n stimulation and challenge to rise above the immediate circumstances caused by characteristics of neighboring buildings. Helpfully, the demands of the client were clear and mandatory: the laboratory workshop spaces had to be completely flexible in their partitioning so as to permit subsequent change dictated by new experimental demands. Yet these spaces had to be lit by northern lights since delicate machinery ruled out direct sunlight, which would have interfered with their accuracy.

A part of the structure, if not of the building proper, had to be at least one hundred feet high to accommodate a water-tank whose contents would be required for hydraulic demonstrations in the ground-level shops and lab areas. Finally, the architects were requested not to use exposed concrete finishes on the exterior. Happily this final request was in accord with their belief that concrete surfaces were inappropriate to the British climate. Out of this clash of site, functional demands and architectural temperament Leicestershire Engineering emerged, I dare say, as a vital and nearly flawless solution.

The building, a low, ground-covering structure juxtaposed with a cluster of highly balanced towers (thus directly meeting the two requirements of north light and height) is shaped in a legible way. It can be recognized for what it is from almost every angle. Its lines and masses together have a character that is both aesthetic and technicericet; yet, no character is more than a by-product of the building's architectonic devotion to its purpose, never a consideration in its own right. The form is rich in color and surface, but its shapes are never gratuitous, and, what's more, none of them looks fanciful, in spite of their novelty. It is


a functional building that looks functional, a factory-like laboratory and classroom building which gives every appearance of being just that: a factory for study (but not, emphatically, an education factory).

Examination tells us how the building works, but the eye has already grasped which this building documents the very thing which, we have been told, contemporary architecture is all about? Of course, in many respects we have allowed ourselves to be misled, especially about the architecture of the twenties, almost invariably more robust than present day, yet not less worthy of our admiration for all that.

What strikes me most after studying Leicestershire Engineering is how purely architectural theory has succeeded in design in the past two centuries. Today, in an age when men have acquired to taste and elegance, to delicacy and purity, all of a sudden we are confronted with an unaccountable, functional solution which takes us back, embarrassingly, to the adolescence of contemporary design. It is a little like seeing a film of thirty years ago projected on a new wide screen. The forgotten technique strikes us as even more poignant than the trite plot. At Leicestershire this is both the delight and the nagging worry. Functionalism is empty: we can't talk of it to students without inventing new ritual formulas, and even then we blush, if not privately. Yet the techniques, as opposed to the touchingly outdated utopian concepts of function, remain perfectly valid in a cynical age. It gives an extraordinary dignity to a building whose role is both practical and aesthetic if not pedagogical, as seems inevitably the case with office buildings.

Glimming, the architect asked us what the building looked like. This is not only in the game of criticism today. I had just come down from London via St. Pancras. Glass and red brick had ineluctably marked the start and finish of an hour-and-a-half trip made by stuffy Pullman. A century ago Scott and Burloe, the architect and engineer, hadn't made much effort to get together, and consequently London's St. Pancras station turned out as it did almost by accident. Leicestershire Engineering was no accident, the architect having visibly worked in accord with the engineers of the Samuely firm. Nevertheless, it was an enigma. This time, of course, the articulation of parts, and the bold use of the circulation and service spaces to make all this ineluctably clear, was part of the architect's deliberately functional aesthetic, whereas it was the individual professional vanities of the Victorian age that imposed the violent articulations of St. Pancras. Still, the comparison struck, for in the end architecture has to be judged by the way it looks. Leicestershire looks picturesque, and is just that, even if it was not composed with that aspect in mind, as would have been the case in the bad old days.

Leicestershire Engineering also seems improved and accidental as well as picturesque in the traditional sense, improved as a college often is. This important illusion is