

become confused by the various principles advanced by approaching the subject from different angles and it is important that those engaged in concrete proportioning should be able to keep their minds clear on the basic principles of concrete proportioning in the midst of all these newly advanced facts. It seems to the writer that the work of Prof. Abrams and that of Capt. Edwards are singularly in accord.

H. M. THOMPSON,
Laboratory Engineer,
Greater Winnipeg Water District.

Winnipeg, Man., August 30th, 1918.

Circular Housing Plan

Sir,—There is a certain type of mind to whom things must never be other than obvious, if misunderstanding is to be avoided. The charge of dullness cannot, fortunately, be levelled at engineers as a class. However, once in a while, there is met a member of the profession who seems to become confused by the inverted sentence. He will accept words in their conventional sense only. When writing to such a person one must use the baldest terms, never be anything but specific and—dull.

All of which is inspired by a reading of the article in your August 29th issue, written by Mr. Lamb, and particularly that portion of it paragraphed under the sub-head, "A Champion of 'Liberty.'"

Mr. Lamb therein quotes from a letter written to him by myself at his request. There was no suggestion from him that publicity in any measure would be given, either to his production or to my comment, otherwise I might have attempted to convey my meaning in more direct and possibly more dignified terms.

I don't think it was quite fair of Mr. Lamb to insert within his production the particular part of my letter he selected without including the context.

I submit herewith the entire letter. I know now that I should have placed marginal notes against each paragraph, after the manner of the author of "The Ancient Mariner." Mr. Lamb would then have understood that I wished to draw his attention to a factor which is sometimes overlooked in problems of the sort he is dealing with, and of which, in reading his paper, I saw no recognition.

Experienced engineers know that anything can be done with inert material. It may be made to take and keep, and its performance therein predicted, any form, or shape, or position, in conformity with physical Law. Nothing, to the same degree, is possible with human beings. Hence, it can be said that an engineer's greatest trials come from his experience with men, and the success he has with them is the measure of his professional value.

I know that Mr. Lamb's greatest trouble will be caused, not by the material, or design, or position of his buildings, or their services, but by the men with whom he will have to deal before he can start construction, and by the men who will inhabit the houses after they are erected.

The desire to improve the conditions under which too many human beings are obliged to live is laudable, and should be followed by action. It is a short-sighted, dull person, particularly if an engineer, who would oppose such a purpose; and he may be neglected who would discourage such enthusiasm as Mr. Lamb displays.

If my letter to Mr. Lamb has a trifling sound, it is my misfortune, but I trust that there are many who will not see that quality alone in it.

Mr. Lamb's problem, and his treatment of it, are not new. Up to the point where he leaves it, it has no difficulties whatever. Nor can its reasonableness, or the good judgment used in its development, be questioned. From all angles it is attractive, but the greatest factor in the whole is not in Mr. Lamb's formula. When it finds its way in, and its value is determined, then, and then only, can the solution be found. Mr. Lamb may then be surprised to discover how the difficulties have disappeared.

It would be unfortunate if no discussion follows Mr. Lamb's article. It contains much material and is excellently handled. The question is one of great public importance, and one on which no one has greater claim to be heard than the engineer. We have heard a great deal during late years of the negligible position in public affairs held by the engineer. It may be that some fault lies in himself, possibly in the way he has of allowing certain abuses to continue, which, to be abuses, no one knows better than he, without raising his voice against them. Here is a subject capable of great development in the way of plain talk. It would at least be interesting to see how we may rise to it.

My letter to Mr. Lamb was as follows:—

Dear Mr. Lamb,—About your housing problem, I really don't know that I can give any valuable comment. The project is not altogether new. Similar, in principle, plans have been produced by many engineers. You have, though, made a very attractive layout with reference to sunlighting, and with reference to the distribution of the service by means of the common underground duct. Your economic result of a yearly charge, bearing ratio of ten to one in favor of your plan, is remarkable, and if you have included every expense in your studies, there should be no trouble in getting your proposals before the proper people.

That they will be adopted, and acted on, is another question. My good friend, Mr. —, has been working on schemes like this for years. Although he has never said so, I'm inclined to believe he regards the public as a stubborn ass. Here in this province we have a perfectly good law, under which a municipality is empowered to give any kind of assistance in the way of stock participation, bond guarantees or tax remission to any company or syndicate who will undertake the construction of model houses, but the act is still virgin, although it has been in the statutes for several years.

Mr. — can't understand why the provincial secretary's office is not all clogged up with applications for charters under the act. Nor why the municipalities are not organizing the fire departments or the police forces into housing companies. He says: "Here we have a splendid plan. If the provisions of this legislation are taken advantage of, we will have no slums erected; people can live in decent, sanitary houses. Cleanliness will be forced on them. If they don't like it at first, they will gradually come to it."

"Cleanliness is next to godliness," he quotes. "What better than a godly, virtue-loving people, loving their neighbor, even the collector and the landlord, and all this millennialism brought about by the use of this Housing Act? All we need are whole-souled, altruistic landlords or syndicates, content to make little or no money, merely satisfied with knowing they are leading the people to righteousness and the love of God."

My friend never uttered the last sentence, but if he had, I'm sure he would have found the solution of his perplexities therein, at least partially.

Consider the slum. Where can better returns on capital invested be found? At least a neat forty or fifty