

JOHANNESBURG'S NEW STATION

ARCHITECT REPLIES TO CRITICISM

A reply to the criticism in yesterday's "Rand Daily Mail" levelled by "A Student of Architecture" against the new Johannesburg station was given to a Pretoria representative of the "Rand Daily Mail" by Mr. Gerard Moerdyk, A.R.I.B.A., one of the architects of the new station.

"A Student of Architecture" had obviously given the matter some study, remarked Mr. Moerdyk, but had he given it a little more he must have discovered the fallacy of his proposed alterations. "He believed that the ideal station, like the ideal castle, should be built in the air, and suggests doing that to overcome the numerous difficulties inherent in a through station as against a terminal one," continued Mr. Moerdyk. "That idea is by no means new; indeed, it was discussed and tried when the designs for the new station were being prepared. As he notes, the native station has been built on that principle; but there is a vast difference between putting a long, narrow building over and across the tracks, and erecting a building 400 feet wide over the rails. What would happen to the engine smoke, and what would the noise be like?"

The Pennsylvania Station in New York had been built partly over the tracks, agreed Mr. Moerdyk, but no steam engine ever came near that station, electric locomotives hauling the trains in and out. Apart from the question of cost, anything like that would be impracticable in Johannesburg in present circumstances.

The idea of lowering all the railway lines so that the concourse could be built on ground level over the tracks had also been considered, but the cost had proved prohibitive. It was patent that another solution had to be found, and, as often happened in architecture, the actual choice was the least of many evils.

The Johannesburg station, emphasised Mr. Moerdyk, was not solely a station, but also a head office for the Railway Administration, and accommodation had had to be provided for a great number of clerks who really had nothing to do with the station as such.

"The building one sees from the outside is not really a station, therefore, but a block of offices used by the S.A.R.," continued Mr. Moerdyk. "In spite of all the difficulties that have had to be faced, Johannesburg will find its station a very convenient place — quiet, restful, dignified and smokeless. The handling of baggage is easy and direct. There will be no bustle and no shouting of 'Gangway, please!' The native problem has been ideally solved. Moreover, when the central subway approach to all platform is completed within a few weeks it will be found that it is a short and direct approach to the trains, and that 'A Student of Architecture's' ten minutes there and back has been grossly exaggerated."

Any day now Johannesburg may expect to find that the concourse has been opened.