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TYPICAL OF THE SOIL.

S.A. ARCHITECTURE.

Looking to London for Plans.

Mr. Gerard Moerdijk, A.R.I.B.A., the well-known South African architect, who is doing so much to develop a purely South African architecture, had some trenchant criticisms of the action of the Johannesburg Municipal Council in connection with the plans for the new Library there, when interviewed.

"I saw the report," said Mr. Moerdijk, "in which it was stated, inter alia, that the Library Committee in Johannesburg proposed to approach the Royal Institute of British Architects in London for an assessor to select a plan for the new Library. I have not seen this confirmed, but I am quite willing to believe the report, because it is so typical of the City Fathers, whose minds seem to move in a groove from here to London. What a snub for the new-born dignity of our South African Institute of Architects, who count amongst their members such famous names as that of Sir Herbert Baker, to pass over their heads to the Royal Institute of British Architects!"

Mr. Moerdijk emphasised that he was not actuated by any anti-British feelings. He himself is an associate of the British Institute of Architects, and received most of his training in England, but the principle involved was totally wrong. It meant that the South African architects must follow the ideas of the London men, who, naturally, would have little or no idea of South African conditions. The South African Institute of Architects was an amalgamation of a number of separate institutes some two years ago.

From the point of developing a South African architecture, continued Mr. Moerdijk, the idea of an imported assessor, one not versed in South African conditions and ideals, selecting a design from those submitted by South African architects, was utterly foolish. It meant that South African architects, to have a chance of winning, must follow the taste and ideas of the assessor. Nothing more detrimental to the development of a South African architecture could be imagined.

BRAINS FOR EXPORT.

"Why not do the sensible thing," said Mr. Moerdijk, "reverse the process. Get South African architects—say three—as assessors, and open the competition to the world. What helpful suggestions might not come from Spain, the Americas, etc., countries, the climates of which approximate ours. We ought not to be afraid of importing brains into our country, but it appears to be a far more urgent necessity to export some brains, especially the type possessed by the Municipal Library Committee!"

Under such a scheme as is proposed by the Library Committee, said Mr. Moerdijk, the British Institute selected the conditions, and the South African architects worked according to these, which were so confined that they left no scope for imagination. To be able to have a chance of winning in such a competition, the South African architect was necessarily forced to follow the British assessor's plans entirely. No English architect would, of course, be allowed to compete.

If the scheme were reversed, as Mr. Moerdijk suggests, the South African assessors would lay down the conditions, with which they must naturally be more familiar than the man who has never been to South Africa. The competition would then be thrown open to architects all over the world, which, in effect, would probably mean that British, American, French and German architects would compete, and possibly architects from Spain and Australia. In such a scheme nobody would be excluded, and South African architecture would benefit tremendously as a result of the large and varied number of plans submitted. The present idea limits competitors to South African architects only, and if, continued Mr. Moerdijk, they wanted to limit the competition to South African architects, they should certainly have a South African assessor. The present idea put the South African man under a distinct disadvantage.

Mr. Moerdijk went on to quote a number of glaring precedents in our public buildings, which have resulted in well-known architectural failures, and buildings which were very far from being on the lines of South African architecture which he and others are so anxious to build up.

"The main thing we are aiming at," he concluded, "is to get at a typical South African architecture." He knew that this was far from being a fait accompli at the moment. South African architects had for their groundwork the beautiful old Cape houses, but the main features of these had to be modified and developed to a great extent before we could say that we had actually arrived at architecture of a typical South African style.