

THE COMPETITION FOR THE PUBLIC LIBRARY BUILDING AT TORONTO

The programme of the above competition was issued to architects on the last day of October and contains many commendable requirements as well as some that are otherwise.

There is a possibility that the winner of the 1st prize may fare worse than the winners of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th prizes. They stand a fighting chance of earning at least some return towards the cost of the preparation of their designs, while the winner of the first prize gets nothing whatever if his design exceeds the prescribed limit of cost. Before this can be determined he will be compelled to go to the further trouble and expense of preparing full working drawings and specifications, which, to compass the full cost will have to include specifications for plumbing, heating, lighting and book stacks.

The amount of the prize money seems inadequate to the work involved, \$350 being the second prize, \$250 the third and \$150 the fourth—the work going to the winner of the first prize. It is a question if, under the strict conditions and the great possibility that the winner of the first prize will have his work for nothing, a larger number of architects would not have competed if a first prize of say \$800 to \$1000 had been offered, with the condition that if the work were carried out from his design, the prize money would be merged in the commission.

The competition is restricted to bona fide residents who have been practising "their profession in Canada at least six months prior to this day."

The words "this day" are somewhat ambiguous but as the only date in the programme is that set for the reception of the designs, (July 31st, 1906) it may be presumed that this is the day referred to.

As there is but a nominal duty on foreign plans, and as no Canadian architect residing at home may practice his profession in the United States, the above provision seems eminently just.

The composition of the Board of Judges is open to criticism in that but three out of the six may lay any claim to be ranked as experts.

It is difficult to see what qualifications the Mayor, an alderman and a member of the Library Board have (as holding such offices) that should especially fit them for the position of judges in a purely architectural problem.

It is eminently fit that the Chief Librarian should be on the board on account of his knowledge of the requirements of the building and that the City Architect should be there to represent the city's interest, but it seems incomprehensible that the other members of the Board of Judges should be any other than men of recognized architectural knowledge and ability.

It is true that the five men above mentioned are to elect a sixth judge, who shall be an architect, but, unless those who may be termed "lay members" are prepared to accept the judgement of the professional members as to the best designs, there may be either a deadlock or the selection of a design lacking proper architectural merit.

A meretricious design may capture these lay members who may be led away with something showy or catchy while passing by designs of quite scholarly excellence, the difference being understood only by

men trained to understand from the drawings what the completed effect will be.

The Board is to be commended in strictly limiting the number and character of the drawings, thus greatly reducing the amount of work required of the competing architects as compared with many competitions of this kind.

The limit of cost, \$260,000.00, is likely to prove the greatest stumbling block in the way of intending competitors. The sum is so manifestly inadequate that busy men at all events will hesitate before deciding to spend precious time on that which may prove a fiasco as far as they are concerned.

Those who drew up the terms appear to have been doubtful as to the sufficiency of the amount when they admitted that it is "Manifestly impossible to secure in competition a design carefully studied out and perfected in all details and capable of execution at a definite point of cost."

About the only way of arriving at an approximate estimate of the cost of the building without previously drawing the plans and sections is by cubing the required contents of the building and allowing a percentage for the necessary halls, corridors, etc. with allowance for the thickness of the walls and partitions.

An examination of a large number of plans of similar buildings discloses the fact that from thirty to forty per cent. of the total floor area is occupied by halls, corridors, etc.

If only thirty per cent. is allowed in the Toronto building, the Main building will contain not far from 965,000 and the Stack building 184,000 cubic feet.

To bring the structure within the appropriation, the Main building will, based on the above figures, have to be erected at a cost of 22cts. and the Stack building at a cost of 19cts. per cubic foot, figures which are manifestly absurd when all the requirements are taken into consideration.

These requirements cover a construction of brick, stone or terra cotta and a building thoroughly fire-proofed throughout. Architects' fees and clerk of works' salary are also to be included in the total cost.

The new Art Gallery on the grounds of the Exhibition Association has cost about 16cts. per cubic foot, contains but a single floor, and has no fittings, no heating, and practically no plumbing, while the cornices and frieze are of galvanized sheet iron.

Can the Stack room of a first class Public Library, with its iron stacks and floors, and its heating, be erected for three cents, and the Main building with its numerous rooms, its staircases, lavatories, heating, lighting and other etceteras for six cents more than this gallery?

The proposition seems entirely untenable.

The Main building will doubtless cost 30cts. and the Stack room 25cts. per cubic foot, running up the cost, with architects' fees and clerk of works' salary, to about \$353,000.00.

How is the first-prize man going to get around the difficulty?

The Board told the protesting committee of architects that \$250,000.00 was enough, but evidently not feeling too sure added another \$10,000.00 and virtually guaranteed the \$260,000.00 to be a sufficient sum for the purpose.

The architect aspiring to be a prize-man has there