The CHICAGO TRIBUNE COMPETITION

By Louis H. Sullivan

SOME seventy years ago, a philosopher, in the course of his studies of the Ego, separated men into two classes, distinct, yet reciprocally related, to wit: Masters of Ideas, and those governed by ideas. It was upon ideas as powers for good or ill that he laid the heavy hand; upon ideas as a living force obedient to the mastery of vision, springing forth from imagination's depths, from the inexhaustible reservoir of instinct.

Ego, considered solely as free spirit, stands out visibly as Master of Ideas. Ego, examined as a spirit benumbed through lack of action, hence inert and unfree, becomes dim of vision and renounces its will. It thus becomes the slave of imposed ideas whose validity it assumes it has not the strength to test, even were the idea of testing to arise. Hence, in timidity, it evokes the negative idea of Authority as a welcome substitute for its declining volition.

Masters of ideas are masters of courage; the free will of adventure is in them. They stride where others creep. The pride of action is in them. They explore, they test, they seek realities to meet them face to face—knowing well that realities and illusions exist commingled within and without, but also knowing well that Ego is its own. Hence they walk erect and fearless in the open, with that certitude which vision brings—while slaves are slaves by choice. They seek shelter in the *shadows* of ideas.

Ever such were the great free spirits of the past, and such are those of our own day.

Masters of ideas of the past and now, frequently have sought and seek dominion, and have reached it because the idea of dominion coincides precisely with the idea of submission. Other masters of ideas then and now, mostly those of immense compassion, have been and still are crucified by those so long in the dark that the idea of spiritual freedom is abhorrent.

A consciousness is now growing and widely spreading in our modern world of thought, among masters of truly great ideas, that unless we become free spirits casting off the cruel, and awakening to the constructive power of beneficence, we shall vanish in decay and self destruction.

The simple world idea, now in process of becoming, in the hearts of men, is the idea of freedom from the domination of feudal ideas. Is there a power that can stop this becoming? There is not.

The eyelids of the world are slowly, surely lifting. The vision of the world of men is slowly, surely clearing. A world-idea is sprouting from its seed in the rich soil of world-sorrow. Beneath the surface of things as they are, everywhere it is germinating, unconsciously with the many, consciously with the few.

The old idea that man must ever remain the victim of Fate, will fade as fear fades. The new idea that man may shape his destiny will appear in its place, in a dissolving scene of the world-drama, as Democracy arises through the humus of the age-long feudal idea. For Democracy would remain, as now it is, a senseless word, a vacant shell, a futile sentimentalism, a mere fetish, did it not carry in its heart the loftiest of optimistic aspirations, wholly warranted, spite of all appearance to the contrary, and grasp the mastery of ideas wholly beneficent in power to create a world of joy devoid of fear.

The world is growing more compact every day, and every day the day is shortening, while the fleeting hour becomes thereby so much the fuller. The cold rigidity of frontiers is melting away, unnoted by the blind—every day the world becomes increasingly mobile, every day there is a silent interchange, every day communication is more fleet, and humanity, in response, more fluent.

Slowly day by day, with enormous and gathering momentum, the hearts of the world draw together. The process is silent and gentle as the dewfall. There are those who see this; there are those who do not. There are those who see in the lightnings and the raging storms of the feudal idea, reaching now the climacteric of its supreme mania for dominion, the symbol of self-destruction of a race gone wholly mad. But that is not so. The masters of the feudal idea alone have gone mad with hate; the multitudes are sound. They have lost a pathetic faith in the feudal concept of self-preservation which has wooed and betrayed them. They are moving somnambulistically now, upwards towards a faith that is new and real, a constructive idea, common to all, because springing from the hearts of all, of which all shall be masters, and about which shall form for the first time beneath the sun, a sane hope and faith in Life, a faith in Man—an idea which shall banish fear and exalt courage to its seat of power.

This idea will become the luminous, the central idea of all mankind because it is the offspring of that which is deepest down in all. It is and will continue as long as life lasts in the race, the shining symbol of man's resurrection from the dead past, of man's faith in himself and his power to create anew.

There are those who will decry this hope as they view in despair a world writhing in the depths of pessimism, of mendacity and intrigue. Yet are they those who are without faith in mankind, without faith in themselves. For this is the modern affirmation: Man is not born in sin, but in glory.

All of this has sharply to do with the Tribune Competition, for in that showing was brought into clearest light the deadline that lies between a Master of Ideas and one governed by ideas. There they came, squarely face to face: the second prize and the first. All the others may be grouped aside, for what is involved here is not a series of distinctions in composition or in detail, but the leading forth into the light of day of the profoundest aspiration that animates the hearts of men. This aspiration has remained inarticulate too long; its utterance at large has been choked by varied emotions of fear; the splendor of its singleness of purpose has been obscured by the host of shadows generated in bewilderment of thought, in a world that has lost its bearings and submits in distress to the government of dying ideas.

In its preliminary advertising, The Tribune broadcasted the inspiring idea of a new and great adventure, in which pride, magnanimity and its honor were to be inseparably unified and voiced in "the most beautiful office building in the world," to be created for it by any man sufficiently imaginative and solid in competence in whatever spot on the surface of the earth such a man might dwell.

Specifically, on the third page of its formal and official program, these statements are made:

"To erect the most beautiful and distinctive office building in the world is the desire of The Tribune, and in order to obtain the design for such an edifice, this competition has been instituted."

These words are high-minded; they stir imagination.

At the beginning of the paragraph immediately succeeding are found these words:

"The competition will be of international scope, qualified architects of established reputation in all parts of the world being eligible."

These words are magnanimous; they stir not only the world of architectural activity, but as well that of enlightened laity. Never perhaps, in our day, has such interest in architecture been aroused.

Not yet content in its eagerness, and purposing to make assurance of good faith and loyalty to an ideal triply sure, there is to be found on page 13, the final page of the program, the following statement:

"It cannot be reiterated too emphatically that the primary objective of The Chicago Tribune in instituting this Competition is to secure the design for a structure distinctive and imposing—the most beautiful office building in the world."

The intensive use of the word PRIMARY gives to the full clause the imposing promise of a token, of a covenant with the Earth. With that one word, PRIMARY, The Tribune set its bow in the cloud.

The craving for beauty, thus set forth by The Tribune, is imbued with romance; with that high Romance which is the essence, the vital impulse, that inheres in all the great works of man in all places and all times, that vibrates in his loftiest thoughts, his heroic deeds, his otherwise inexplicable sacrifices, and which forms the halo of his great compassions, and of the tragedy within the depths of his sorrows. So deeply seated, so persistent, so perennial in the heart of humanity is this ineffable presence, that, suppressed in us, we decay and die. For man is not born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward; he is born to hope and to achieve.

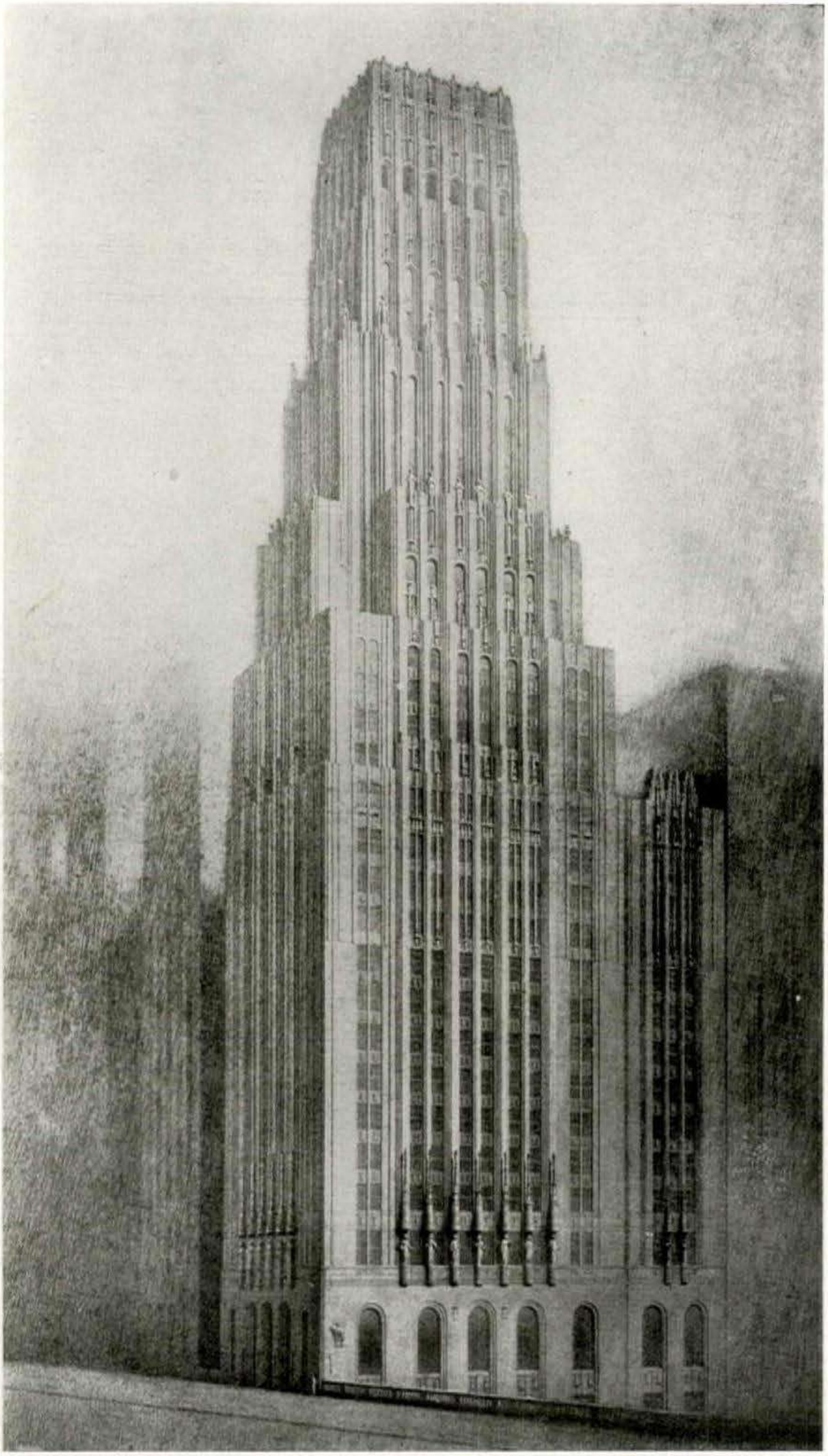
If a critique of architecture, or any other art, or any activity whatsoever, is to be valid, it must be based upon a reasoned process. It must enter with intelligence into the object or subject at hand, there to seek what signifies, and yet maintain such detachment as to render judgment unconstrained and free. A true critique is not satisfied with the surface of things, it must penetrate that surface to search the animus, the thought; it must go deeply to the roots, it must go to origins, it must seek the elemental, the primitive; it must go to the depths and gauge the status of the work thereby. A true critique must likewise derive of the humanities. It is not its function to deal with cold truths but with living truths.

Viewed in this light, the second and the first prize stand before us side by side. One glance of the trained eye, and instant judgment comes; that judgment which flashes from inner experience, in recognition of a masterpiece. The verdict of the Jury of Award is at once reversed, and the second prize is placed first, where it belongs by virtue of its beautifully controlled and virile power. The first prize is demoted to the level of those works evolved of dying ideas, even as it sends forth a frantic cry to escape from the common bondage of those governed by ideas. The apposition is intensely dramatic to the sensitive mind. Yet it is in this very apposition that we find a key wherewith to unlock and swing open wide a door, and reveal to all the vast and unused power resident in the great architectural art when inspired into motion by a Master of Ideas. The Finnish master-edifice is not a lonely cry in the wilderness, it is a voice, resonant and rich, ringing amidst the wealth and joy of life. In utterance sublime and melodious, it prophesies a time to come, and not so far away, when the wretched and the yearning, the sordid, and the fierce, shall escape the bondage and the mania of fixed ideas.

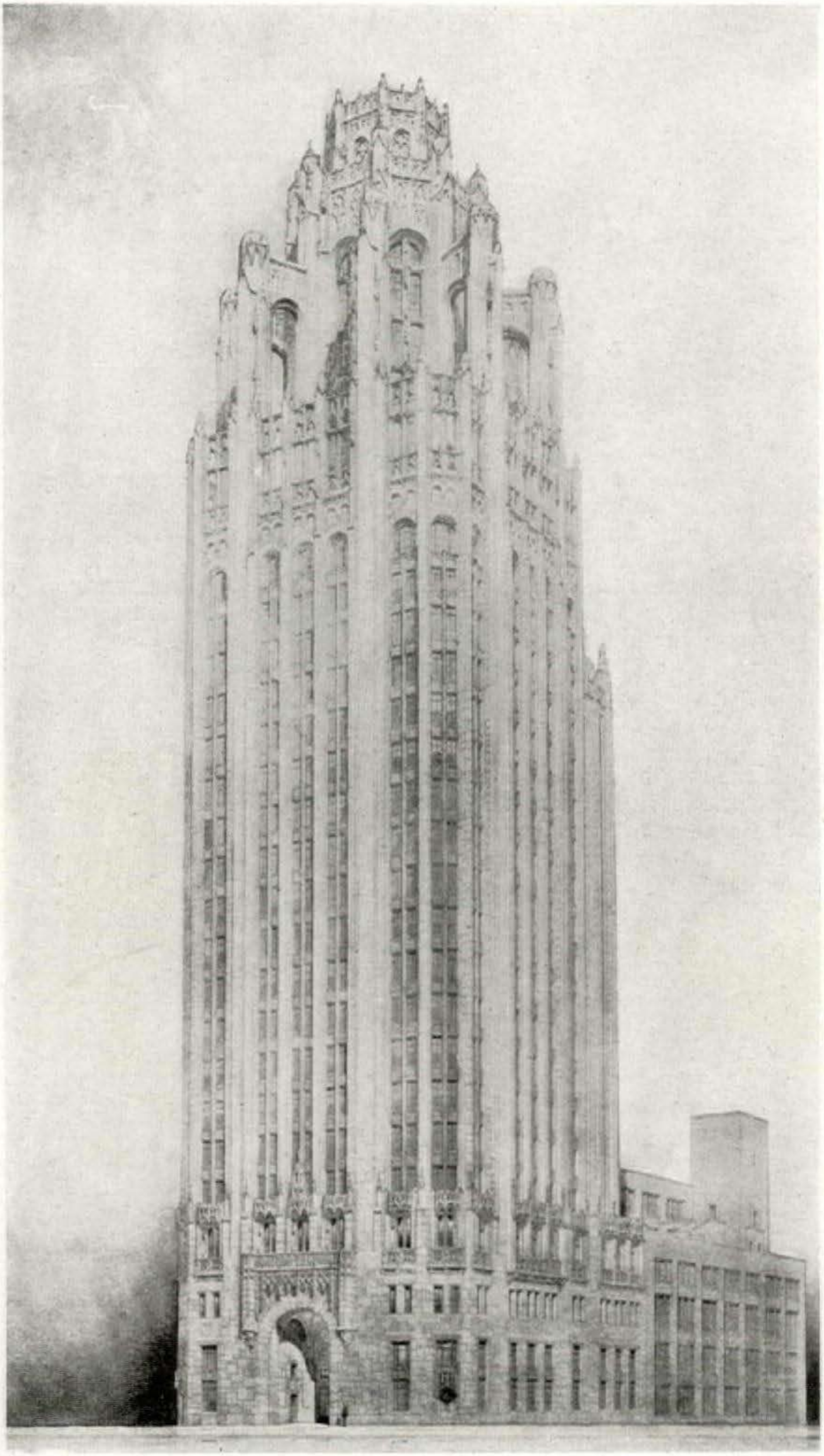
It is wretched psychology to assume that man is by nature selfish. The clear eye of sympathy sees beyond a doubt that this is not so; that on the contrary, man by nature is a giver; and it is precisely this one discerns in this beauteous edifice; the native quality of manhood giving freely of inherent wealth of power, with hands that overflow, as to say: There is more and more and more in me to give, as also is there in yourselves—if but ye knew—ye of little faith.

Qualifying as it does in every technical regard, and conforming to the mandatory items of the official program of instructions, it goes freely in advance, and, with the steel frame as a thesis, displays a high science of design such as the world up to this day had neither known nor surmised. In its single solidarity of concentrated intention, there is revealed a logic of a new order, the logic of living things; and this inexorable logic of life is most graciously accepted and set forth in fluency of form. Rising from the earth in suspiration as of the earth and as of the universal genius of man, it ascends and ascends in beauty lofty and serene to the full height limit of the Chicago building ordinance, until its lovely crest seems at one with the sky.

This is not all; there remain, for some, two surprises; first, that a Finlander who, in his prior experience, had not occasion to design a soaring office building, should, as one to the manner born, have grasped the intricate problem of the lofty steel-framed structure, the significance of its origins, and held the solution unwaveringly in mind, in such wise as no American



SECOND PRIZE—THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE COMPETITION.
Eliel Saarinen, Helsingfors, Finland.



FIRST PRIZE—THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE COMPETITION

John Mead Howells and Raymond Hood, New York.

architect has as yet shown the required depth of thought and steadfastness of purpose to achieve.

Philosophy has been defined by a modern philosopher as the science of substantial grounds. It is the notable absence of substantial grounds, in the ambitious works of our American architects, that so largely invalidates such works, and groups them as ephemera. But the design of the Finlander, Master of Ideas, is *based* upon substantial grounds, and therefore it lives within the domain of the enduring.

Second surprise: That a "foreigner" should possess the insight required to penetrate to the depths of the sound, strong, kindly and aspiring idealism which lies at the core of the American people: one day to make them truly great sons of Earth; and that he should possess the poet's power to interpret and to proclaim in deep sympathy and understanding, incarnate in an edifice rising from Earth in response to this faith, an inspiring symbol to endure.

Why did the men behind The Tribune throw this priceless pearl away?

Would that one might say words of similar nature, if less fervent, for the unfortunate first prize; but it is the business of this review to make a searching psychological analysis and summary of the two designs, as *types*, in order that the heavy of eye may see revealed the architectural art as a vast beneficent power, lying now in continental sleep, ready, ever ready, to be awakened by Masters of Ideas, who shall affirm its reality in eloquence of form.

Then shall we become articulate as a people; for to reveal one art is to reveal all arts, all aspirations, all hopes; and the substantial ground of it all shall arise from out our timid faith in man—a faith patient and long suffering under the superstitious tyranny of insane ideas. But once let the beckoning finger of the Free Spirit be seen in the open, and a voice heard that saith: Arise; come unto me, for I am Life—then will that timorous faith come forth inquiringly, and in the glow of the Free Spirit grow strong. The Ego of our Land shall thus find its own; for Man shall find Man. Why, therefore, deal in trivialities? Why inquire, with spectacles on nose, why this or that dewdad should be thus or so?

Confronted by the limpid eye of analysis, the first prize trembles and falls, self-confessed, crumbling to the ground. Visibly it is not architecture in the sense herein expounded. Its formula is literary: words, words, words. It is an imaginary structure—not imaginative. Starting with false premise, it was doomed to false conclusion, and it is clear enough, moreover, that the conclusion was the real premise, the mental process in reverse of appearance. The predetermination of a huge mass of imaginary masonry at the top very naturally required the appearance of huge imaginary masonry piers reaching up from the ground to give imaginary support. Such weird process of reasoning is curious. It savors of the nursery where children bet imaginary millions. Is it possible that its author in his heart of hearts, or his head of heads, really believed that bathos and power are synonyms? It looks that way. It also looks like the output of a mind untrained in the mastery of ideas, in the long discipline of realities and the test of substantial grounds. It looks also like the wandering of a mind unaccustomed to distinguish between architecture and scene painting. This design, this imaginary building, this simulacrum, is so helpless, so defenseless when brought face to face with mastery of ideas and validity of grounds, that it is cruel to go on, for analysis is now becoming vivisection, unless we recognize the palpable effect of self-hypnotism. This is not to say that the individual who made the first-prize design did not *believe* he had a great idea. Certainly he believed it, otherwise he would not have taken himself so seriously. Such seriousness prevented him from seeing the humor of it, from seeing something funny and confiding. If the monster on top with its great long legs reaching far below to the ground could be gently pried loose, the real building would reveal itself as a rather amiable and delicate affair with a certain grace of fancy. And even so, it could be but as a foundling at the door-

step of the Finn—for it seems they breed *strong* men in Finland.

So much, for the present, concerning the second and the first prize.

Our attention now shall concentrate upon The Tribune. By "The Tribune" is here meant, not alone printed white paper, but incisively the men behind its screen, who stand for ownership and control. These men made a solemn promise to the world. Why did they renege? Individually and jointly they made a triple promise—as set forth above—as members of the Jury of Award. A design setting forth the most beautiful conception of a lofty office building that has been evolved by the fertile mind of man, was presented squarely to them at the last moment. Were they frightened? Why did they welch? Did it come upon them as a ghost, an apparition—a revelation most unwelcome at a time when everything seemed nicely settled? Was this vision as trebly disconcerting as the remembered triple-promise, arising now also as a confronting ghost—the two ghosts standing side by side—likewise the two designs, in material form, standing side by side?

For no choice can exist without motive. Men are both revealed and betrayed by their acts. For men's acts show forth their inmost thoughts—no matter what their speech may be. Man can create solely in the image of his thought; for thoughts are living things—words may dissemble. In men's acts alone is the reality of their thought to be sought and found—there is no hiding place secure against the tracking searcher. In the same sense the two competing drawings are acts. Each clearly reveals the thought of its responsible author. Each sets forth in the materials of a drawing, presented as a symbol of an edifice to be, the power or the frailty of the thought within.

No manipulation of words or felicity of phrasing can screen from view the act of the Jury of Award, or the dominating will of one or more of its personnel. The final choice is most obviously an act of dominion—of brutal will. For, to cast aside, with the sop of a money prize, the surpassing work of a "foreigner" of high distinction and thorough discipline in executed works, was an act of savagery in private, regardless of how neatly, how sweetly, thereafter, the man may have been shown the door, as a parting and an honored guest, as one whose presence in the house had indeed triply honored his host.

Thus vanished from sight The Tribune's bow in the cloud.

Its act has deprived the world of a shining mark, denied it a monument to beauty, to faith, to courage and to hope. Deprived an expectant world of that Romance for which it hungers, and had hoped to receive. "It cannot be reiterated too emphatically that the primary objective of The Chicago Tribune in instituting this Competition is to secure the design for a structure distinctive and imposing—the most beautiful office building in the world."