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From The Hilltop

A COLUMN OF VIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

(By F. J. Pickering)

A pat on the back for those contracting firms who are working on the cloverleaf which will handle traffic at the intersection of the new Toronto-Barrie highway and highway No. 7, west of Yonge Street. As you enter the construction area big signs ask you to PLEASE slow down and drive carefully. At the other side of the area equally big signs say "Thank you for your courtesy and co-operation."

In this day and age, when "please" and "thank you" unfortunately tend to become overlooked, and when public notices often assume the "verboten" attitude of one-time German officialdom, it's a refreshing thing to see a couple of contracting firms — the Cart Paving Company of Toronto and Johnson Bros. of Brantford — exhibiting such a type of good public relations.

It's to be hoped that the motoring public reacts fittingly.

During the last few months it has been my privilege to attend a number of meetings regarding education and schools. In order to remove any feeling that the situation which I have in mind is only local let me emphasize that some of those meetings have been entirely outside this district.

During the course of those meetings the word "recreation" has been mentioned scores of times. There has been much talk about music — a lot about manual training — quite a bit about transportation. Music, art and kindred subjects have come in for their share of consideration. I've heard theorists orate at length on the "development of individuality" and all that sort of thing.

But strangely enough I haven't heard a thing about that simple word "spelling." Neither have I heard, at any time or in any place, the slightest mention about the good, old-fashioned "three R's" — reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic.

There have been lots of questions about provision for sports, but not one about whether the millions we are spending on education were producing students who could use the King's English acceptably.

Again, I've heard questions as to whether the instruction in music was adequate — but not one as to why our youngsters were not learning to write in such a way that their scrawls could be deciphered.

The plain, honest truth is that our school curriculum has gone completely crazy. We're worrying about — and spending millions on — the frills. And in the process we are producing a race of citizens who can neither read, write, spell or add.

That's my personal opinion. And, furthermore, I can back it up by producing the work of students to prove it. When you see a foolscap page less than half full, written by a sixteen year old boy, with eleven errors in spelling in it, and when you see that same sort of thing repeated year in and year out, you may be forgiven for holding pretty positive opinions on the subject.

And just in case there is any suspicion that I am biased let me repeat something I quoted in this column some months ago. It is taken from a report made by people who should know what they are talking about — the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. Here's what one of their committees has to say:

"The English teachers of the Ontario Secondary Schools are dissatisfied with the present set-up in English. Most of them spend a large part of their evenings and their week-ends marking the written assignments of their students; yet, despite this devotion to the cause of English, they are turning out graduates who can neither speak nor write, nor even read their native tongue competently. From both the university and the business man they hear that the English of the average high school graduate is 'atrocious.'"

Pretty plain words, coming from such people. Where is the solution to be found? In my opinion by those who have to pay our staggering educational bills getting up on their hind legs and asking the long-haired theorists of Queen's Park when they are going to design a curriculum which will deal with fundamentals rather than frills.

Richmond Hill council, I see, is going to do something next year about the re-numbering of streets. Good going! Improvement is long overdue.

While they are at it, it is to be hoped that our village fathers also do something about street names. To those who tread every village street with the assurance of long familiarity the situation is not bad. But to

the "stranger within our gates" — and his numbers are growing fast — it's quite a different story. I realize that it's so awfully easy to be critical that these things all cost money, and so on. Nevertheless here is one of those many problems forced on us by growth and its solution would certainly do much to add to the amenities of life.

It's amazing sometimes how loosely we can use a descriptive phrase when we want to "knock" something of which we do not approve. Take that word "Red," for illustration. We run up against a man whose views may, to our minds at least, be a bit radical or advanced. So right away he becomes a "Red," and so we describe him. On the other side of the picture there's the "reactionary," that very much over-worked word is used to take the individual who doesn't want to go all the way with us on whatever pet scheme we have.

So there you have them — "reds" and "reactionaries." It just depends upon which side of the fence you are as to which unsuitable tag you use to describe your opponent. Maybe there's a little bit of both in most of us and a little charity might well be used before we hasten to put the finger on the other fellow.

Which brings to mind another loosely used phrase. It's summed up in expressions such as — "Oh, it was good enough for his father so it's good enough for him."

Well, what's wrong with it being "good enough for father?" Granted that in this day and age everything that belonged to yesterday will not fit the conditions of today. Father found that out — so did grandfather and his father before him. But that isn't to say that we need to condemn everything and everybody because the finger of a past generation touched it.

Some of the "old boys" you know, did a pretty fair job. It was our forebears who welded disunited provinces into a homogenous nation. It was the men of yesterday who built the bricks and stones and the mortar into some of the structures we look on with pride today. It was the pioneers of generations now gone who hewed out the forests which stood where our homes now stand — it was the men of yesterday who stood firm against oppression and tyranny and played their part in building the laws under which we operate today. It was the newspapermen of yesterday who helped build the "free press" of this age.

Yes, we can span a continent in a few hours with our modern methods of transportation. But it was "father" who played a major part in the earlier days of discoveries and inventions.

Perhaps some of the things that were "good enough for father" might well be revived today — discipline, self control, sacrifice. True enough we don't want to go back to the stiffness and starchiness of the Nineties. Neither do we want to go back to the days of sweated labour, of a low standard of living.

Nevertheless everything that father did wasn't bad or unstable. So let's give him a bit of credit for doing some pretty fine things and not be in quite so much of a hurry to condemn a man because "the things that his father did are good enough for him."

Anyway, play it safe. Somebody may be saying the same thing about YOU some day.

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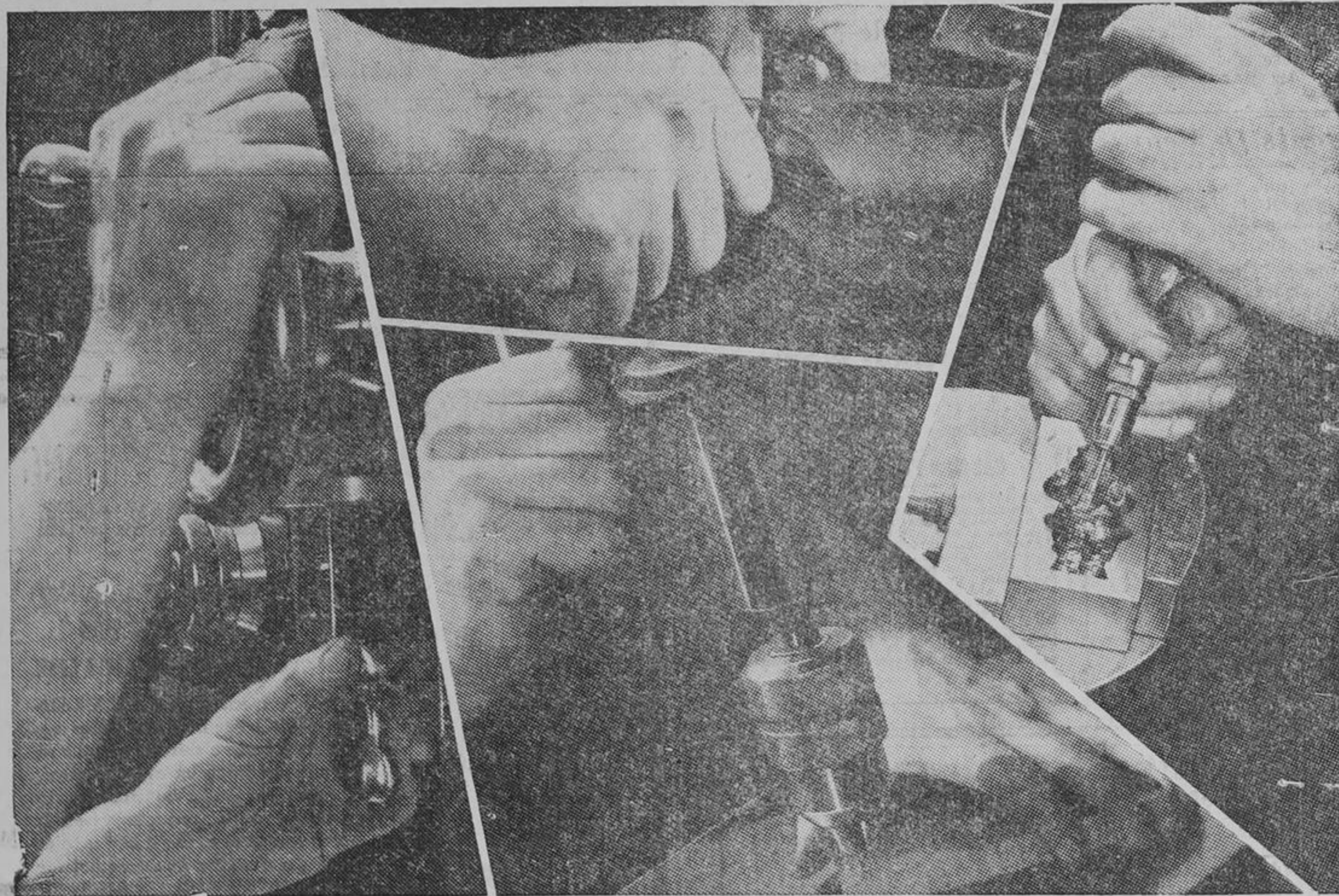
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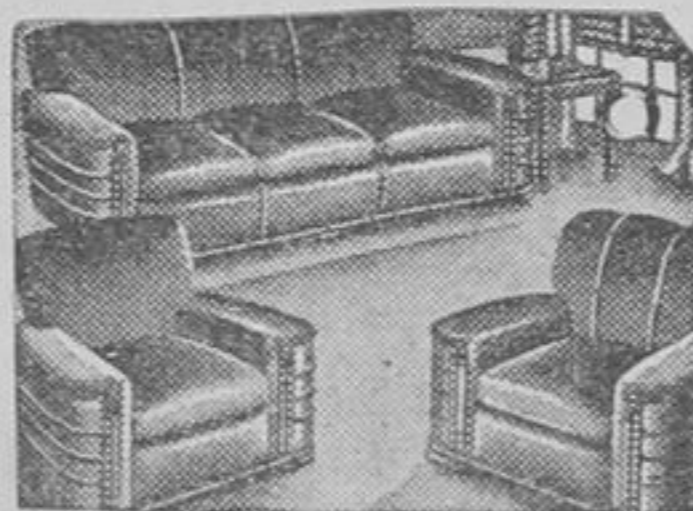


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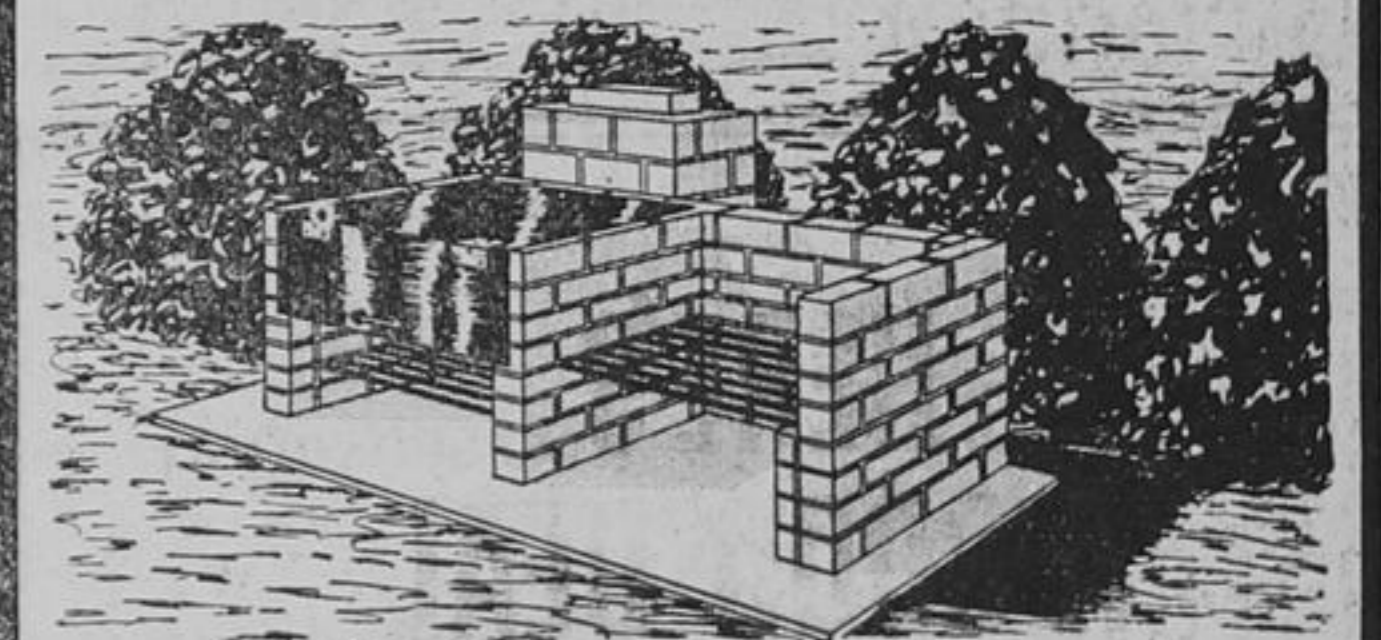
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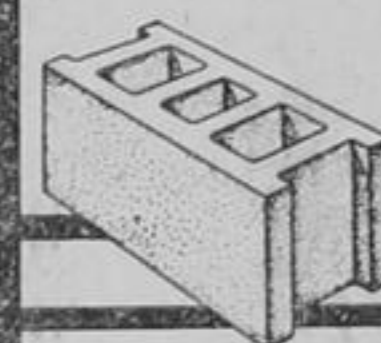
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