OIL & FAT INDUSTRIES

The Editor's Page

The Chemical Age

AS TIME, the inexorable, continues on his endless round, those who attempt to visualize the progress of mankind must constantly change their conceptions of the world, its governments, its social motivations, the ideas, ethics and morals of peoples, and above all, the trend of civilization as exemplified particularly by the major type of man's constructions and manufactures.

Thus the geologist, the archeologist and the antiquarian have been able to portray for us the strivings upward of mankind through countless ages, out of the nomadic darkness of fireless existence into and successively through the epochs when stone, wood, copper, bronze and iron were each ascendant in man's economy.

Mediæval civilization, as distinguished from that of the ancients, was characterized by the development of particular skill in the arts, especially as applied to painting, weaving of fine fabrics and the working of delicate designs in the precious metals. The progress of civilization has been halted from time to time and on occasions has seemed even to retrogress, but in the main, progress has been quite steady.

Our modern civilization, which of course had its ultimate foundations in the revival of learning in Europe during the early part of the present millennium, appears to owe its life and nature to four major factors, namely; steam, steel, electricity and blasting powder. Of these factors, three are essentially forces, the fourth a material of construction, useful for buildings and machinery.

Close observers of manufacturing development in the current era note that the production of synthetic materials by chemical methods is forging into such prominence as to already stand equal with the production of steel, not in volume but as an indication of the type of mankind's mental progress. The past twenty years have given us synthetic plastic materials, cellulose fabrics, composition wall boards, synthetic solvents beyond number, foodstuffs, lacquers, and many other examples of the versatility of the chemist and the engineer. The development of new products and processes has made great advances, but may be said to have only scratched the surface of the possibilities. We confidently expect the next ten years to show even more adaptation of chemical synthesis to the useful arts than was achieved in the past.

Fools and Fortunes

WE VERY occasionally get a chance to do a little reading on subjects somewhat apart from oils, fats and soap. In a recent issue of our esteemed contemporary, "Collier's Weekly" there appeared an article entitled "Figgerin' Fools" which we respectfully recommend to the attention of the oil producing and refining industries of this country.

The author shows how the boys who, when in school, exhibited especial aptitude for mathematics, have developed into the modern statisticians who chart the course of business in all successful lines. The subject is developed by the example method, the examples including that of the telephone company which is forced to install the automatic switching system because the statistician has proven from facts and figures that in 1950 there will not be available a sufficient number of suitable young women to operate the manual switchboards. Another example cited was that of a coal merchant in one of our largest cities who changed an annual loss into a profit through acting on the advice of a "figure hound" as to proper seasonal distribution of sales and purchases.

In summary, it is today clearly apparent that proper and intensive study of figures will invariably reveal the trend of buying habits, of demand and of supply as well. The effect upon an industry of import or export tariffs can be clearly charted by the persistent statistician who has available records of foreign and domestic trade before and after the imposition of the duties. The same records over a period of years will inevitably disclose the changing hab-