

## The Retort Courteous

"Wars, conflagrations, deluge," says Aristotle, "destroy, nations and with them, all their monuments, their discoveries, and their vanities. The torch of science has more than once been extinguished and rekindled, a few individuals who have escaped by accident reunite the tread of generations."

The same sad misfortune which has happened to so many cities will happen again, but, in the case of the professions, most of them will never be extinguished for their early history has been recorded; their origin, their foundation, together with the eventful period of their youth has been filed on the shelves of libraries for the use of future generations. This, however, would not have been the case with Civil Engineering if I had not snatched it from obscurity in the very nick of time; in the moment that these facts herein recorded were about to enter into the insatiable maw of oblivion.

Just as the tender suckling saps the strength of the parent stalk, or the malignant parasite the vigor of the mighty oak, so the various forms of engineering—Chemical, Electrical, Mechanical, Fire Protection, and, horror of horrors, finally Architectural, have attempted to undermine and outshine the glorious past of Civil Engineering; the progenitor of all engineering professions as I will show farther on.

Fortunate, therefore, is the Civil Engineering profession to have me begin in this little essay a history to serve as a foundation on which other historians may hereafter raise a noble superstructure, swelling in the process of time until this history will be equally voluminous with Gibbon's "Rome".

Harking back to the origin of man, we find him in the Garden of Eden, depending and inclining to the seduction of woman as he will until the end of time. In peace and quiet, without a thought of the morrow, he rests at ease, but, unfortunately for himself and all future generations, by one act all this is changed and the edict of banishment is passed. (These facts are taken from authentic records of the time and the reference may be obtained from the author upon application.) Suffice it to say that the lease was broken and there was no chance of a renewal. (Historians are inclined to set the date as May first.)

Now comes the first point in our argument to show the antiquity of Civil Engineering. Adam was ordered to leave the Garden of Eden. In order to leave there had to be a road. Now, as the Latins playfully remarked in times past, "Ergo stat difficultas," but for a true historian no difficulty exists that cannot be surmounted. So if we consider that Adam was the first man as well as the only one in existence, the difficulty is easily circumvented. All we have to do is to have Adam build a road; very simple, is it not? Since he had to have one, that is exactly what he did. Therefore, since Adam built a road to leave Eden he became at once a Highway Engineer. But a Highway Engineer is a Civil Engineer. Therefore, since Adam was the first man, he was also the first Civil Engineer.

Thus we establish the antiquity of the profession and, since there is no record of a boulevard lighting system, we must necessarily drop the electricals at this point and incarcerate their hopes for fame in one of their own arcs.

Passing over the many and glorious feats of engineering performed by those following Adam, and allowing the reader to seek through the records for his own satisfaction, we come to Noah, who built the Ark. (No hope for the electricals to horn in here because Noah's Ark is distinct from the electric arc, as may be seen from the spelling.) This piece of magnificent work was not one of architectural beauty, but was necessarily massive and substantial. As only a Civil Engineer could design such a vessel, Noah was, therefore, a Structural Engineer, and was one without the aid of an architect. Thus we have eliminated the architects from any claim to antiquity, and have advanced the shining star of the Civil. Nor can the mechanical claim any glory at this point of our argument, for the motive power of the ark was a negative quantity. It was allowed to drift, not at will, but guided by One in Whose hands is the destiny of all.

We might continue citing examples "ad infinitum," but we think that our work is completed as we have absolutely proven in a logical unassailable argument that Civil Engineering is the oldest known profession and as such should be given its place in the niche of time, and proper steps should be taken to prevent the encroachment upon her fame and good name by any popinjay upstart.

N.B.—We do not consider the chemicals worthy of our notice.