

THE CORK DISTRICT LUNATIC ASYLUM PLANS.

IN reference to these plans, and the differences existing between the architect and engineer, already alluded to in these pages, a report was brought up at the last monthly meeting by the Board Committee. The following letter from the architect deals with the action of the board, and is sufficiently explanatory without the printing of the report:—

GENTLEMEN,—I have to acknowledge receipt of a communication from the House Committee, in which it is stated that a recommendation will be made to the Board that my services as architect to the proposed works should be dispensed with in consequence of some alterations in the plans having been made by me. In justice to my professional character, I feel called upon to vindicate my conduct and action in this matter. In the first place, I may remark that according to the usual professional practice, before the contract is entered into with the builder the architect is not only at liberty to make any changes he may find necessary in the plans in the interests of his client, but it is his duty to do so, in order to insure economy and efficiency in the execution of the works, so that the drawings, although signed on behalf of the clients, cannot be looked upon in title light of deeds until endorsed by the contractor. The drawings for the proposed works in question consisted of about forty large sheets, in five of which some alterations have been made. I myself proposed but one, and that a matter of construction, the others being only slight alterations in the size of some minor store buildings, and changes principally in the size and position of doors in main store building. These changes in the first instance were proposed by Dr. Eames himself, and not either devised or suggested by me, and were approved of by the House Committee, new drawings for which (although unnecessary) would have been made had not Dr. Eames called to my office a few days previous to the meeting of the governors of April 2nd, and I told him I could not have any new drawings ready for the Board, but as there was so little to be done to the drawings of the store buildings I could have them ready. He replied that it would be a great matter to have anything prepared for the Board, and I consequently completed the alterations in question on the original drawings, solely for the good of the institution, in order that they might be laid before the Board at once and not put off to the next monthly meeting, as it was considered of importance that the works should be commenced as early in the spring as possible. I had not the slightest intention of doing anything to these drawings until Dr. Eames called. I was greatly surprised on reading the reports of the proceedings of the Governors of April 2nd in the public papers, that Dr. Eames, when I was not present, made a number of statements most injurious to me as a professional man, and stated that a letter of explanation submitted by me was "all incorrect," that my tracings could not be depended on, and implied that I was the cause of the delay in the progress of the works. I now beg emphatically to reiterate every word contained in that letter, and also to state that any tracings prepared by me were perfectly correct. The real cause of the delay arose from the fact that Mr. Edward, the surveyor employed by the Board to take out the quantities, although appointed early in December, 1874, never asked for any explanation which he stated he required until March, 1875, and then made incorrect reports to the Board which, together with Dr. Eames' statements, have prejudiced the Governors against me, and caused some of them to make use of very strong language most injurious to my professional character. On reconsidering the matter, I feel sure that the Governors will deem it but an act of justice to make reparation for the great injury publicly done to me, as I would much regret, after being connected with the institution for twenty-eight years, that I should be compelled to take steps in any way of a hostile nature,—I am, gentlemen, yours obediently,

WM. ATKINS, Architect, F.R.L.A.I.

We see by the report of the proceedings that it was proposed and carried, "that, after considering Mr. Atkins' letter, they considered that no person had ever been permanent architect of the board, and that Mr. Atkins' claim to that effect was quite erroneous and unfounded in fact." In the report of the House Committee it is said that, though the board would be "warranted in wholly repudiating the plans, we suggest that such a course should not be adopted, but that Mr. Atkins should be paid for those plans at the rate of 2½ per cent. on the approximate amount of the expenditure, or on the amount of the tenders that may be accepted for the work; and this suggestion we make from a conviction that your board desire to deal as fairly with Mr. Atkins as you consistently can with your duty to the institution and to the ratepayers."

The annexed correspondence is a reply to the statements made in the published report of the House Committee, and in answer to the query of Dr. Eames:—

SIR,—I have seen in the report of the House Committee of the above institution some very strong remarks on a short letter that I had previously written to them, which remarks had no doubt the effect of prejudicing the minds of the governors present against me. They are—that the letter "is unwise, incorrect; that they are coerced to express all opinion about it in strong terms, That it contains in their opinion expressions tantamount to an attempt at usurping the powers, and setting the authority of the governors at defiance." As the letter is not long I give below the entire text of it, and I am quite confident that the public will be much surprised how it merited in any way all these strong expressions. As to the "wisdom" of it that is a matter for myself, but I distinctly say that the letter is perfectly correct. I mentioned in it that I am architect to the proposed new works, which cannot be denied by the committee, and from which position I have never been removed. A resolution was finally proposed and carried, "That my claim to be permanent architect to the hoard was erroneous and unfounded," Where have I made any such claim? Surely it is not right for a public body to put forward statements as having been made by me which I never even hinted at, As far as the resolution quoted goes, "that in case of any works being required I should be applied to on the subject," it hears but the one interpretation, which has been heretofore given to it, by the governors of the asylum, as it has been strictly acted upon with regard to all architectural works for sixteen years, and never controverted until Mr. Edwards commenced making his reports, the correctness of which I deny. With regard to the statement in the report, "that I was especially cautioned by the committee against making any alterations whatever in the plans," I most distinctly assert that I cannot call to mind anything of the kind having been said to me, the committee sat for an hour after I left; the subject might have been there brought forward, but I know that after that I told Dr. Eames in my office that the only way I could have anything ready for the board was to complete the alterations of these plans, and he did not even suggest to me not to do it, or call my attention to any direction as having been given by the committee on the subject. As to the new plans referred to in my letters, I most clearly state that I was directed by the House Committee to complete them as quickly as possible, and some are at present with the other plans at the asylum, Dr. Eames has, I perceive, the same thing as reiterated his statement that all my letter was incorrect. The truth of assertions thus directly opposed to each other can only be ascertained by proof from document and otherwise; these when I necessary I can produce.

WM. ATKINS.

SIR,—In reply to your communication of the 10th inst., you will please inform the committee that it is premature to furnish an account for professional services, in connection with the proposed new works, of which I am architect, until progress is made in the buildings. There is a balance due to me on account of the extension of the infirmary, a statement of which I shall forward. I have the new plans ready, embodying the other changes, ordered by the committee.

WM. ATKINS.

J. A. Eames, Esq., M.D., R.M.S.

We have taken means to inform ourselves of the nature of the alterations alleged to have been made by Mr. Atkins in the plans, concerning which so much angry feeling has been aroused. While agreeing that the alterations should not have been made, they appear at the same time to be of a very trifling character, confined to five plans out of forty, one alone in the matter of construction proposed by the architect, and the rest, it appears, were proposed by Dr. Eames. It also appears that these alterations were sanctioned at first by the House Committee, and were put upon the drawings merely to save a month's time. Mr. Edwards, the engineer, was the surveyor, employed to take out the quantities, and three months had elapsed without anything being done in the matter. If we should state anything to the prejudice of Mr. Edwards in our remarks which can be explained away, we shall be glad to hear of it and do justice to him. We cannot, at the same time, help, thinking that Mr. Atkins has been harshly, treated, after his twenty-eight years' service; nor can we get over the feeling that there is some professional jealousy at work. We would like to know if it is true that the engineer reported against the architect's work, and got it transferred to himself; and if any plan for the entire sewerage of the building made by the architect was appropriated by the engineer; or if in any other cases work was taken out of the architect's hands by incorrect reports of the officials or other members of the board? These are questions which we would like to see answered in a satisfactory manner before we deal further with this case.

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