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FROM THE UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, NEW YORK



MESSRS. ALLEN & COLLENS, ARCHITECTS

THE GROTESQUE IN GOTHIC ORNAMENT

BY CHARLES COLLENS, A.A.I.A.

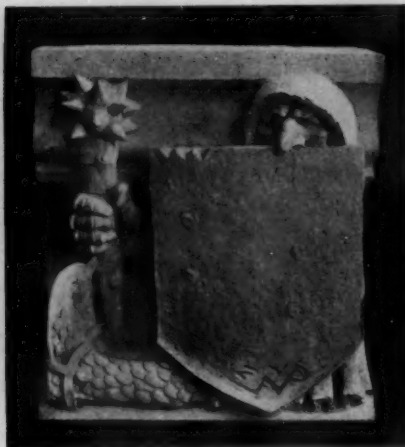
THE uninitiated sightseer who wanders among the fine old churches of England and the Continent, probably looks upon a great part of the sculptured ornament as grotesque. The high standard of modern sculpture would certainly warrant such a conclusion, but a great deal of this ill-proportioned work was done with every intent to truthfully reproduce nature. During the Romanesque and Gothic periods, before the rediscovered work of the Greeks and Romans revolutionized ideas, sculpture had to be evolved from its earliest forms. Statues of kings, saints and angels, which were regarded then as excellent modeling, sometimes appear to-day as though they had been executed with a motive far from serious. Such work designated as "conventionalized sculpture" has become an especial feature of Gothic ornament. Modern sculpture is out of place in our adaptation of the Gothic forms.

There are certain locations in Gothic work which are almost always adorned with serious sculpture, while other parts of the ornamentation might be whimsical without creating offense. The canopies, the long arcades of the façades, and the deep recesses of the entrance doorways always contain historical or religious subjects executed in the best modeling of the period. but the gargoyles, the billets, the column capitals, griffes, label springs, misericordes, and the lesser ornament are

usually devoted to subjects which exhibit either a foliated design or a humorous conceit on the part of the carver. These carvings are largely on constructive members, and were, therefore, executed by workmen engaged in the yards, and not by the sculptor who produced the free-standing ornament.

The grotesque has been aptly styled the "Slang of Architecture," and its growth is coincident with the growth of humor. The Egyptians and Greeks seem to have had very little sense of the ridiculous and Roman wit was largely satirical or vulgar. Although we associate the grotesque with Gothic work, its derivation is classical, arising from the medieval discovery of uncouth forms in the grottos or baths of the more degenerate Romans, which, among those high livers, undoubtedly passed for humor. During the Middle Ages the humorous as portrayed in the literature of the age was largely of a licentious nature. It is to be wondered at that comparatively little work of this nature has been handed down in the grotesques. Such lapses from propriety occur almost entirely in the misericordes of the churches, which casts some doubt on the reverential atmosphere of the monkish devotions.

That the carvers were permitted to exercise their whimsical instincts on the religious work of the period was due to several causes. The architects of the



FROM THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT, N. Y.

MESSRS. CRAM, GOODHUE AND FERGUSON, ARCHITECTS

medieval churches personally designed and carried out their work as a mass, determining the general size and location of the ornamented surfaces. The devising and execution of the ornament itself was left to the fancy of the workman.

It is a common occurrence among the students at the Ecole des Beaux Arts to practise innumerable jokes on the problems rendered for exhibition. A very beautiful plan may be shown lettered in the most absurd way. "Steps to Hell," "Elevator to Heaven," "Office of the Gold Brick Man," and other "blagues" figure in the scheme. The judges pass these things by, or if they notice them at all ascribe them to a harmless exuberance of spirits which affects in no wise the value of the design. The Gothic architects must have regarded the grotesque in much the same light, and permitted the carver to ornament his particular piece of work in any way that fancy may have dictated.

Many of these grotesques depict the most ordinary affairs of every day life. If a man had had cause to beat his wife that morning he may have taken a secret delight in perpetrating that fact, as at York, or if his wife had beaten him, that circumstance may have furnished the whim, which produced the curious grotesques of Sherburne and Beverly Minster. There are many instances where the carvers have cut their initials as

ornament, or shown themselves at their trade. Another homely subject often treated is the Ale-wife, who is either doling out imaginary beer to a thirsty carver, or has so provoked his ill-will as to be depicted as borne into the jaws of hell by a grinning demon.

The sculpture in the medieval churches was the picture gallery and library of most of the smaller towns. All that they ever saw of imagery was there, and it is conceivable that such frozen literature may have had its serious as well as its comic side.

The carvers of the Middle Ages all belonged to a guild of Masons whose history runs far back among the earliest constructions. Thus many grotesques may be careful copies of certain forms which primarily were executed in all seriousness, but which when copied by a later generation found their original uncouthness merged into comedy. Such forms were almost in the nature of a Masonic trade-mark, and many of them can be traced back to a Hindoo or Pagan myth. It is for this reason that the earlier churches in England on which Italian and Flemish workmen were employed have grotesques almost identical with those found on the Continent. These early carvings deal largely with mythical characters and the symbols above referred to. Later the grotesque developed into adaptations from nature and curious fancies of all sorts.

By far the largest number portray the devil in



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FROM THE COLLEGE OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK



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various forms. The gargoyles, flying out from the cornices and buttresses, typify the driving of the evil spirits out of the church, evil spirits of all descriptions, with some birds' heads and claw feet, others with heads of animals and birds' wings, still others carrying off souls in their stony grasp. Such a mystical animal has a form well adapted to the long, slim character of the projecting waterspout. The upper parapets of Notre Dame de Paris have an intensely interesting group of demons, looking down over the hordes of the great city, ready to swoop like a flock of buzzards on the unwary. These figures are admirably carved, and must have been executed by a master hand.

The gargoyle, in countries where the rainfall is heavy, is long and highly developed, especially in Flanders, Northern France and England. In the churches of Southern France it has small prominence.

The devil inside the church is largely confined to the capitals and corbels, and is usually busy making trouble for other people, or whispering evil advice into somebody's ear. When not thus engaged, he is frequently reaping the fruits of his efforts, and carrying souls into the jaws of hell. This awful place is a common subject, representing the future life of the evildoers in the maw of a horrible tooth-studded face.

In addition to these domestic and religious subjects the carver had his fund of folk-lore to draw on for in-

spiration. Even Mother Goose figures in the grotesques of Beverly Minster and at Wells. Reynard, the Fox, symbolizes the cunning of the clergy in many places. The cat, the dog, the pig and mice all have their niches, some symbolic, others merely fancies.

Heads and masks were most popular for the corbels, as they could be readily adapted to the square form. Many a cornice shows an unbroken line of grimaces of every description. The mask is more popular in England than on the Continent.

During the Norman period the grotesques were numerous in the decoration, but the advent of early English limited the use somewhat. Later with the decorated architecture in England, and the flamboyant in France, the grotesque was at its height, and protruded its ungainly but interesting shape at every point of vantage. With the advent of perpendicular the grotesque gradually fell away, and the carvers exercised their ingenuity in developing the intricacies of the canopy, and the armorial bearings, interspersed with rich foliation. The long unbroken lines of the perpendicular left few capitals or corbels to decorate. The gargoyle also disappeared, since a more effete civilization demanded that the water be carried off by some more modern method than down the necks of the passersby. From this point the grotesque passes out of Gothic. In the Renaissance architecture it becomes a copy of the forms found in the



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Roman ruins, usually an ingenious combination of vegetable and animal, and is confined almost entirely to garden and fountain decoration. What grotesques appear in the treatment of friezes and capitals lack any humorous or symbolic element.

In the Flemish Renaissance they lived for a time, but merely as means of decoration, and, as in the case of the Italian, with no especial significance.

In England the grotesque as a natural product disappeared with the advent of Elizabethan Architecture. It has been revived there to some extent, but most of the modern examples are largely in the nature of caricatures.

In this country we have only recently begun to use it as ornament. Our sense of the fitness of things would hardly tolerate the carvings on our modern Gothic churches that are commonly seen in the older buildings. The former spontaneity of such work has given place to a carefully studied model designed and executed under supervision and by trained workmen.

Modern architectural education has taught that the use of a building may be emphasized by its exterior treatment. This is really an outgrowth of French training, based on the exercise of logic in planning. Thus even in the designing of Gothic buildings the architect not only adopts a general form, which should express the uses

of the buildings, but the smallest ornament is modeled with the same end in view. This method is exemplified especially in the new buildings of the College of the City of New York, the West Point buildings, and the new Union Theological Seminary buildings.

The grotesques used in the College of the City of New York are admirable in their adaptability to the expression requisite for each building. The figures on the main building typify all of the various studies in a way which reminds one of the excellent work of Maxfield Parrish. The gymnasium, chemical building and mechanical arts building are all decorated with little gnomes, busily employed in imitating the various doings within in a way which is vastly entertaining. The grotesque work at West Point is much more conventional in character, modeled in planes, and yet in its way extremely interesting. Both are excellent in their way, and each well adapted to the particular style of Gothic which it adorns.

The secular element of the two groups above admits of the use of actual grotesque. The religious character of the Union Theological Seminary Buildings does not allow such freedom. The ornament there is very restrained and the grotesques are confined to the library building and tower, depicting the various symbols of knowledge, with the owl, the sphinx and busts of monks

STALL FINIAL,
DURHAM CASTLEFROM THE SKETCH-BOOK
OF CHARLES COLLENS

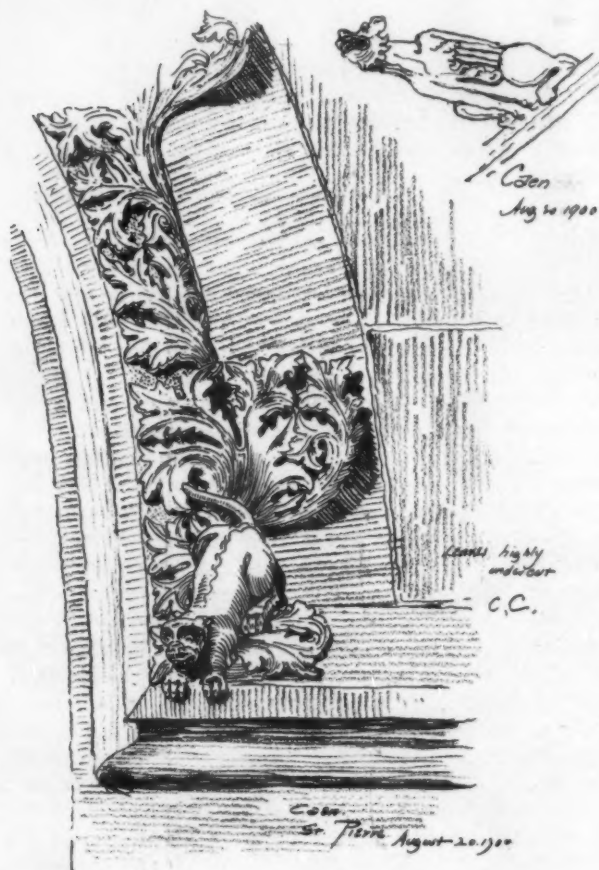
typifying pedagogy, thought, research and preaching. The chapel building, while having various ornamented billet courses well adapted to grotesques, has been treated only with angels, cherubs and evangelists. The ornament of the other buildings consists in armorial bearings or foliation.

The day of the grotesque in church decoration has gone by but there is still a great field of interesting descriptive ornament to be worked out in domestic and public buildings. The active reintroduction of this element into our Gothic architecture is coincident with that logical movement which is gradually making every building speak for itself and every feature of that building have its *raison d'être*.

ARCHITECTURE: ITS TRUE PRINCIPLES

THE AXIAL LINE

From what we have considered relative to symmetry and other kindred subjects, we must conclude that in all matters of architectural composition the question of axis, actual or understood, is of the first importance. Practically, we know, the whole of design is based on axial lines, even if only constructive, and not appearing actually in the design. From centers we set out widths, measure distances, set our large parts as well as small. The axis of superficial and solid figures may be com-



FROM THE SKETCH-BOOK OF CHARLES COLLENS



Grotesque
Babuli Gardens
June 20 1901

RENAISSANCE GROTESQUE
IN THE BABULI GARDENS

FROM THE SKETCH-BOOK
OF CHARLES COLLENS

pared to the central idea, motive or main purpose in other things. Every composition in any art requires first its central idea or main theme, and so in the parts forming this whole composition there is need of actual or an inferred axis. Without such there is no unity, and without unity no individuality. The main effect of symmetry and axial design tends towards the producing of oneness in the whole, and as in life so in architecture, the strength of the community is the sum of strengths of component individuals, and with decay in the individual comes decay in the community. An ellipse may be constructed to contain the area of a given circle. The one is relatively diffuse, the other compact, and compactness is unity, unity is individuality, and strong individuality means force as distinct from that which is feeble, diffuse and scatter-brained. In like manner the contents of a cube may be contained in a parallelopiped. The one is compact, the other diffuse.

It will be seen that symmetry concerns one object—balance concerns two. We employ the terms on their accepted art sense. Symmetry makes one; balance makes two (or puts two) at one—that is brings two into harmonious relation—smooths out antagonistic differences, adjusts conflicting claims. The distinction is important as enabling a clearer idea to be obtained of the relative value of the two terms.

SYMMETRY OF UNITY AND OF MULTIPLICITY

We cannot give too much attention to the question of exact symmetry, its position in design. We see it to be at once the simplest method of producing ornamental

effect and the most erudite if attempt is more to fully explain its whole significance and bearing. The least-cultured housewife arranges the "ornaments" on the parlor mantelshelf in symmetrical array. The clock or other feature considered as best and most imposing is placed in the center, and the vases on either side must be in pairs—two small ones either side, two large flanking vases.

How universally this instinct is shown indicates some vital and quite sound principle. It is by no means to be dismissed as the crude ideas of uncultured taste. The truth lies deeper. The sense of order that arises from the center-and-wing arrangement, being so universal, is to be looked for in some great fundamental principle. The idea of the arrangement of the mantelshelf ornaments is first the center. This is evidently as it should be, and is simply a concrete demonstration of the appreciation of the principle of a central idea or theme in any work.

Whether the symmetrical object be an individual, indivisible unit—as a sphere, heart or trefoil—or a multiplicity of units—as a building, the idea of centrality, condensation, oneness, as contrasted to independence, diffuseness and manifoldness in the idea (apparently) upon which the principle of symmetry rests; for although in the plane representation of the heart form there is no obvious central axis, it is understood; and, more than this, the oneness of the form is derived from symmetry. We have seen that in a composition of center and wings, the wings always predicate the center, and must, if not thus subordinate, at least always have reference to the center, either as servants, dependents or guardians. Every symmetrical object therefore challenges the eye to find a central idea, a form or axis; and we must conclude that in the heart or trefoil the center is the conception of the form itself, and, in the building group, the central feature of the winged composition.—R. Owen Allsop in *The Architect and Contract Reporter*.

THE "BURNHAM PLAN" FOR CHICAGO NOW MADE PUBLIC

The "Plan of Chicago," on which Mr. D. H. Burnham and a corps of assistants have been engaged for considerably more than two years, was made public on July 3 by the Commercial Club of that city. It is an unusually interesting project for the betterment and future development of the territory within a sixty-mile radius of the City Hall so as to afford maximum convenience for the needs of a population of 13,000,000, without neglecting the improvement in the appearance of the city. The more the project is studied the greater merit it will be found to possess, particularly in the very clever manner in which the existing system of streets and parks is utilized. There will be an "intellectual center" about the foot of Congress Street, with a 250-foot boulevard running west to a "civic center" at Halsted Street. At the former are to be grouped the Field Museum, Crerar Library and Art Institute, and at the latter the federal, county and city buildings, from which diagonal thoroughfares are to be constructed in several

directions so as to afford more direct access to this center than a rectangular system of streets will give. Encircling this center will be a series of concentric boulevards, largely made up of existing roads. Wholesale warehouses are to be moved out to a great clearing yard for all the railways now entering the city, which will be connected by belt roads, while an extension of the present loops and subway lines will connect the belt roads and warehouses with the heart of the city. Passenger traffic is to be handled from two stations centrally located, while the elevated and surface railways are to have loops and other additional facilities for making them more serviceable. The greatest change is in the treatment of the river, which it is proposed to eventually utilize for recreation by replacing the warehouses, that now line it, with boulevards. In view of the growing conflict between the shipping interests using the river and the needs of the great volume of traffic over the bridges, this feature of the plan has many things in its favor, but before the shipping is driven out some other place must be provided for it, and here the project is least satisfactory. Chicago is one of the world's greatest ports and it is highly desirable to assist rather than retard the development of its shipping facilities. It is not enough to provide wharves where vessels may load and unload, but there must be provision for the warehouses of merchants, for the direct transfer of freight between cars and vessels, and for the speedy delivery of freight from the wharves or the adjacent warehouses to the city. It may be questioned whether the future development of this magnificent water-borne commerce, to which the city owes a considerable measure of its present prosperity, does not make it advisable to utilize for docks and warehouses at least a part of the water front south of the river which it is proposed to convert into a great playground and lagoon.—*Engineering Record*.

STUNNED STONEMWORK

Correspondence about the decay of the stonework of some of our most cherished buildings has evoked the opinion of a scientific expert that much of the mischief is probably due to the former ill-considered use of blasting powder in quarrying. It has now become recognized that heavy blasting had the effect of weakening the rock crystals or grains, and quarrymen are now careful not to put upon the market stone that has been stunned, and the wasteful blasting process is being superseded by the use of the wire saw, which cuts the stone from its native bed without injuring its texture. That the crumbling stonework of our venerable buildings may have had its constitution ruined before it was placed in position, and that this condition no longer obtains, is doubtless reassuring to modern builders; but it makes the state of the old work even more hopeless than before. Clearly, if stonework crumbles because its constitution has been shattered while the stone was reposing in its natural bed, superficial treatment must be futile. This is a stunning blow to the anti-restorationists. It is now "up to them" to point out the inestimable advantages of stunned stone, and the insidious wickedness of the wire saw, which, being modern, must therefore be execrable.

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Reconstruction of Church of Saint Vincent Ferrer (5 plates).

The Donovan Memorial Altar (3 plates).

Frontispiece:

Detail of the Cathedral at Lucca, Italy.

WHAT we are unwilling to consider as an accurate indication of the average building commission's appreciative estimate of value, and knowledge of art, is the reported attitude of those having in charge the matter of mural decorations for a public building in a neighboring State. It seems the artist had been furnished with inaccurate measurements, by reason of which his paintings were prepared too large for the spaces they were intended to occupy. To some persons less brilliant and resourceful such an error would have appeared little short of a real calamity, but not to our illustrious committee. With hardly a moment's hesitation it was proposed to simply trim the pictures down until they fitted the surfaces available, similar to the manner in which wall paper purchased at a few cents a roll would be cut to fit. Moreover, it was held that, inasmuch as the surface to be covered was somewhat less than anticipated, the artist's remuneration as agreed upon should be proportionately decreased. In other words, the artist should be paid by the square yard the same as the plasterer. Surely such a committee will be appropriately rewarded for its signal service.

BUT unquestionably the instances of such utter ignorance and entire lack of appreciation of art are becoming rarer each year, and no doubt for this reason attract wider attention. The vast sums expended in this

country annually to promote education in art are producing unmistakable results of the most gratifying character. The criticism that has long been indulged in by Europeans concerning the absence of any art in the everyday life by those living in America will be entirely undeserved in a few years more. Even now it is only true of a comparatively small class, although it was distressingly true less than two-score years ago. The movement for better art originated in the minds of a few cultured men of more than ordinary intelligence and wisdom, and spread rapidly in the centers of population. The rural communities quite naturally have been slower to feel its influence. Unfortunately, legislative bodies in the various states have not been greatly affected, and few victories have been recorded for art in the departments of the Federal Government. It is, however, only a question of a few years at most when the people's representatives will be required to recognize the people's demands, and then with the government aid and sanction we will quickly take our place in art education and development with the countries of Europe.

FROM press reports it appears that the Earl of Verulam, who owns the tract of land on which the ancient Roman city of Verulamium stood, near London, has given permission to the Society of Antiquaries to undertake extensive excavations. The Roman bricks taken from the ruins of Verulamium have, of course, been much used in later buildings. St. Alban's Abbey is said to have been practically built with them. Excavations have been undertaken on two or three former occasions, and about forty years ago the theater was partially uncovered and frescoes, marbles and other features of uncommon quality were exposed. The dimensions of the theatre are said to agree almost perfectly with those of the theatre at Pompeii. Indeed, the entire city seems to resemble Pompeii to a remarkable degree. The excavations and explorations of this buried city built in England and inhabited by Romans two thousand years ago will doubtless provide material of extraordinary interest. If done thoroughly it cannot fail to be of great educational value to the scientist and archaeologist, as well as those who have made a special study of the art of that period.

TO a constantly increasing degree architects are coming to realize the importance of having adequate regard for the quality of "texture" in the façades of their buildings. It has been an inability to sufficiently appreciate the value of this quality that has contributed to many failures in the past. The proper selection of materials is of very real importance in order to secure desired results, but their manipulation, or the manner in which they are used, is also of great concern. Obviously, the conception is the first step in the realization of any object or aim, and possibly it calls for talents of the highest order; but he who is capable only of producing a creditable design, and lacks the ability and experience that qualifies him to make the necessary selections of materials, and finally to direct the manner of their use in order to secure the full realization of his conception, can never rise to the greatest heights.

ILLUSTRATIONS

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH OF ST. VINCENT FERRER

ALLEN & COLLENS AND JAMES W. O'CONNOR,
ASSOCIATED ARCHITECTS

The present church of St. Vincent Ferrer is situated at the corner of Lexington Avenue and Sixty-sixth Street. It is a comparatively old church and on the exterior has no redeeming features. The church as at present constructed is of brick, and consists of a nave and two aisles. It has no chancel. The first floor is raised well above the street, in order to admit of a high lower church, lighted by capacious areas on both sides of the building. At the rear of the present church is the building occupied by the Dominican Sisters.

In reconstructing the church, it is the intention to tear down the present front of the building and build a new front with two towers. On each side of the present church the windows will be cut out and large arched openings inserted in their place. These arched openings will connect with ambulatories, which in turn will join a series of side chapels, alternating with recessed windows in the ambulatories. This will complete the present construction. It is intended, however, that as funds are received the entire church shall be reconstructed. In so doing the present church, which is of ten bays 15 feet wide, will be lengthened by the addition of a chancel, side chapels, and vestry on the site of the Dominican Sisters' home.

In place of the present iron columns which support the roof, steel columns will be inserted, which will raise the nave ceiling to the height of 75 feet, allowing a high clear story with a triforium beneath. The main floor level and also the level of the lower church will remain as at present.

In reconstructing the old church it is the intention to produce a new structure, following as closely as possible the best examples of the French Gothic. The proximity of St. Patrick's Cathedral makes this a somewhat difficult problem, as it is necessary to vary the architecture in such a way as not to recall too strongly the motifs which Renwick used so successfully on the Cathedral.

The two spires will rise to a height of about 200 feet and will be entirely constructed of limestone. This same material will be used throughout the exterior, including all of the work above the granite base course.

The main entrance doorways have been lowered as much as possible by the addition of steps in the vestibule itself. The closeness of the façade to the building line on the front makes it rather a difficult matter to install all of the steps that are necessary to reach the present first floor, and at the same time give an appearance of breadth to the vestibule. These vestibules are lined throughout with limestone. The floors will be of marble, with solid marble steps. In the main vestibule two columns will support a groined roof, which will be constructed with limestone ribs and Guastavino tile filling. The side vestibules will be veneered in the same manner as the main vestibule, with the exception of a flat wood

ceiling, which allows the passage of the stairs from the main floor to the gallery level without breaking through a vault.

The gallery will be given over entirely to the organ and the choir. Its front balustrade will be of solid limestone, as also the screen beneath, which will have as its main features two canopies covering the holy water fountains.

The rest of the interior of the church will be finished in imitation limestone, with the exception of the tracery and window jambs, which show on the inside of the church. This imitation limestone is not a construction which the architects favor, owing merely to the fact that it is an imitation. In this case, however, it is made necessary by the retention of so much of the old work, which it would be very difficult to veneer with actual limestone.

The ambulatories and side chapels will be built with limestone veneer, marble floors and Guastavino ceilings. The ambulatories are separated from the main aisles of the church by wrought iron grilles, as in many of the French and Spanish churches. The side chapels will each have a large stained glass window, completely filling the outside wall of the chapel. They will be further ornamented by an elaborate bronze rail across the front.

The new baptistry is to be constructed on the south west corner of the church in the present building, which connects the church with the parish house.

It is hoped that when the building is complete it will be a material addition to the church architecture of New York City.

DONOVAN MEMORIAL ALTAR, CHURCH OF ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE, NEW YORK CITY

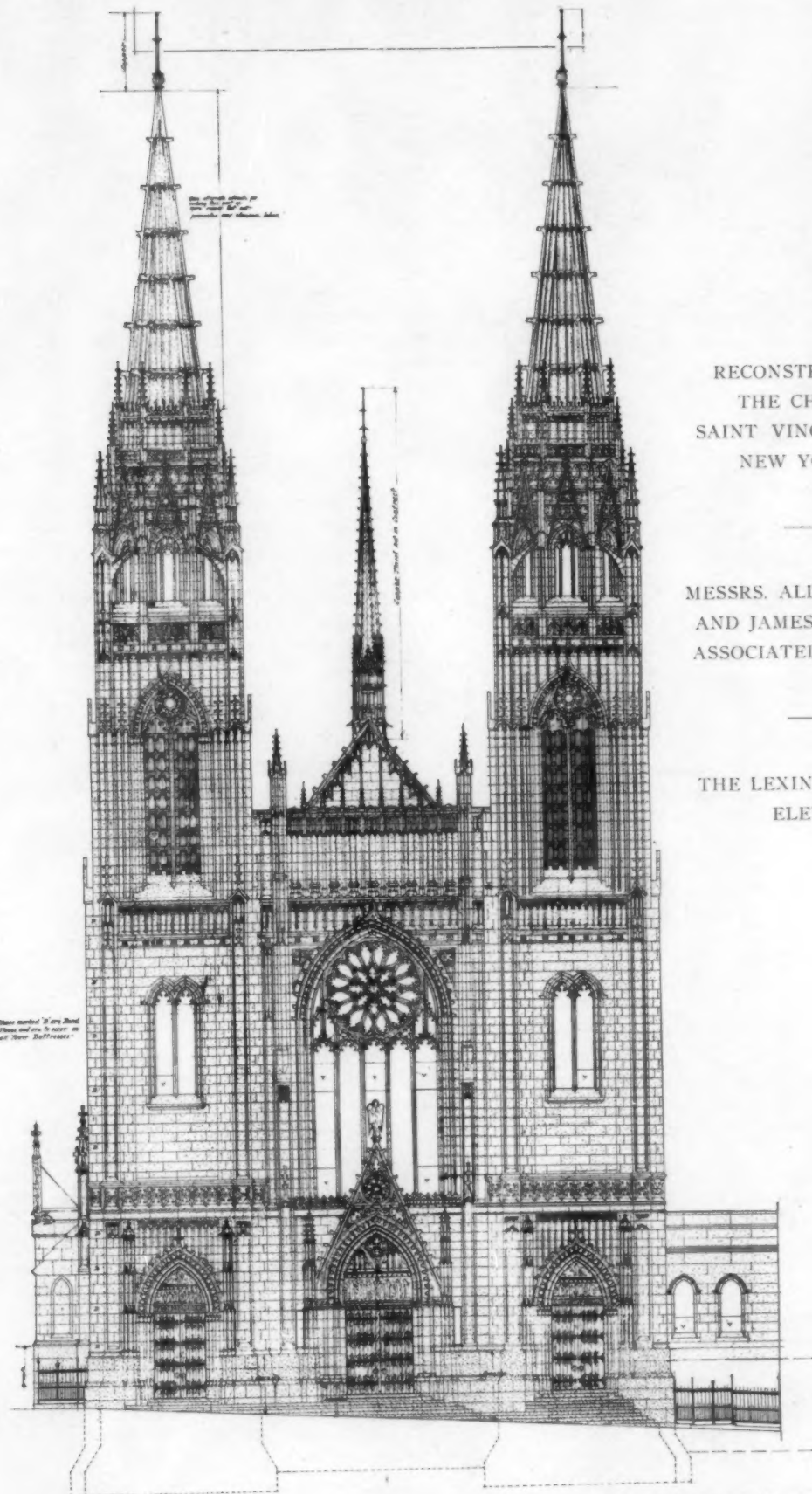
MR. A. D. JENKINS, ARCHITECT, MR. BELA L. PRATT,
SCULPTOR

In this alteration problem special pains were taken to meet the ritualistic requirements in the arrangement of the mensa, or altar table, the retable and the foot space immediately about the mensa. The fact that the interior of the church is decidedly Italian—or rather Italo-Byzantine—and that the church authorities desired Roman rather than Byzantine lines for the new work, led to the adoption of Italian Renaissance forms.

The altar occupies the central side of the chapel on the south side of the church; and this chapel being the Chapel of the Annunciation, the figure represents the Blessed Virgin at the moment of the appearance of the announcing angel.

The decorations immediately behind and around the reredos are to be done over, so as to harmonize with the new altar.

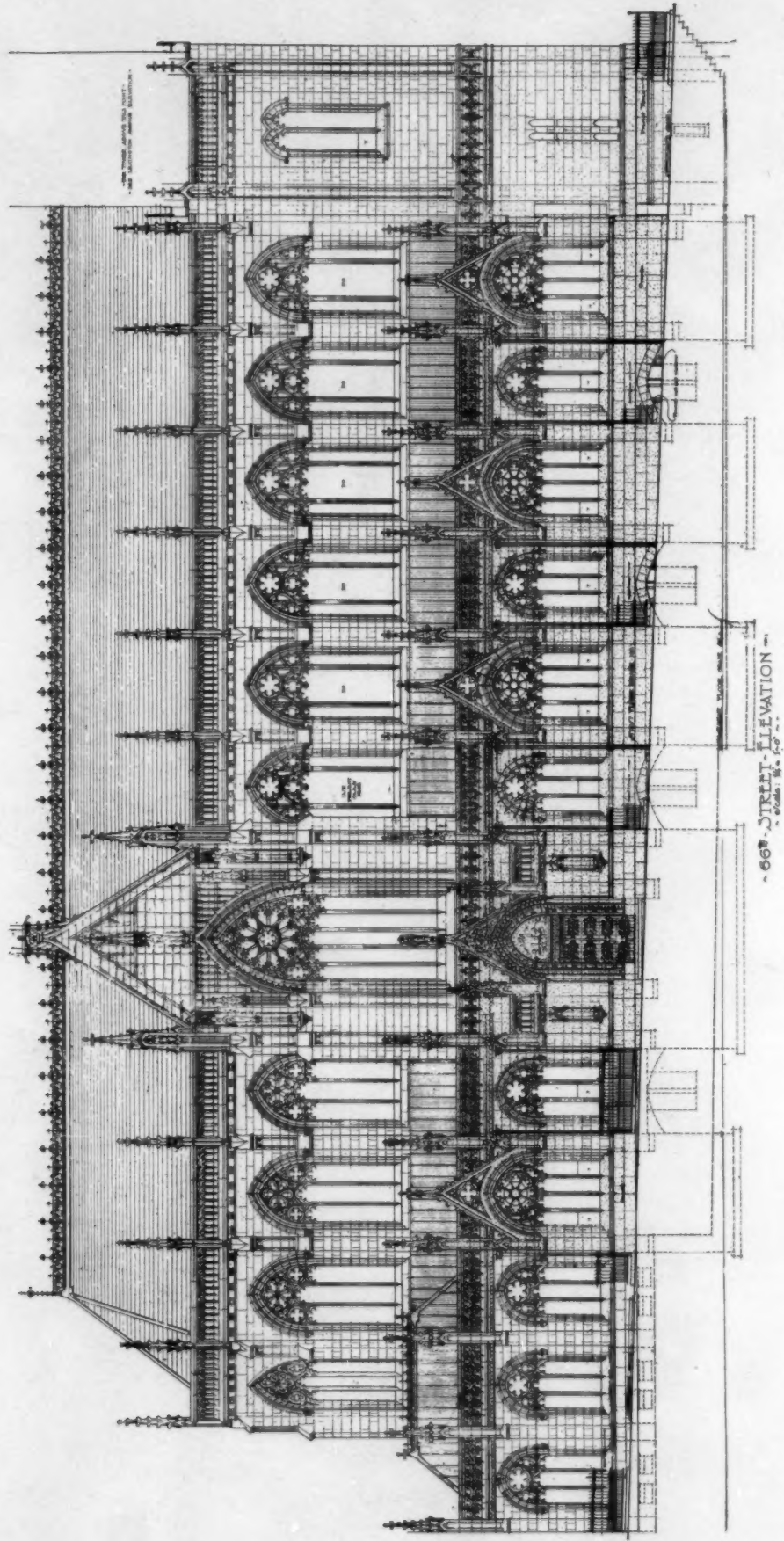
The altar rests on a new fireproof floor of steel and terra-cotta arches, with a finished floor of Pavonazzi and Numidian marbles. The main body of the altar, reredos, etc., are of Sienna, while the paneling, altar rail, etc., are of Numidian and Pavonazzi marbles. The gates are of cast bronze.



RECONSTRUCTION OF
THE CHURCH OF
SAINT VINCENT FERRER
NEW YORK CITY

MESSRS. ALLEN & COLLENS
AND JAMES W. O'CONNOR
ASSOCIATED ARCHITECTS

THE LEXINGTON AVENUE
ELEVATION



RECONSTRUCTION OF THE
CHURCH OF SAINT VINCENT FERRER, NEW YORK

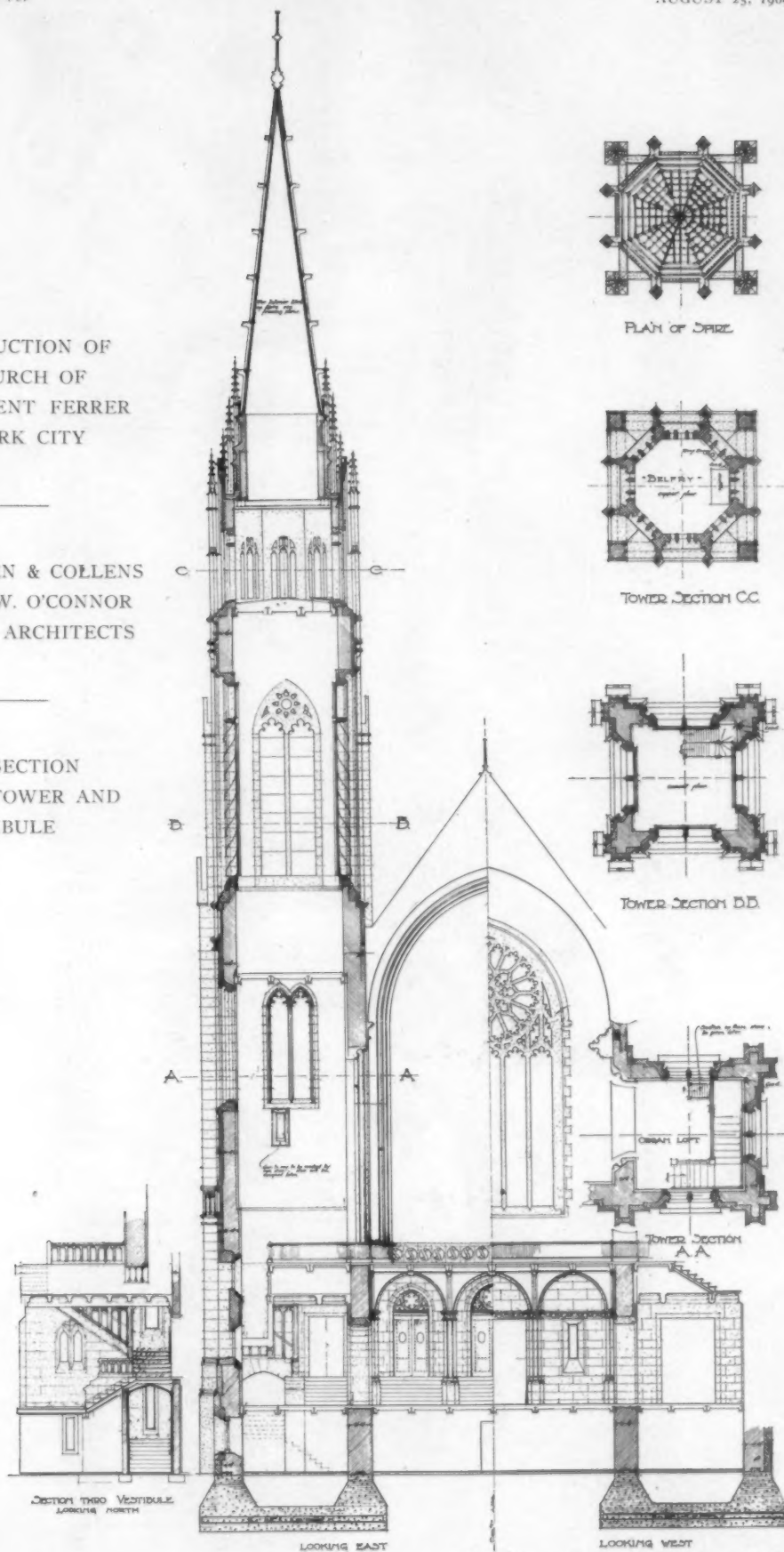
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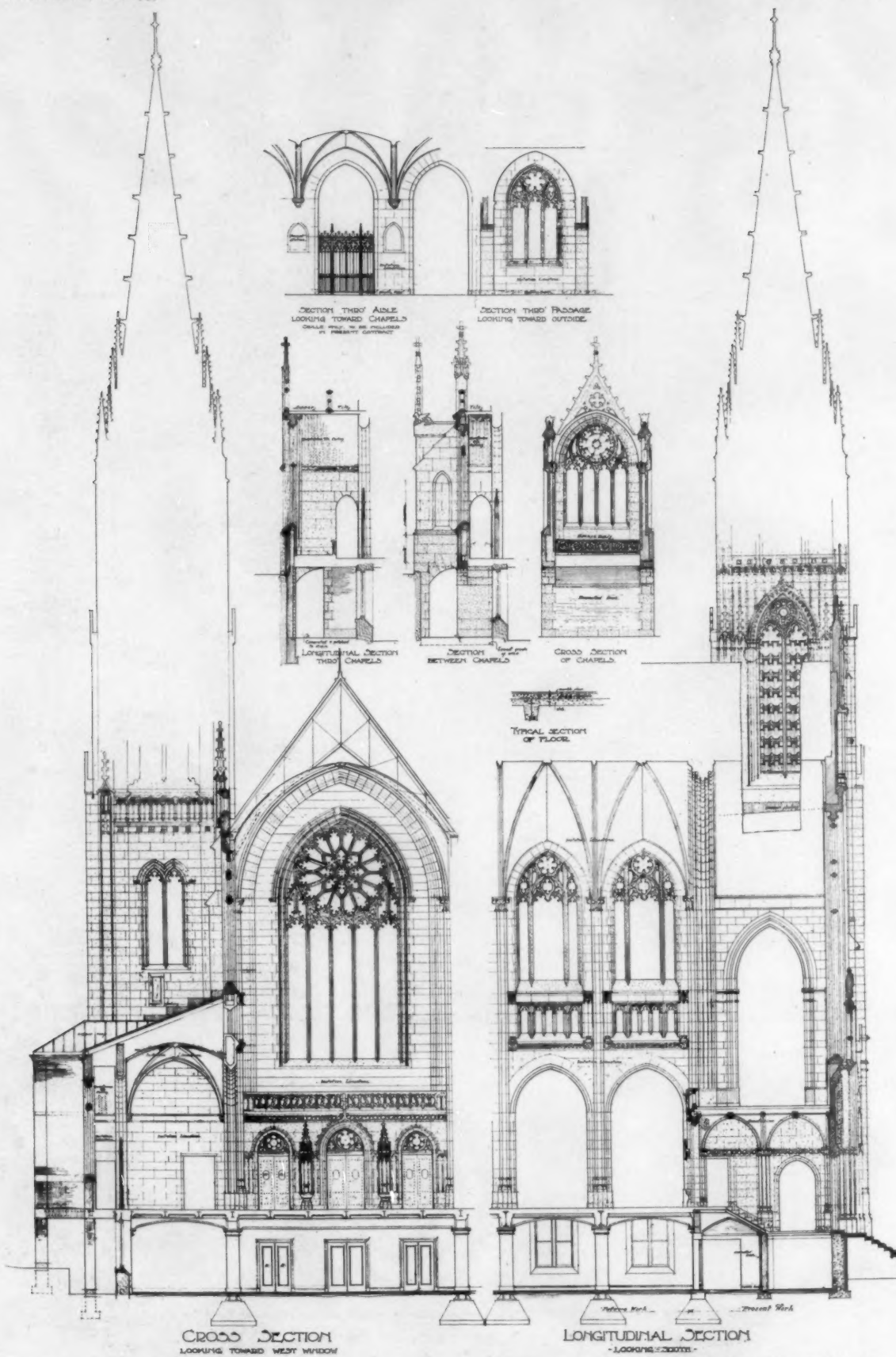
RECONSTRUCTION OF
THE CHURCH OF
SAINT VINCENT FERRER
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MESSRS. ALLEN & COLLENS
AND JAMES W. O'CONNOR
ASSOCIATED ARCHITECTS

CROSS SECTION
THROUGH TOWER AND
VESTIBULE

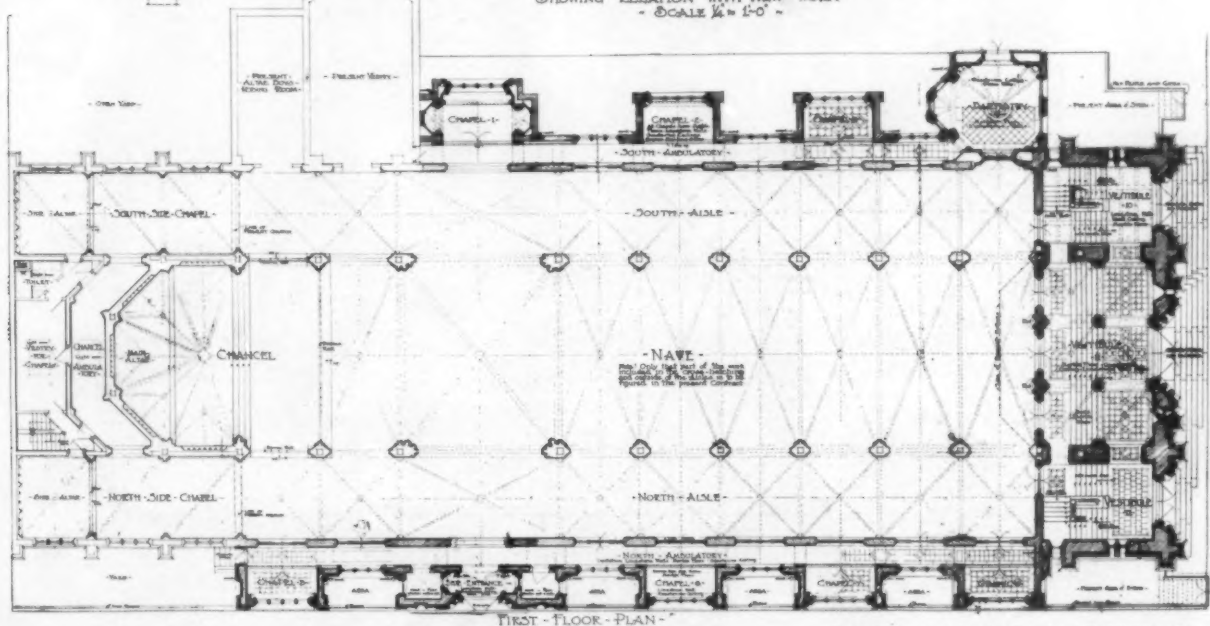
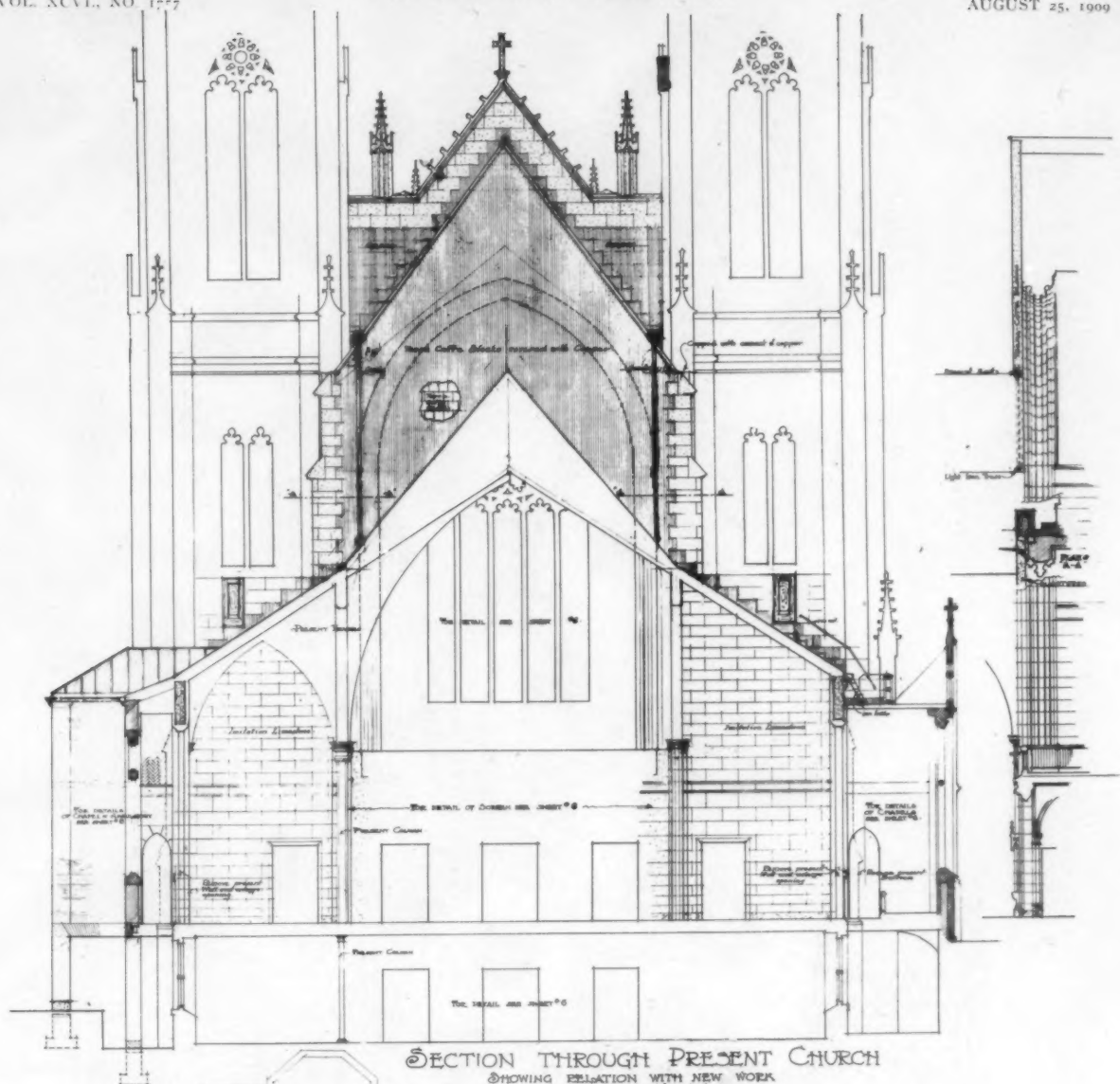


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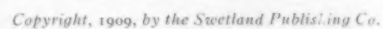
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