

PROGRESS

With which is Incorporated

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EDITORIAL COMMENT.

We offer no apologies to our readers for the space we have devoted this issue to the reproduction of a large proportion of the competitive designs for the new Parliament Houses in Wellington. The interest has been so great throughout New Zealand in this competition, which is unique in the Country's history, that we feel we should do something to place on record some of the efforts of the competitors, which, thanks to their assistance, we are able to do.

We do not think that the importance of this competition has been sufficiently realised. It is for the first building in the country—the home of our Parliament, and it is of the greatest importance that the highest skill available should be obtained in the designing and carrying out of the subsequent building. In such a building there are two essentials which should be embodied at all costs, viz.: It should fulfil the purpose for which it is intended, and be expressive of that high purpose, and it should be a fine building from an architectural point of view.

When we reflect that it is proposed to erect a building which is to be the home of our National Legislature for, say the next century, and when we consider that the building cannot fail to exert an influence for good or ill, we will realise that we cannot afford to run any risk of making a mistake by erecting a building which the next generation would want to sweep away. It will be generally conceded that the average persons knows very little about the art of architecture, nevertheless we are convinced that a fine building will have an influence for good on all those who come within its walls, as well as for that vastly greater number who behold it from without.

A grant has been made for building a National Gallery of Art in New Zealand; that is, a gallery for the permanent exhibition of pictures and other works of Art. Here in our proposed new Parliament Buildings we have an opportunity indeed of building a National Gallery, a gallery which will be of a hundredfold more value than any collection of pictures. For pictures are not the beginning and end of art. Galleries are unexplored by the vast majority of people. Pictures remain hanging on the walls, and books are hid away on the shelves, but our buildings are ever before the eyes of all men on their daily walks. On these grounds, therefore, we should make it our sacred duty to use every endeavour to erect a building worthy of our country, a building which will be a source of inspiration and beauty to us and to the generations to come, and which we can hand down to those who come after us with pride as a fine example of the noblest of the arts.

So many different opinions have been expressed with regard to this competition, and so much disapproval at the assessor's award, that we feel we should place a few of them before our readers.

To begin with, A certain set of conditions was drawn up and sent to all competitors at the outset. (They are printed elsewhere in this issue.) Competitors' designs were to be judged by those conditions. As soon as they were published, it was seen that the question

of getting the accommodation asked for and at the same time putting up a building that would be a credit to this country in the future, was very problematic for the money. A large number of competitors made an honest attempt to erect a suitable building for the money, but a larger number evidently concluded that provided the erection of the first Schedule (section A) could be carried out for the £110,600 stipulated, no amount was mentioned for the completion of the building. And so we have two sections of competitors, i.e., those who endeavoured to adhere to the conditions, and those who practically ignored them, and sent in designs which, while providing for the accommodation asked for, ignore the question of cost entirely.

There is a great deal to be said for the latter, as we believe the best and most artistic results are obtained when the artist has free play. But why send in plans that are to be judged by a certain set of conditions, entirely ignoring those conditions. And what is to be said when an award is made on this basis, as appears to have been the case in this instance?

Again, there is the question of boundary. Some of the prize winners have not adhered to the conditions. Can this be considered fair treatment? Is it right that competitors should be put to the expense of drawing elaborate plans at great expense in time and money, and then find themselves in this position? The responsibility of assessing the prizes for this competition lay with one man. His time was admittedly short—just 3 weeks—and one wonders how any man could possibly scrutinize carefully the 300 odd drawings of the 33 competitors in this short period. To conscientiously do this would tax the strength of the most robust man.

Would it not have been much better to have sent the whole of the plans away to England, after having first adopted the conditions drawn up by the N.Z.I.A., which are based upon those issued by the R.I.B.A., to be judged by a member nominated by the Royal Institute of British Architects? There could have been no question then of any but fair treatment.