prospectors have been working last summer and thus seeking to wrest from Mother Earth her secrets of mineral deposits.

The development of aviation has opened up overnight western Canada's portion of the pre-Cambrian shield. Exploratory trips that were practically impossible before the advent of aviation are now every day occurrences there.

Of this we are forcibly reminded by the prominence with which some of the dangers of exploratory work have come into the papers in recent weeks. May I recall one case illustrating the contrast of the last few years in this respect. Four men left Winnipeg some years ago on an exploratory trip north of the Laird River in the shadow of the Arctic circle. Their trip occupied four months and involved such hardships that one of my friends vowed never again would he undertake it. In August of this year several engineers made that same trip. The elapsed time was exactly four days. They covered more country, brought back more information, than did the four month trip by the old methods.

In August of this year I sat with the Premier of Alberta on the shores of Great Slave Lake in latitude 61, some twelve hundred miles north of this city. Not very far north as we think of things up there. Great Slave Lake is larger than either Lake Ontario or Michigan It is the third largest lake in America. And the fourth largest is still further north, Great Bear Lake. There by the shores of Great Slave, we found twenty-five men engaged in exploratory work on lead and zinc deposits. This has advanced to the point of demonstrating the deposits to be of a richness of $26 to $28 a ton and with a quantity of ore which closer to transportation would have ensured a large mineral development. They are carrying on in the hope that the quantity to be found will be sufficient to take transportation out over the several hundreds of miles that separate that point from the nearest point of railway steel.

Nor are the new productive elements in Canada's north west confined to minerals. Hydro development has taken place at many points and is in early prospect at many more. One newsprint establishment and numerous saw-mills are the forerunner of a large forest products development. A new westward movement in industry has given to each of the prairie cities a new industrial situation, spirit and outlook.

Alberta's industrial population has increased by 50% in

four years and this month her Premier quoted a leading industrialist of the East as predicting that in another five years Alberta would become a great industrial province.

And all the while in the great Peace River country a new and accelerated flow of settlers is steadily pushing farther north the boundaries of profitable agriculture.

These developments and tendencies and the sound basis for them are making the railway map of western Canada. Nothing in relation to the new North-West is more significant or more convincing than the new psychology towards it of our railways.

Consider what has happened these past twelve months in the territory north of the North Saskatchewan River which, rising on the eastern slope of the Rockies, flows through Edmonton, Prince Albert and Le Pas into Lake Winnipeg. Even today the Canadian Pacific Railway is not operating a single mile in that territory. But within the past year it has joined with the Canadian National in purchasing from the Alberta government 858 miles of railway serving the Peace River and Athabasca districts. It has undertaken a half interest with the Canadian National Railway in building 528 miles of extensions to those lines. It has secured federal charters for 1200 miles of new construction on its own account.

The Canadian National Railway, already operating over 1000 miles in that territory, has of this year, under construction or charter, another 225 miles.

During the past twelve months our two railways have made new commitments north of the North Saskatchewan exceeding in length a new transcontinental from Toronto to Vancouver. And this comparison does not include the 510-mile stretch of the Hudson Bay railway over which trains will shortly be running to Churchill.

I have been asked to say something in particular about the Peace River country. My first word will be a quotation of the vision that came to the Premier of Alberta in August last as he completed a 3000-mile tour of Alberta's northern hinterland. He put it in these words:

> "Farm homes for a million people—agricultural production exceeding that of all western Canada today—and both accomplished facts within my own lifetime".

Equally striking were the reactions upon the president of Alberta's university, another government official and myself, who accompanied the Premier on this tour. Aeroplane, private gas-boat and buck-board were used to visit areas far removed from railroad steel and motor highway. Advance arrangements brought to our party at various points fire-rangers, trappers, and traders with long and broad experience in areas at present wholly unsettled. This trip added much to what I had learned on five other visits to closer-in portions of the Peace River country.

Consider first Peace River itself. Rising in the trench of the Rockies, close to the center of northern British Columbia, it pours its turbulent waters for a hundred miles through majestic mountain passes and canyons. Emerging from the last of these at Hudson's Hope, B.C., it winds its way more slowly and peacefully for another seven hundred miles through a rich agricultural plateau. Its width varies from half a mile at Hudson's Hope to over a mile at Vermilion Chutes and at many points beyond, and for half its course its banks are eight hundred feet in height.

Federal government statistics place the area of Peace River's agricultural country at forty-seven million acres. That is almost twice the acreage from which Ontario derives an annual agricultural production worth half a billion dollars. It is double that from which western Canada cropped last year half a billion bushels of wheat.

Fertile soil and unique climatic conditions make the Peace River country one of great agricultural productivity. Three world-championships in wheat, one in oats, and one in peas attest the high quality of its products. In yield per acre it usually passes all other large areas in Canada. This year its average yield in wheat was double that of the Dominion as a whole.

One difficulty in visualizing Peace River is the narrow width of southern Alberta. Many forget that the western boundary of Alberta extends itself westward as it parallels the Rockies in their march to Alaska. Thus Alberta in the latitude of Peace River is more than double her width at the American border.

But the latitudinal location of Peace River is the greatest obstacle to popular appreciation of its agricultural pos-

sibilities. Ontario's great farm belt lies south of the 47th parallel. In Manitoba no one would think of farming north of 53°. The Peace River country starts at latitude 54 and extends northward to 61. Its northern boundary is as far north of Toronto as Miami, Florida, is to the south.

The explanation is partly geological. The pre-Cambrian shield is constantly working northward in its westward stretch from Quebec to Saskatchewan and penetrates only the north east corner of Alberta. But the great fertile belt of the prairie provinces that steadily widens as it crosses Manitoba and Saskatchewan, swings sharply northward after reaching Alberta and continues up to and beyond the northern boundary of that province. This gives to Alberta, alone, among all the provinces of Canada, a vast agricultural country in the north, side by side with its portion of the pre-Cambrian shield.

Unique climatic conditions provide a further explanation. In the growing summer season there are but one to three hours of darkness in these northern latitudes. Long days of bright warm sunshine hasten the ripening of the crop. Lower altitude and more regular precipitation are other beneficent factors.

But the most striking is an inexplicable northward swing of favorable isothermal lines. The average summer temperature at the most northerly part of the Peace River country is identical with that of the Portage and Brandon plains of southern Manitoba.

Who shall estimate the potentialities of such a country? When its density of farm population has attained even the present low average for Alberta, it will be sustaining well over a million people on its farms alone. This makes no allowance for urban or mineral development, nor for the more intensive farm settlement of which it would still be capable as the rest of Alberta is today.

But potentialities are quite insufficient in themselves. What then are the prospects for early wide-spread development?

Events move quickly in western Canada. Alberta in her twenty-fourth year as a province has attained a record of $330,000,000 in value of agricultural production.

Already Peace River is producing more than all Alberta did twenty-four years ago. In this year of below-average crops elsewhere, Peace River is contributing one-tenth of Alberta's total wheat. It is a safe prediction that well within ten years Peace River's wheat production will exceed that of all Alberta this year.

For scenes of the great pre-war immigration period are being reproduced in Peace River today. Settlers are flocking in as to no other district in Canada since pre-war days. New areas are being opened up and fully homesteaded in a single season. Over ten thousand new farm locations have been taken up since the beginning of 1928. Towns of one hundred buildings exist where native grasses grew a year ago. At this long last Peace River shows unmistakable signs of coming into its own.

What is the reaction of all this new development upon our national outlook and our national unity?

Peace River, fully developed, will widen Canada's agricultural territory to that of the United States between Chicago and New Orleans. This comparison illustrates Peace River's potential contribution to a new Canadian consciousness. Alberta is the one Province from Quebec westward that is capable of agricultural development for its entire depth from south to north, a depth of seven hundred and twenty miles.

Peace River will make a second contribution in the building of national character. There is something about the far north that develops strength, not in body alone, but in mind, in purpose, in initiative, in resourcefulness. These elements are being bred into the settlers of Peace River and with them that kindliness, hospitality and capacity for sacrificial service that are usually found among pioneer peoples. All of these qualities are already blended in a character that is individualistic and distinctively typical of Peace River. Canada's national character will gain alike in strength and in tenderness through the infusion of this new spirit of Alberta's north.

A third contribution will accrue from the mineral aspects of this development. That, in conjunction with a similar mineral development in northern Ontario and northern Quebec, is providing a new bond of interest between

East and West. This dual movement is bringing to the north of both East and West people whose points of view are essentially and fundamentally alike. The engineers and prospectors of the new North-West beyond Superior speak a common language with those of northern Ontario and northern Quebec. Their outlook is not circumscribed either by geography or by fiscal policies. They know no provincial or territorial boundaries. They know nothing, except by far removed tradition, of old conflicts as between East and West.

Closely linked with this is a fourth contribution to national outlook and unity. The growing industrialization of the new North-West will engender a broader outlook in industrial matters and fiscal policies. It will provide in the west a demonstration of that interdependence of agriculture and industry which is already in evidence in other parts of Canada but heretofore has had to be viewed from a distance by those in the great agricultural area of the prairie provinces.

One other point and I am through. All of this development of which I have been speaking emphasizes and typifies two of the many great charms of life in Canada. One is that we are close to the beginning of things. In older countries this privilege is denied. In many it is necessary to dig to subterranean strata to ascertain what their beginnings were. Out there in the northern hinter-lands of our prairies, and in your own northern hinterland, we can talk with those who cut the first trail, who turned the first furrow, who found the first bit of mineralized rock, who drove the first railroad spike, who set up the first church and school. Thus we can encompass in the short space of our own human life the whole gamut of northern development across this Dominion.

The other charm to which I refer is this: our country is still at such a stage in its development that we who are young or middle aged may look forward with confidence to seeing in our own lifetime a further development exceeding in magnitude and variety all that has taken place to date. What has been done this far is but the building of the frame-work of the Canada that is to be. One after another the pioneers who did that work are passing on.

They have given to us a goodly heritage and with it a living torch to carry. It is well that we should take stock from time to time of our national wealth and of the road by which we as a nation have come. It is justifiable that we should have pride in our national achievement and in our national prospects. But these should provoke also another and more humble quality—a determination that our contribution to Canada's further development and national life shall be such that later on when our time comes those to whom we hand the torch may say of us, as we do now of those from whom we take it, "they have done a great work well."