

The Architecture of the Dominion.

What Lord Plunket said about the architecture of the Dominion a short time ago has been discussed considerably. His criticism has now found its way into the technical papers of the Old Country, and the general impression is that the architecture of our cities and suburbs is "contemptible." This conclusion is combated by Mr. T. K. Mason in the *Empire Review* in that spirit of acquiescence which must lead most New Zealanders to pray to be saved from their friends. "New Zealand," says this authority, "has no architecture at all as yet." His meaning will be plain from the following extract:—"Many hundreds of the chief buildings," he says, "have been erected piecemeal, new wings being added as the accommodation was required. In the old Parliamentary Buildings one portion was wood in the plain gable style, and the other, of stone, contained Gothic arches. There are no traditions, and such forms as there are, are generally adaptations of English designs to achieve the greatest accommodation at the least cost—that is, plain, barn-like structures with oblong windows. Ornamentation is avoided, as a rule, on the ground of expense, for economy is a ruling factor in colonial affairs. Hence any criticism of architecture in New Zealand must be premature."

Now it is all very well to declare against adaptations, but must all architects be condemned to originality? It seems rather late in the day to insist upon new forms and fresh combinations when the world is so full of the achievements of genius.

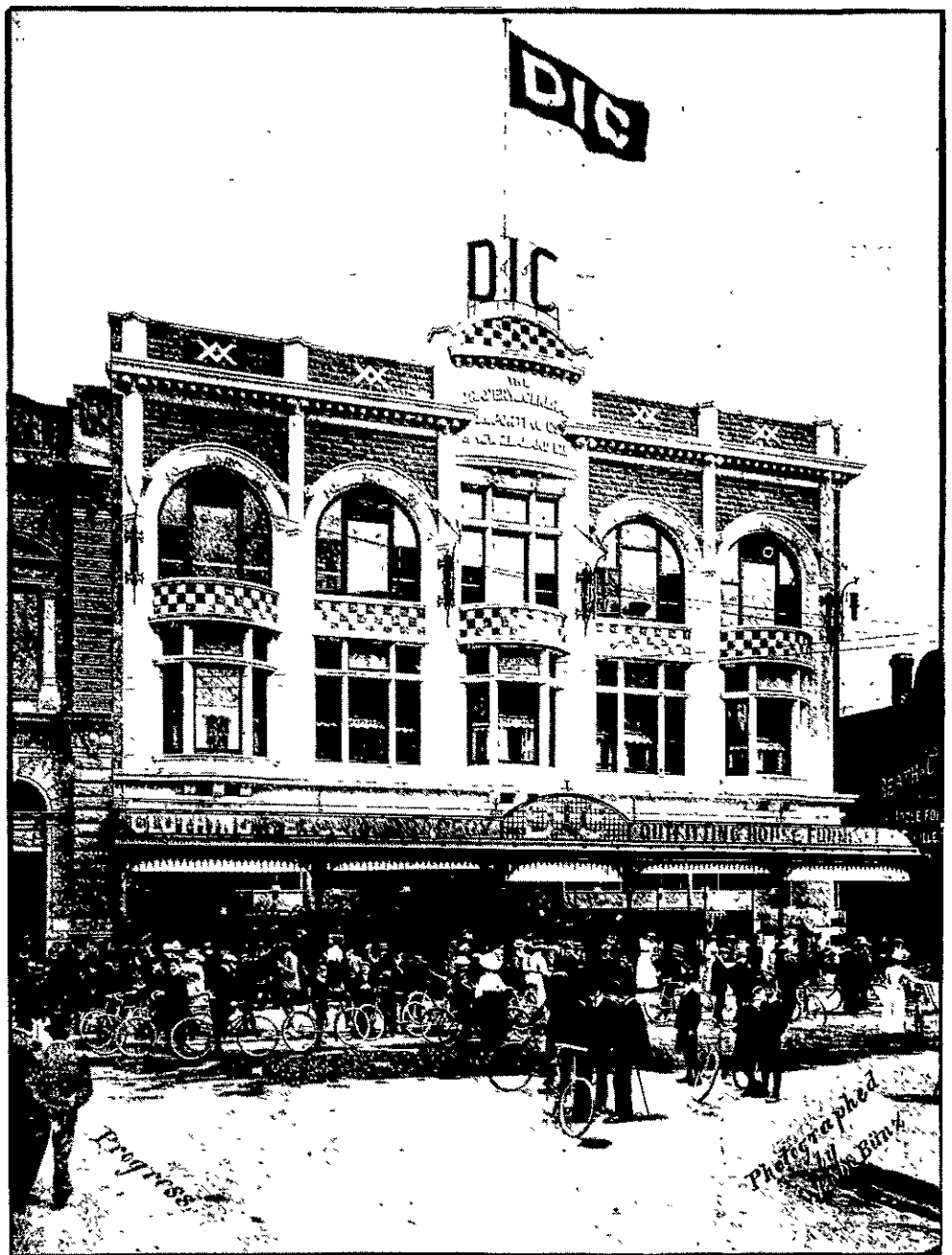
It is worth noting here that condemnation of imitation is not confined to the works of the Dominion architects. Professor Geddes, in a late issue of the *Municipal Journal*, complains with regard to many cities of both England and America "of a too crude and hasty adoption of city plans, inspired, not by local life, but by imitation of the costly and meretricious composites of great Continental capitals." The result he sees "in dreary perspectives and conventional ornament, relieved only by occasional extravagances," a state of things he boldly condemns as "even uglier than the prevalent industrial squalor and garishness of our poorer quarters or even than the featureless monotony of our respectable ones." In conclusion, he protests against repetition of the mistakes of the French city improvers of the Second Empire, and the corresponding developments of Berlin, Strasburg, etc."

The ideal of the Professor is individuality. "The problem," he insists, "which every city has increasingly to face is to conserve and express its local individuality, its uniqueness and character, yet to recon-

cile this with a full and increasing participation in the material appliances and the immaterial advantages of other cities; in short, at once to live its own life, and this more and more intensely; yet to be also in the great world, and this more fully also." On these lines he advocates work of the cooperative order, hinting at something also

here to ventilate it, not to endorse the sentiments. These, however, are commendable to say the least.

To return to the "defence" of the *Empire Review*. It strikes the most careless as somewhat too sweeping in its generalisation. One would imagine that everything in the Dominion's street architecture is



D I C BUILDING, CHRISTCHURCH, REBUILT AFTER THE BIG FIRE.

in the way of official interference, say by an officer at the head of a sort of civic General Survey Department empowered to see that architects keep to certain specified lines. This is the way in which ancient cities were built, and in which the modern lines of advancement are in some cases carried on. We have mentioned the matter

patched and botched, antiquated and hideous. It is true that the old Parliamentary Buildings were patchy and very mixed. But we must not conclude that all other buildings, public as well as private, are of the same order. Speaking of Wellington alone, take the big wooden buildings for the Civil Service: surely they are