

Auckland Arts Building Competition.

The baffling thing about competitions is that they never seem to give much satisfaction to any of the parties concerned—except perhaps the winners—and the Auckland Arts Building Competition seems to be no exception to the general rule. The Auckland University went to the trouble of engaging Professor Wilkinson, Lecture of Architecture to the Sydney University, who acted in conjunction with Mr. W. A. Cummings, of Auckland, and Mr. Basil Hooper, of Dunedin, and the result of their decision (which we published in our July issue) seems to have provoked a storm of derision from a number of the unsuccessful competitors, and a feeling of disappointment from most people who are sufficiently sensitive to appreciate a good design.

The design is described by an Australian technical journal *Building*, "as a similar abomination to that which was foisted on the Melbourne public in the Newman College at the University." The same paper says:—"In the latest freak—the Auckland building, however, the designers have thrown over their claim for 'new art' Yankee notions that were put into the Newman College as architecture, and without much alteration have now claimed an inspiration from English Gothic. The assertion that English Gothic had anything to do with the design published, should make our great English architects turn in their graves; for whereas these latter had a purpose and a power associated with wonderful decorative features, these so-called inspirations lack every fundamental of any sort of architecture, and look more like the crudeness of the child with a set of building blocks." According to a correspondent in an Auckland paper at least two exterior designs are far superior to that selected, and one is forced to the conclusion that these two designs were thrown out owing to the cost.

It seems obvious that the Board had some difficulty over the design, as the Education Board's architect apparently had some very caustic criticism to offer which resulted in the winners taking their designs back to "re-study the treatment of the front of the building, particularly the tower, and submit to the Council and the Minister of Education the result of his study in a month's time"—according to a report of a meeting held in Wellington of the architects, the Auckland Education Board and the Minister of Education, details of which were published in the Auckland dailies.

Mr. Lippincott at this meeting naturally defended his design, but agreed that "in a re-study of the treatment it might be possible to embody some of the suggestions of the Government architect." When this report appeared in print Mr. Mair, the Education Board's architect, replied as follows to the Minister of Education:—"My at-

tention has been drawn to a report published in Auckland on August 8th of a discussion on the chairman's report of his interview with yourself and officers in Wellington on July 27th last with reference to the plans of the proposed Arts Building for Auckland University. From the newspaper report it would appear that the chairman did not appreciate the position, and placed the Council's architect in the unfortunate position of having to publicly state the correctness or otherwise of adverse criticism made by the Department's architect. This position, as a matter of professional ethics, I was at pains to avoid, and accordingly suggested to the director the course followed—that is, a private discussion of the plans between the architect and myself before their consideration at the conference. Having carefully examined and frankly criticised the composition on fundamental principles, and come to a friendly understanding with Mr. Lippincott as to how he proposed to modify on re-study, I felt satisfied the final design would be quite satisfactory, and purposely so worded my interim report as to obviate traversing before others the particularities as set forth in my detailed report of July 29th." Mr. Mair's delicacy over a point of professional ethics is to be commended, but if the design is good enough to be placed first surely the designer need not fear criticism.

The plan we publish in this issue of the winning design is the result of a thumb-nail sketch made while the drawings were on view in Auckland and is therefore not necessarily exact, but the measurements given are approximately correct. We understand that the six designs in the final competition were Messrs. Lippincott and Billson (Melbourne), Alex. McKee (Brisbane), McDonald, Mullions and Smith (Auckland), S. Goldsboro' (Auckland), and two designs by Messrs. Coombs, Macfie and Millar (Dunedin).

In comparing the plan of the winning design with the conditions one naturally asks—Why have not the specified sizes of rooms been more closely adhered to? The library, for instance, is approximately only two-thirds of the required area, and it will be seen from plans that there are other rooms that have been varied in dimensions in order to obtain with the least possible trouble, necessary symmetry and balance. Further, the lighting of corridors and class rooms is fundamentally bad, and no re-arrangement of window spacing could be carried into effect without disturbing the elevations or working utility of the class rooms. No provision seems to have been made to comply with the rules of the competition regarding future additions—it being difficult to see from the plans how access is to be gained to future blocks. No portion of the building seems to have been allocated for heating and ventilating plant.