CORRESPONDENCE

[This department is a meeting-place for ideas. If you have any suggestions as to new methods or successful methods, let us hear from you. You may not be accustomed to write for publication, but do not hesitate. It is ideas we want. Your suggestion will help another. Ed.]

THE METRIC SYSTEM.

Sir,—Why should this peaceful province be bombarded with "circular" letters of the Decimal Association? One wonders whether to be amused at the fatuity of this particular letter or vexed at its disingenuousness. So long as this continent is marked out in mile sections a very large part of its thought must always be in terms of the English measures. On the ocean no enthusiast is ever likely to carry a change in the navigation tables—they are not metric. In the machinery trades of the British Empire and English-speaking America and in the cotton trade all over the world the substitution of the metric system would involve expense out of all proportion to any supposed advantage. See "The Metric Fallacy," written by two American technologists four or five years ago.

The instances given of "the forward march" of the metric system, when examined, really count for very little. Educated people of a scientific frame of mind naturally use this system whenever they can and it will undoubtedly be employed in all new scientific industries. Pharmaceutists and medical men are all chemists, and it is very obvious that in professional work they would favor the abolition of apothecary weights and measures for the metric system, in which the majority of experiments affecting their work are recorded.

In England it is lawful to manufacture, buy and sell in metric units, so that there is no obstacle in the way of a manufacturer preparing goods for metric markets. The Association wish to make the metric system obligatory and exclusive. The metric system has two distinct features—the decimal notation and its co-ordination of weights and measures. Practically we have met the first point on this side of the water by the "short ton" and the measurement of most commodities in terms of one unit only such as the foot, pound, gallon, etc. As regards co-ordination, out of every million measurements made by the man in the street I doubt if ever one calls for co-ordination. In special trades where it may be required the calculator always has his special factor at his finger ends.

It is not, of course, correct to say the metric system has broken down hopelessly in France, but after over a hundred years of legal use old measures are still employed in country districts all over Europe for wood, wine, etc., in spite of the vigorous educational propaganda.

One word on the educational aspect of the question: Every high school student who has to take up chemistry learns the metric system as a matter of course. It would be fatuous to expect more than a general acquaintance with it from others. I have used the metric system all my life, but I am not ashamed to confess I have no idea how large a hectare is. The full knowledge of the metric system is a part of specialized education and has no place of necessity in ordinary high or primary education. Sad to relate, a co-ordinated system of measures is as much out of the reach of the Anglo-Saxon race as a purely phonetic language is. A modified decimal system is with us.

The Decimal Association always drags in Lord Kelvin, but I distinctly remember a letter in the Times some years ago in which that prince of scientists praised the English system—the duodecimal—of money and measures as a great blessing to the poor in their small transactions.

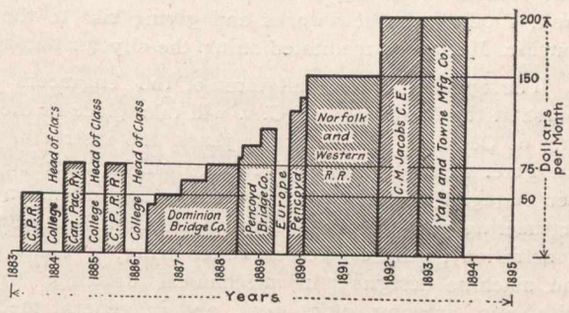
G. R. F. Prowse.

Rossendale, Man., August, 1908.

THE SALARY OF A YOUNG ENGINEERING GRADUATE.

The matter of an engineer's salary is a much discussed question.

We take pleasure in publishing a graphical record illustrating the salary and occupations of an old School of Science Graduate for the first ten years of his experience as an engineer. It will be noticed that he received a higher wage during the vacation of his college years than he did for two years after graduation, and that immediately after graduation he accepted a less salary per month than he was receiving before he attended the school at all.



MONTREAL WATERWORKS IMPROVEMENT.

Visit of Mining Engineers, Building Conditions.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

Montreal, September 9th, 1908.

The probabilities are that another new electric plant will shortly be under construction for the purpose of supplying electric current to Montreal. The company concerned is the Montreal Electric Light Company, regarding the control of the franchise, of which there has been some litigation. The trouble has at last been settled, and it is said that New York financiers have been looking over the situation and are favorably impressed by it. It is thought that financial arrangements will soon be completed and that another rival will prepare to enter the field against the Montreal Light, Heat and Power Company.

The work of laying sidewalks, paving the streets and carrying out certain other public works in the town of St. Louis, Montreal, has at last been commenced. This is the work of improvement for which debentures amounting to $625,000 were recently sold by the town to Messrs. Hanson Brothers, the highest bidders. The town has recently received $98,000.50 from the purchasers, on account, and no further delays in carrying out the work are anticipated.

A group of Montreal capitalists, whose names are not mentioned, is reported to be interested in the development of Port Stanley as a Canadian lake port. The rumor does not receive much credence in Montreal, as it cannot be seen what object there would be in such an undertaking. The report, however, may be correct.

It is just a year ago since the contract was let by the city of Montreal to P. McGovern, of Boston, for the construction of the covered concrete conduit to run parallel with the present aqueduct, this being part of the two million dollar scheme of waterworks improvement designed for Montreal. Mr. McGovern was the lowest of four bidders, his figure being $684,815, made up as follows: 27,100 lineal ft. conduit, at $21.25 per ft., $575,875; 44,000 cubic yards rock excavation, at $2 per yard, $88,000; 10,000 cubic yards loose rock or boulders