

Dec. 10 - 1929.

THE CITY LIBRARY DESIGN

MR. REES-POOLE PLEADS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTS

Mr. V. Rees-Poole, who is himself a pupil of Sir Herbert Baker and, incidentally, the Pretoria diocesan architect, was asked to-day for his views on the Johannesburg Library Committee's decision to secure the services of an assessor from overseas for the new library building. Mr. Gerard Moerdyk's adverse criticisms were published in yesterday's issue of The Star.

Referring first to Mr. Moerdyk's remarks on developing South African architecture, Mr. Rees-Poole pointed out that it was Sir Herbert Baker who first started what there is of South African architecture to-day, taking as a model the old Cape homesteads. And the architects of South Africa had promoted that idea in an extremely successful manner.

"This type is very delightful, but it is a purely domestic type," said Mr. Rees-Poole, "and when it comes to a library building it is an entirely different matter. It is very difficult to lay down any particular style for a library. Any appropriate, simple style which might be based on any form, would be quite suitable for a library building in South Africa."

"GIVE THEM THE CHANCE."

Mr. Rees-Poole was not in favour of Mr. Moerdyk's suggestion that the competition should be thrown open to competitors from all over the world. "I am strongly against any but South African men being eligible," he said. "There are too many men who are earning their living here who would probably be very glad of the opportunity of competing and want an opportunity of expressing themselves. Give them the chance. Throw open the competition not only to practising architects, but to young men in the public service, etc. But don't go outside the country."

He had no desire to be narrow-minded, continued Mr. Rees-Poole, but a plan of this description should not, he thought, be difficult to find in South Africa. Plans for libraries represented a special branch of architecture.

"Mr. Moerdyk says," continued Mr. Rees-Poole, "that London assessors would not perhaps be au fait with local conditions. I cannot agree with him there. After all, a library is a library, whatever the country. The only thing you must not do in this country is to over-light."

Mr. Rees-Poole went on to criticise the very haphazard methods of appointing assessors which obtained in South Africa. "Even if you choose a practising man you must see that he is conversant with the type of building required. Certainly I agree that an assessor should preferably be one who has visited this country. It is desirable that the assessor should be a man who knows the conditions of the country, and no one knows these better than Sir Herbert Baker. I suppose this library building in Johannesburg is likely to cost about a quarter of a million—otherwise why talk about going overseas for an assessor? Under this scheme you would probably get as an assessor a man who specialises in libraries."

NO FIRST-RATE LIBRARY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

There was always a good deal of difficulty when it came to competitions. No first-rate library had ever been built in South Africa, said Mr. Rees-Poole, and naturally an expert should be appointed to assess. Sir Herbert Baker knew the conditions of the country, but there was the counter-criticism that Sir Herbert Baker had never designed a library building, with the exception of college libraries.

"What we want in an assessor is broad-mindedness. In spite of the work of American, German and French architects," said Mr. Rees-Poole, "do you find men like Lutjens and Baker following in their footsteps? Emphatically no! You will find that the latest buildings in London designed by these two men are beautiful, big, not tremendously tall, buildings, following the traditional Wren style, which cannot be beaten. It is very sad to think that we have not a man in this country who is big enough to take on the job of assessing competitions. But that is always the trouble when it comes to competitions. You simply cannot conceive the difficulties we encounter. There are, perhaps, young men who might take on the job of assessing, but they do not get the opportunity. It is given to the older men, who may never have done anything remarkable in their profession."

THREE ASSESSORS.

"Mr. Moerdyk suggests three South African assessors. Well, I suggested this idea long ago. But I went much further. I consider that every competitor should also be an assessor. This idea is followed out in the studios. All the competitors would judge each other's work and by a process of elimination the best three or four would be chosen. And then the fight would come! I am not prepared to say what would be done after that, but I do think that some scheme might be worked out on these lines."

It would be very difficult for three assessors to arrive at a unanimous decision in regard to the winning plan. None might agree. And what would happen then? "If two assessors were appointed," concluded Mr. Rees-Poole, "you would perhaps get one strong man and one weak man, and the latter would give way, possibly against his better judgment, to the former."

My answer to this
FOR THE TREE OF
MERCY
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ENTERTAINMENT AT THE