

(December 19)

## Western Farmers and Their Ideals.

BY MR. E. A. PARTRIDGE.\*

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club on the subject, "The Organization of the Western Farmers, and Their Ideals," Mr. E. A. Partridge said:

*Mr. President and Gentlemen,*—I esteem very highly the opportunity which has been given to me to speak before this club. I do not regard it as a personal matter, but as a compliment paid to the western delegation that recently visited Ottawa, and a recognition that you must have had some interest in the work of that delegation. I think it well to speak to you of the organization of the western farmers, and of the ideals which inspire their leaders. No doubt there is not perfect unanimity on all questions, even among the farmers. Still, you must have seen from the representation we made at Ottawa that there must be a respectable body of opinion among the farmers on certain important questions.

I would like to outline to you the organization we have. In the western provinces, what we are pleased to call the three prairie provinces, a name pretty well known over Canada, we have three great organizations. In Alberta we have the United Farmers of Alberta, which is composed of two organizations that existed previously: the Farmers' Association of Alberta, and the Canadian Society of Equity. The second organization, which is the oldest of the three, is the Grain Growers' Association of Saskatchewan. The third is the Grain Growers' Association of Manitoba. The members of these three associations aggregate something like 30,000, and that growth has taken place since 1902. These great organizations of farmers have from the beginning been dealing with questions which they conceive affect their financial well being, and more and more they have come to examine social and economic problems which they believe have a bearing upon their material comfort, and their

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\* Mr. E. A. Partridge, Vice-President of the Grain Growers' Grain Company, Saskatchewan, was one of the important members of the delegation of five hundred Western grain growers who visited Ottawa in December to present their views to the Government on the tariff and other matters. Mr. Partridge, besides having the practical knowledge and experience of a farmer, has keen business ability and advanced views on economic subjects.

happiness. In fact the scope and character of the organizations has enlarged and broadened as time has gone on.

I remember our first organization in Saskatchewan was nothing more than a protest against certain conditions. At that time we were in the position that we were unable to enjoy freedom of shipment. The use of the transportation facilities was denied us. If a man had a carload of grain, he could not secure from the railway companies facilities for loading that car direct from the siding, so that he could ship it to a secondary market where prices for carloads are very much higher than at country points. After a good deal of protest, we organized an association and endeavored to secure redress. The elevator companies, acted in concert with the transportation companies. The latter held us up to prevent us from securing transportation while the elevator men went through our pockets. I am glad to say, however, that the representatives of our organization went to the Federal Government and secured an enactment of law which broke this combine. And so we got one point nearer to our ideal in connection with the marketing of our grain by securing perfect freedom in the placing of our grain in carload units upon the secondary markets.

One difficulty which presented itself to our organization was the fact that we were not sufficiently familiar with the financial and commercial world. We did not know all the circumstances which surrounded the marketing of our grain after it had left the initial point. We were asking for legislation from a government who frequently said, "We have heard from the other people, the people who are handling the grain and the transportation facilities and the terminal elevators, and they say you are all wrong." I remember being sent down as a representative of Saskatchewan to spend a month in Winnipeg and look into the circumstances surrounding the grading, transportation and marketing of our grain. While there, I found there was a very considerable reserve on the part of the agent who was handling our grain.

After all, the biggest asset of a man in business is the ignorance of the fellow he is dealing with. I have noticed in the realm of sociology that the morals of those engaged in different occupations take color from those occupations. One time I expressed it in this way. I said the people who settled in the New England States were an extremely good people. They left the Old Land because they believed it was interfering with their religious belief, and interfering with the manner in which they were worshipping the Deity. The came out determined

to worship the Deity in the way they thought best. They were extremely religious. I think it was in Connecticut that there was a law that a man could not kiss his wife on the Sabbath day without being fined. The man who is as religious as that is pretty well up to the mark. It is also said they never took a glass of whiskey without asking grace over it, and yet they had no hesitation, good as they were, in taking a handful of glass beads and exchanging them for a two dollar beaver skin with an Indian. I take it from that that we will find the views of those engaged in certain avocations somewhat colored by the nature of their business, and that their morality may sometimes be tinged from the same source.

Having discovered that we knew so little about the grain trade, and that it was so difficult to impress our views upon the government, we decided that the best thing to do was to get into the grain trade ourselves. And so in a co-operative manner we organized ourselves in order that we might see how things were done, what disabilities there were that could be removed. The outcome was the formation of the Grain Growers Grain Company, which drew its membership practically from the same sources as the association. They had a somewhat stormy time.

It has been said that farmers cannot unite. There was some truth in that. After six months hard toil we had secured 1,000 members, each contributing \$2.50 apiece—\$2,500—to wrestle with the great problem of the transportation of grain. That is the condition we were in; but we learned our lesson, and one result of it is that we could provide for such a demonstration as that which took place at Ottawa. We started out our organization with the magnificent capital of \$749 less than nothing, but I am proud to tell you that after four years we now have a membership of 8,000, and a paid-up capital of more than one third of a million, and this year we handled one-quarter of the grain that passed inspection at Winnipeg.

We have done something else. We have been moulding public opinion all this time. In order to do that we had to have some avenue. In our association we had provided what might be called schools of social and economic science in which we discussed the problems that affected our welfare. We were without text books. Our people were not familiar with the literature connected with these subjects, and we had few men who were teachers of the sciences. Our association at the beginning was extremely simple and had relation to a commercial object, or the making or saving of money. But later

on we began to understand that we had a higher object than that.

It was felt to be desirable that we should have an organ, some paper that would be entirely untrammelled, free from the domination of commercial interests and political influence, through which we might communicate with one another freely, and in which every person who had a view to propound, a theory to advance, might enter the arena and freely expound his proposition. And so we inaugurated the *Grain Growers' Guide*. I am glad to tell you that after a brief period as a weekly we have now 23,000 subscribers who read it. Now I think this *Grain Growers' Guide* is one of the most important instruments for the moulding and unifying of public opinion. We are trying to get a broader view. We are trying to inject the ethical element into what we are doing. We are trying to get a square deal. We are trying to teach the people that if they are going to reach a certain goal, it must be approached along right lines, on the straight, and not by a devious path.

I would like to mention the conceptions which have taken form with respect to the evolution that is taking place in the organization of society and in the economic arena. I know it is generally regarded that the people of the west are radical. I do not care how radical a man may be so long as he is right; and we are trying to walk so that our views and actions will be right. I might refer to certain directions in which our thought seems to be leading us. I need not attempt to prove that we are developing a very strong sentiment in the direction of free trade. I think the delegation which visited Ottawa and the unanimity with which they presented their arguments—and if I may be permitted to say the logical manner in which their arguments were presented—indicated pretty clearly what our attitude in that matter is.

After all, that is based not so much upon the question of gain. It is a matter of equity. If protection is right, if protection makes for the square deal, if protection is necessary to the development of our country along the best lines, if the effect of protection upon our political life, upon our national life, upon the characters of those who enjoy the benefits of protection, and upon the characters of those who do not enjoy those benefits but are exploited by them, is good, then protection is good. If on the other hand these in the main tend in the opposite direction, it behoves us to devise some other means whereby we may carry on the affairs of the country and pay our way as a nation.

One thing which greatly surprised the people of the east, I believe, was the announcement made that the organized

farmers throughout the four provinces, including Ontario, were prepared to meet the alternative of direct taxation. You are all familiar with the statement made long ago by a British statesman, that one might tax individuals until they were clothed in rags, and afterwards tax the rags upon their backs by means of indirect taxation and there would be not a murmur. Now I believe that has been true so long as individuals have not been students of economics, and have not examined the question of taxation. I believe we are developing to such an extent that our people won't stand for being clothed in rags, much less for being taxed upon the rags. There is an alternative naturally to the removal of protective duties.

I need not enter into the argument with respect to the advantages or disadvantages of protection or free trade in a general way. Those persons who are not concerned, and who are not protected by protection do not need any argument to convince them of the undesirability of protection, while those enjoying the benefits of protection do not want to be convinced. But there is the question of alternatives. Alternatives may take certain forms. In the west it appears to us, perhaps we have been guided by reason of the fact that we are surrounded by speculators, that the west has been a country where the motto of many who come in is something for nothing, where the natural resources of the country have been exploited all around, where men have become amazingly rich by securing the natural resources, and then as the population increased, benefitted from the added increment. That sort of thing has taught us to talk along this line. I do not think we are going to be believers in direct taxation in a general way, that is by the taxation of income. I believe we are coming more and more to be believers in the taxation of land values. (Applause.) Thanks for your applause, but I can tell you there is going to be a louder noise when land taxation is alluded to two years from now, gentlemen.

We recognize, and I think our people are coming to recognize in the west, that we have got to do something to take the natural resources out of the hands of monopoly, that after all the source of inequality is not different degrees of industry, but different degrees of opportunity, is the possession by one portion of the community of those natural resources to which the human race must go for its sources of supply. We in the west believe we have got to break down that great monopoly which is exploiting our people and taking a portion of their subsistence. It is not alone the feeling that we are exploited now. We people of the west, the people now occupying the west, the past and

present generations of farmers have not felt peculiarly the pressure of this monopoly. The early settlers went in there when land was of no value, when the speculator had not the courage to go there. They lived in shacks. They fought against nature. They did not know the country. They developed and enlarged it. They carried on their farming under the greatest handicap of lack of knowledge. But ultimately they triumphed. They won out. But they had this advantage. They "got in on the ground floor," as a man would say in a land deal. They got next to nature's breast. They did not have to pay their way. They did not have to mortgage their future. Consequently, this generation is to a considerable extent enjoying the fruits of their labors, except in so far as they are taken away from them by greedy transportation companies, and by reason of having to pay for protection for our manufacturing friends.

Now we people are coming to learn that in the taxation of these natural resources is a means of raising revenue and a means of preventing their accumulation in the hands of a few. There might have to be other means of disintegrating some of the enormous fortunes which are a menace to our settlers, but by the taxation of land we may prevent a monopoly of the artificial means of production. This thing we believe regarding exploitation, and I say it to you with all seriousness, the thought that underlies the most of the leaders in the west is not a desire to enjoy more of the material blessings. Most of the earlier settlers have been in the fortunate position, that having started in on the ground floor they have been in a position that their children and their children's children will not be in, unless the economic system changes. Those who come afterwards must by purchase, displace those who have the land, and in doing so they will largely mortgage their future, and will not be free to take part in such demonstrations as we had at Ottawa, or organize public opinion, and so make the will of the people prevail.

I regret to say there are no opportunities created for the education of youth in these matters. I deplore the exploitation of our natural resources, gentlemen, but I deplore more than that the exploitation of human beings under the economic system we now have. I deplore the system of education on the prairies. We have a system which teaches children to read and write. It does not teach the fundamentals with respect to the great problems that affect humanity. It does not enlarge their outlook and prepare them for the duties of citizenship. We are speaking now as Canadians at a Canadian Club. The duty of this nation is to develop such a condition for those who

toil that will provide for the children of the toilers opportunities to become equal to any within the land in the matter of education, culture, and the ability to discharge the duties of citizenship.

That is my message to you, that is what we in the west are aiming at in our humble way, and through various agencies, through our Grain Growers' Grain Company, which though a commercial enterprise, is employing its revenue for the dissemination of light and instruction on the great social and economic questions—through the medium of *The Guide*, an organ established and maintained not by advertisements of the protected manufacturer, but by the money of the people who are concerned in making a change of the conditions. That being our ideal, we ask you to look with some sympathy upon our work, which is a movement, a desire to create a nation which shall take a dignified place in the family of nations, and which will build up a citizenship that will be a credit to us in our national life, in our intercourse with others, a citizenship which will make for equity in human relationships, which will sweeten and beautify our human relationships so that we may be able to build up a type of manhood and womanhood in whose commercial and other relationships equity will be their watchword.