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W. A. DE VIGIER.

Continuing our series of short biographical notes of compatriots, who have achieved success or fame outside the borders of our country, we have great pleasure in presenting to our readers to-day, Mr. W. A. de Vigier, Chairman and Managing-Director of Acrow (Engineers) Ltd., London.

Whilst, most of the men, who have been portrayed in the columns of this paper reached the peak of their achievements somewhat late in life, Mr. de Vigier, has, what is usually called "arrived" at a comparatively early age.

Our friend, who was born 38 years ago, hails from the historical town of Solothurn, also known as "La ville des Ambassadeurs", and like many famous men of his native town, he too has become an ambassador; perhaps not in the sense one usually connects ambassadors with, but by his vision, enterprise and keen perceptive faculty, he has become an "Envoyé extraordinaire" in the sphere of Commerce.

During an interview which was kindly accorded to the writer some time ago, an extraordinary story of a successful business career was revealed; which reminds one of many of the achievements of well-known industrial magnates in our great sister republic of America.

\* \* \*

Who ever meets Mr. de Vigier for the first time is at once struck by his forceful personality, his unbounded energy and congeniality.

He started his engineering career in the early twenties with the well-known Scintilla Company of Solothurn. Like so many of our young countrymen, he soon felt the urge to try his luck in foreign lands. In the year 1936, he landed in this country, with great expectations but little money — in fact his worldly belongings amounted to about £50 — which even in those days, was a modest amount to set oneself up in business, but where there is a will, there is a way and

the way was found. A work-shop, with a payment of £15 down was procured, underneath one of the Bow arches: admittedly in not one of the fashionable centres of this great Metropolis, where he started manufacturing his labour and material saving devices.

His keen business mind had perceived for some time, that by employing the costly and wasteful methods of using timber for scaffolding, this country was still building in the manner of the medieval times.

The next acquisition was an office consisting of a small back-room in Charterhouse Chambers at a modest rental of £16 per annum to be paid in quarterly instalments.

By these outlays in establishing himself his capital by this time was strained to its utmost, but still heavier expenses had to be faced. It became necessary, to engage workmen as well as a foreman, the latter alone demanded a wage of £4.0.0 p.w.; he was engaged under the *proviso* that his employment would only last as long at the business could afford to pay him, this was agreed to. This man, must have felt confidence in the business capabilities of his employer, and the soundness of the goods which were to be put on the market and he received his reward, within a few years this, no doubt, farseeing work-hand became a Director.

Equally important became the question of office staff, this matter was solved by Mr. de Vigier appointing himself to the posts of office boy, shorthand typist as well as salesman.

These were anxious times for our friend, and much midnight oil must have been burned in facing the innumerable problems with which this young business man was confronted with.

It is not an uncommon thing, that few people give credit to the ideas of a "youngster"; many to whom he introduced his goods treated him as a visionary or even as a "crank", but undetermined by some of the early setbacks and with full confidence in the soundness of his merchandise he persisted in his endeavours, hoping that the day of recognition would come — and it came — when, two large building contractors, Sir Robert Mc. Alpine & Sons, and a Danish firm, Peter Lind, became aware of the advantages of the prop. This comprises a steel support which can be heightened or lowered as desired by a few simple turns of a screw effecting considerable economies in labour for it eliminates cutting, wedging or nailing which had to be done hitherto by using wooden prop.

Some small orders were placed by these firms, and what was equally important, credit was accorded to our friend, which enabled him to acquire the necessary material, and a delivery van — an old Morris Cowley — for his goods was purchased for the princely sum of £16.0.0.

Soon more orders were forthcoming, larger credits were put at his disposal, in short the time arrived when the business could be put on a proper footing.

A company, registered under the name of Acrow, was founded with a modest share capital, and from this day onward, Mr. de Vigier never looked back, slowly but surely business expanded, and the foundation of a large and profitable concern was laid; with renewed energy and determination this young business man put heart and soul in his venture.

Three years after the company was formed, two of London's largest buildings — the steel-framed Adelphi facing the Thames from the Strand, and the

reinforced concrete Berkeley Square House — were using 8,000 Acrow props. For the first time sales figures for the year surpassed the £100,000 mark and the initial capital rose to £10,000.

Afterwards the company made the bold decision to use aluminium for its products, foreseeing the possibility of a shortage of steel, a new venture the "Rolstore Mobile Unit Storage" a unique and economical method of utilising storage space was introduced, and many other new products.

The yearly turnover of the company during the last few years increased by leaps and bounds and exceeds to-day £2,000,000 per annum. Factories were built at Saffron Walden, Uxbridge, Glasgow, Leeds and Bristol. Branches in South Africa, Canada, the United States, Australia and Argentina were founded, all under the personal supervision of Mr. de Vigier, who has become a veritable globe-trotter.

At a recent Annual General Meeting of Acrow (Engineers) Limited, resolutions were passed increasing the authorised capital of the company to £400,000, the profits of the year amounted to £208,572, after providing for all chargeable expenditure and a final dividend of 25 per cent. on the ordinary shares, making 40 per cent. for the year, was proposed.

A few months ago, the H. C. Drayton group, the shrewdest and most vigorous Financial group in the City, paid over £300,000 for a 36% interest in Mr. de Vigier's firm. What greater sign of confidence could be bestowed by the City to our young compatriot.

\* \* \*

The above notes, which, owing to the restricted space at my disposal, are necessarily inadequate to convey a proper biography of our distinguished countryman, and I must leave it to the imagination of my readers to guess, how much hard work, anxiety and energy has led him to success. If the Goddess of Fortune has smiled on him it has been for these endeavours, enabling him, in the spring-time of his life, to attain such a prominent position.

Success has, I am glad to say, not made him unapproachable, his early struggles have given him a fellow-feeling towards the ordinary man; he is an employer who takes a real interest in his employees, which, in both high and low created a feeling of

loyalty, so necessary for harmonious working conditions between Management and personnel.

In conclusion I wish to convey to Mr. W. A. de Vigier the great pleasure we, his compatriots feel in knowing that he is one of our own kith and kin; we are proud of his achievements which are equal to the best traditions of our homeland; by his efforts and his great integrity he had added to the good name which our country so happily enjoys everywhere, and for this we are grateful to him. With unfailing interest, we shall follow his career which started from humble beginnings and will, I am sure lead him to still greater heights.

ST.

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