

EDUCATIONAL HORIZONS

Is Teaching A Profession In Canada Right Now?

What do we understand by a profession? What are the qualifications of a person who is a member of the professional class?

First and foremost, he must have enough native wit to absorb a long and often intensive training in his chosen field. This training ultimately makes it possible for him to meet certain clearly defined problems and deal with them expeditiously and fully. For example, we call a doctor a professional man because he can, as a result of his training, tell what is wrong with us if we are ill, or if he is not sure himself he can describe our condition, in fully understandable terms to another doctor who will be able to diagnose the trouble. In other words, he is able to judge our difficulties in terms of the whole field of medical knowledge. Not that he is acquainted personally with the whole field, but he has sufficient grasp of the basic principles that he knows his own limitations, which is important, and knows someone else's scope which, for his patients is even more important.

WIT
A thorough grasp of his subject then is the first condition of the professional—a condition we may term succinctly—*wit*.

The second condition is that he constantly tries to improve his knowledge by doing further research, reading the technical journals and even taking refresher courses in certain new areas that are important. A professional man cannot rely on the facts which he learned in college to last him for a lifetime.

It is interesting in this regard to note that we speak of the doctor or lawyer as practising. He knows that he can never be perfect and he knows that he must constantly try to redefine his basic concepts in terms of ever-changing conditions and of newly discovered techniques in his own and allied fields. These activities will bring him wisdom.

Such acquired wisdom and native wit sets the professional man apart from his fellow men. They come to regard him as being superior to them not only in the exercise of his own profession, but in matters of mutual interest to the community. They therefore come to him for advice and look to him for leadership in many community enterprises. And so we have in Canada medical doctors, lawyers and engineers representing us in our national life.

EXPECTED MORE
Now, since the populace expects more from these professionals, the professionals are entitled to expect more from the

populace. They charge more for their services than do other men. It is no secret that doctors, lawyers and engineers are the three highest paid groups in Canada. With this money, which enables them to relax well after working hard, they are able to support financially those community causes which they are asked to lead. Whenever such professionalism brings such tangible returns it is necessary to protect the profession from unscrupulous people who are anxious for the returns without giving the service. For this reason doctors and lawyers for example police their own profession. Any doctor who commits an immoral act or is guilty of unethical conduct is struck off the register by his fellow doctors, just as a lawyer is disbarred for the same reason.

To sum up then, these are the prerequisites for any professional man first; native wit; second, acquired wisdom; third, a higher than average income; fourth, a tradition of service to the community; and last, a rigid control of his professional standards by the other members of his profession.

AND TEACHERS

How far along this road to professionalism are the teachers of Canada?

That they all have native wit is surely agreed without argument. Those who teach in secondary schools have graduated from a university in their own special subjects. Those who teach in the public schools are daily dealing with some of the keenest shrewdest minds in the country. You can fool grown-ups, but it is easier to get to know the right answers than try to fool children. They can spot a fake two classrooms away.

What of acquired wisdom? Here there would be less agreement. A small percentage of teachers keep up with the advances in their own subjects, an equally small number get to know more than they will ever be called upon to teach. But a teacher's holidays are far more likely to be spent in trying to earn a little extra money than in enlarging his professional knowledge.

VICIOUS CIRCLE
We cannot blame the teachers for this. Up to now they have been so badly paid that they have not been able to do otherwise. And that is why there has been

so much talk about salaries and why the professional associations of the teachers have spent most of their time arguing about rates of pay. This has been a vicious circle. Teachers have not had the money with which to do it. And yet there is determined opposition to their getting the money until they have proved that their professional wisdom deserves it.

There is another reason, however, why teachers do not occupy the position in our society they should. As a group they are preternaturally shy about com-

munity service of any kind. It is rare to hear of a teacher active in even municipal affairs, far less provincial or federal. They are not often to be seen as members of service clubs. The excuse is often that they have not the time to spare. When they have corrected their school papers, they say, and have looked after the school play, or opera or cadet corp or swimming team or baseball team or football team, there is only time to prepare the next day's lessons. And yet I can't think they are any busier than lawyers, doctors,

or professors or clergymen. This reticence is often, in the event, taken for unwillingness. The result is that decisions about education in the community are taken by the people who are running the other things in it, and not by the teachers who should be making the decisions about it.

NOT BY TEACHERS

This brings me to my final point. The standards of education in Canada are fixed by politicians, not by teachers. And since these standards are dictated from the provincial capital, it is natural that the standards for teachers are thus dictated, too. Just so long as the standards for teachers are set by a government department, there will never be a teaching profession. For, as I said, one of the great marks of a profession is that it is administered and controlled entirely by its members and not by any outside agency.

We must conclude, therefore, that there is, as yet, no teaching profession in Canada. It is sad that there is not. Teachers are the guardians and the transmitters of our culture and of our collective knowledge as a nation.

If we deny them their rightful honour and rewards, and they refuse to seek it for themselves, we all lose. Worst of all, our children lose, and they will never realize it until it is too late.

This was a talk given by Arnold Edinborough, Talks and Public Affairs Department, Toronto.

This department is conducted by the Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation. Contributions are welcomed and should be sent to the general secretary, Estelle Bowness, 98 Prince St., Charlottetown.

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FIND EXTRA NOSE

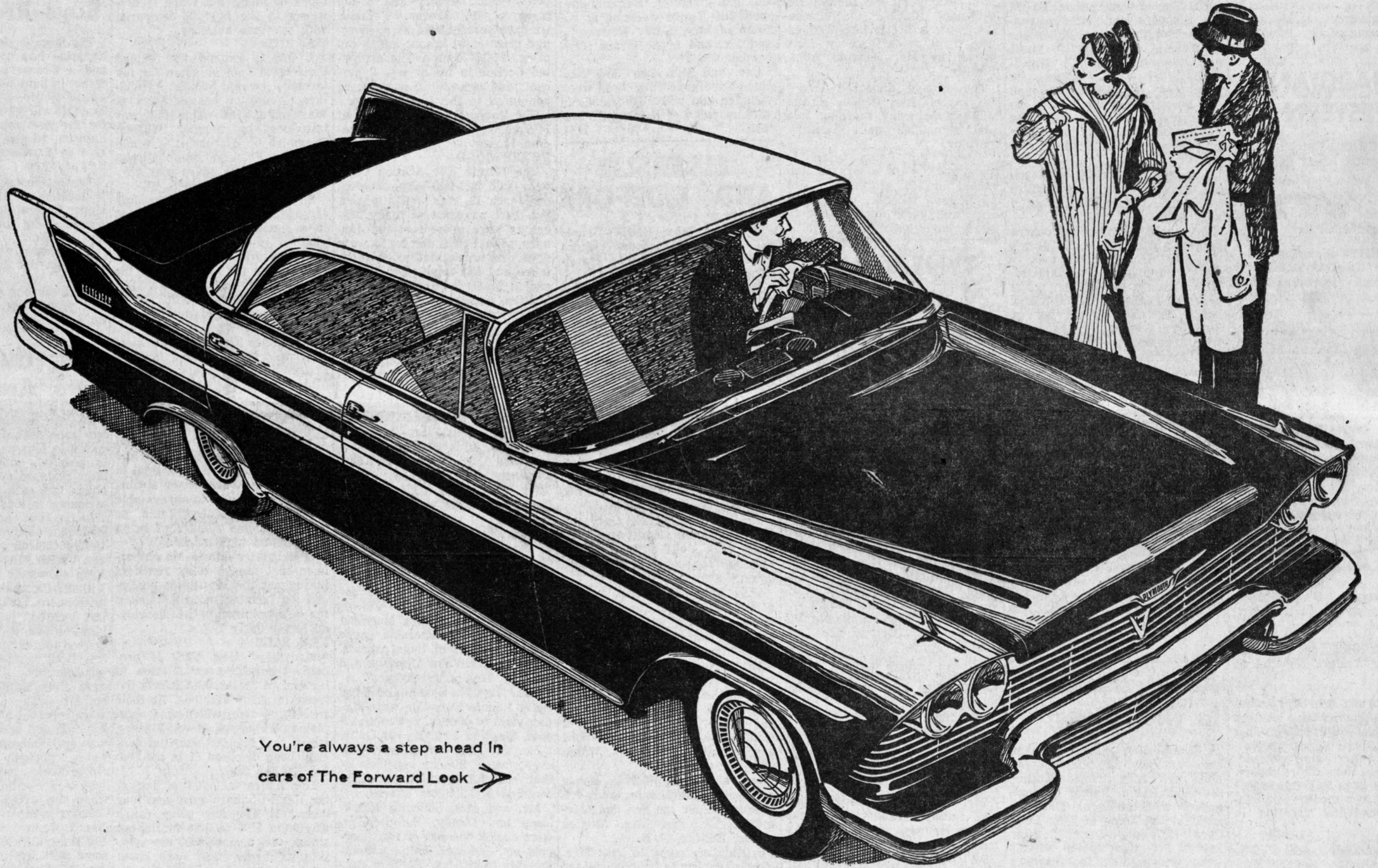
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