

Editorial

"Business as Usual"

ABOUT A MORATORIUM.

In these strenuous days engineers in Canada are inquiring as to the meaning and scope of a moratorium. It is a temporary and emergency measure and provides for the postponement of the settlement of certain debts. Its duration and the debts to which it shall apply are specified by government proclamation. The time and scope of moratorium laws in various countries, since the declaration of war, have varied considerably. In England the moratorium first was declared for one month to September 4th. Then it was extended another month to October 4th, although of 8,000 replies received to an inquiry of Mr. Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 4,500 were against an extension. A moratorium has not been declared in Canada; but the necessary legislation has been provided for its declaration, if thought necessary. It should be made clear that a moratorium does not cancel, but merely postpones a debt. In England, the press is advising the people to pay their debts whenever possible. That is good advice.

ENGINEERING ENGLISH.

Dr. Chas. H. Snow, Dean of the School of Applied Science of the University of New York, once said in an address to an assembly of young engineers: "The success of the engineer is influenced practically as much by a knowledge of English as by a knowledge of mathematics." Coming from one whose prominence in the advancement of engineering education has marked him as an authority, his audience had, therefore, no occasion to disbelieve.

It must be true that too many engineers do not know how to use good English. The appeal for a remedy comes, not from professional cranks always looking for the impossible and never satisfied with any attainable training, but from reasonable, practical men, at or near the head of their profession—men whose chief desire it is to try to better existing conditions. The appeal cannot, therefore, be disregarded by our engineering schools. It indicates that advancement is needed on their behalf in the interests of engineering education, that perfection has not been reached or the time at hand for a relaxation of united effort in this direction. The subject has been touched upon occasionally in these columns. The motive is by no means a reflection upon the present status of engineering, but it is an endeavor to emphasize that one of the sorest needs in our engineering schools to-day is the need for adequate instruction in English.

By "adequate" is meant sufficient attention being paid to it throughout the entire technical course (and carried even into the graduating thesis) until the student has become proficient in the subject. Every spoken and written report which he is called upon to make should receive proper consideration from the instructors as to its wording and its grammatical construction.

Let us place the facts clearly before our engineering schools and the students themselves. Among the most important deficiencies noted by practising engineers in the technical graduate is his inability to express himself correctly and forcibly in either writing or speaking. The English spoken by many graduates of technical institutions has occasionally been termed atrocious, their letters are awkward, misspelled, and ungrammatical, and their ability to write reports, specifications and contracts is deplorably lacking.

Who is to blame if all this is true? Who is responsible for the lack of good English among our engineers? Why is there a need for engineers to know good English? What is the remedy? These are questions that received some serious consideration at the meeting in Philadelphia some weeks ago of the Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education, an organization to which a great deal of the advancement of engineering education is due.

Three factors within the institutions of learning are concerned, viz.: the department of Engineering, the department of English, and the student. All three, individually and collectively, are to blame. The student, entering from the technical school, is not generally well-prepared, and his weakest subject is, invariably, English. Those technical schools which boast of courses of instruction in English confine it largely to the first year. To the student it appears of minor importance. He is seeking instruction in engineering and studies English as sparingly as possible. The result is that the subject is neglected, and when the stage is reached where it no longer forms a part of the curriculum, it is ignored outright.

The department of English recognizes this attitude of the student towards the subject and makes no attempt to alter it, for the instructor in English is, generally speaking, no more in sympathy with his engineering students than they are with his subject. He knows little or nothing of engineering and makes no attempt to acquaint himself with such a woefully practical study. Is it any wonder that this class of engineering students seek the merest margin of a pass in his subject? Does he, with his disinclination to associate with such uncultured students, desire to restrain the delinquent ones for another term under his instruction?

The department of Engineering is disposed to nonchalantly observe that the student is extremely deficient in his English, and that it is regrettable since in the study of engineering there is no time for him to retrace his steps over past studies. Further, the department errs in not recognizing the value of English to the student and in not putting more of it into his work. More than this, the lack of co-operation with the department of English removes the last stepping stone toward retrieval.

It would appear, therefore, that upon the co-operation between the departments of Engineering and English, hinges a matter of gravest importance in the training of the engineering student. It is a mutual problem, and to turn out thoroughly efficient engineers it must be solved.