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 Phoenicians 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; Spotwood'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.

Moreover 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 rustiest 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 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 "periodic renewal," 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 the way of life, and gave them a new culture, a new type—the American as distinguished from the European. This man, this race, the American, has given to the world a new idea 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.

And finally 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 Tennessean spirit who broke down the traditions of conservative rule, swept away the privileges 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 grunted, 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 breathed 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 to be found 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 people by 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 bright or early day 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. 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.

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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 visions of 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 woman had to show a wonderful tenacity for the burdens imposed by such a life. She can but feel the poignant truth of those lines of Whitman—as tragic as anything to be found in American literature:

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 seat of a tiring with 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 hold on for the spring and half the burdens imposed by such a life. He can but feel the poignant truth of those lines of Whitman—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 those but to many who remained in the service 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. Starting 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.

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with the Hittite expedition and has done restora-
tion work for the Carnegie Institute at Wash-
ington, 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 Sep-
tember while returning from Colorado.

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

1929

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

THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

(continued from page 270)
a dozen cars may be found parked there
almost any day unless an official is on
watch to tell motorists to move on. The
natural conclusion must be that either
those who park cars on the university
campus 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 Eu-
ropean 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 dough-
boy out unless backed up with plenty
of M. P.'s with life size clubs and short
and hasty tempers. The American dough-
boy 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 pub-
lic building, reaches back to strike a match
on it to light his cigarette and if someone
remonstrates he is likely to defend him-
self 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 Ameri-
can who has little respect for the law has a
profound faith in laws as a sovereign
cure all for all economic, social and po-
litical 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
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 completely untrained Jackson and
Lincoln. In every state and county we choose offi-
cials without the slightest training or ex-
perience 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 superin-
tendent of schools or the college president
is wrong, and can even point out the mis-
takes made by the doctor in his diagnosis
of a case.

The spirit of the West is apparent
in education. The frontier needed surveyers,
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 edua-
cation to most people came to be something
to live by rather than something to live
with. The utilitarian in education flour-
ished; 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 arith-
metic 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.
Grammer won't learn me nothin'."

The result of these western ideas of
education is all too apparent. The man im-
bued 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 con-
vinced that economic independence is not
to be secured by hard work, economy, and
good business management. He, it seems,
it to be secured by purchasing at a low
price something which will, without ef-
fort on his part, greatly increase in value.
reserves, game refuges and national parks to provide forest lands
and lakes with fish and seek to preserve the wild life once 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 blow 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
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 FAREWELL

(continued from page 265)

Sooner 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, 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 to
honest, so sportsmanlike and so capable—for the
money that Oklahoma has paid?

Next thing we'll be hearing is 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, editor of The Oklahoma Daily, in his column, sometimes humorous, sometimes pertinent, comment-
ed:

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

They fired him because he lost ball games.
And they said they wouldn't.
And they wouldn't go on to 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-
entire victoria.

They wouldn't schedule important intersectional
games because it was only good clean fun we
were after.

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

So they've decided to abolish our purify
policy. Maybe they're gonna create a few jobs and
get some Ralph Grahams, Henry Sauers and Carl
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 got fuzzy scriples. It didn't bother
them when they turned a man with a
family out into a depression ridden world
with
our 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
breathe our simone pure "sports for sports
sake" attitude.

It might make strangers think we've got a
bunch of yuppies 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 for Ad and
full recognition of the fine record he has estab-
lished 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 pic-
ture may remove a most unfortunate situation
which has existed in the Oklahoma football de-
partment for the last two years.

In the first place it may bring in new coach-
ning blood that will completely dominate the
Oklahoma football picture. This domination—for
reasons not widely known—has been sadly lack-
-ing the last two years. The players, the
student body and the alumni may revel enough in
their victorious effort to oust Lindsey that they
will accept a new coach as a heartfelt, moral
support and school backing to which they are
entitled.

Complete domination of the football depart-
ment 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 stand-
dard 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 stu-
dents and certain friends in the coaching staff
made him lose strength with players on his foot-
ball squad and members of the "O" club. School
spirit was at its lowest ebb last fall, and as Lind-
sey left the field to win a championship the nat-
ural 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 bet-
ter football coach than Lindsey, who recently
resigned the chair of Pigskinology at Norman.

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