

Call to Action

In the midst of controversy over immigration on the one hand, and emigration on the other, it is useful to ponder occasionally on how this country was built. There is a tendency in the older, settled parts of Canada to forget its origin, and to assume it has always been here, just as it is. This is a delusion which may explain many of the weaknesses that Canadians themselves recognize, but have done little to correct.

Even forty years ago there was a different spirit in the air. There were people flowing into this land from overseas, and others in the East were answering the lure of the West. They were the kind of people who had the courage to take a chance, who were willing to begin small, and grow as opportunity offered. They built their homes that way, adding rooms and improvements from year to year, until they were complete. They brought with them new talents and skills, new outlooks and ambitions.

The transfusion of enterprising blood which Canada received from its immigrant stock created an atmosphere of optimism and had widespread effects, not all of which were wise, like the excessive railway building. But, had the process continued, had adventurous people continued to come to our shores, the national development which would have made the railways fully profitable might not have been so long delayed. Instead, the war and the depression cut off the flow, and the country fell into comparative stagnation.

This is the more strange because the settled stability of Old Ontario has never been typical of most of Canada. This is still a pioneering nation. It is not an outworn cliché that our resources have scarcely been scratched; it is the simple, unvarnished truth. As this newspaper recently pointed out, the vaunted wealth of the central Provinces is but a reflection of the development of the primary resources of forest and mine, which adventurous people had the energy and the daring to exploit.

Part of the loss of enterprise has been due to the stopping of immigration, but quite as much of it is due to the loss of the most ambitious of our young people to the United States. Their idea of what opportunity it has, however, became blurred in their minds. Success has come to mean sitting at a desk ordering other people to do things, or recording their activities in balance sheets. That kind of success is easier and often more secure than discovering things, or building them. It does not add to the wealth of nations, however, nor do its satisfactions last.

Those concerned with our youth—parents, teachers, employers—should do their part to reawaken the spirit of pioneering adventure. There are any number of opportunities in prospect for those qualified to take advantage. In the field of forestry alone, for instance, there are a multitude of new professions in forest management, in the science of conservation, and in the numerous uses of wood and wood products which research has been uncovering. This is only one field which opens alluring prospects.

Where are the young men who have the vision and the courage to seize the initiative and carry on in the faith of their forefathers? We are not so long established that we should regard ourselves as self-sufficient. What can Canada hope for from young immigrants possessing special knowledge, new skills, and great ambition?