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The spirit of the west

BY EDWARD EVERETT DALE, '11

SINCE the dawn of history the word "West" has been associated with romance and achievement and high adventure. Whether it was the Greeks reaching out to Sicily or the shores of Italy to found a Syracuse or the colonies of Greater Greece; the Phœnicians steering their light galleys over the placid waters of the Mediterranean to establish Carthage or plant settlements in Spain; Columbus in search of a world; Drake sailing strange seas in order to plunder along the Spanish main; the Puritans seeking religious freedom on the rugged coasts of New England; or the more modern immigrant in search of economic opportunities denied him in his old home, it has been toward the West that the people of Europe have sought the fulfillment of their dreams.

In our own country this has been equally true. Whether it was Hooker and his little band moved by "the natural strong bent of their minds" to settle the valley of the Connecticut; Spotswood's Knights of the Golden Horseshoe seeking the crest of the mountains; Daniel Boone passing through Cumberland Gap to Kentucky; the Argonauts journeying across the Plains to California; or the Boomers of '89 settling upon homesteads in Oklahoma, the restless American has always seen his own particular golden treasure reflected in the yellow glow of the setting sun.

More over those who have once eaten of the lotus of the frontier West are never quite content with the social conditions to be found in the more stable East. The West gets into his blood and he feels toward it much as did Kipling's Tommy toward the region "somewhere east of Suez."

*"And I'm thinkin' ere in London
What the ten year soldier tells
If you've 'eard the East a-callin'
Why you can't 'eed nothin' else."*

So does the true westerner feel about his own land. He may leave it for a time but always he hears it calling in tones that will not be long denied.

"Back to God's country" is a favorite phrase of the westerner away from home, and the expression "gone West" used by our soldiers over seas takes on a new significance when we remember that to most of these men the West was "God's country."

The first West in American history was the frontier settlements of Jamestown and Massachusetts Bay. They were established by a few hardy and adventurous souls who sailed across three thousand miles of salt water to plant in the wilderness these far flung western outposts of the British Empire. Here began the process of building in America a western spirit.

The late Frederick Jackson Turner has pointed out in his essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" that these first settlers landed upon our shores civilized Europeans and found themselves in the midst of a savage environment. They had come out to conquer and possess the wilderness and this wilderness proved at first too strong for the individual. It stripped off his civilized garb and clothed him in deer-skin shirt and leggings like the primitive inhabitants of the forest. It took from his hands the tools of civilized life and replaced them with the tomahawk and scalping knife. He learned to wield these weapons; to shout the battle cry. He lived in a long house like the Cherokee or a bark lodge like the Iroquois. He depended largely

upon the chase for a livelihood. He planted a small patch of corn and cultivated it with the rudest of implements—a crooked stick or a clam-shell hoe. So in time this man who had been a civilized European became scarcely distinguishable from the aboriginal inhabitants of the region he had come to occupy. Yet he still possessed the instincts of a civilized man and these instincts prompted him to set to work to conquer his environment. He cut down the forest trees and so widened the clearing. He built himself a better log house. He planted more corn. He began to spin and weave. He gathered his friends about him, established towns and villages and took up commercial and industrial pursuits. So at last he emerged from his semi-savage state until he stood forth a civilized man once more. Yet in the process of going down into primitive life and coming back to civilization again this individual had gained some things and he had lost some things so that the new man was very different from the old. This new man was no longer a European—he was an American.

Now the children of these men finding cheap lands and business opportunities lacking in the older settled regions pushed on west into new lands, there again to revert to primitive life and to emerge once more into civilization. Their children in turn journeyed still farther west to repeat this process until settlement and civilization had extended to every part of our country. This constant change, this "perennial rebirth," as Turner calls it, has been the most significant thing in our Nation's history. It has given to the world a new type—the American as distinguished from the European and has given to our people as a whole those qualities which we designate as essentially American.

To quote once more from Doctor Turner:

Into this vast shaggy continent of ours poured the first feeble tide of European settlement. European men, institutions, and ideas were lodged in the American wilderness, and this great American West took them to her bosom, taught them a new way of looking upon the destiny of the common man, trained them in adaptation to the conditions of the New World, to the creation of new institutions to meet new needs; and ever as society on her eastern border grew to resemble the Old World in its social forms and its industry, ever, as it began to lose faith in the ideals of democracy, she opened new provinces, and dowered new democracies in her most distant domains with her material treasures and with the ennobling influence that the fierce love of freedom, the strength that came from hewing out a home, making a school and a church, and creating a higher future for his family, furnished to the pioneer.

She gave to the world such types as the farmer Thomas Jefferson, with his Declaration of Independence, his statute for religious toleration, and his purchase of Louisiana. She gave us Andrew Jackson, that fierce Tennessee spirit who broke down the traditions of conservative rule, swept away the privacies and privileges of officialdom, and like a Gothic leader, opened the temple of the nation to the populace. She gave us Abraham Lincoln, whose gaunt frontier form and gnarled, massive hand told of the conflict with the forest, whose grasp of the ax-handle of the pioneer was no firmer than his

grasp of the helm of the ship of state as it breasted the seas of civil war. . . Best of all, the West gave, not only to the American, but to the unhappy and oppressed of all lands, a vision of hope, and assurance that the world held a place where were to be found high faith in man and the will and power to furnish him the opportunity to grow to the full measure of his own capacity.

The West has given us not only these things but it has also given us a western spirit, a frontier psychology which persists long after the conditions that produced it have passed away. The material West has gone but the West still exists as a state of mind profoundly influencing the life and habits of our people.

The roots of this western spirit may be found even before a new land was peopled; in the self selection of those who were to go. When Longfellow in speaking of the Pilgrims said:

*"God had sifted three kingdoms
To find the wheat for this planting
Then had sifted the wheat,"*

he was but voicing a general truth applicable to the settlement of each successive frontier since that time. The bold, restless, and adventurous went west. The timid, the conservative, the satisfied remained at home. Once new settlements were made in the American wilderness whether in Kentucky, California, Oklahoma, or any other frontier region, another sifting took place. The weak, the incompetent, those who could not adjust themselves to new conditions were weeded out. They either perished or returned to the more civilized and stable east.

No bigoted clergy of earlier days ever punished with more heartless cruelty the non-conformist than did the wilderness punish the individual who refused to conform to the "law of Jungle." Society was primitive; life was hard and at times dangerous. Thus were developed still further those qualities of hardihood, initiative and self reliance that had in the first place sent the settler West.

The pioneer was an optimist; he lived in the future. He *must* live in the future. The social group of which he was a part had no glorious past and very little present. But he had boundless faith in the future and that faith was of the type that "bearth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things." Like Christian he had seen afar off the Celestial City and the vision sustained him through all the hardships and vicissitudes of life on the frontier. It is to be feared that in many cases it was a city of golden streets and pearly gates—in short a city largely of material things—but that was inevitable. With his family housed in a rude cabin and living close to the verge of actual want the pioneer would have been somewhat more—or somewhat less—than human had he devoted much time and thought to music, art, and literature before he had made better provision to meet the physical needs of those dependent upon him.

Yet in this primitive, materialistic society were certain elements that kept alive the spark of appreciation of beauty and of culture. Most prominent of these elements was the pioneer woman. Forty years ago the old covered wagon headed west was a familiar sight. Any thinking person who saw one of these old prairie schooners jogging along the dusty road leading west with the husband and wife sitting on the spring and half a dozen children peeping out beneath the brown, travel stained cover could hardly fail to realize which was the tragic figure in that little family group. It was not the man with his dreams of a region of free land and great natural resources. It was never one of the children, for to all of them the journey was one continuous picnic. The tragic figure of the group was always the woman sitting by her husband's side, leaving home and church and old friends and all those little things that mean so much more to a woman than they can ever mean to a man, and going out to the frontier to begin life all over again in a new and strange land. How often she had found room to store in the wagon among the tools and necessary household goods a few pictures carefully wrapped with tender, loving hands, some packages of flower seeds, or for some roots and scions of the old rose bush clambering over the front porch of the former home, packed away in moist earth to be transplanted into the alien soil of their new home in the West which as yet existed only in their dreams. Even today one sometimes sees in newer regions of the far West a pioneer's cabin; and it is significant and a little pathetic to see there a bed of flowers blooming beside the door, a blossoming plant and a bit of white curtain at the window and to remember that some woman's hand placed them there to lend a little touch of brightness and beauty to what would otherwise be a very drab and sordid scene.

Life on the frontier has been none too easy for the men, but it has been much more difficult for the pioneer women. Just before the Civil war a woman who had migrated with her husband to Texas wrote to her relatives in the East that: "Texas is a good country for men and dogs, but an awful hard place for oxen and women." Perhaps the same might be said of virtually every frontier region. Far more than the men did the women of the new West plant flowers, beautify the home, and urge the need of schools, colleges, churches, and Sunday schools that the children might not grow up in ignorance of the finer things of life.

To one who knows how hard was the toil of the average pioneer mother it is not strange that many were found too frail to endure for many years the burdens imposed by such a life. He can but feel the poignant truth of those lines of Whittier—as tragic as anything to be found in American literature:

*"To thee the grave has brought the
best
That Heaven itself could give thee—
rest."*

To another element in this western society America owes much. To those choice spirits who sought the pioneer West not for material things but to devote their lives to the promotion of those cultural and spiritual values without which any people must be poor indeed. These included the ministers, the pioneer bishops, the presidents and faculty members of the new and struggling little colleges. But not only to these but to many more who served in a more humble capacity, to the country pastors, the circuit riders and the country school teachers we owe a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.

But interesting as is the study of this bygone West, a study of its effect upon present day conditions in America is even more significant. Some forty years ago the federal government announced that we no longer had in the United States a definite frontier line. Areas where frontier conditions existed were still to be found but a definite frontier line extending from Canada to our southern boundary had ceased to exist. Within the next few years these frontier areas were gradually filled in, free lands capable of producing crops without irrigation vanished, and the material frontier West passed away.

But though the West had disappeared, it had done its work. It had fixed in the hearts and minds of the American people certain traits and characteristics that must long endure. Time will permit the mention of only a few of those frontier traits that seem of special significance.

One important feature of this western spirit is a lack of respect for law merely because it is the law. Respect for the rights of others is not lacking but a lack of respect for the majesty of that abstract thing called "law" is everywhere apparent. We are perhaps the most lawless people in the world. Not only in the sense that crime runs riot, but also in the sense that the average citizen thinks little of breaking the letter of the law. The statement has been made, and it has a large element of truth, that if each of us were arrested, tried and given the maximum sentence for every time in our lives we have broken the law, many of us would be doomed to spend most of the rest of our lives in jail. Startling as this statement may seem, if you will think of each time you have knowingly broken the law by running a stop line, illegal parking or in a hundred other ways and then remember that you have undoubtedly broken it ignorantly and unconsciously far more often, you can see that it is perhaps not so startling after all.

On the oval before the University of Oklahoma administration building is a sign "No parking on this turn" yet half

with the Hittite expedition and has done restoration work for the Carnegie Institute at Washington, D. C., in mapping the mountainous city of Yaxchilan, Mexico.

1927

Miss Minnie Bidwell, '27 ed., 1101 East Twelfth, Oklahoma City, began teaching in the city schools March 7, 1932. She was not able to teach the first semester of school on account of injuries received in a bus accident last September while returning from Colorado.

Mrs Addie T. McMillan, '27 arts-sc., '31 M. A., 1205 Main street, Woodward, is teaching classes in Woodward and Laverne for the University of Oklahoma extension department.

1929

John R. Pearson, '29 arts-sc., law, Pawhuska attorney, was appointed United States commissioner for the northern district of Oklahoma with headquarters at Pawhuska by Federal District Judge Franklin E. Kennamer. He will continue his general practice of law in addition to the other duties of the commissioner's office.



THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

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a dozen cars may be found parked there almost any day unless an official is on guard to tell motorists to move on. The natural conclusion must be that either those who park cars on the university oval cannot read or else they have no great respect for the law *per se*.

Men who served overseas with the army of occupation will remember that if a European soldier started to enter a village and saw a sign "Verboten" he would turn back. But officers might plaster "Verboten" signs over a whole village and they did not keep the American doughboy out unless backed up with plenty of M. P.'s with life size clubs and short and hasty tempers. The American doughboy did not believe in signs!

Throughout the whole United States this disregard for the letter of the law is apparent. The young man leans back against the "No Smoking" sign in a public building, reaches back to strike a match on it to light his cigaret and if someone remonstrates he is likely to defend himself on the ground that it did not say "positively." We read the sign: This is Smithville—Speed limit fifteen miles." We slow down to thirty and go blithely on.

Yet curious as it may seem the American who has little respect for the law has a profound faith in laws as a sovereign cure all for all economic, social and political ills. "There ought to be a law" is an American maxim. Once the law is passed we feel that our troubles are over. We have the law. Everything is all right. We forget that laws are not self enforcing.

Temperance and the effect of alcohol upon the tissues of the human body were once taught in every public school in the country. Then came national prohibition and we largely ceased our efforts along these lines. It was now against the law to

manufacture or sell intoxicants. Our worries were ended. It took us some years to realize that the problem was not yet solved; that it takes education as well as legislation to root out such an evil.

The western spirit is a youthful spirit. The West was the kingdom of youth. On the frontier a man forty years of age was regarded as an old man. This spirit of youth persists in the newer western states in most remarkable fashion. We are young in our speech, our dress, our pleasures. "Come to see me" say the Oklahoman of any age, "Come this evening. I will take you out in my new car and show you the city. We have a beautiful speedway, an excellent country club, parks, swimming pools, and all the features of a real city. After we have seen the town I will take you to a restaurant—a nice bright place with a jazz orchestra and we will have dinner. Then after dinner we will go to the picture show and see *Flaming Youth* or something similar."

"Come to see us" says the staid, sedate Bostonian of the old school, "Come next Wednesday evening to tea. We will have tea—baked beans, brown bread and other good New England dishes. Then after tea we will build a fire on the hearth, pop some corn and take turns in reading aloud from the *Atlantic Monthly*."

That in the slang parlance of modern youth is their idea of "making whoopee." It does not appeal to the average westerner. He represents youth; the New Englander mature age.

Another characteristic of the western spirit is a lack of taste in art, literature and music. This many people will bitterly deny, but its truth is all too apparent. Popular taste—or lack of taste—in art is revealed by the pictures to be seen on the walls of the average American home. The tabloids and confession magazines that litter our newsstands give eloquent testimony as to what most people read; while the blaring radios of some millions of homes shriek in trumpet tones the story of the music so many Americans love.

The westerner of the early days was a jack at all trades. Settling on a tract of land in the forest he cut down the trees and constructed himself a log cabin. To that extent he was a carpenter and builder. He made some crude furniture and was to that extent a cabinet maker. He planted and cultivated crops and was thus far a farmer. He fought Indians and so was in a sense a soldier. If the children became ill he administered certain "home remedies" and was to this extent a doctor. He engaged in trade and so became something of a merchant.

This great versatility had two curious results. The westerner or the region permeated by western ideas has always lacked respect for training and experience. It is currently believed that the man who fails at one thing will fail at another and the man who succeeds at one thing will succeed at another because the qualities which

make for success or failure are inherent in the individual rather than derived from training and experience. The westerner believes that he has ample historical proof of the truth of this idea. He points to such men as John Quincy Adams and James Buchanan splendidly equipped by training and experience for the presidency and compares their success and fame with that of the comparatively inexperienced and untrained Jackson and Lincoln. In every state and county we choose officials without the slightest training or experience in the technical and complex work they must perform.

In the second place the average western American feels himself entirely competent to advise the technical expert upon the details of the latter's work. The average man on the street can tell you exactly how the banker should operate his bank or the editor his newspaper, where the superintendent of schools or the college president is wrong, and can even point out the mistakes made by the doctor in his diagnosis of a case.

The spirit of the West is apparent in education. The frontier needed surveyors, doctors, teachers, bookkeepers, and young men weary of the hardships and toil of frontier farm life sought an education as a means of escaping from a situation they had grown to dislike. As a result education to most people came to be something to live *by* rather than something to live *with*. The utilitarian in education flourished; interest in the cultural subjects languished.

"I want my boy to have an education" says the toil-worn, hard-handed farmer, "so he can make a living without having to dig it out of the ground as I have had to do."

"My father wants me to study arithmetic mostly this year," a country boy once said to me, "so I can do business and figure the price of things. He says I needn't study grammar and things like that. Grammar won't learn me nothin'."

The result of these western ideas of education is all too apparent. The man imbued with the spirit of the West does not believe in the truth of the old saying: "You cannot get something for nothing." He has seen it proved false too often in the matter of free, or very cheap, western lands. A homestead is taken and within a few years a railroad is built, a town grows up on the land or nearby and the unearned increment makes the original homesteader well to do. In other cases oil is discovered on a piece of worthless land and the poor struggling farmer who owns it is suddenly raised to affluence.

The average man has seen these things happen so often that he has become convinced that economic independence is not to be secured by hard work, economy, and good business management. Rather it is to be secured by purchasing at a low price something which will, without effort on his part, greatly increase in value.

At first free or very cheap lands seemed to offer such an opportunity. Once they were gone it was a natural step to transfer his interest to cheap stocks. Here lie the roots of much of our economic distress.

The frontier spirit is a restless spirit. We own more automobiles than all the rest of the world. Moreover we drive them—"and how!" We are a nation on wheels. We drive three hours to reach a town exactly like any other town and then turn about and drive madly home again.

It might naturally be supposed that people living in small towns and cities of the Middle West with little opportunities to hear good music, attend grand opera or to visit great libraries and art galleries would feel a real hunger for such things. It would seem natural then when vacation time comes many of us would journey to the cultural centers of the East there to hear or see the work of great artists, to study in the great libraries, and to view the rich treasures of museums and art galleries. As a matter of fact we do nothing of the kind. We put a luggage carrier on the left running board of the family automobile, pile in blankets, army cots, pots, pans and other camp equipment and start west. We stay at tourist camps by night, or camp beside a stream and cook bacon and coffee over a camp fire. We pause at filling stations to swap sagas with other tourists and lie about the mileage we get to the gallon and eventually reach Mesa Verde, Yellowstone, the Petrified Forest, or merely some remote canyon of the Rocky Mountains. There we camp some more, fish, live out of doors and at last return to tell tall tales of fish caught, or nearly caught, and of the wonderful vacation we have had.

Most of us have seen literally thousands of these people scattered along the highways or resting in the tourist camps that so plentifully sprinkle the Great West. Men in checked golf knickers, and hose of variegated hues, and corpulent women in khaki breeches with silk stockings, high heeled slippers and boudoir caps. "There ought to be a law" we think sometimes and still summer after summer their number grows.

It is the blood of Daniel Boone flowing in our veins, the spirit of Kit Carson and of all that multitude of pioneer ancestors which sends us out in search of great open spaces each summer by tens of thousands. No longer are there new lands to occupy, we travel west for the sheer love of traveling.

In a hundred other ways does this western spirit show itself. The enthusiasm with which we took up the work of the boy scouts and camp fire girls; the popularity of summer camps, our eagerness to hunt, and fish and picnic, are all manifestations of this same spirit. The federal and state governments recognize the craving of our people for out of doors and provide forest reserves, game refuges and national parks

and at the same time stock the streams and lakes with fish and seek to preserve the wild life once so abundant, but now so fast disappearing.

The old time West as a region is gone and it has gone forever, but this flaming spirit of the West is still with us to give shape and color to our national life. For if it is true that:

*"You may break you may shatter
The vase if you will
But the scent of the rose
Will cling to it still."*

So it is also true that you may cut down the forests and plow up the green prairies; you may widen the pioneer's trail to a broad highway and build towns and cities on the site once occupied by his cabin but something of the spirit of the West will remain to lead us on.

To me this frontier spirit constitutes at once a danger and a hope. A danger lest we attempt to apply frontier principles to the solution of problems caused by our complex industrial society, and a hope that the optimism, energy, and faith that conquered a continent may enable us to conquer the foes that endanger our nation and the modern society in which we live.

Perhaps it is the western optimism inherited from many generations of pioneer ancestors which makes me feel that the elements of hope found in this spirit of the West far outweigh the elements of danger. Our problems are far different from those of our frontier forebears but their blood flows in our veins and their courage and hardihood still live on in the present generation. We have new wine for old bottles and new tasks for old enthusiasms. Let us trust that the Spirit of the West will enable us to triumph over difficulties; that the energy, faith, and ideals of the pioneer in his log cabin will carry us safely through the dangers of our modern industrial life.



HAIL AND FAREWELLI

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Sooners to accomplish the nearly impossible and win all games blamed young Prof. Lindsey.

Ever since the team returned triumphant from a successful though foolish junket to Hawaii the wolves have sounded their merciless and bigoted chorus, which must have been sweet music to one Alfalfa Will Murray, who has let an indifferent world know that he doesn't go much for "those football matches."

Gallant old Benny Owen fought for his youthful coach, but in vain. The wolf pack continued to yowl. Like Burton Ingwersen at Iowa, Ad Lindsey could stand it no longer. He quit.

And where will Oklahoma get a coach so honest, so sportsmanlike and so capable—for the money that Oklahoma has paid?

Next thing we'll be hearing that Oklahoma alumni have turned on Benny Owen himself, the living symbol of all that is worthwhile and good and progressive in Sooner athletics.

Raymond Parr, city editor of *The Oklahoma Daily*, in his column, sometimes humorous, sometimes pertinent, comment-

Here's what makes me mad about the Lindsey deal:

They fired him because he lost ball games. And they said they wouldn't.

They wouldn't go out and do the subsidization that's necessary to turn out Notre Dame teams.

They told him everything was all right. It wasn't our policy to subsidize athletes and over-emphasize victories.

They wouldn't schedule important inter-sectional games because it was only good clean fun we were playing for.

This was a noble policy, but the powers that be didn't have the guts to stick with it when the wolves howled.

Maybe they've decided to abolish our purity policy. Maybe they're gonna create a few jobs and get some Ralph Grahams, Henry Sauers and Carnie Smiths down here.

Ha, ha, that's a good joke. We've got too many scruples to commit any crime such as offering inducements.

But they've got funny scruples. It didn't bother them when they turned a man with a family out into a depression ridden world without a job.

It's gonna be plenty silly, tho, to keep firing coaches for not winning games and to keep turning down 200-pound fullbacks so we can brag about our simon pure "sports for sports sake" attitude.

It might make strangers think we've got a bunch of hypocrites around here.

Gal Wood of *The Tulsa Tribune* writes that the resignation of Lindsey should wipe the slate clean:

The resignation of Adrian Lindsey as head coach should bring about a tremendous revival in football interest at the University of Oklahoma. That can be said with all due respect to Ad and in full recognition of the fine record he has established in five years of coaching at the Norman institution.

Sorry as we are to see the passing of Lindsey, we are happy for O. U.

Ad's action in stepping gracefully from the picture may remove a most unfortunate situation which has existed in the Oklahoma football department for the last two years.

In the first place it may bring in new coaching blood that will completely dominate the Oklahoma football picture. This domination—for reasons not widely known—has been sadly lacking the last two years. And in the second place students and the alumni may revel enough in their victorious effort to oust Lindsey that they will give a new coach and his teams the moral support and school backing to which they are entitled.

Complete domination of the football department by the head coach, departmental harmony and the moral support of the entire school and its alumni is absolutely necessary if the grid game is to be played on the championship standard demanded at O. U.

If all of this is accomplished, Lindsey, by stepping out, will have done more for the school at Norman than he possibly could have done in two or three years of football coaching. For some reason or other Ad wasn't popular with the students and certain friction in the coaching staff made him lose strength with players on his football squad and members of the "O" club. School spirit was at its lowest ebb last fall, and as Lindsey's eleven failed to win a championship the natural reaction was the student-alumni campaign to "get Lindsey." And they "got" him.

Follows a complimentary sendoff from C. E. McBride of *The Kansas City Star*:

Oklahoma hardly will be able to obtain a better football coach than Ad Lindsey, who recently resigned the chair of Pigskinology at Norman.

Oklahoma may obtain a coach who will fit into the scheme of things at Oklahoma better than did Lindsey, but in the knowledge of football and the business of teaching it chances are the new coach, whoever he may be, will have nothing on Ad Lindsey.