TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE OTTAWA CONFERENCE: OLYMPIC GAMES: INSTRUCTING THE SCHOOLMASTER: THE CRAZE FOR CHANGE.

WE have been so often warned not to expect too much from the Ottawa Conference that it would seem wise to prepare ourselves to expect too little. Early critics, by reason of temperament or expediency, went to prophetic extremes of jubilation or jeremiad; but even before the initial handshakes of contestants had given way to the tentative preliminaries of sparring for an opening, it became clear that the give and take of serious encounter would be pretty evenly matched. Each constituency was accordingly reminded that there would be no *quid* without a *pro quo*, and the more cautious prognosticators arrived almost at the point of suggesting that each country should be well satisfied if its delegates were made to understand why they could expect nothing from the others. At least we were all given sufficient warning to reduce our faith to that of the Irishman who announced that his pig had sold for less than he expected;—but he always thought it would.

Actually, the immediate achievement—so far as our present incomplete knowledge leaves us able to guess—seems to be as good as we had any reason to expect. And that, too, with no more ill-feeling or danger of a break-down than might be expected of a Conference that was primarily economic, and far removed from the old Colonial and Imperial Conferences, where no serious trading followed the flag-wagging.

Taken as they stand, the agreements of the Conference might be regarded as at least of moderate success, but for the two unfortunate conditions that are keeping us all in suspense. The discussion of agreements by the parliaments respectively concerned will lend interest to the proceedings of the next few months; and the bargains struck will not be overlooked at the subsequent World Conference. Even the benign influence of the League of Nations will hardly persuade all its constituent States, and some others, to accept on equal terms a group that has already made an exclusive and profitable private bargain.

Cynics have derided and sentimentalists have deplored the bargain-hunting spirit of the recent Conference. Of an economic conclave their complaints would seem to be unreasonable. Business

and sentiment do not mix; but good feeling is more likely to endure if it arises out of good business than if it is too much emphasized as an essential part of the negotiation. The quick transition from compliment to business was therefore a hopeful sign; what did produce apprehension was that the combatants were not allowed to find their own way to a decision, according to their own terms of reference, but were harried and confused by various partisan influences. If the delegates could have been isolated from all communication with the outside world, and in particular from newspapers, lobbyists, journalists and the expert advice of special interests, doubtless the path of discussion would have been straighter and smoother. And at the end, the humble tax-paying consumer might have had a clearer idea of what his dollar would be worth and how many cents of it he could keep for himself.

From press accounts, the Conference would almost appear to have been less concerned with the establishment of an effective trading agreement between nations than with sectional interests within nations; at least the protests against a conjectured individual loss were usually louder than the applause for a collective gain. Special pleading for special interests might be allowed to cancel itself out if only all sides were fairly represented. But Canadian farmers have contended that they were unable to secure effective representation as compared with the wealthier and better organized manufacturing associations whose interests were likely to be adversely affected by their own. There seems, indeed, to have been no diminution, during the Conference, in the representation of certain industrial concerns that have been able, at times, to remind parliament of the need for protecting the young and feeble; and doubtless their wishes were "sensed", if not heard, at the Conference. But in spite of their poorer representation it appears to be the farmer who at present is most certain of advantage. What will happen to the manufacturers is not at present clear; but from the way in which certain newspapers have turned against the Prime Minister, it appears that they fear the worst—which may or may not mean that they are no longer to be favoured at the expense of the country at large. The terms on which preferred British manufactures will be admitted to Canada are less interesting at the moment than the conditions determining preference. One of the less satisfactory features of the major Canadian agreement is the presence of question-begging qualifications concerning industries reasonably efficient or sufficiently established. "Reasonable" and "sufficient" are terms admitting of a wide range of interpretation, which the establishment of a joint board may not immediately

determine. However, the presence of exporters' as well as of home manufacturers' representatives on a tariff board will doubtless remove certain existing anomalies, such as the assessing of duties not on export price, but upon an arbitrary "value", so that an article selling for ten cents in England might sell for ninety cents in Canada.

Recently, it was declared in the press that higher prices were the first essential to returning prosperity. The idea appeared to meet with editorial favour; but much depends on the point of view. In a manufacturing community, general high prices produce no hardship, because every buyer is also a seller; but low prices for coal and potatoes, and low wages outside of industry, are not always regarded as deserving the same expansion.

The suggestion has recently been made that Canadian industry is socialized in every respect except that the State has neither control nor profit in the undertaking. Obviously natural resources should be developed, and initiative encouraged, and men put to work; but the present situation amounts practically to a special subsidy by the taxpayer, which relieves the manufacturer of the necessity of meeting foreign competition on an equal basis. If the surmise is correct that Mr. Bennett has withdrawn some of the special privileges of the manufacturers, he has shown rare courage, and a fine disregard for the traditions of party politics. He can expect little gratitude from any infant industry which is told that it is able to swim for itself; and it is safe to conjecture that the Liberals will be less concerned with praising his concession to Free Trade than with explaining where he got it. In Canada, as elsewhere, his Majesty's loyal Opposition can be trusted to give credit where it thinks credit is due.

The potential conflicts in parliamentary debates were already sufficiently involved, with all sorts of incongrous extremes lined together against the middle course necessarily imposed in the Conference. But to what has been written it is now necessary to add a reference to the disturbing conundrum raised by the alleged interchange of aluminum and petroleum with the same Russia that caused all the bother about lumber. Without going into the question of why conscience is most sensitive when competition is most dangerous, and why in matters of humanity a general embargo is not more consistent than a special one, we may await with interest the remarks of the British and Canadian lumber groups and of the Canadian refiners.

Returning from the free-for-all scramble of an open convention to the close warfare of party politics, the Canadian Prime Minister

can hardly hope to meet with complete favour from either side of the House. But the advantage of a Conference, as of a Coalition, is that policies are anybody's property; and Mr. Bennett may prove to have modified his creed—to the general good—with a judicious leavening of some of the less reprehensible tenets of Liberalism. It is a tribute to all concerned that Canada neither gave nor received advantage at the Conference from her position of hostess; and it may be construed as a tribute at least to Mr. Bennett's firmness and acumen that, in a meeting where each was present to get most for himself, he succeeded in raising no greater feelings of jubilation among his competitors than among his constituents. But his shoulders are broad, and he should by this time be accustomed to contumely. That his colleagues appear at times to have complained of him may indicate merely that he denied them the pleasure of getting the better of him. When a bargain is struck, popularity may be the distinguishing mark only of a compliant loser. If this be our criterion, Mr. Bennett may be regarded as having achieved conspicuous success.

THE Olympic disputes being now concluded, the nations may return to the more serious quarrels from which these minor feuds are supposed to distract them. Delegates to this gladiatorial league of nations may have achieved at Los Angeles the peace and good-will that rest with Geneva like a benediction, but the pleasure they contribute to those who follow their progress in the local sports page seems to be based less upon sportsmanship than upon success. Like the delegates to the Economic Conference, they are expected not so much to make a good impression as to "bring home the bacon". And, even at home, they too may find that they are received by a house divided on separate interests. Paradoxically enough, it has just been reported that a dinner to the returning Irish athletes was able to bring together Mr. Cosgrave and Mr. de Valera, who had until then contrived for some time to remain apart. But no deduction can be drawn from evidence supplied by Mr. de Valera, even if their joint homage to sport should prove to result in permanent harmony between him and Mr. Cosgrave. Before the Canadian representation had been settled, there were charges and countercharges of favouritism that should have been as humiliating to their supporters as they were embarrassing to the contestants. As news of the events came through, individual press reports were handled with the same partisanship that has come to characterize the hostile camps of supporters at so many contests in football, baseball, and hockey. A distinguished foreign victory

would receive bare mention, and the headlines be given to the local boy who "made good" in his heat.

The Olympic Games are possibly more free from selfishness than most other commercial exhibitions of what is still called "amateur" sport. But it is open to question whether every elaborate and expensive contest is not essentially professional. It is not intended to stir up useless argument concerning curious discrepancies between taxable income and standard of living, or doubts as to whether a change of team precedes or follows a change of residence. Nor is it intended to enter into any subtleties of discrimination between the tennis or golf professional and the amateur, shall we say, who uses his skill at golf to obtain a living by selling golf-balls or Government bonds. Many a man who wastes time and money on golf never scores below three figures and is still a professional. His diligent coaching, his earnest pondering of textbooks, his concern with figures, obsess him with the preoccupations of those who make their living at the game, and remove him from kinship with the amateurs, gifted or unskilful, who follow it for recreation. He makes a business of what should be a pleasure; just as the contender for a world's championship, even if it is decided at his door, must so arrange his training and preparation as to make a business of it.

There would be less reason for concern if, in some major sports at least, besides the arduous business of training and the exacting business of making journeys according to schedule, it were not necessary to make it a business to win. A certain American football coach used to boast that he was responsible for a change in the regulations each year, to close unsuspected technical omissions that his ingenuity had been able to discover in the regulations and turn to the advantage of his team. The summit of his achievement, in the opinion of admiring devotees of fair play, appears to have occurred when an entire team appeared with a realistic imitation of a football as part of the uniform, so that while his team-mates kept the opposition confused, one player was able to make an unostentatious score with the genuine ball.

So far as can be observed, such tactics, when they occur, belong to coaches and managers rather than to players. Playing a game develops a tendency to play the game. Making it pay does not. It is significant that the baseball player specially distinguished in his youth for ability to play the regulations rather than the game rapidly developed into the most ruthlessly successful of managers. The real taint of professionalism that has invaded amateur sport comes less from the financial difficulties that often embarrass players

than from the influence of the manager and the gate. The fan—an adjunct of sport that has recently been restored to the prominence which he enjoyed in the Colosseum—demands something for his money. "The cash customers were on their feet yelling for blood." ... "So-and-so is a crowd-pleaser, and the promoters promise one hundred cents worth of excitement for your dollar." Such statements as these are a matter of course in sport reviewing, and indicate clearly that the competitor is often merely a puppet in the hands of a showman.

Sport was once supposed to develop, among other things, initiative and self-reliance. But the fan and the promoter have reduced the athlete to the level of a public institution. Even golf tournaments are now pursued across country by a peripatetic grandstand. Places have been known where a reputable team was coached by a captain and "managed" by a secretary—both regularly playing members of the team—where the members purchased their own equipment and paid their own expenses, and where each thought for himself and played as his judgment dictated. But the mere suggestion of this would sound like an unpleasant fairy-tale to those who are accustomed to the idea of a manager and an assistant manager, of a coach and a bevy of trainers, by whom uniforms are handed out and recalled like the costumes of a chorus, and at whose nod the players go in and out of the arena with the docility of trained seals. Training for a competitive team-play with the idea of playing on one's own initiative to an uninterrupted finish seems to have been lost. The battle of wits lies between managers and coaches, not between players. Conferences or "huddles" are called to discuss any tactics of the opposition that have not been reported from the vigilance of the scouts (spies would be a better name) who have tried to break the secrecy of the training ground. Players who are found unsuitable are removed during the game, and substitutes provide resting periods for those that remain. A fresh relay of victims is brought out as to the bull-ring, and a brilliant player who has been slack in training may be thrown in for five minutes to snatch a score and be withdrawn before he collapses from lack of stamina. A year or two ago, when an American college football player disregarded signals and the instructions of his coach and managed to think for himself, he was blazoned across the headlines as a phenomenon unique in the history of sport, and comparable only to the Rugby youth who first ran with the ball in his hands and so inaugurated a new type of football. His example, however, has not been followed; and the machine still rules.

The battle against regulations, and the carefully rehearsed

instructions, are only two items in a long list that contributes, in a word, to sophistication. The special uniforms and protections, the constant aiming at a constantly receding "record", the constant "improvement" by more skilful technical equipment, all bring to mind Mr. Shaw's description of the ceaseless and futile struggle between guns and armaments. Sport, like war, seems in danger of becoming impossible by its very efficiency and of killing itself by the monsters of its own creation. Spontaneous play demands the implements that come first to hand, and the first golfer was probably a cheerful soul who lightened his labours by hitting a turnip with his hoe. His successors who first played the game as a game may be argued to have derived as much pleasure from a bent stick and a feather ball as can be purchased with a dozen matched clubs and other equipment intended to adjust an outdoor game to the mathematical nicety of billiards. Progress has brought us to the stage where the ancient art of horse-shoe pitching has advanced from behind the forge of an evening to a set annual tournament, with rules, appeals and penalties, and an exact standard of weights and measures for the shoes. To preserve the spirit of our games we should restore them more nearly to the primitive simplicity from which they have sprung. That this desirable condition may ultimately be achieved is suggested by the growing popularity of the unspoiled pastime of wrestling, in which the conventions and equipment are as simple as they were in the days of the caveman. The spectators indulge to vicarious repletion the primitive instinct for combat, and achieve a thorough purgation of pity and terror. The game will eventually be spoiled by the unfortunate commercial spirit of promoters, who appear to be concerned rather with preserving the contestants for future bouts than with providing their customers with good clean fun unrestrained by any narrow prejudices as to mayhem. But it is difficult to conceal the sporting spirit that seeks an outlet in such naive emulation; and in general the fans may be said to have discovered a sport in which they still get their money's worth.

EVERYONE dictates to the schoolmaster. His specialized professional duties are dragged into public discussion by service-club orators, politicians, and anyone else with an itch for minding other people's business or providing advertisement for his own. Other professions can work with a certain measure of freedom. Doctors and lawyers are allowed ordinarily to handle their cases with little instruction from State Departments, and would not very patiently endure criticism from people, including their patients and

clients, who could not distinguish a stethoscope from a scalpel or a *habeas corpus* from a *nolle prosequi*. But the public teacher is subjected to a battery of criticism by anyone in search of a target; and the missiles of the attack are often directed without proper distinction between the faults of the person and those of the conditions under which he works.

It has been complained that teachers are second-rate men; ("women" would be more correct for present conditions; but the masculine designation, though no longer generic, may be retained for convenience). "Those who can, do. Those who cannot—teach." The fairness of this gibe is doubtful; what is certain is that teachers receive only third, fourth or fifth rate salaries even when they do work that is first rate of its kind. Few holders of junior posts in a Civil Service, to make a fair comparison, are required to perform such exacting duties as a school teacher on equal pay, or to reveal the initiative and originality that are expected in the class room. Working often in noisy, crowded, and ill-ventilated buildings, coping with an impossible number and variety of pupils and subjects and classes, the teacher is expected to satisfy the prescribed routine of a hierarchy of principals, supervisors, inspectors, and departmental superintendents. In his daily task of adjusting official aims to practical necessity he is subjected to the advice of self-styled experts who are not teachers of anything and so are free to teach those who are teachers. Finally, in the intervals of bureaucratic solicitation, when the teacher has been exhausted by an effort to divert Johnny's attention from spitballs to fractions, Johnny's mother urges her ward alderman to use his influence towards securing a dismissal, and complains in the newspapers that Johnny is overworked and misunderstood by an unsympathetic taskmaster who is warping the soul and restricting the natural genius of an admittedly exceptional child.

The parent's lament may explain everything except the teacher's failure to murder her offspring. But she can be as sure of sympathy as the teacher is sure of abuse. The writer hesitates to suggest his views on the necessity for corporal punishment of the wilful offences natural to healthy boyhood, and merely notes in passing that some evidence may be obtained by statistical comparison of juvenile delinquency with sentimental methods of schooling. Educational theorists may charm us with Wordsworth's boy trailing clouds of glory from Heaven which is his home. But the boy encountered in the school-room is more commonly Bagehot's "small apple-eating urchin whom we know", and his soul is in no immediate danger of being warped by the discipline of at least a

little assigned and possibly unwelcome work. The theorist, however, joins the hue-and-cry, and aids the sentimentalist in his plea that school-work must not be difficult. An age that delights—or should delight— in working off surplus energy by manufacturing difficulties for its own amusement is pampered by the removal, not of unnecessary barriers, but of every hurdle and stumbling block that is essential to the process of learning and presents an opportunity for development. The "project-method" is one of the latest aids to learning without working, and consists in letting the pupil follow his own bent. Carried out consistently, it has great possibilities, but this is impracticable under conditions of ordinary public schools, and it becomes merely an opportunity for allowing the pupil to avoid anything that is unattractive to him. In short, when the pupil's purpose is to avoid learning, it is time for the teacher's purpose to intervene. In any case, the organization of the average school demands a subordination to common expediency that the average pupil will find useful in after life.

Every employer and advanced teacher can testify that illiteracy is on the increase except in schools where there is strict compulsion to accurate writing for writing's sake. Improvement of expression —our great common need—by the project method suggests nothing more modern than Dotheboys Hall. "Boy" said Mr. Squeers, "spell winder". And "winder" having been spelled to the satisfaction of both, the wretched youth was set to clean the window and so drive the lesson home by fulfilling a useful purpose. The practical difficulties have been entertainingly suggested by "Ian Hay" in a book that is worth all his novels put together. In *The Lighter Side of School Life,* Major Beith describes how the relations between the diameter and the circumference of a circle were discovered to be lacking in romance when stated in the dull exactitude of mathematics. It was therefore proposed in one of the more modern and improved text-books that the true state of affairs be elucidated with the aid of baking powder cans and pieces of string. The idea is interesting, and practical to those who arc concerned neither with accuracy in measurement nor with the possibilities in the hands of fifty lively boys, on a sloping floor, of fifty pieces of string and fifty round tin cans.

With the cry for modern methods comes the cry for modern text-books. On both of these counts the school-system nearest to the writer has been subjected to lavish journalistic criticism, the comparisons being for the most part based on what is to be found in America. With few exceptions, both attackers and defenders were content to state without proof. If Nova Scotia is

so poorly educated, how has she been able to provide the rest of the continent with so many presidents of universities, banks and insurance companies that there is no one left to work her farms? Since the United States offer the greatest possible extremes of good and bad education, is there any relationship between these and the divergence, if any, between good methods that are new and good methods that are old? So far as technical equipment is concerned, American education provides the English speaking world with an object lesson in competence and generosity. If a comparison is to be made as to methods and equipment, local critics (before condemning their school-system) would do well to consider the still far too niggardly expenditure by which it is supported, and ask whether the blame does not lie at the door of the taxpayer, and on a system of assessment that places the heaviest burden on the poorest communities. That our schools should have succeeded so well in the face of such continued poverty, would almost of itself persuade one to accept sentimental reminiscences concerning the little red school house. At least it reminds us that equipment is not everything, or rather that the essential equipment is a good teacher.

Carlyle's description of a university as "a collection of books" needs to be modified for schools by Mark Hopkins's vision of a log with a student at one end and a teacher at the other. American text-books are admittedly the best in the world for teaching large classes with the minimum of effort all round. But this is in itself as much a condemnation as a compliment. Unnecessary difficulties should go the way of chilblains and back-breaking desks and standing in a corner that are prominent in the present writer's recollection of his schooldays. His education derives rather from the fireside than from the schoolroom, but the books that supplied it were the antiquated schoolbooks of his father, discarded in demand for something more modern as some of them were discarded years ago in this and other provinces of Canada. Except for science, and the manifest need for periodical supplements to literature and history, some of the old books have every quality of the new except a specious claim to originality, and a tendency to persuade the reader that he lacks the capacity to assimilate anything but confectionery. Latin grammars assist the study of conjugations by hypothetical pictures of Roman family life, but it is not agreed that schoolboys are better trained by these works than those who follow their grandfathers in the use of *Bradley's Arnold*. History is now embellished with maps and plates that are an improvement upon the old date-lists and genealogies, but not

upon the word-pictures of John Richard Green. Modern literature may be added to the classics of our own and other tongues, but cannot supersede them. The asses' bridge and the right-angled triangle, in spite of modern improvements, still appear to provide difficulties that cannot have been much greater in the days of Euclid and Pythagoras. And French and German are better mastered, either for use or for training, from an old-fashioned grammar than from a tourist's phrase-book and illustrated guide. The Bible—but controversies about this ancient Book have caused more trouble in our schools than any other, and just here I had better stop.

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