

THE BYSTANDER.

THE interest manifested by Canadian architects in the suggestion to throw open to competition designs for our national buildings, shows that many among the profession have been thinking along the same lines as Mr. G. F. Stalker, of Ottawa, in his article in these columns last month. The Bystander has talked with a number of architects recently, and they have been, without exception, of one mind on this question. The only point on which any seemed desirous of being guarded in their expressions was in their references to the present government architect, of whom all spoke in the highest terms. On this point, it was clearly shown how the force of agitation for a desirable reform may sometimes be broken by the faithfulness and ability of a public official, just as agitation for some reforms have their inception in the incapacity of an officer, where, perhaps, the system itself may not be faulty. As President Burke, of the Ontario Association of Architects, said to the Bystander, "There is a wide difference between the gentleman at the head of this department of the public service in the Dominion, and Supervising Architect O'Rourke, of the Treasury Department of the United States." "But then," continued Mr. Burke, "the principle involved in the suggested change is the same, whether in Great Britain, the United States, or Canada. And loyalty to the most efficient public servant ought never to be allowed to stand in the way of attaining that which principle establishes as right, and experience has shown is wise. In Great Britain the practice of giving the profession generally an opportunity to exercise their talents in designing for public buildings has proven an undoubted gain to the mother land, financially, and also from a strictly professional point of view, in securing a better class of buildings in every respect."

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Other architects with whom the Bystander talked were just as definite in their statements as the President of the Architects' Association. If the subject is to be discussed from a public standpoint, there can be little question that the change is imperatively needed, and no doubt this fact has had much to do in securing the passing of the United States bill, a very clear outline of which was given by Mr. Stalker in the article published in last month's ARCHITECT AND BUILDER. En passant, it may be remarked, that the estrangement of opinion between Secretary of The Treasury Carlisle and Supervising Architect O'Rourke has at last culminated in the head of the Treasury Department summarily removing Mr. O'Rourke, and the Architects' Bill, it may be generally conceded, has now, practically, become law. Mr. Glenn Brown, who entered into the question of architects' charges, exhaustively, in the American Architect and Building News of some few months since, comparing cost of construction of many buildings as under the supervision of the government architect, or when in private hands, has presented a case, which in point of financial cost, seems wholly unanswerable. The Bystander does not intend to burden his comments with any large quotation from Mr. Brown's article, but it is to be remarked, that when we find a building, erected under the supervision of a government architect, as was the case with the Custom House and Post Office at Albany, N. Y., costing \$811,204, or 102.8c. per cubic ft. to construct, and requiring 11 years for completion, and we place alongside of this a building erected at Kansas City for the New York Life Insurance Co., the work under the supervision of a private architect, and this costing \$950,265, or 38c. per cubic ft., and completed in two years, whatever may be the opinion among professional men, the conditions are of a character to set ordinary citizens thinking. This case is only one out of many cited by Mr. Brown in his carefully tabulated statement. Mr. Burke was asked, how so wide a difference in cost was to be explained. Was it a case of the government architect drawing a fat salary? "It is not here the trouble rests," said Mr. Burke. "In fact, compared with the responsibilities of the office and the class of work performed, Mr. O'Rourke was in receipt of a meagre salary. The trouble is in the amount of routine about the business—the curse too often of all public work. There is a whole regiment of employees, civil service officers, connected with the department, and they do their work in a perfunctory manner that is never known in business circles, but that is indigenous to officialdom. Here is where the cost comes in. Push and energy are unknown, and the work is allowed

to drag along without much regard to the time actually consumed."

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The strongest argument in favor of a change in system, as seen by architects, was the advantage to be gained in the character and style of the buildings to be erected, if thrown open to competition. "It matters little how competent may be the government architect," remarked Mr. Langley, "he is bound to get into a rut, when the work is left continuously in his hands from year to year." A similar thought was given expression to by Mr. Siddall, of Siddall & Baker. "No man," said he, "can give freshness to his work when he is burdened with all the details of management, as must be the case with anyone holding the position of government architect. There is a want of incentive for such an officer to keep in close touch with the advances that are being made in architectural and building lines. "The Bystander was reminded in this connection of a protest he had heard against uniformity in building in general, when this policy is pursued, as it sometimes has been pursued, by communities: "Never lapse into deadly dullness, the modern classic monotony of later Spain." Perhaps it is that arguments of some force can be advanced against any change in the present system, so far at least as Canada is concerned, but the Bystander has so far failed to learn of any of these as he has talked over the matter with those active in the profession. The strength of experience is always worth much, and the fact that the system of public competition has worked so admirably in the public interest in Great Britain, as well as having given strength and encouragement to all interested in architectural pursuits, is to many minds sufficient argument to influence the various Canadian architectural associations to take steps to secure legislation along the same lines. In doing this they would only be following in the circle, along with the mother land, and their neighbors to the south.

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A short time since designs were asked for by the Free Library Board, of London, Ont., for the erection of a new building for library purposes in the Forest City. A statement of specifications and particulars was sent out to those architects who desired to compete, and about 20 architects, it is said, in different parts of the province, sent in designs. Within the past month the award was made and to the surprise of those who had adhered strictly, as they believed in honesty they ought to have done, to the requirements set forth in the specifications, they learned that the Free Library Board had accepted the plans of an architect in Brooklyn, N. Y., whose drawings, it is alleged, were not in accordance with the specifications. The party who has been successful in the competition was a former resident of London. It has been stated, now that his plans for the London building have been accepted, that he will return again to Canada. Just how far this is the case, however, the Bystander is not prepared to say, and whether any significance is to be attached to the fact that the award was given to an "Old London Boy" is a matter that the people will decide according to the various ways of measuring up a transaction of this character.

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The interest of the Bystander was in ascertaining the feelings of the profession in a case of this kind. Messrs. Siddall & Baker, who were among the aggrieved parties, were seen, and both members of the firm were very indignant over the action of the London Board. They said a protest which they and others had signed, had been forwarded to the Board, but whether any good would come out of it time only would tell. In the opinion of Mr. Baker it ought to be the duty of every architect to protest against conduct of this kind. "What is the use," said he, "of asking for plans on certain lines, if others are to be permitted to deviate from these conditions and undertake to secure, perhaps a little more for their clients as a step to secure the award. A continuation of this practice must inevitably lead to corrupt and immoral methods in competing for work. We have enough of this kind of thing in other walks of life, and if the dignity and character of the architectural profession is to be maintained, we should act as one man, not alone, in denouncing conduct of the kind, but we should unanimously take steps to prevent, if possible, its recurrence in other ways." Mr. Beaumont Jarvis, who had also entered the competition, was spoken to about the matter. He had signed the protest that was being entered, and