

## TOPICS OF THE DAY

A CONFERENCE EPIDEMIC: "EXCELLENT NEIGHBOURS": AMERICAN DIPLOMACY: BRITISH PROPOSALS: THE SACCO-VANZETTI CASE: VARIETIES OF ENGLISH.

WHEN in doubt as to whether or how one can get one's own way, to call a "conference" seems to be the proper present-day proceeding. Consequently, the more doubt there is, the more conferences there are. The world is overflowing with conferences. Of all the supposed means of solving practical doubts, a conference would appear to be, and usually is, about as unsatisfactory as any. Conferences are of two main kinds—those the members of which are certain in advance as to what they would like to do or have done, and those in which there are radical individual differences of opinion and aims. A conference of social "uplifters" is bounded, upwards, only by the high heavens, and downwards, by the too, too solid earth which it would so gladly melt and merge with the ethereal blue of its own imagination, if it but could. A conference of politicians or diplomatists knows no limitations except partisan or national wishes and supposed interests. The chief function of a well-regulated conference is to listen to talk; that of its individual members is to talk, each mostly for his own greater glory and the getting of something for himself in particular, and, incidentally, the securing of an advantage for the "cause" or party or nation of which he is the self-constituted or duly accredited representative.

We have long been accustomed to conferences on "temperance" and "moral reform", which were merely meetings of those whose consuming desire was and is to promote the Kingdom of Righteousness by means of prohibitory or mandatory legislation. The politicians have been manifesting a strong disposition of late to imitate these in their conference proceedings. The impulse has obviously come from the United States, the pietistic yearnings of whose "plain folks" are so irrepressible. Since the late President Wilson made the world conspicuously safe for peace by his League of Nations, although his fellow-countrymen cunningly dissembled their love for it by kicking it ignominiously down stairs, the Republican Administrations which succeeded his have been bursting with conferences for the further promotion of peace, of their own peculiar kind, in their own chosen way.

Being virtually an isolated country with little or no foreign trade, and made secure against foreign aggression by vast ocean distances between them and all possible enemies, and therefore having little or no need of a navy of their own, United States politicians have conceived the original idea of producing complete peace at sea by threatening to build an overwhelming navy of which they have little or no immediate or prospective need, if other nations, with navies which they do need, hesitate to reduce those navies in accordance with limitations prescribed by the United States. They first called the Washington Conference, and dictated terms to it. After a breathing and politically cogitating spell of a few years they came to the conclusion that they could arrange things still more to their own satisfaction by means of another conference—this time at Geneva, as a fancied sop to European and Japanese sensitiveness. As usual, they had, not their programme, but their special schemes in readiness for imposition on the conference. To their pained surprise this latest conference of their calling was not in quite so adopting a mood as its Washington predecessor of immediate post-war days. Since nothing but their own so-called programme, the whole of it, and nothing but it, could be seriously contemplated, much less accepted by their chosen representatives, political, professional and diplomatic, the conference, from which so much was expected for President Coolidge and the Republican party in the next presidential election, simply ceased to confer, after the discovery that it could confer nothing on its sponsors, and slipped, if not into oblivion, into “innocuous desuetude”—and “normalcy.”

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SINCE the Geneva Conference has ceased from direct troubling, it would perhaps be better forgotten, and that as soon as possible. It was fabled to have been convened in favour of international amity. As managed, it proved to be a strong agency in an opposite direction. Nothing in recent years—not even the Venezuela message of President Cleveland—has so ruffled British and American feelings, if not relations, as this Geneva performance. It was faulty in inception, bad in management, and worse in conduct. It is to be feared that few Canadians have a clear idea of its record. Only meagre press accounts of it appeared in Canada, and these mostly tinted with the colours of the United States “news” channels through which they percolated to us. It is but just to say that, in spite of the dispatches which they received from Geneva, not a few American journals of the better class saw through the whole proceedings, and expressed opinions far from complimentary to

their country's awkward, partisan diplomacy. It is important that, before proceeding to "forget" this unfortunate incident, Canadians should have fuller knowledge of its character and outcome.

No thoughtful Canadian would desire to add to the, let us hope temporary, international bitterness which has been engendered, by unnecessary aspersions on the conduct of a neighbouring people or on their rulers. But facts are facts with regard to one's own country as well as to others, and should be known and faced. Canadians are wont to speak and think of Americans as "excellent neighbours"; and so they are, individually. But the people of the United States and those to whom they ordinarily commit the management of their public affairs are quite separate and distinct entities, not to be confounded with or mistaken for one another. While the people of Canada have the warmest friendship for and good will towards the people of the United States, neither the Government of Canada nor that of Great Britain has ever been indebted for special favours of any kind to the Government of the United States, or has ever found that Government a cheerful giver or other than an exacting taker.

The history of Canada records one long series of grabs or attempted grabs from this country by the United States. They have succeeded, by British complaisance, time after time, in paring down our territory to the utmost possible limit, short of armed seizure. If now there is peace, perfect peace, between the Dominion and the Republic, it is because there is no longer a foot of Canadian land to which the Republic can lay plausible claim. Only the fish remain to be squabbled over. This may be freely accepted as, if not satisfactory, at least somewhat better than that blood should have been shed in support of our claims, and enmities established which might have endured to the endangerment of future relations. But it is, nevertheless, difficult to displace it from the back of our minds as a qualification of the *political* excellence of the United States as a neighbour. It may be better worth remembering as a warning for our guidance in future negotiations. The Geneva Conference failed to reveal any newly-developed altruism on the part of the United States with reference to the British empire of which Canada is a component part, although she took so little interest in that Conference and is so ill-informed, if not so mis-informed, concerning its inception and proceedings.

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IT would be difficult to find a more competent or more reliable exponent of European opinion with regard to the Geneva naval disarmament fiasco than *The Tablet*, of London, the great organ of

British Roman Catholicism. Under the editorial heading, "Some Melancholy Reflections", *The Tablet* devotes a two-page leader, in its issue of August 13th, to that subject. For the information of Canadian readers, a summary of the more important contents of that article may be of value. "No poorer compliment", begins *The Tablet*, "could be paid to the United States of America—whose people we shall hereafter call by the imprecise but handy name of Americans—than to treat them as a nation of thin-skins, ready to take mortal offence at even the most reasonable and friendly remonstrance."

The conference opened on June 20th last, and adjourned on July 14th, after having practically come to an *impasse* owing to American intransigence. Its sessions were resumed at the beginning of August, only to be abandoned, after a day or two, without the accomplishment of anything of value. *The Tablet* was writing less than a week after the dissolution of the conference. "Coming straight to the point", it says, "we feel bound to tell Americans that last week's breakdown at Geneva was more and worse than a failure to complete an admittedly difficult negotiation." "Despite profuse assurances on both sides that good will remains unabated, Anglo-American amity has had a shock." Posterity reading the chronicle of the conference will note that an island kingdom, whose life-breath has been seafaring and her sea-power, quietly laid the trident down at the call of Peace. "Britannia Rules the Waves" has served for generations as the refrain of our national song. Our sea-empire has been bought with our best blood. Yet there has hardly risen up a single Jingo in protest against the sudden summons to abandon our naval supremacy and to accept equality with another Power. That summons came from the United States shortly after the war. It was returnable to, and sentence was pronounced at, Washington in 1922.

The United States had no natural call to assume any such position with reference either to the British empire or to the world. Most of her people are inlanders, millions of whom have never seen the sea. They are a self-contained people, with little foreign commerce, no important trade-routes to protect, and no immediate or prospective need for extensive sea-power. Yet Britain's ready concession of their demands was accepted by them as a matter of course, and without apparent comprehension of what it implied for the British. Not content with what they exacted at Washington, the American aim at Geneva seemed to be not merely the further humiliation of Great Britain, but the crippling of her necessary sea-defences while providing for the still further aggrandizement of American offensive sea-power at Britain's expense.

It is to be remembered, too, that the invitation to the conference on "Further Naval Disarmament" came from President Coolidge. It was an open secret that the British Government had intended to call such a conference, and London might very properly have asked Washington to let it have the initiative. Although Washington had no regular status at Geneva, the League of Nations capital, Britain and Japan politely gave pride of place there to the United States. "As the inviting or convening Power, what did America do?" asks *The Tablet*. Surely the participants in such a conference, especially the inviting Power, should regard it seriously and at least come adequately prepared. *The Tablet* "defies any fair-minded man, either Britain's friend or Britain's foe, to maintain that America, after convoking the Geneva Conference, discharged the obligations which she thereby incurred". "Her representatives, as was once cruelly said of Mr. George Moore, conducted their education in public. Political and technical prolegomena, which the other delegates had duly worked up beforehand, had to be mastered (or muddled) by the Americans as they went along; and this kind of thing lasted until the ignominious end. Our own observer in Geneva writes that the offhand attitude of the Americans towards the preliminary studies took one's breath away, and this is confirmed from other quarters." Even Lord Balfour, whose considerate courtesy is so well known, was compelled to deplore the "gross misconstruction and gross misuse by Americans at Geneva" of an easily accessible and very important item in the proceedings of the Washington Conference of 1922. He said: "It is really a melancholy reflection that, as one of his leading arguments, Mr. Gibson (head of the American delegation) should have inadvertently omitted words which modify the whole sense of the passage from which they were extracted." This "inadvertence" might well have recalled the similar singular "inadvertence" of the type-writer of Secretary Mellon, that omitted such significant words from the famous Princeton letter.

"There is worse to be told", remarks *The Tablet*. President Coolidge, having assumed the rôle of foreman in a grand work of peace, apparently sent his legates to the council-chamber with instructions which stultified their mission. American *amour propre* (French for self-conceit) thwarted reasonable settlements. The United States were to be second to nobody in anything, not even in things which are of minor importance to them and of supreme importance to somebody else. They, with their vast land stretches and relatively insignificant sea-connections, were to have the same maritime police as the little British Islands whose people could

not live more than a few weeks if their seaways were blocked. *The Tablet* "does not complain of an immensely rich, powerful and populous Republic for having large ambitions", but it "does say that such a Republic should know her own mind before inviting other states to an expensive and troublesome discussion on smaller navies."

What *The Tablet* characterizes as "worst of all" was, as it says, that "America let loose upon the conference town a horde of political and Big Business wire-pullers which her official spokesmen ought to have rebuffed and disowned." In confirmation of this statement, *The Tablet* quotes the *London Observer*, "whose chief proprietor is of American birth and of inextinguishable American predilections", as saying with regard to this matter: "The delegates to the naval conference have now practically all departed, also the miscellaneous group of auxiliaries who, in a manner entirely foreign to the Geneva atmosphere, mixed American national politics with business interests in a campaign markedly anti-British, which, apart from being revolting when considered in relation to the nature of the conference, has proved unquestionably harmful to Anglo-Saxon prestige in Europe."

After the foregoing and much additional plain speaking, *The Tablet* expresses the opinion that "Bluntness is best when things are going from bad to worse", and that "the truth is too often concealed from Americans that their chiefs are serving them ill in the Old World." *The Tablet* concludes its powerful and impressive article as follows: "For a long time the Old World excused such lapses as these on the plea that America was a young country, without the technique of diplomacy. She is already far older than the kingdom of Belgium, which conducts its international affairs with dignity and efficiency. The plea of youth no longer stands. America has come of age. Therefore it is high time for her millions of high-minded, courteous and honourable citizens to assert themselves, and to claim for their great country that it shall not again be misrepresented in Europe as having no better standards than a *nouveau riche*. As Americans do not hesitate to speak plainly about these kingdoms and republics, both in the New World and the Old, which appear to have worse Governments than their people deserve, we are sure that the better sort of United States citizens will read us without resentment. As for the baser sort and the mediocrities, they have never heard us, and therefore we have been free to speak without fear of inflaming their passions."

THE propositions which the British submitted at Geneva for the "further reduction of naval armaments" are briefly summarized in the "Foreign Affairs" department of the *Contemporary Review* for August. Its summary is reprinted here for the more exact information of *Dalhousie Review* readers.

"The propositions started from the hypothesis that the main reductions in armaments should be attempted by a reduction in the size of ships and guns, and that the naval strength of the three countries should be rationed on the basis of the reasonable needs of the three countries. In detail, the British proposal would work out thus: the life of capital ships should be extended by six years; the life of 8-inch gun cruisers, destroyers, and submarines should be prescribed; the future size of all battleships should be reduced, and their guns reduced from 16 inches to 13.5 inches; aircraft carriers should similarly be subjected to limitation of size and of the size of their guns; destroyers should be limited to 1,700 tons for flotilla leaders, 1,400 tons for others, all guns limited to 5 inches; that torpedo boats and coastal motor boats should be limited to 400 tons in size and to 3-inch guns. So far as cruisers were concerned, the British proposal was that the present Washington ratio be stabilized in the case of 10,000-ton cruisers carrying 8-inch guns, the three Powers to agree on their respective strength of such cruisers: but in the future all cruisers should be limited to 7,000 tons and to 6-inch guns. It was stated in the British proposal that the British desire for the total abolition of submarines was untenable in view of the French and Italian craving for submarines, but Great Britain proposed that submarines should be divided into two categories, the large type (up to 1,600 tons for long range action) and the small type (up to 600 tons). The British proposal was the most detailed and the most technical. It was therefore assigned to the expert investigation of the technical committee of the conference. It was more clearly directed than either the American or the Japanese proposals towards the reduction of naval expenditure and towards the reduction of belligerent strength. The British budget on its expenditure side would be saved some £50,000,000 a year by the extension of the life of capital ships alone, and the other suggested reductions would save like sums."

In explaining the British case to the House of Commons on July 11th, when the failure of the conference was unmistakably in sight, Sir Austen Chamberlain said: "Our delegation went to Geneva with a carefully thought-out plan for the future limitation of naval armaments, and the efficacy and extent of the proposals which we are prepared to lay before the conference may be measur-

ed, perhaps, by this single fact, that for years to come they would mean a reduction, adopted by others following the same example, on the naval expenditure which we would otherwise have to incur of a sum nearer £50,000,000 than £40,000,000. To my mind, and to the mind of our Government, the question of total tonnage is by itself insignificant, and a decision on total tonnage and that alone would by itself be ineffective either to check armaments or to secure further limitation. Unless some further limitations are to be put upon the number of ships which have the most aggressive character, which are the accompaniments and parts of the great fleets, then the mere total limitation of tonnage would lead, not to a reduction of naval competition, and not to a reduction of expenditure, but would involve all the parties in still further extension and still further expenditure. . . We can only move with other Powers. We reduced our army without waiting for anyone else. Immediately on the conclusion of the armistice, without waiting for the conclusion of peace, we brought the size of our army to what is nothing more than the bare military police required for the purposes of such an empire as ours. It is unthinkable to us that we should enter into competition with the United States of America in a new race of armaments. We do not attempt to suggest, without criticism or objection from us, that in any class of vessel they are not entitled to the parity that their needs require. For our part, we seek only to secure the special protection which is vital to an empire so peculiarly situated as ours, on the lowest scale that we can arrange with other naval Powers, so that all our burdens and efforts may be lightened, and that the menace of war, with big armaments, may be removed. We must recognize, and I am sure that others will recognize, the difference between an empire such as ours, which is scattered over every sea and divided by wide oceans, and the position of empires which are practically self-contained, and whose communications in war would be unmenaced even although they were engaged in a great struggle. We in this country not merely desire trade as others desire it, not merely desire protection as others desire it; but we whose supplies are only sufficient for seven weeks' consumption, and our people, have to think how we could live, not how we should starve, if our sea communications were interrupted."

The American proposition was, in the main, to limit the total, or, as they chose to call it, the *global* cruiser tonnage for Britain and the United States to not more than 450,000 tons. This would enable the United States to build practically as many powerfully offensive 10,000-ton battle-cruisers as they pleased. Great Britain



would have had either to follow suit and build a similar number of such cruisers, or sink definitely to second place as a naval Power. If she built as many such cruisers as did the United States, she would have little or no tonnage left to her for the provision of the small and strictly defensive cruisers, almost useless for offensive purposes, which she requires for the defence of her trade-routes. The American proposal, if accepted, would have involved Great Britain in a new competition in naval armaments with the United States, and in vast additional outlay instead of a reduction of annual expenditure; and it would have crippled her trade defences. Why the United States should want, at present, larger naval armaments, except as a childish challenge if not an open defiance to Great Britain, no American has yet undertaken to explain.

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**M**ASSACHUSETTS is to be highly complimented on the firmness of her judiciary and the courage of her executive in the Sacco-Vanzetti affair. In this connection the Government of the United States is also to be commended for its general dealings with Communism, which is merely another name for Bolshevism, that is, Communism in power. No other nation has shown an equally fearless and determined spirit in withstanding organized political lawlessness—not even Italy, which has merely countered Red revolution with Black revolution.

The courts of Massachusetts have long enjoyed an enviable reputation in British legal circles. Their decisions have been cited impressively in the highest courts of the empire. The people of Massachusetts, from whom her juries are drawn, enjoy a unique reputation for intelligence among those of the other states of the Union. The one great blot which sullies the whole face of the Sacco-Vanzetti record is due to a faulty system of procedure, from which all the states suffer. That it should have been possible for quibbling lawyers, supported and enticed by contributed Communist funds, to impede for seven long years the execution of the obviously proper sentence of a responsible Massachusetts court, is a thing not to be lightly censured, but to be pitied and made impossible for the future by long-overdue legislative and judicial action.

To begin with, there was nothing extraordinary in the Sacco-Vanzetti case. The two men involved were indicted for murder and robbery. The evidence against them was convincing to a Massachusetts court and jury. They were found guilty and

condemned. Each of them had been a conspicuous and inflammatory Communist, not a special recommendation to decent sympathy, it might be supposed, when their vile theories ripened into criminal action, and hardly a fact to be blatantly urged in mitigation of a just sentence. A consistent Communist is never to be suspected of any tender regard for human life, or of any meticulous discrimination between *meum* and *tuum*. The fact that these two were active Communists may not have raised any implication of their guilt of the particular crimes of murder and robbery with which they were charged, but it certainly did not tend to suggest their innocence or extenuate their guilt.

Their lawyers, as certain not over-scrupulous and overpaid lawyers will, raised for them the specious cry that the trial judge had been prejudiced against them because of their Communistic attachments. This cry, while it nominally impeached the fairness of the trial judge, ignored entirely the unanimous verdict of the jury. But what did that matter? The cry served to excite Communists "from ice-bound Kamchatka to stormy Cape Horn", to furnish them with a new yell against "bourgeois justice", and to draw cash from their pockets for lawyers' tricks and quibbles, which worked effectively for seven years before the electric chair finally ended them. It also served to stir the souls of sympathetic cranks all over the world, who, although not all of them exactly Communists themselves, are constitutionally "agin" any law which operates in restraint of crankdom in general.

The Massachusetts courts, although undeniably as able and fair as any in the world, were assailed and vilified. Every conceivable legal and popular device, including violence, or threats of violence, was resorted to, the world over, to save this brace of offenders from the just punishment, not at all of their anti-social creed, but of their criminal misdeeds. The uproar has not even yet subsided. But the courts of Massachusetts and its executive manfully stood their ground and upheld the law. They had the unanimous support and approval of all the best elements in the United States. They had the approval of the thoughtful and well-informed everywhere. Bolshevism, outside of Russia, has been taught that it cannot indulge in personal Bolshevistic conduct against non-Bolshevists and escape the consequences by pleas that such deeds are in accordance with Bolshevistic theories, and that courts of law are prejudiced against them because of creed.

The Los Angeles *Times* makes the pertinent remark, in this connection, that "Perhaps the most striking thing about the Sacco-Vanzetti case is the absolute certitude of certain (foreign) groups

that they know twice as much about the merits of it as do the people of Massachusetts." The sort of "justice", free from prejudice, which the Communists in power in Russia mete out to those whom they regard as "undesirables" has been glaringly illustrated by an incident since the Boston "judicial murders." Madam Kolepikoff, wife of a Russian naval officer who was shot on suspicion, not proof, of espionage, has been sentenced to death by the Bolsheviks because she refused to reveal the place of concealment of her husband while they were searching for him.

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A TYPOGRAPHICAL inadvertence seems to have permitted the appearance of the words "*an* historical" in this section of THE DALHOUSIE REVIEW for July.\* The same words may have appeared at other times and in other parts of this review. It may appear again, as it undoubtedly does, from time to time, in other English reviews of excellent standing. The present writer's purpose is to separate himself personally from the use of the phrase. It may not be incorrect. There is no universally accepted English authority to decide that it is. But it is indisputably archaic; and it is contrary to the generally recognized rule that the particle *a* is to be used before a consonant or consonant sound, and the particle *an* only before a vowel or vowel sound.

That this rule is frequently disregarded, particularly in America and by a few writers in England, does not derogate in the least from its general cogency. In the United States, to which New England has long set the fashion in language, the archaic appears to make exceptional appeal. The Holy Scriptures, Shakespeare and other writings of the Jacobean period are proudly cited in justification of the practice. Should that fail, the individual *ear* is set up in final judgment. For example, we are told that "*an* historical" sounds better than "*a* historical." Yet the same ear tolerates without a quiver "*a* history", and would be shocked by "*an* history." The probability would appear to be that when "an" was first placed before "historical", the old English habit of

\*It was not a typographical inadvertence, but the deliberate act of the Editor, who cannot allow his excellent and painstaking printer to be blamed for it. Perhaps it has served a good purpose in calling forth here one of those philological meditations which are always suggestive and of which we have too few. Under shelter of the Bible and Shakespeare, one's personal taste on these disputable matters is indulged with a certain fortitude. Mr. George Macaulay Trevelyan, for example, has entitled one of his later books *Recreations of An Historian*. But this paragraph in *Topics* is too good in itself, and too instructive as a pattern, to be omitted.

dropping the *h* at will had not been abandoned. St. Paul in the authorized version of the New Testament is made to write of "*an* one." Many good Americans and Englishmen still use that phrase in ignorance or disregard of the fact that there is much to indicate that the *o* in "one" was formerly pronounced long, as in "only", instead of as *wo* in "won." The word *atone*, originally "at one", supports this supposition. Similarly, *at all* and *all right* are fast being Americanized, if not Anglicized, each into a single word. Many if not most Americans make a mouthful of the *ho* in "hotel", and yet they persistently speak and write of "*an* hotel." Now, "hotel" is a word of comparatively recent importation from France. It came with a French silent *h*, and, originally, was correctly preceded, in English, by *an* and not *a*. Since *h* in the word has come fully into its own among us, it is worse than absurd to speak, much more to write, of "an hotel."

The source of error lies in the fact that certain of the vowels have consonant as well as vowel powers. For example, in *one*, as already stated, the *o* is preceded by the consonant power of *w*. The initial vowel *u* frequently has the consonant effect of *y*, for example, in "union", "united", etc., and requires *a*, not *an*, before it. The ordinary ear should easily discriminate between a vowel and a consonant sound at the beginning of a word, and automatically dictate the correct use of *a* or *an*. On this subject Mr. H. W. Fowler, author of *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, joint author of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, and one of the highest modern authorities in English, writes: "A is used before all consonants except silent *h*; *an* was formerly used before an unaccented syllable beginning with *h* (*an* historical work); but now that the *h* in such words is pronounced, the distinction has become *pedantic* and *a historical* should be said and written. A is now usual also before vowels preceded in fact though not in appearance by the sound of *y* or *w* (*a unit*, *a eulogy*, *a one*)."

Spoken language in the United States, and, through the United States, in Canada, has suffered greatly at the mouths, if not the hands, of unlettered free-school teachers, many of whom would appear to be incapable of comprehending the vocal markings of their own dictionaries. Worst of all, perhaps, is the pronunciation of the common word *the* as "*thuh*", which, to say nothing of ordinary school reading, has made a veritable mess of choral singing in our public services. This vocal horror was imposed on us some thirty odd years ago, through simple ignorance of the fact that *the* is and always has been *the*, scarcely distinguishable in speech from *thee*, before vowels, and that it is a mere inarticulate breathing before

a consonant, as *th' man*, not "thuh man", with special emphasis on the "thuh", lest the unfortunate pupil should be guilty of saying "the man." At about the same date in our sub-national development came in those sweet vocal morsels "wur" for *were*, "whur" for *where*, and "whurfore" and "thurfore" for *wherefore* and *therefore*, along with not a few others of the same kind—due to the inability of most teachers to perceive that the *e* in *fern*, which Webster's American Dictionary indicates as similar to the *e* in those words, is by no means consonant with *u* in *turn*.

All of the foregoing words, and others like them, were correctly spoken by Canadians before free schools began their improving work. Since those schools have achieved so much in such a comparatively short time, may we not expect, if not hope for, almost anything from them in the long years to come?

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