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Principal Contents of this Issue

	PAGE
The Fuels of Canada, by B. F. Haanel, B.Sc.....	85
Report of Annual Meeting of Canadian Society of Civil Engineers	94
Report of Conservation Committee, Can. Soc. C.E.....	96
Report of Roads and Pavements Committee.....	97
Report of Committee on Steel Highway Bridge Specifications	98
Report of Committee on Concrete and Reinforced Concrete	99
Report of Committee on Portland Cement Specifications	99
Report of Committee on Sewage Disposal and Sanitation	100
Report of Committee on Education	99
Report of Branches, Canadian Society of Civil Engineers	90
Editorial	103
Personal	104
Fourth Annual Conference on Road Construction.....	104
Construction News	46

CHEMICAL RESEARCH

If the cabled report of the discovery, by United Kingdom interests, of German dye secrets, is correct, a strong weapon against enemy trade after the war will be available. The Imperial, Canadian and United States governments are all devoting considerable attention to the development of the dye and chemical industries. The British government has a substantial interest in an important dye manufacturing corporation and has appropriated a large sum for experiments. The United States government is actively engaged in furthering the dye and chemical industry in that country. Canada has appointed a special commission to investigate these and similar matters. Inquiry is also being made into the production of potash. Germany is said to hold the world's monopoly in this commodity. All the valuable deposits are under German control, the principal source of potash being at Stassfurt. Attempts are now being made in Canada and the United States to produce potash from feldspar and from other resources. A Toronto company is already engaged in experimental work with that object in view and a large Montreal concern has announced its intention to enter this new sphere as a side line. While we must depend upon individual initiative to a great extent for the development of new industries, it is reasonable to expect enterprising governments to encourage experiments of this nature with practical support. The United States, it is understood, has offered as an inducement in research, a large sum to the citizen who can produce potash from one or more of the natural resources of that country, and in quantities which will give an adequate supply.

ENGINEERING INFLUENCE

It is an assumption common enough to believe the idea widespread that for considerable success in any sphere of activity the most important asset is that of influential friends. Indeed, it has been said more than once that the greatest luck which can befall any man is that he chose his parents wisely. Where a belief is widespread there is usually an underlying truth, while it is also not uncommon to find severe limitations to the popular assumption.

Success is not independent of initial advantage, although cases can be quoted where the start was at so low a level as to constitute little or nothing advantageous. What does seem extraordinary is, where men have outstanding initial advantages and do not avail themselves of their birthright. For some reason or other they forfeit the chances of an enviable beginning and perhaps because of the lack imposed by the discipline of circumstance, refuse to fit themselves in the highest manner to an end well within their reach. The man who is without initial advantage has thereby a longer road to travel and he sacrifices some of the best of his youth merely to make a beginning. Still, the lean years, for all their drawbacks, do possess sterling advantages although they must in many ways penalize the individual.

Natural handicaps set by circumstance can be upset by high endeavor, the cases where the very handicap itself has been turned to advantage is proved in the case of many successful men. There is something sure in a foundation which has its beginnings on a solid bottom.

The question of influence has many ramifications. It is perfectly certain that all the influence in the world cannot foist an incapable fool on the community in a professional capacity. He may, however, out of public money, be found a safe job free from competition.

In the professions, and in industry generally, wherever the element of competition is present it ensures some measure of capacity. The initial advantage is often made non-effective by a want of natural sense. It is, as a shrewd technical man once pointed out, extremely difficult to keep brains down. While the final result may be less, the total by comparison is greater.

Whether it is possible to assess success at all, may be debatable.

There is another form of influence not always realized: it is the reaction each individual makes upon his immediate associates, his profession and the time and place wherein he lives. The results are intangible but none the less real, for no man lives to himself, nor ought he try so to do. It is the special privilege of some to exert abiding influence while tangible reward to themselves is lacking.

The question of influence of communal character explains why many capable men tackle troublesome public tasks. It is not so much to be in the public eye as to be of public use to the community. Since each derives advantage—safety, peace and service—from the communal stock, so each should be willing to place themselves in accordance with their capacity at the service of the community. Unless men are public-spirited, democratic government is a failure; it certainly is less successful if men peculiarly fitted withhold themselves and refuse to entertain posts of public responsibility.

Too much has already been left to those who make a trade of the business of government; too little has been done by those having executive ability, high intelligence, education and training. In the interests of the public at large the custody of public interests should be entrusted to a wider range of individuals.