

THE DESIGN OF THE CITY'S LIBRARY

PLEA FOR SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE

Mr. Gerard Moerdijk, the well-known South African architect, whose criticisms of the Johannesburg Library Committee's action in proposing an assessor from overseas were published in *The Star* on Monday night, returns to the attack this morning in the course of an interview with the Pretoria representative of *The Star*.

"I have read your interview with Mr. Rees-Poole in *Tuesday's Star*," said Mr. Moerdijk. "He has a great many things to say, most of which I agree with. But they are irrelevant to the point at issue. He further says that 'after all, a library is a library.' With that I also agree. I don't see how I could very well do otherwise. But in the context he says in effect that as a library is a library and not a Cape homestead we have no suitable architectural style that is applicable, and that therefore it can be better assessed in London than anywhere else, provided it is not overlooked.

"With that I most thoroughly disagree. We have no style, that is 'holus-bolus' suitable for modern conditions. No country has. But as a style of architecture is the outcome of geographical, climatic, and social conditions, it can only be judged by those who have a knowledge and experience of these conditions.

"Mr. Rees-Poole says, give South African architects a chance. They have a chance, and, being versed in local conditions and judged by men of experience and feeling similar to their own, they would have a better chance than anyone else. I say, give South African architecture a chance. This it will not have if assessed in London.

CONFIDENCE IN THE ASSESSOR.

"Mr. Rees-Poole goes on to say that we have no one big enough in South Africa to assess competition. I admit that the way some of our recent competitions have been assessed is enough to make one despair. The same, only more so, can be said of those of our competitions that have been assessed overseas. If, however, we look at the result of the competition for the Reserve Bank in Capetown and the Technical College in Pretoria, there is every reason to have complete confidence in the assessor. Both these buildings add their quota towards the development of a South African style, the present incompleteness of which seems such a handicap to Mr. Rees-Poole. As far as the working of a library is concerned, the assessor could be assisted by an expert librarian (not an architect).

"However, I am glad to testify that Mr. Rees-Poole's works are more convincing than his words," concluded Mr. Moerdijk with a smile.
