

TOPICS OF THE DAY

PEACE CONFERENCE MOTIVES: THE FRUITS TELL: THE ECONOMIC SITUATION: AN ARTS COLLEGE: "A YOUNG COUNTRY":

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IT is a fashionable saying at present that the Washington Conference was an epoch, marking the beginning of a new era in human history. It was certainly a great and hopeful event; but it might be as well to "wait and see" before becoming too enthusiastic. Was it not really of more importance as a symptom of underlying conditions than because of its actual achievements? Does not an epoch, in any case, partake more of the nature of an effect than of a cause? Is it not usually the end rather than the beginning of an era? Does it not signify historically that some age-old institution or state of affairs has at last been outworn or outgrown and finally cast aside? Did not the advent of Christ, for example, mark the beginning of the end of the old pagan philosophy of life rather than the definite introduction of the new spiritual conception? However it may be viewed, it is certain that no event can be pronounced epochal until it is long past. Time has to do the testing and proving. The Washington Conference may or may not be epochal. If its underlying cause was universal weariness of war, and a heart-felt desire to make it cease for ever to the ends of the earth, it may be safely regarded as marking the end of an era which has prevailed from the beginning, and the dawn of a new era which should continue to the end. If it was merely a scheme to provide for the lessening of the cost of preparations for war in time of peace, it may and will soon be forgotten. The question still to be decided is whether men have conceived a sufficiently strong aversion to war to compel their rulers and leaders to put it aside definitely and for all time, or whether they merely desire a truce that they may rest and grow strong for renewed fighting. Rulers and leaders will do as they are bidden. Are the people bent on permanent peace? The Washington Conference was an indication that they are approaching such a frame of mind. It was through indirect popular pressure that it was called. Did those composing it act as if they were conscious of irresistible forces behind, impelling them forward in the paths of peace? Or was their conduct such as to

indicate that with peace on their lips they had still war in their minds if not in their hearts?

BY their fruits must International Conferences, as well as individuals, be judged. What were the fruits of the Washington Conference? That they were of very considerable, immediate, practical value, all must gladly admit. That they are potentially of much future worth is equally evident. It is as a promise that they are most significant. Their significance lies mainly in the fact that they were produced in the open instead of under old-time diplomatic glass, and that they were gathered from young grafts on old stems, for it is as impossible to mature new varieties of human as of vegetable plants over night. In composition the Conference did not differ outwardly from others of its kind in the past. It was the new spirit which differentiated it. It began business at its opening session instead of wasting days on diplomatic hocus-pocus. That business was introduced in a perfectly frank and open manner, as to any ordinary assembly for deliberative executive purposes. Mr. Hughes's proposal for the reduction of naval armaments in compliance with a fixed scale was radical or conservative according to the point of view. From the former diplomatic and military avenue of approach it was radical in the extreme. From the new peace outlook it was characteristically conservative. It did not suggest any variation in the relative existing war-strength of the nations to be affected, but merely a *pro rata* reduction of their strength with reference to one another. Its acceptance and adoption by formal agreement has changed nothing. On the contrary, it has confirmed and will tend to perpetuate what was. Its good effects will be to reduce the cost of naval maintenance, and to prevent competition in naval construction. That these are real benefits is obvious. There was no logical end but war to the mad race of Capital-ship construction which was in progress when the Conference opened. The countries engaged in it were being over-burdened financially, and their people were being taxed beyond endurance. Worse than that was the fact that they were steadily marching towards war at no distant date. The laying aside of a considerable portion of their armaments by mutual agreement is an unmistakable gesture of peace, even if they still remain as strong as before in relation to one another. It removes one of the main grounds of fear and suspicion, and therefore of the hatreds which breed war between nations. It ought to lead to still further relative reductions of naval armaments if only no other nation turns outlaw, and proceeds to build warships or other naval craft, regardless of the spirit of the Washington compact.

IT is always well to "keep a stiff upper lip" in face of misfortune, but it serves no good purpose to under-rate or misunderstand the extent of a misfortune. Preparations for recovery can be made only with adequate knowledge. Those who are shouting that the return of "good times" is at hand, may be commendable for their intentions. Their judgment is to be doubted. "Good times" neither return nor abide until a solid, economic foundation has been laid for them. Where is such a foundation at present to be discovered? Who has done anything of importance towards the laying of it? The old foundations were overturned and more than half destroyed by the war. The work and savings of generations were swept away. Mountains of debt and taxation were heaped upon the nations. What is there in sight to make better, much less good, "times"? History, as well as observable fact, is against the present optimists. The teachings of history have so far been verified to the letter. All history records that great wars are immediately followed by brief periods of increased inflation, which soon give way to steadily increasing and long continued depression—the length of each period depending directly on the magnitude of the war. The late war was the greatest in history. It was followed by an unusually long period of inflation which lasted more than two years. The period of depression following thereon has not, so far, been clearly observable for much more than a year. It has a long time yet before it, at the best. Little interludes of temporary activity may interrupt it at times, but the general tendency is not likely to be much impeded until rock-bottom is reached. As to when rock-bottom will be reached it can only be answered, not until prices of all kinds have reached not merely a stable and normal, but a sub-normal level. Is anyone to be persuaded that as yet, they have even approached such a level? Is not every possible effort being made to prop them up artificially instead of letting them take their natural course? The world is actively fighting against the return of better conditions. Historically it should only be necessary to remember that after the Napoleonic wars more than a quarter of a century was required for a return to normality and a fresh start upon the upward path to permanent prosperity. There were little interludes, flashes in the economic pan. But the general atmosphere was of continuous depression. The late war was on a vastly larger scale than that of the days of Napoleon; but the means of recovery in our time are probably upon a correspondingly greater scale, so that we need not look for worse but rather better than that which befel the world a hundred years ago. Quite apart from history, present conditions speak for themselves, and in no comfort-

ing or reassuring tones. Russia, with her one hundred and seventy million people, is economically dead, and worse than valueless to the world. She shows no signs of revival. Germany is hopelessly bankrupt, both internally and externally. She cannot pay what she owes without trading with the nations. She cannot trade with neighbouring nations without injuring if not ruining them economically. They are shutting her out of their markets. She cannot trade with the United States because of the exchange rates against her, and because of the prohibitive American tariff. Japan has captured Germany's former markets in China, and her colonies have all been taken from her. Only some miraculous political device can save her from her approaching doom. France is insolvent financially, and otherwise on far from stable economic ground. Italy is a poor country at best, is loaded down with debt, and in a bad way politically. Austria has passed definitely into the pauper class. Greece and Turkey are still in the clutches of war, both hopelessly bankrupt. Poland, the resuscitated, is in such a financial condition that it costs more to print her paper currency than it will pass for at home or abroad. Hungary and the Balkan states have neither outlet nor markets for their products. The United States of America, after "cornering" the world's gold, have enclosed themselves within a Chinese fiscal wall which, at present rates of exchange, is almost insurmountable for trade purposes. Great Britain alone is exhibiting real signs of recovery, but inasmuch as she is hampered by domestic political and economic circumstances, besides being dependent on the outer world for her markets and her trade, her return to any marked degree of prosperity is likely to be slow. Moreover, she is burdened with an appalling debt, saddled with new and most costly political obligations. Where, then, are signs of an early return of "good times" to be observed? Canada is so largely self-contained and self-supporting that we may feel the pinch less than others when it actually comes. But it is practically as certain that the real pinch has not yet come as it is that it will come inevitably and before very long. All the indications are that economic sails of every kind should be close and closer furled instead of being prematurely spread. There is an economic and financial cyclone yet to descend as surely as the war is past. So far, we have merely felt its outer currents. In short, the overwhelming mass of mankind, in every country, must realize that for an indefinite but no brief period to come they will have to be content with the bare means of existence, and that the only "standard of living" for them will be what they can possibly earn by unremitting industry, and by strict thrift make go as far as possible.

THE announced intention of the Provincial Government of Quebec to establish and endow a school of Arts in Montreal, and to offer valuable annual prizes for literary work, is inspirational. Quebec Province is evidently determined to maintain and advance the leadership in culture which it has long enjoyed in the Dominion. In that Province alone has there been hitherto a real literary and artistic cult. This is not to say that there have not been artists and writers of considerable merit in other Provinces of Canada, but they have appeared only sporadically, and have aroused little interest except in small, special coteries. They have, on the whole, been regarded as curiosities rather than as models. We have been surprised instead of stimulated by such successes as they have achieved. English-speaking Canada has developed no real higher cultural atmosphere. Its ideas of Art are rudimentary. Popular taste is deplorably primitive, as manifested through the books of native production which it applauds with its purse, by purchase. Nothing could be much cruder than some of our "best-sellers" among the novels. Few if any of our verse-writers have aimed higher than the "pretty" or, when they did, have succeeded. The cause is not hard to find. Practically all our writing has been either as a "side show" or for money-making. As a side show, it has found it easier to be merely imitative. For money-making purposes it has been directed and governed mainly by the American magazine market—an extremely poor monitor, apart from its being foreign. This may be deplorable. It is. But can we deny it? More important—can we remedy it? It is to be feared that much well-directed effort and no little time will be required to produce noticeable improvement. Concerted steps will have to be taken towards popular culture. Our people will need to be taught to distinguish between the sham and the true, between aggravated ugliness and beauty. To this end something more practical will be requisite than nice little verses concerning the beauties of nature, or nice little paintings intended to portray those beauties. While our population at large is not merely content but smugly proud of hideously ugly domestic surroundings, it can scarcely be expected to be more than imitatively or pretendedly appreciative of nature. Is there a single piece of really artistic—that is to say, good—furniture made in a year in the Dominion, or offered for sale except at second hand as an importation of long ago? Is there anything to direct our shop-keepers in their purchases except the tongue of the "drummer"? Is there aught to guide individual buyers but what they are told is "the fashion"? How can beauty or the love of beauty develop in such a medium? The free schools which most of our

children have to attend and in which a great part of their younger days must be spent are, with few exceptions, habitations of horrible ugliness. If we really desire improvement we must begin at the very bottom instead of the top. But, before we can begin at all, we must have teachers and guides. It is to the great credit of the Quebec Government that they have recognized this, and that they are to institute a school for the purpose of training missionaries of Art, that is, of Beauty, to enter upon the work of conversion, and, it is to be hoped, in time of regeneration. Will the other Provinces follow Quebec's example and join heartily in the good work?

THE prohibition of figurative language, in ordinary life, is clearly indicated and urgently required for the salvation of society. If it be justifiable to forbid the use of physical stimulants, what logical objection could be made to the banning of "exuberant verbosity" whereby auto-mental-intoxication is induced? The calling of a spade a spade, and nothing but a spade—excepting its handle—is as necessary in religion, politics and sociology as in the legal domain. Figures of speech are the chief emissaries of the Prince of Darkness. They are the *agents provocateurs* of misunderstanding, misrepresentation and mendacity. They are the blinkers of truth and the blinders of intelligence. Let one say, in all complimentary innocence, of another that he is as skilful as a pickpocket, and before the phrase has passed through half a dozen pairs of lips, it will have reached the dimensions of a story that the one spoken of has been caught red-handed in burglary aggravated by arson and murder. And there is no recalling a misleading metaphorical word or phrase once it has got a start. Take the phrase "New World", as applied to America, for example. It was perfectly legitimate, in a way, as first used. The exaggeration implied in it was scarcely perceptible. Its antithesis, "the Old Country," was similarly unobjectionable in its origin. Consider them now! The Old Country is still freely so called by those to whom it is not *their* old country—for they were not born, nor did they live in or near it—and to whom the phrase has now come to signify either something of effete-ness and decrepitude, or something of venerable and specially admirable, according to their state of mind. The "New World" has got itself divided up into a lot of "new countries" in the minds of "Home-landers." Worse than that, they have adopted "young" as a synonym for new, and gravely talk of, say Canada, as a "young country." They not only talk of it but think of it as such, and adopt a corresponding mental attitude of more mature and superior

wisdom towards its people, and some of its people accept this attitude as properly expressive. As a plain matter of fact, Canada is no more "a young country" than a man is of necessity young because he has moved into a new house. Geologically, Canada and England are contemporaries, or not far from it. Politically and socially they are exactly synchronous. The fact that one pair of one's grandparents remained in Great Britain while the other came to Canada, and that certain of the brothers and sisters of one's parents came to Canada with them while others remained in Great Britain, does not in the very least differentiate between the grandchildren or children in either case. It no more makes the one set of them "young" than it makes the other "old." It no more signifies that the one is wise, than that the other is simple. Metaphorically, were it not for the inherent danger of metaphor, it might be quite justifiable to call Canada a "new country" in definite allusion to the state of its physical development. But when the metaphor is made applicable to its people, politically, it is time to call a halt. Canada, as a nation, is just as old as Great Britain. The people who came to it from Great Britain brought not only their blood and inherited qualities with them, but all their home institutions and ideas and knowledge, and established them here with themselves. Canada is as old in experience, in thought, in learning and in judgment as Great Britain. Its colonizers may have been changed somewhat by environment in the course of several generations, but really no more than, if as much as, the stay-at-homes have been altered by time. They are able to think just as effectively, and to manage their public and private affairs quite as satisfactorily as the present-day people of Great Britain. The opportunities for individual culture have certainly been fewer in Canada than in the so-called Old Country, but that is not to say, for it would be incorrect to say, that Canadian intellectual culture in general is inferior to popular intellectual culture in Great Britain. Canada may be a "new country," in the original sense. It is not a "young country" in any proper sense of the phrase. It is simply an average British country, with some superiorities and some inferiorities.

O, happy is the land that breeds a seer,
Of vision such as that of Joseph Howe,
To whom, in reverence, each head should bow
For all he saw, and all he made appear.
To serve his country was his earliest vow,
By every influence within his sphere,

Through her, a glorious monument to rear,
And, first of all, with freedom to endow.

He saw his Canada, well-knit and strong,
Among great nations destined to win place;
He urged her on by deed and speech and song,
And joyed to know her started in the race.
He bade his people guard their muniments;
They owe him eucharist and sacraments.

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