HE Island of Manhattan, containing the old City of New York, has for a century had a problem as to housing the people who selected this small area for their homes. Years ago individual, private wooden buildings were sufficient; then they were replaced with brick. New neighborhoods were opened and settled at once with newer types of houses while the processes of remodeling the old buildings further down town went on. Old family estates were divided up and the homestead, being entirely surrounded by quite an inappropriate setting, was frequently turned into habitations for several families. As the pressure for room was felt, buildings were erected on the rear of lots and all sorts of conditions arose.

At this time there came to be introduced the flat or tenement from abroad—a building of multiple type containing several families, all doing independent house-keeping under one roof. At first these buildings were reasonably generous as to the amount of space and light and air alloted to the tenant, but soon competition drove the speculative builder to building rows and rows of houses in which it was impossible to house human beings healthfully.

The community soon became aroused to the danger it was incurring by allowing this crowding to continue and laws were enacted from time to time restricting the amount of lot that could be covered by a building, also making other beneficent provisions as to light and air.

For a long time this crowding was only among the laboring classes, and the “tenement” was the source of worry to the Health Authorities. Gradually the middle-grade of society began to adopt the French “flat.” These became more and more elaborate, and with the perfection of the elevator the “apartment” became the vogue. Now we have the wealthy classes taking to a multiple type of house in preference to the private house of the past. The same tendency to build too densely was observed in these buildings and laws were passed restricting them. In fact, the tenement, flat and apartment were all classed tenements and had to obey the same rules.

During the development of years thousands of houses were erected from the most modest tenement to the most sumptuous apartment. All sorts of plans were built. Some “took” well; these were sure to be reproduced rapidly. As new devices were introduced, the speculative builder was keen to observe. As laws were
changed, the resultant new types became more and more various.

Nearly all these houses had interior stairs and halls, some of them black dark: all of them ill-smelling and often steam-heated. When carpeted they were dusty. It was quite natural to have interior stairs, the private houses from which many of these houses developed having had interior stairs. The tenants liked interior stairs: they kept their apartments warmer. The steam-heat often provided here, if nowhere else, in the house, took the chill off in winter.

But soon it was observed that the death-rate in these multiple dwellings having this disease-breeding, inter-communicating dark hall and stairs was a serious menace to the health of the city. As the germ theory became established, people began to think about these stairs. Many model tenements then came into existence making the stairs perfectly light, and also well enough ventilated too, if the tenant only saw fit to open the windows thereon. The tenant seldom saw fit: if one did, another would surely object.

The author, having had some years of rather trying experience with operating several types of tenements, determined that the only safe means of housing many families, under one roof, was the very simple method of having open stairs. That is, the various tenants should ascend from the street to roof in the fresh air on a stairway sufficiently weather-protected to be unobjectionable. The street should be brought right to each one’s door. A plan, embodying this idea, was submitted to the Tenement House Committee of The Charity Organization Society at a competition in nineteen hundred and it received a prize, but was not built until ten years later.

Convention and custom are very serious hindrances to development. People were afraid of open stairs. New York’s climate was unfit for the types of houses we see frequently in Europe. So people thought, until Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Sr., through her interest in tuberculosis, sought this plan for four large buildings housing three hundred and eighty-four families in Seventy-seventh and Seventy-eighth Streets and Avenue A. Here now can be seen sixteen open stairs, weather protected, which remove from this tenement the most serious danger to the occupant.

As soon as these buildings were sufficiently advanced to show the scheme, the value of the plan, as a speculative instrument, was observed by others. The usual hall space was used for rooms: all rooms were light. The use of the open stairs for ventilating toilets made it possible to preserve all the outer wall space or periphery
APARTMENTS WITH OPEN STAIRWAYS

for rooms: none of it being wasted for toilets or baths. Twelve lots opposite the Vanderbilt group are now being used for open-stair tenements.

The financial statement of this group and the evident economy in room space soon appealed to a land improvement company of New Jersey. Mr. Richard Stevens, in commenting upon the plan pointed out that it was a duty of such a corporation to erect a building that did not outclass its neighbors. He felt that the greatest lesson must be one that would appeal to the business man or speculative builder. Mr. Stevens hit the keynote: a reform to be lasting must be profitable. The laws of demand and supply cannot be upset.

PROBABLY many forms of open stairs have been tried in New York. The author was informed by one of the oldest architects in town that years and years ago the latter had built such buildings; since torn down. We have right on Manhattan Island the "Monroe," illustrated herein, an interesting example of open stairs tenement, built, perhaps, in eighteen hundred and seventy-eight. This type did harm to the development, so unprofitable was it as to the use of space that no one would embrace it. The tenants liked it. This the author well knows for the plan is identical to that used about the same time by Mr. Alfred T. White in Brooklyn. In the February, nineteen hundred and ten, number of THE CRAFTSMAN, the author pays tribute to these buildings. From eighteen hundred and seventy-eight to nineteen hundred and nine no building of prominence seems to have had open stairs.

Open stairs, in any form, are a great improvement over the former types. Their application is very broad: they are readily applied to flats, apartments, or any form of multiple building. The multiple building has come to stay. People, who can afford larger quarters or private houses, prefer the ease of house-keeping, which comes from being grouped with others. The tenement dweller once saturated with the conditions of congestion is not readily willing to go into the lonely suburb.

Nor are we in New York and in big centers solving our own
THE STEVENS TENEMENTS IN HOBOKEN, BUILT WITH OPEN STAIRWAYS AND ROOFS ARRANGED FOR OUTDOOR LIVING.

THE JOHN JAY DWELLINGS IN NEW YORK: OPEN STAIRWAYS; ROOFS PLANNED FOR USE OF THE TENANTS.
"THE MONROE"; SHOWING STAIRWAY OF APARTMENT HOUSE IN 1878: STAIRS IN AN EXPOSED PART OF THE BUILDING, ALSO WASTEFUL OF STREET FRONT.
THE DETAIL OF AN OPEN STAIRWAY SHOWING METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION, AT ONCE SANITARY, SAFE AND CONVENIENT.
THE EXTERIOR OF THE VANDERBILT OPEN STAIRWAY DWELLINGS, SHOWING BALCONIES AND STREET ENTRANCES.

VANDERBILT TENEMENTS, SHOWING DETAIL OF GLASS CANOPIES OVER OPEN STAIRS.
problem alone. The whole west watches New York and follows somewhat blindly. Right on the plains of the west or south, one can see rearing into the air without any reason the four or five-story apartment to which the New Yorker is escorted with pride. Our example in this line, although bad, should be our best and it is a pity that any multiple building should be allowed in the future that does not safeguard its occupants by some sort of non-communicating stairs.

Factories, schools, even hospitals, and, in fact, all forms of buildings where many people are grouped independently of each other, would be much benefited by exterior, fire-proof stairways. The occupants would be less liable to accident in case of panic.