

OPEN LETTER TO THE ROYAL
INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS — 1912

Gentlemen,—I earnestly appeal to you to use all your influence to bring to an end the evil custom of publishing the names of assessors in architectural competitions before the designs are sent in to be judged. The practical outcome of publishing the names beforehand has been to prevent many from competing who have felt unable to sympathise with the taste and ideals of the assessor. But the greatest evil of all is that men are induced to design up or down to the assessor's level. Not setting out to do what they honestly feel to be the very best they are capable of, but for the sake of the reward, to prostitute their powers by endeavouring to appeal to the taste of the assessor. Let no competitor know who is to be his judge, and you at once remove a powerful inducement to unfaithfulness. It is a fearful tyranny that imposes any style on a designer.

Conditions and requirements and moral law are enough data from which to produce the noblest architecture, if properly attended to; assuming of course, some degree of native refined sensibility. But when any style is imposed upon the designer the conditions and requirements that ought to control him are made subservient to the style. The poor plan has to be squeezed like a Chinese foot, and the honest expression of needs is sacrificed to the conventional commonplace of symmetry. The supposed leaders in the profession by this system can impose upon the British public the deadly dull imitations of the style they affect. Hence we have seen public buildings arise one after the other with the same trail of the serpent over them all. No healthy national style can be artificially grown in this way.

Yours faithfully,

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