

*The Athenæum on the result of competition for
Building*

9

THE ATHENÆUM

THE BUILDING FOR THE GREAT INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION OF 1851.

OUR readers are already aware that plans, elevations, &c. more or less elaborate, amounting to the remarkable number of 245, have been sent in to the Building Committee appointed by the Royal Commission, in answer to their invitation for "information and suggestions" in reference to a fit edifice for the purposes of the above Exhibition:—and on these plans, elevations, &c., the Committee have since made their Report. The large list of competitors embraces natives and foreigners:—France, Austria, Holland, Belgium, Hanover, Brunswick, Hamburg and Switzerland having contributed their services in aid of the views of the Commissioners. This competition may, therefore, be considered as the first act of the Industrial Exhibition:—England having here tried her strength against the architects of Europe. The result has been most disastrous. England is beaten—and shamefully beaten—in the first battle. In the list selected by the Building Committee for honorary distinction, out of one hundred and ninety-five English contributors the Committee can find place for only three,—while out of thirty-eight competing foreigners they have been able to recommend fifteen. This, as has been remarked, is, as regards the whole numbers, in the proportion of 1 to 65 of our own countrymen—and of 1 to about 2½ of foreign architects!

This result is so strange and unexpected, that it forcibly challenges inquiry. Are we really so far behind the rest of the world in an important branch of the Fine, as well as of the Useful, Arts as this?—The issue of this contest is calculated to have the most unfavourable effect. If the Commissioners have arrived at a just decision (by means of their Committee) in this their first award, the fact will greatly strengthen the argument of the alarmists who, wanting faith in their countrymen, have shrunk from committing England to the contest of nations. If the verdict be unjust, and have been arrived at on vicious premises, then, the faith of the public in the awards of the Commissioners is fatally shaken at the outset. We cannot help it. The matter must be looked into. It is of the utmost importance, if there be anything wrong, that the results of the first estimate of the Commissioners should be readjusted,—both for the honour of the architects, and as a warning to the Commissioners themselves in the future exercise of their functions.—Our readers will see that, in the whole of our argument, we hold the Commission liable for the judgments of its Committees.

It is in no grudging spirit against foreign merit that we enter on this inquiry. In an arena so wide as we have ourselves chosen, we expect to be occasionally beaten,—and will hold the chastise-