

The Wealth of British Columbia

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In extent and resources British Columbia is not a province but an empire. Its potential wealth is incalculable; but to realize this wealth the merest beginnings have been made. Most of it is untouched, in forest and field and mine. Much of what we do produce is exported in the raw state, or in the simplest manufactured form. Our most ambitious manufacture, the building of steel ships, would almost immediately suffer the severest strain if anything should interrupt the steady movement of steel plates from rolling mills three thousand miles away.

Vancouver is served by one of the finest natural harbors in the world. Three or four transcontinental railway lines reach tide-water here. The city occupies a strategic position on one of the world's greatest highways of travel and trade. The Orient, with its fabulous wealth, developed and undeveloped, looks across the broad Pacific, inviting us to come over and share in her rich banquet. Surely it is our part to be up and doing.

Our wealth in coal is undisputed. It is high time we assured ourselves of the extent of our iron deposits. If these are found to be adequate we should not rest until the output of smelters and rolling mills puts our shipbuilding industry on a sure foundation. Then, not individual ships, but great fleets, registered in Vancouver, should make the Seven Seas their familiar highways. Ships cannot sail without cargoes, and every form of industry that our natural resources invite, should be developed here, until amongst all our Canadian provinces British Columbia takes the foremost place in manufacture and trade.

But in value far above that of sea and forest, mine and soil, stand our resources of blood and muscle, nerve and brain,—our human resources, our men and women and children. And of these the last are first, since in these will be realized the advance of a generation beyond those of us who have passed life's keystone year. Individually and collectively, as members of families and as wards of the state, they are worth all the sacrifice we can make on their behalf.

By philosopher and religionist the human individual is properly regarded as an end in himself. In this article I choose for a time to regard him not as an end, but rather as a means, as a resource, the greatest of those resources by means of which our potential wealth is converted into the actual wealth on which our natural human life is conditioned, and through which the glories of our civilization are possible.

For the training of our children and our youth we are doing much, and even in the form of material gain no investment will yield greater returns. At the age of fourteen our boys and girls are graduated from our primary schools with trained intelligence, and in the main with a commendable sense of moral values. As wealth producers and homemakers every experienced and impartial observer will give them a place far above that accorded to the masses in those countries where illiteracy is the rule, not the exception.

Then we have our academic department in high school and university, where emphasis is still laid on the training of the intelligence, the teaching of our young people to think, to think clearly, to think rightly. To this class we instinctively turn for leadership, and we choose Sir Byron Walker, Sir Thomas White, Mr. Edward Beatty, Mr. Arthur Meighen.

We have our professional departments in the university, our nurses' training classes, our private business colleges, our night schools. We have done much; but we have left much undone. We have very properly provided higher education first of all for those graduates of our primary schools who have been most strongly drawn to things intellectual.

For this class we should in the future do not less, but more; not for their own sakes, but because as a nation and as lesser communities we reap from them a return many times in value the cost of our investment in them.

But, granted all this, we have too long neglected the more numerous class of young people who have little taste for the world of pure thought, the world of the abstract, the world of books,—those whose development must come in the main through the concrete, if it comes at all. For these, it is true, we have begun to make provision in such departments as the technical classes of the King Edward high school. But we have made only a beginning, and we should not rest satisfied until we have a fully equipped technical high school, training the eye and the hand, imparting a knowledge of the principles of the natural sciences, and the application of these principles to modern industry with a vocational outlook, so that its graduates may become the skilled craftsmen of our factories, the foremen and managers, our captains of industry, in a city which should, largely through their efforts, become one of the greatest industrial centres of the world.

Between our boards of education, our technical and vocational schools, and our industrial and commercial concerns there should be the most intimate and hearty co-operation, so that every boy should be enabled to choose the life-work for which he is best fitted, in which he has the best chance to succeed; and so that he may be at stated times excused from his duties in the workshop or counting-house to attend classes that will make him more proficient in the line of activity he has chosen, such training being compulsory until the age of eighteen at least.

There should also be a determined effort to enroll in night classes every illiterate adult, and every foreigner who has not learned to read and write English, and who is ignorant of the main facts of our history and the leading principles of our local, provincial and Dominion government. Every stranger within our gates that we do not absorb into our national life, and truly Canadianize, is a menace to our social stability and our national existence.

But still more should we require of ourselves. Every day, if we choose to observe, we may see hundreds of men walking the streets aimlessly, standing on street corners, lounging in saloons. At times these are multiplied into the thousands. Is it not a pity that we have no educational classes for just such as these, suited to their various tastes and capacities, and the leisure time at their disposal, so that the periods of enforced idleness that come to so many may not be desert wastes to look back upon in after years with regret and bitterness, perhaps—but periods rather that have spelled opportunity, with successive harvests of gain in all the time to come?

Again let me say that our resources of flesh and blood, muscle and nerve and brain, mind and heart, are of all our resources infinitely the greatest, and that to train and develop these resources to the utmost is a task worthy of our most strenuous and unceasing effort, worthy of the most generous private and public expenditure and sacrifice—is an investment that will yield returns the magnitude of which we do not now even dream.

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