

Editorial

VALUE OF DISCUSSIONS.

The presentation of papers for discussion at engineers' meetings affords the writers splendid opportunities for the dissemination of information which they have acquired in the course of their professional duties. The writing of a paper is also an excellent training in the art of expression of views and facts, and in the assimilation of knowledge which will always be found helpful in professional matters. The main object of reading papers is to elicit discussion, and the more critical that discussion may be, the better is the object attained.

In our issue of November 11th we adverted to the need for a greater communion among engineers for mutual promotion of all that tends to the welfare of the profession as a whole, and one of these elements is that of uniting in the exchange of information. While papers are usually excellent and contain a fund of material for discussion, for some reason or another there is a lack of that cordial unity of purpose among engineers which is so highly desirable in the development of their best interests, for the discussions are far too limited. Among the members of the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, for example, there are many who could supply a store of information, and there are certainly a much greater number whose contributions would be welcomed.

Papers may be short, terse and full of facts, or they may be elaborate, complete and masterly treatises, but to whichever category any paper belongs it is meant as an incentive to members to criticize, supplement and discuss. Any paper which does not compel the members to participate indicates that they are loth to come into the limelight, that they lack confidence in themselves, or that the paper is such that it does not lend itself to discussion. Few papers, however, are so abstruse or deal with subjects of abstract, scientific nature; they ordinarily are associated with the engineer's daily work and, therefore, offer abundant scope for a lively interchange of opinions.

The discussions are valuable just as they represent the extempore opinions of the members. Some one has said that an engineer who can speak in public must be a freak. Doubtless some may think so still, but we strongly advocate that the freak may be multiplied so that engineers may soon be recognized in society as men who can not only do things but can also express their views on the public platform in a manner which will reflect credit on themselves. To the average engineer the views expressed in a paper, especially when endowed with plausibility, may appear incontrovertible, but when members take part and by virtue of their varied experiences are able to point out that such views are not warranted or are subject to qualifications, then we are able to see how valuable discussion becomes. In the absence of criticism many a bald statement is often accepted at its face value and errors are duplicated, but when someone has force of character and fund of information enough to point out its fallacy, engineers are benefited in a no mean way. The value of a paper is often appreciated by the manner of its reception at the hands of competent critics, perhaps few in number, but endowed with undoubted ability. Each member, however, can become a critic and the writer of a paper will recognize the honor done him,

by a fusillade of criticisms. It is a poor reward to a writer to receive only encomiums and platitudes for his trouble. Much would he prefer an energetic controversy against and in support of his views, for then something is done by others as well as by himself to promote the best interests of the profession.

Some engineers may hesitate to write papers if they are to meet with criticisms. It must not be thought that criticisms imply unfriendliness on the part of those who criticize, or a want of knowledge on the part of the writer. We often find friends are more generous in criticism because they know each other, and some of the greatest of engineers have met with different opinions, only to increase in strength by meeting them. It is independence of thought and action that we strongly advocate. We want men to lead, to act, to do things, regardless of criticism. At first a new thought or idea is generally opposed, then it is accepted tentatively, and finally it becomes an integral part of our life; but if its champion were to fail in courage of conviction we would be that much poorer.

Lastly, at some meetings discussions are impossible, because time is inadequate or, in other words, papers are too numerous for an intelligent discussion. This is to be regretted as the principal objects of such meetings are not fully attained. Free and easy discussions often bring out more valuable information than the papers do themselves.

NEVER AGAIN.

The trials of depression, suspense and bereavement through which we are now passing, give us in our quiet moments time for reflection. We look back and sigh when we think of the happy days of prosperity, the thrill of past busy days and think with satisfaction of the success of completed works.

It is, however, a theme for thankfulness to remember that never a cloud however dark but has had its silver lining, and we have thus determined to fight our cause until this brightness appears.

We have all decided on this. We have put our hand to the plough from which there shall be no turning back.

Well, and what then? Are we to remain as thoughtless, careless and apathetic in our undertakings, in our attention to municipal government, and in the choice of friends as of yore?

No! We have learned our lesson and "Never Again" must be our slogan and watchword.

Never again will we allow our conduct to be slack in the choice of business firms with which we are to deal. No Germans.

Never again will we purchase mathematical instruments, or slide rules, or pencils with "made in Germany" stamped thereon.

Never again will we allow any German engineer to enter our Society, consult with him in practice or in any way help him to hold the same status as before.

Having now decided on this course, then, let us also decide to be more accurate in our daily work, more ready to obtain and impart knowledge to our fellow engineers, more ready to give encouragement and instruction to the