

What Constitutes Unprofessional Practice in Architecture?

In the following article republished from our well known contemporary the "American Architect," the writer has courageously tackled what he evidently regards as certain ethical misconceptions in reference to the practice of architecture. It is to say the least a thorough analysis of an important and time-worn subject, and while many may not be in accord with the writer as to certain phases of his opinion, the general viewpoint is one which even here in Canada will be found of interest and not entirely without concurrence and support in the sentiment expressed.—Editor.

DURING a time of stress two psychological conditions manifest themselves, seemingly very opposite but really almost identical. The one is a loosening of restraint, a throwing off of conventions and an increase in the intensity of competition; the other is an exaltation of ideals, a seeking for new standards and a greater intensity of emotionalism. The architectural profession is just now experiencing both of these moods. We are certainly in times of stress; we certainly are filled with emotions which tend to raise our ideals, and we certainly are throwing over some of the restraints which in the past have made us one of the most straight-laced professions, ranking in that respect only after that of medicine. Now, restraints, ethics, codes of practice are such necessary things and contribute, when properly devised and applied, so much to the enjoyment of the practice of a particular profession that we cannot afford to throw over any code which has a real value. We cannot afford to blunt the keen edge of our ideals; and it is, therefore, fitting that while we are going through the melting pot, while we are trying so many lines and losing so much that we once thought fundamental, we should consider very carefully in what our code of ethics should consist and what is to be the standard of professional conduct in the light of the revolutionary episode of the war.

A code of ethics is simply a statement of the conditions under which a man can follow his calling with fairness to his competitors and with justice to his clients, his employees and his associates. So far the question of ethics seems very simple, and it is really only a constant application of the Golden Rule, but unfortunately the element of business is a very prominent one in architectural practice, and it is right there that the line begins to waver. The American Institute of Architects for the last fifty years has been formulating codes of ethics and trying to define professionalism, but always the point of view has been backward, applying to the future only the tried and proven experiences of the past, and experiences which have been interpreted by the members of the profession who have been successful and have won their full share of opportunity. I often wonder what our code would be like if it had been drawn up in every case by men under

twenty-five, if it were based not upon the practice of the past alone, but upon the hopes of the future, as judged with the restraining point of view of the Golden Rule. It has not required the upheaval of the present war to make our past codes of ethics seem strange and illogical to at least some of the young men who are coming out of the architectural schools and are eager to take their place in the profession, but are met right at the very start with restrictions that they do not always understand, and for that matter, which very few of us clearly comprehend.

The fundamental essential of the practice of architecture is to get a job, and to get a job one must have friends or acquaintances, or business connections who are willing to take a chance on an untried quantity, if the architect is just beginning; or at any rate, a certain amount of uncertainty is involved even when the older and more experienced architects get their chance, and right there the difficulties begin. We tell the young man he must not seek out a possible client and offer professional services, and yet in most cases how will an unknown man otherwise get a job? We tell him he must not let his talents be known, and yet if he cannot sound his own praises how can he expect anyone else to? We tell him he must sedulously keep his personality in the background, suppressing his name, suppressing his connection with the work, and yet architecture of all professions is one of personality, and if we tell him to suppress the vital part thereof how is he going to find his chances? We tell the young man that his best programme is to do every piece of work that comes to him just as well as his abilities will allow, to give the most rigid attention to details; in fact, to carry out all of the conditions of most efficient service and that then the rewards will come if he has the ability, and yet on the other hand we all of us know of architects who give their very life blood to the profession, who do creative work of the highest rank without fair reward, and there are scores of young men in all our cities who are able, sufficiently experienced, and certainly honest and well meaning, but whose average income from architecture is a mere pittance.

Again, we tell a young architect he must be a business man, must run his profession as a