

Letter to the Editor

IS THE ENGINEERING PROFESSION RETROGRADING?

Sir,—Civil engineering is a profession in which the relationships, attributes, duties and the remunerations have been appraised principally for the benefit of public bodies and governments.

The secrets to be discovered in the profession act as a stimulus, but enthusiasm is changed to discouragement by the little gratitude shown the engineers for their services. The engineer, at the cost of thousands of sacrifices, has tried to maintain his social position, even though paid half of a bricklayer's wages or about the same as a common laborer. The engineer feels that, even though he is associated with the laboring class during working hours, he should have the privileges of any other liberal profession. The engineer imolated to the god of gold in the recent difficult times, but did expect a readjustment when equilibrium was restored. The result has been that after a long fight for his professional life, he recognizes that he is no more appreciated by his country and his fellow-citizens than before. He is facing three alternatives: To give up his ideal, to deprive his family or to look for another field of activities where his qualities or his physical strength will be more appreciated.

Living up to Hoover's Definition

Civil engineering demands constant study, because science progresses. The man who gives himself to this profession ought to be disposed to concede a large share of his time to study. Every day brings new discoveries, new experiments and changes which the engineer is compelled to know all about, because he will have to apply them—not as per the data he collected when he was at the university—but according to the developments due to the daily progress of science.

The engineer's ideal is to know and to understand engineering problems. For that he has to pay constant attention to the technical journals, buy new books, etc. His library must be up-to-date, otherwise he cannot be efficient and compete with advantage against confreres who have these privileges.

Those who live in large centres have the public libraries, but in small towns every engineer has to provide his own literature. The minimum sum which he should allow for this is \$10 per month. This may be divided as follows: One technical book, \$5; four journals, \$1; and the remainder for daily papers, magazines, etc. Mr. Arthur Surveyer, consulting engineer, Montreal, in speaking of the importance of reading for intellectual culture, suggested the reading of journals and books pertaining to one's profession, a few daily and weekly papers, two papers published in foreign countries, and some diverting reading to rest the brain. In other words the engineer must be well read in order to live up to the definition given by Mr. Hoover, food controller of the United States: "The engineer is the man who can produce with a dollar that which anyone else can secure only with two."

Must Make Sacrifices

Civil engineering is a liberal profession. Up to the present, it has been considered one of the select branches of Canadian society. When he was at the university, the engineer naturally expected to earn enough to be able to marry and support a family, but as things are going now, he will have to sacrifice this.

It is easy to prove by comparing the remuneration offered to the engineer with the high cost of living that the engineer is not paid in proportion to the value of his services. Inasmuch as I have had experience myself, I will try to prove what the domestic expenses are for a family of five persons in Three Rivers, Que.:—

Rent, \$40; taxes, \$7; light, \$2.50; heating, \$10.50; fuel

for the kitchen, \$4; depreciation on furniture, \$8; total, \$72 a month, or \$864 a year.

Clothes for the man will require an annual expenditure of \$210; for the wife, \$160; for the children, \$235; or a total of \$605.

With butter at 75c. a pound, eggs at \$1 a dozen, sugar at 18c. a pound, bread at 26c., beef at 30c., etc., it is not too much to allow \$780 a year for food.

Adding these sums gives a total of \$2,249 a year. This is a very conservative estimate of expenses excluding any provision for the children's education, sickness, emergencies, insurance, savings, etc.

Death of Legitimate Ambitions

This is what the engineer has to face. He has to fight for his daily bread and on his return home has not the satisfaction of an accomplished duty but fears to see his credit compromised at any moment. He has to desert his social life, to request from his wife sacrifices which she never knew in her own family. His fellow-citizens consider him in the miser's class. He is a witness to the death of his legitimate ambitions.

Probably, unless the future quickly brightens, many civil engineers will have to give up their profession. They will have to use their brains or muscles in other activities. The bricklayer receives \$1.25 an hour; the carpenter \$1 an hour, and the day laborer 45c. This is for the first eight hours. For overtime they are paid extra. This means \$3.50 to \$10 per day. The engineer who has charge of a party of laborers, works more than eight hours. Will the engineer become a bricklayer or a laborer?

One of my acquaintances, who was at a commercial academy with me some 15 years ago, is now a commercial traveller in dry goods. He is 35 years of age and has a fixed salary of \$3,500 a year plus a bonus. Last year he drew \$4,700. A younger man earned a little over \$3,000. Should the engineer become a traveller?

A brakeman employed by a railroad company received for the last month \$288. The freight conductor received \$375. Perhaps the engineer will become a trainman?

Must Educate the Public

Engineers have a duty before them if they wish to be understood. It is to educate people to the importance of their profession. The small percentage of the engineers who come in constant touch with officials must impress upon the minds of company directors and public officials the personality and character of the engineer as a professional man. During this dark period, close co-operation between chiefs and assistants is necessary in educating the public to a realization of the fact that no body of men are so vital to the public's welfare as are the engineers.

ROMEO MORRISSETTE.

Three Rivers, Que., March 20th, 1920.

W. C. K. & CO., INC., CHANGES NAME

ANNOUNCEMENT has been made of a merger of construction companies in the United States, which will be of interest to many Canadians, as one of the companies, Westinghouse-Church-Kerr & Co., Inc., maintains a Canadian office and has done a large amount of work in this country. This company has been merged with Dwight P. Robinson & Co., Inc., of New York City, and the new company will be called Dwight P. Robinson & Co., Inc., with executive offices at 61 Broadway, and engineering offices at 125 East 46th St., New York. Dwight P. Robinson, who will be president of the company, was for many years president of the Stone & Webster Engineering Corporation. He formed his own company in 1918 and has specialized in large central power stations and hydro-electric plants. "W. C. K.," as Westinghouse-Church-Kerr & Co., Inc., was generally called throughout the construction field, was established 36 years ago and has specialized in the construction of industrial and power plants and railroad shops and terminals.