

CORRESPONDENCE.

[Letters are invited for this department on subjects relating to the building interests. To secure insertion, communications must be accompanied by the name and address of the author, but not necessarily for publication. The publisher will not assume responsibility for the opinions of correspondents.]

A WOOD CARVER'S VIEWS.

To the Editor of the CANADIAN ARCHITECT AND BUILDER.

SIR,—The people of Canada appear to be at last awakening to the fact that they have a grand country—worthy to be classed among the nations of the earth—and that they are possessed of all the qualities that make for success, in quite as marked a degree as the people of any other nation. It is to be hoped that this feeling of self-confidence and respect will grow, until it reaches even the building trades.

As far back as my experience reaches, Canadians have been given second place to the stranger in their own country. The boy who served an apprenticeship to a trade, and who most likely possessed as much ability as the stranger, was forced to take a back seat at home, or leave his native land in search of appreciation elsewhere. I have often heard the stranger tell the native that "If he did not like the treatment he was receiving he could go somewhere else," and he went. He may come back some time, but, if we wish to retain him as a citizen, we must show him that we are prepared to give him at least an equal chance with the stranger, and that we appreciate his worth. I have worked in some of the best architectural and furniture carving shops in Canada and the United States, and have met some very clever workmen from all parts of the world. I have always found the Canadian in the United States shops receiving the average wage, and in some cases reaching and holding his own in the front rank. I have never known a Canadian to be occupying an inferior position anywhere, except in Canada. I have worked with as many as one hundred and sixty carvers in one shop, and among those who lost least time, did the most and best work, and received the best wages, were always to be found more than one Canadian.

If this is the case in the United States among men of all nationalities, why is it not so in Canada? Because we do not give the Canadian the same chance. We have always been too ready to extend the "glad hand" to the foreigner, with the idea that, coming from the older country, he must know more than we do. As soon as he arrives there is always someone to help him into the position that rightfully belongs to the boy who learned his business with us.

Some ten years ago there were gathered together in New York city the greatest collection of wood carvers ever seen anywhere—some of the best men from Italy, France, Germany, England, Scotland, and, of course, Ireland—in fact, they came from all countries and were of all grades. Mr. Philip Martinz, who did so much of the best work at the World's Fair in Chicago, was one of them, and was not regarded as the best by any means. The work was of the very best class of Italian Renaissance, and rivalry ran high. As soon as something was produced that was looked upon as good, the others would set themselves to produce something better, and every week or so a piece of work was turned out by someone, that was voted by all, "best yet." Of course the Italian was generally first, with the Frenchman a close second—all others scattered. The Canadian and United States carvers were quick to seize their opportunity, and it surprised everyone how quickly they picked up the loose ends, and, step by step, bettered their position in the ranks, until, when the end came, and they were all scattered far and wide, the carvers of this continent were working shoulder to shoulder with the picked men from all Europe, receiving the same wages as the best of them, which is positive proof that they did as good work.

At the same time that the carver was proving himself as good as his brother, the carpenter and cabinet-maker had been passing through a similar experience, and came out of the test with their heads up.

It is a well-known fact, to all who have worked in the United States, that some of the best men in the furniture trades are Canadians. In the best shops in Boston, New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, Grand Rapids, Canadians are to be found in one or more departments, filling the position of foremen, and in some cases the manager and foremen, from top to bottom, are all Canadians, and most of those who hold these positions, also hold honorably cancelled indentures of apprenticeship from Jacques & Hay, of Toronto, although I have met some from Bowmanville, Oshawa, London, Montreal and Quebec. One of the most

successful furniture manufacturers in Grand Rapids, Mr. John Mowat, is a Canadian and a Jacques & Hay apprentice.

It is not, therefore, for any want of ability that Canadians do not remain at home, but entirely from lack of opportunity and because of the lack of faith in their ability. The manufacturer, the architect, and business man generally, are largely to blame for the existing state of things. They have in the past given the preference to men from the old countries, being Old Countrymen themselves. As a rule, they could not be induced to believe that the boy brought up in the bush could possibly have as much knowledge as the mechanic from "home." So, when a stranger landed here, unknown and poor, who claimed to be a builder, for instance, he was taken in hand and helped along. The bank helped him, the architect gave him his confidence, and he became known as a "successful contractor." In some cases he was a good fellow, and is with us yet; in other cases he left us monuments of his ability in the shape of unfinished blocks of buildings and unpaid claims; while the Canadian, who stayed at home and tried to establish a business for himself, was looked upon as a man of little experience or ability, and left to do the best he could.

I have tried to show by all this, that we have, in the past, neglected to encourage our own people, while we have freely helped the foreigner. We depreciated our own ability, and failed to inspire others with confidence in us, because we lacked confidence in ourselves. If an expert opinion was required, we sent to some foreign country for it, and paid a large price for it.

This is not the way to build up a country, and the sooner we make a change in our methods, the better it will be for us all. Canadians should have the first say in all matters which affect Canada. Canadian architects, engineers and experts should be consulted in preference to foreigners. I am looking for the good time that is coming for us all, when good, honest work will be asked for, and the man who will give the best class of work, for a fair price, will be considered the best man to deal with. In these days of competition, it is the man who will do work cheapest who is looked upon as the best man to employ. The wood carver suffers in this way. The good man has not only to compete with the cheap man, but has to contend with all sorts of substitutes. Compositions of all kinds are handled by people who should know better. The idea that all, or any of these substitutes, are cheaper than good honest wood carving, is wrong. Wood carving can be and is done every day for as little money as plaster ornament is made. I have been asked to tender on mantels, the ornaments for which were to be either wood carved or gilder's composition; the figures quoted for wood were only a few cents more than the cost of composition. This is not fair competition, but it is the way we do it in Toronto. I do not blame the architects, because, for a great many years, they have been paying for good work and not getting it. The want of ability to do good work, on the part of the class of carvers who have been doing work in Toronto, is evident to anyone who inspects the work they have done; and it must be remembered that the carvers who have been doing the work in Toronto have not always been Canadians. Men have gone into business for themselves, who, as journeymen, found it somewhat difficult to keep up their end at the bench. Others who have been in business did not understand wood carving as well as they understood stone carving.

I am prepared to prove that it is almost impossible to be at the same time an expert wood and stone carver. It is always possible for a stone carver to do a little wood carving, and vice versa, but the man who would be an expert at either, must stick to one or the other. A stone carver tendering on wood carving will tender high, because he will take more time, and when it is done it can always be recognized, by its want of spirit; it lacks that lively, sketchy appearance, which the expert wood carver could give it. It was this "artistic indifference" in the treatment of the wood carving, by the Italian carvers who worked on the Vanderbilt work in New York, which surprised the stone men into the admission that the wood work was far superior to the stone.

The architect who has been fighting for good work at a fair price, has generally got rubbish at a high price. The method of asking for tenders, and giving the work to whoever is lowest, is not calculated to produce the best results, neither is the method of bolstering up one man, as being the only one who can do good work. Another way of doing it is to let the contract for all wood work, including carving, to a builder. Say that it is estimated that there is \$500 worth of wood carving on the job. The builder will sub-let the carving to the man who will do it cheapest, and save probably one-third of the original estimate. This method