The architecture of the land and generation are now brought face to face with something new—under the sun—thence, that evolution and integration of social conditions, that special grouping of them, that result, in demand for the erection of tall office buildings.

It is not my purpose to discuss the social conditions; I accept them as the fact, and say at once that the design of the tall office building must be reconstructed and confronted as the outlet as a problem to be solved—a vital problem, pressing for a true solution.

Let us state the conditions in the plainest manner. Briefly, they are:—these offices are necessary for the transaction of business, the invention and perfection of the big-scaled elevators make vertical travel, that was once tedious and painful, now easy and comfortable; steel development of steel masts, and the introduction of the great height, converted growth of population in the great cities, consequent congestion of centers and tax in value of ground, stimulate in number of stories, these successfully piled one atop another, meet ground values—add to, by action and reaction, interaction and inter-reaction. Thus has come about that form of lofty constructions, called the 'modern office building.' It has come in anyway to a cured, for in a new grouping of social conditions has found a habitat, and a name.

How to point all evidence is self-evident; an exhibition of force, of evolution, of justice or the keen edge of the word: It is the joint product of the spectator, the engineer, the builder.

Problem: How shall we impart to this noble pile, this credit-worthy...

brutal agglomeration, this rock, staring elevation of eternal strife, the graveness of these higher forms of sensuality and culture that rest on the lower and fervor passions? How shall we proclaim from the dizzy height of this strange, weird, modern hodgepodge the pious edification of sentiment, of beauty, the coil of a higher life? 

This is the problem, and we must seek the solution of it in a process analogous to its own evolution—alteration, a continuation of it—namely, by proceeding step by step from general to special aspects, from coarse to finer considerations.

It is our belief that it is the very essence of every problem that it contains and suggests its own solution. This I believe to be natural law. Let us examine, then, carefully the elements, let us search out this contained suggestion, this essence of the problem.

The general conditions are broadly speaking, these:

Wasted—1st, a story below-ground, containing boilers, engines of various sorts—etc.—in short, the plant for power, heating, lighting, etc. 2nd, a ground floor, as called, devoted to stores, basia, or other establishments requiring large area, ample spacing, ample light, and great freedom of access. 3rd, a story readily accessible by stairways—this space usually in large subdivisions, with corresponding liberty in structural spacing and expanse of glass and breadth of external openings. 4th, above this an indefinite number of stories of offices piled tier upon tier, one tier just like another tier, one office just like all the other offices—an office being similar to a cell in a honeycomb, namely, a compartment, nothing more. 5th, and last, at the top of this pile is placed a space or story that, as related to the life and usefulness of the structure, is purely physiological in its nature—namely, the attic.

In this the circular system completes itself and makes its grand turn, ascending and descending. The space is filled with tasks, pipes, valves, sheaves, and mechanical elements that supplement and complement the force-originating plant hidden below-ground in the cellar. Finally, or at the beginning again, there must be on the ground floor a main aperture or entrance common to all the contexts or points of the building.

This utilization is, I presume, characteristic of every tall office building in the country. As to the necessary arrangements for light courts, these are not germane to the problem, and as will become more evident, I trust not need be considered here. These, and such others as the arrangement of elevators, for example, serve to exactly with the economics of the building, and I assume them to have been freely considered and disposed of by the satisfaction of purely utilitarian and pecuniary demands. Only a rare instance does the plan or floor arrangement of the tall office building take as an aesthetic value, and this usually when the lighting court is external or becomes an internal feature of great importance.

As I am here seeking not for an individual or special solution, but for a true normal type, the attention must be confined to those conditions that, in the main, are common to all tall office buildings, and every more incidental and accidental variation eliminated from the consideration, as harmful to the clearness of the main inquiry.

The practical horizon or verdant division or office unit is naturally based on a maze of comfortable area and height, and the size of this stan-
dual office room as naturally predestined the standard structural unit, and, approximately, the size of window openings in turn, purely arbitrary units of structure from an entirely natural saw the true basis of the artistic development of the exterior. Of course the structural spacings and openings in the first as inherent the story are required to be the largest of all, those in the second or quasipenetrable story are of a somewhat similar nature. The spacings and openings in the attic; are of no importance whatsoever (the windows have no great value), for light may be taken by the roof, and no recognition of a cellular division is necessary in the structural spacing.

Penrose &c follows inevitably, and in the simplest possible way, that if we follow our natural instincts without thought of books, rules, precedents, or any such educational impediments to a spontaneous and "natural" result, we will in the following manner design the interior of our office building:

Beginning with the first story, we give this a main entrance that attracts the eye to its location, and the remainder of the story we treat in a more or less liberal expense, consistent in a way broad exactly the practical necessity, but expressed with a sentiment of largeness and freedom.

The second story we treat in a similar way, but more with a liberal pretentiousness. Above this, throughout the indeterminate number of cubic offsets, we take our ease from the individual cell, which requires a window in its upper periphery, its sill and lintel, and so, without more ado, make them look all alike because they are all alike. This brings us to the attic, which, having no division into offices, walls, and no special requirement for lighting, gives us the power to show by means of its broad expanse of wall, and its dominating weight and abstractness, that which is the fact—matter, thus the series of offices here is come definitely to an end.

This may perhaps seem a field result and a heartless, ostentatious way of stating it, but we in we certainly have advanced a more characteristic stage beyond the imaginary quadrate building of the spectator-engineer-builder combination. For the health of the architecture is now definitely left, in the decisive plotting of once taken, and the suggestion of a thoroughly sound, logical, harmonious expression of the conditions is conformably apparent.

When I say, the hand of the architect, I do not mean necessarily the accomplished and trained architect. I mean only a man with a strong, natural feeling for buildings, and a disposition to shape them in what seems to his qualified nature a direct and simple way. He will probably tend an ingenious path from his problem to its solution, and therein he will have an enviable gift of logic. If he have some gift for form in detail, some feeling for form, purely and simply as form, some love for his art to his result in addition to its simple straightforward naturalness and completeness in general statement, will have something of the charm of weariness.

However, thus far the results are only partial and tentative at best; relatively true, they are but superficial. We are distinctly right in our instinct but we are too lack a fuller justification, a finer sanction, for it.

I am now that in the sight of our problem we have passed through the various stages of inquiry, as follows: 1st, the social basis of the downward
for tall office buildings. 2nd, its ideal material satisfaction. 3rd, the elevation of the question from consideration of linear planning, construction, and equipment to the plane of elements architecture as a direct approach of sound, sensible building; 4th, the question again elevated from an elements architecture to the beginning of true architectural expression, through the addition of a certain quality and quantity of sentiment.

But our building may not have all three in a considerable degree any day yet be far from that adequate solution of the problem we attempting to define. We must now heed the imperative voice of memory.

It demands of us, what is the chief characteristic of the tall office building? And at once we answer, it is height. This loftiness is to the architect his problem. It is the very aground zone in its appeal. It must be true to the dominant chord in his expression of it, the true existent of his imagination. It must be tall, every inch of it tall. The force and power of an object must be in it, the glory and pride of elevation must be in it. It must be every inch a proud and aspiring thing, rising in sheer exultation that from bottom to top it is a unit without a single dissolving line—that it is the new, the unexpected, the elated generation of most hallowed, most forbidding conditions.

The man who designs in the spirit and with the sense of responsibility to the generation he lives in must be an iconoclast, an editor, no bookworm, no dilettante. He must live of his life and for his life in the fullest, most consummate sense. He must realize at once and with the grasp of imagination that the problem of the tall office building is one of the most stupendous, one of the most magnificent opportunities that the Lord of Nature in His beneficence has ever offered to the proud spirit of man. That this has not been perceived—indeed, has been flatly denied—is an exhibition of human perversity that must give us pause.

One more consideration. Let us now lift this question into the region of calm, philosophical observation. Let us seek a comprehensive, a final solution: let the problem indeed dissolve.

Certain opties, and very thoughtful ones, have advanced the theory that the true prototype of the tall office building is the classical column, consisting of base, shaft and capital—the molded base of the column typical of the lower stories of our building, the plain or fluted shaft suggesting the uninterrogated signs of offices, and the capital the complete power and sanctity of the attic.

Other theorists, assuming a mythical symbol as a postulate, wrote the many entities in nature and art, and the beauty and consciousness of such truth in unity. They seek the beauty of prime savor, the mysticism of the number three, the beauty of all things that are in three parts—see to it, the day, subdividing into morning, noon, and night; the limbs, the three, and the hand, constituting the book; so they say, should the building be in three parts vertically, substantially as before, but for different motives.

Others, of purely practical and temperamental hold that such a design should be, in the nature of a logical evolution, it should have a beginning, a middle, and an ending, each dearly defined—therefore again a building so simple, in three parts vertically.
Others, seeking their examples and gratifications in the vegetable kingdom, urge that such a design shall be based on all things to be organic. They quote the utility flower with its bunch of leaves at its base, its long graceful stem, carrying the gorgeous single flower. They point to the pine-tree, its many roots, its life, it approximately true, its tall green high in the air. Thus, they say, should be the design of the tall office building again in three parts separately.

Other still, some sensitive to the power of a roof and to the grace of a trellis, say that such a design should be struck out on a flow, as though by a bioluminescent or by fiery force, or should be thought born, as was Minerva, full grown. They accept the notion of a triple division as permissible and welcome, but not essential. With them it is a subdivision of their type, the roof does not come from the alliances of the three, they accept it without mistrust, provided the subdivision does not discard the sense of timeliness and range.

All of these critics and theoreticians agree, however, partially, unequally, and similarly, in this, that the tall office building should not must not be made a field for the display of architectural knowledge in the encyclopedia sense, that no much learning in this juncture is as dangerous as obvious, that for the learning, that conceals it, is abundant to their sense, that the six-story building must not consist of sixteen separate, distinct and unrelated buildings piled one upon another until the top of the pile is reached.

To this latter fall, I would not refer were it not the fact that many out of every ten tall office buildings are designed in precisely this way, not by the ignorant, but by the educated. They seemed indeed, as though the trained architect, when facing this problem, were bent at every story, or at every third or fourth story, by the hysteric dastard lest he be in "bad form," or he be not breaching his building with sufficient of quotation from this, that, or the other "correct" building in some other land and some other time, lest he be not "enough" in the display of his wares, lest he be, in short, a lack of consciousness! To impose upon the broad, this crowded and fagades hand, to allow the sisters to palm, the beast to cool, to reflect equals, to mean similarly, coast beyond his, to love, or to wear, in a waking nightmare filled with the diurnal museum of architecture. The spectacle is not inviting.

As to the forest and arum views held by discussing and thoughtful critics, I shall, with however quick of a gesture, dissent from them for the pur- pose of this demonstration, for I regard them as entirely, only, non-essential, and as nothing at all upon the vital spot, upon the quick of the critic maternal, upon the true, the insensible formula of the architectural art.

This view let me now say, for it brings to the solution of the problem a final, comprehensive formula.

All things in nature have a shape, but in art, a form, a outward resemblance, but tell us what they see, that distinguishes them from ourselves and from each other.

Undoubtedly in native these shapes express the inner life, the native quality of the animal, tree, bird, fish, that they present to us, that they are char-chargeable, as recognizable, that we say, simply, it is "natural" it should
be so. Yet the moment we peer beneath this surface of things, the moment we look through the tranquil collision of ourselves and the clouds above us down into the clear, fluent, unobstructed depth of nature, how startling is the illusion of it, how annoying the flow of life, how absorbing the mystery. Uncannily enough, the essence of things is taking shape in the matter of things, and this unexplainable process we call birth and growth. While the spirit and the matter fade away together, and it is this that we call decay, death. These two happenings were jointed and interdependent, blended into one like a bubble and a wind which, and they seem born along upon a slowly moving air. This air is wonderful and all understanding.

Yet to the smallest eye of one standing upon the shore of things, looking cheekily and most lovingly upon that side on which the sun shines and that we call presently to be life, the heart is ever flattered by the beauty, the exquisite spontaneity, with which life seems to take in its forms in an accord perfectly responsive to its needs. It serves as such as though the life and the form were absolutely one and inseparable so adequately is the sense of fulfillment.

Whether it be the sweeping ægle in his flight or the open apple-blos-

m, the toiling work-horse, the milk-wagon, the branching oak, the winding stream at its base, the drifting clouds, over all the coming sun, seem ever follow function, and this is the law. Wherefunction does not change form does not change. The pasture rocks, the ever-blooming hills, remain for ages, the lightning lives, come into shape, and dies it is a twinning.

It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things, physical and metaphysical of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression that form ever follows function. This is the law.

Shall we then, daily violate this law in our art? Are we so decadent, so impotent, so utterly weak of eyeight, that we cannot perceive this truth so simple, so very simple? Is it indeed a truth so transparent that we see through it but do not see it? Is it really thus, a very marvelous thing, or is it rather so commonplace, so everyday, so true a thing to us, that we cannot perceive that the shape, form, outward expression, design or whatever we may choose, of the tail office building should in the very nature of things follow the functions of the building, and that where the function does not change, the form is not to change?

Does this not really, clearly, and conclusively show that the lower one or two stories will take on a special character suited to the special needs, that the tiers of typical offices having the same unchanging function, shall cut

in the same unchanging form, and that as the axis, specific and conclusion is in it in its very nature, its function shall equally be so in form, in significance, in continuity, in consummation of outward expression? From this result, naturally, spontaneous, uninteresting, a three-part office, not from any first version, that, or fancied logic.

And then the design of the tail office building takes its place with all the other architectural types made when architecture, as has happened once or many years, was a living art. Witness the Greek temple, the Gothic cath-
dral, the medieval fortin...
43  L. Sullivan, Kindergarten Chats*  
1907-02, 1919

As Hugh Morris points out in his biography, Sullivan was forced, in spite of himself, to become not an architect but a teacher in his later years. His 1907 extended literary venture was "Kindergarten Chats," such no more than two pages published in the weekly issues of Thefireside, architect and editor of Cleveland, running an entire year, February, 1901, through February, 1902. In these, Sullivan offered a dialogue between an experienced water (Raimond) and an imaginary pupil, "young, well-educated, self-confident and unassuming bookful." He properly avoided technical language, keeping the character simple and elementary; hence the title he selected. Some of the chats are better anyhow amusing and wholesome criticisms, where 50 per cent of what is form and function and still others are provocative and provocative. Some of them are eagerly sought by younger readers such as Claude Bragdon and

* The greatest Architect and Builder 2 and 5, February 10, 1901 through February 3, 1902, reprinted in Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings, ed. J. Abbey (New York: 1941)