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VOLUME
XCVIII

SEPTEMBER 21, 1910

NUMBER
1813

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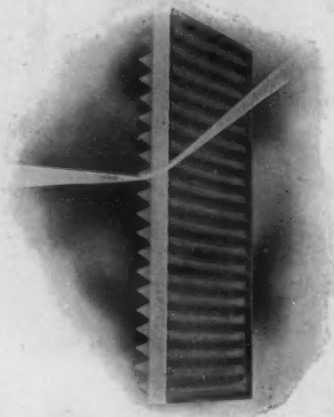


PLATE I. This illustration shows how light rays are bent by means of prism angles.

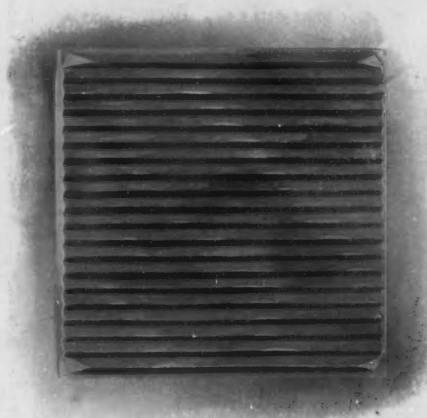


PLATE II. This illustration shows appearance of simple prism square. Note angles on surface.

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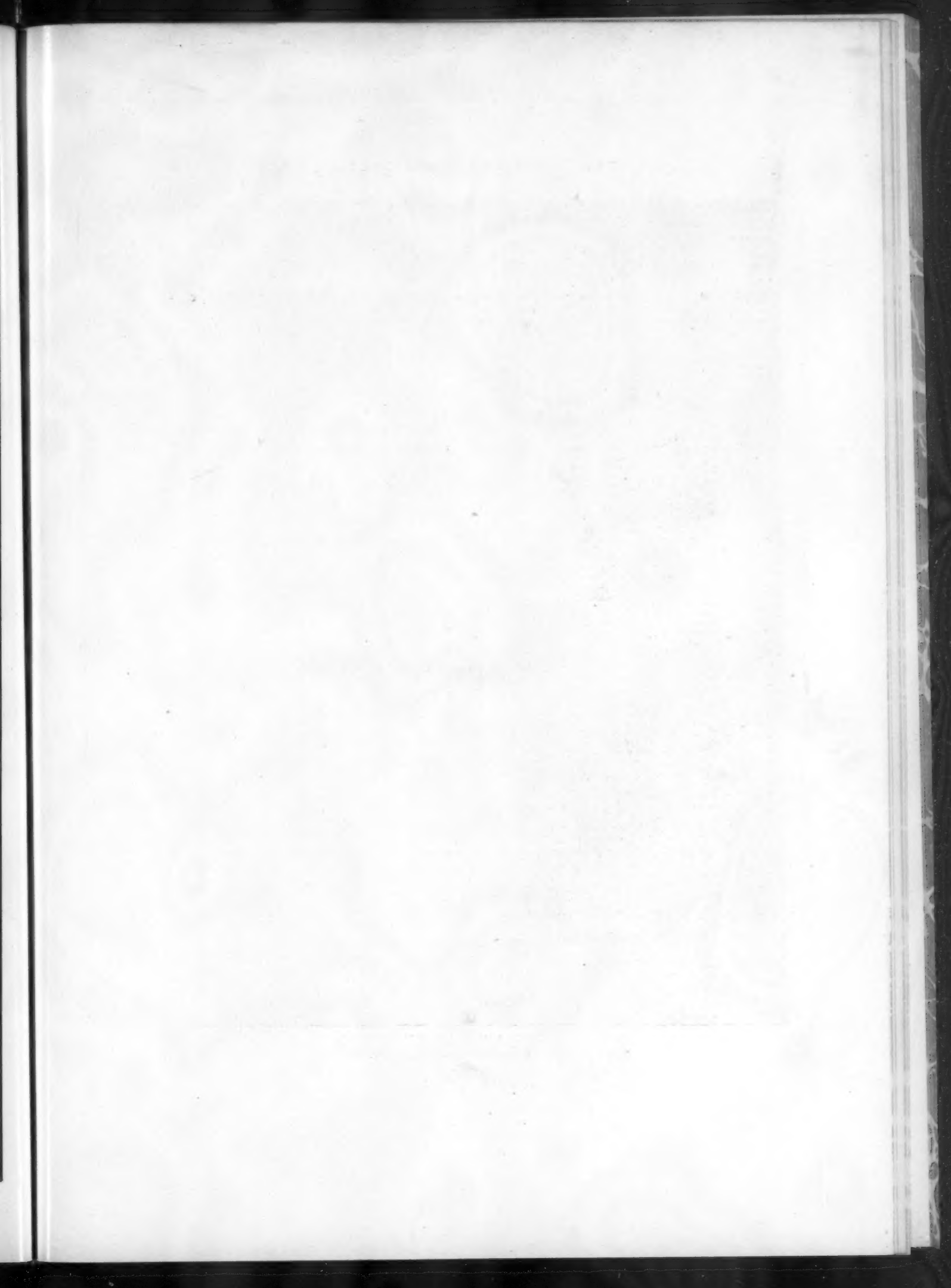
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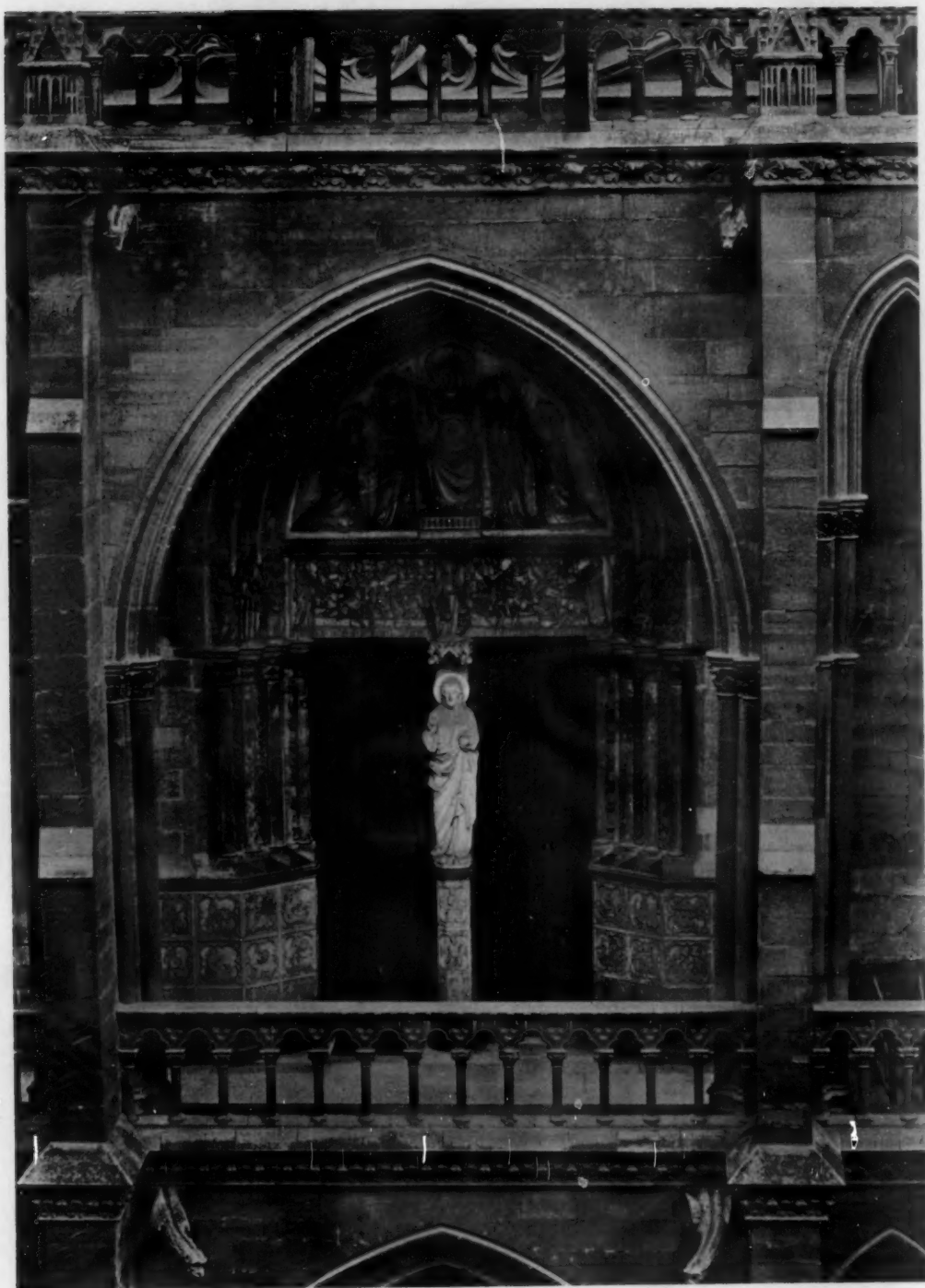
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LOGGIA OF THE SAINTE CHAPELLE, PARIS

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THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

Vol. XCVIII

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 1910

No. 1813



TEMPERAMENTAL ARCHITECTURE

THE CONVENT AT MONTE FIORENTINO

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON ARCHITECTURAL DISSYMMETRY

BY WILLIAM WELLES BOSWORTH

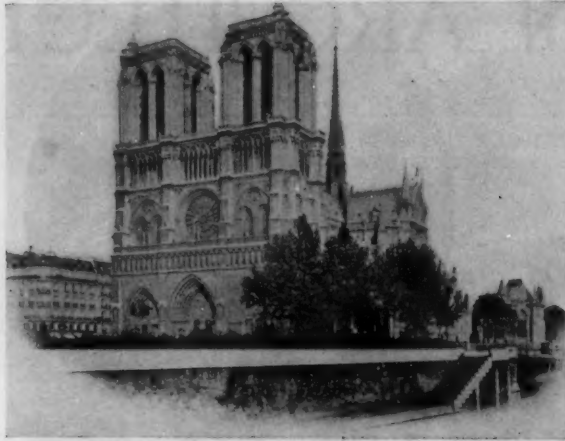
IN response to a request from the editors, the following notes on mediæval asymmetry, suggested by a recent trip abroad, were written by Mr. William Welles Bosworth:

"The Alternation of Contraries Beautifies and Sustains the World."—Balthasar Gracian.

The investigator of architectural dissymmetry will find the façade of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris particularly suggestive. The difference in width of the towers, though so slight as not to be noticed by the casual observer, is just enough to escape the monotony of perfect symmetry. By shutting out from view, first

one tower and then the other, a complete change of impression is produced. Each is a reiteration of the other, but in a change of key, like two musical notes which form a harmony when sounded together. The south tower (the smaller), being toward the river, was more often seen on the diagonal; this would give it a broader appearance, but no one who has studied the building with sympathy would wish that the two towers were identical. It has been said that they were made unsymmetrical because, not being at that time, like Chartres, the seat of a Cardinal, it was necessary to render the façade imperfect and subordinate; but after investigating the many other applications of the prin-

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NOTRE DAME, PARIS. THE NORTH TOWER IS ABOUT ONE METRE WIDER THAN THE SOUTH TOWER

ciple of dissymmetry here, both of exterior and interior, one is ready to agree with Viollet-le-Duc—who says of it—"At first sight the grand portals seem symmetrical, but even here this artistic love of variety finds subtle expression; for the door on the left does not resemble that on the right. The north tower (that on the left) is sensibly thicker than the south tower, and the tracery of the grand gallery on the left is more masculine and compact than that at the other end; from these facts we are justified in concluding that the two stone spires should present points of contrast in detail, while they should offer two harmonious and balanced masses in general effect. There is the same evidence here as in other contemporary structures built under a single impulse and without interruption that the architect could not bring himself to repeat the same detail twice. In treating his two towers differently, the increase of labor he thus imposed on the workmen was grateful to them, when compared with the mechanical tediousness of producing two such colossal masses identical in every respect.

"Though such points of difference are often blamed as an offense against absolute symmetry, it cannot be denied that this desire for variety was spiritual, and gave to the workman a liberty of thought which prompted him to a perpetual study for improvement, to an emulation, I may say, which is in singular harmony with the western character . . . a new ideal of civilization, that is, perfect liberty, without license."

Viollet-le-Duc has shown, convincingly, how the elements of mediæval art were derived from the Greeks, though Charlemagne, who first undertook to revive the arts in the West, by "coarse reproductions of a few monuments entirely Oriental in their origin; furniture from Byzantium, etc."

He probably had slight, if any, knowledge of the extent to which the Greeks practised "curves," but he fully realized their independence of mechanical rules of symmetry. He says: "He (the Greek) was endowed with perceptions far too delicate to permit him to submit to any blind, inflexible law. If he admitted formal symmetry, it was rather as a poise or balance than a geometrical rule."

After one has become interested in the application of

the theory of curves and asymmetry to the point of carefully observing its effects in the older buildings, he is inclined to feel that it is really the distinguishing difference between mediæval and modern architecture. If a building is built with that free and easy mastery of dimension where each part has an individual expression of its own which makes the ensemble vibrate, it is of the ancient or mediæval type. Where the contrary is the case, and repeating members are not only equivalent, but exact facsimiles, as if reproduced from the same mould, the building is of the modern type.

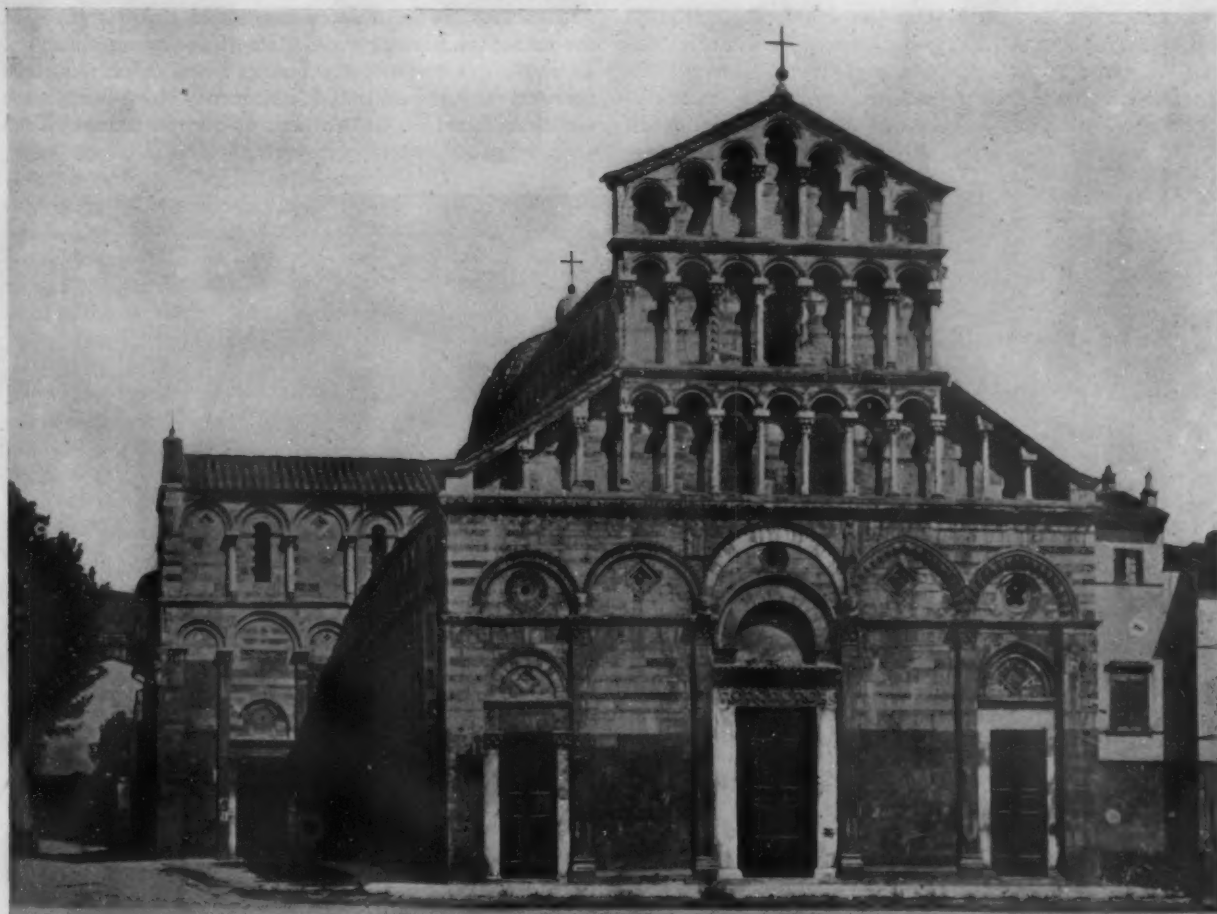
These qualities were noted with various applications in several minor buildings, such as the church at Beaumont, the court of the châteaux of the Comte de Segur-Lamoignon, and notably in the church at Fiesole; but in Rome a cursory search for them revealed nothing except in the little temple church of Fortuna Virilis, near the temple of Vesta. Sighting along the rear cornice, a decided bulge outward was apparent; but the front cornice which had been rebuilt in modern times with a new dentil course was made as straight as a die. It was very entertaining to compare the two and to note how much more agreeable the rear pediment was, with the curve, than the front one, which had been straightened out.

In most mediæval buildings, one has been taught to suppose that much of the asymmetry was due to indifference as to accuracy of measurements. But here in the classic temple it was so undeniably intentional and so beneficial in its results that one felt the appropriateness of Professor Goodyear's name for such practices, "Architectural Refinements."

Of course, everyone knows that the columns of the



THE OLD AND THE NEW—FANO



INTENTIONAL DISSYMMETRY

CHURCH OF S. PAULO, PISA

circular temple at Tivoli lean together at the top like the columns of the Parthenon, but we could discover no application of the theory of asymmetry, or of curvilinear refinements in the Pantheon, except perhaps it might be allowed they exist in the coffering of the dome.

At Toscanella, however, we found a most delightful example of it. In the church of San Pietro there is literally not a mechanical line. The side aisles of the nave were far from parallel; there were hardly two arches of the same diameter; the heights of the columns varied; the arches of the transept were all dissimilar and non-concentric with those related to them. The apse was not on axis with the nave and the main motive of the decoration—the “Bon Dieu”—painted on the semi-dome of the apse, was off the axis. Yet no one could look at it and not be delighted with the charm of the place, due in very large measure to these irregularities. In fact, for a better estimate of them, we drew the plan both symmetrically and as built, and it was surprising to see how far short the former came from expressing the beauties of the latter.

The apse faces west; projects out over a deep valley on high buttressed walls; and the late afternoon sun coming from behind the Ciborium was reflected by its white roof on to the painted niche of the apse; and from that, forward through the almost windowless nave.

The vibration of line and dimension due to the extreme lack of symmetry was so great, and yet the balance was so perfect, and the light and color so beautiful, that it all seemed to be afloat in space.

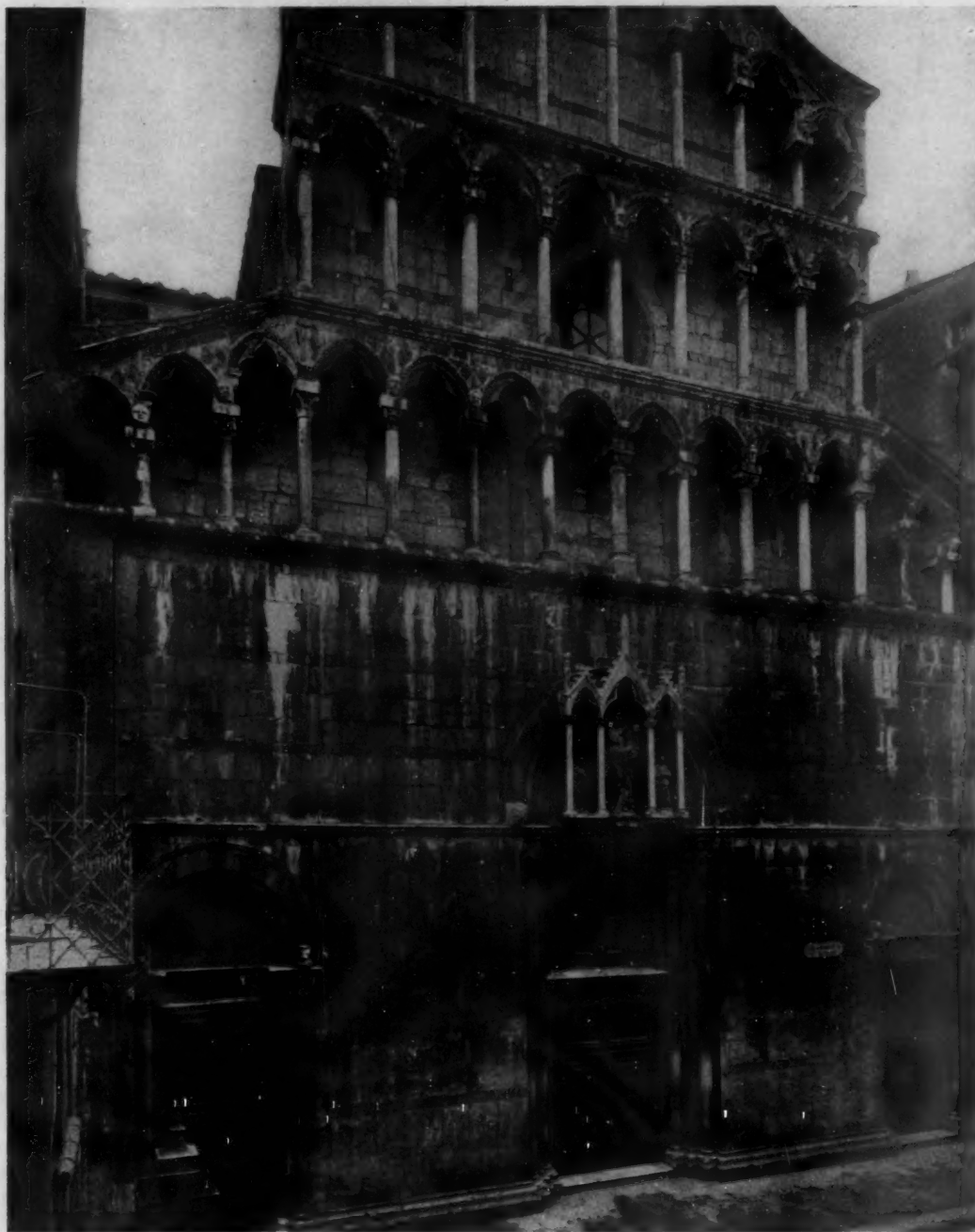
The only available photographs gave no appreciable recall of these qualities, but the photograph of the interior of the less important church of S. Maria Maggiore at Toscanella shows so clearly as to be beyond discussion that the avoidance of axial symmetry with them was intentional. Note the position of the Ciborium with relation to the niche of the apse. Note how emphatically the figure of the Creator is placed to one side, in the tympanum of the front entrance portal, the lateral figures also being set high on one side and low on the other. Could anyone claim that builders capable of constructing such an edifice were unable to avoid such irregularities, or were indifferent to them?

The Vaudremer Church in Paris and the André church in Tours, though both affect to be vastly finer architectural expressions of this style, seemed stale and dry, as the mind reverted to them. One felt impelled to think that if they had been treated like this, fearlessly on asymmetric principles, they would have gained greatly in quality.

Possessed with these ideas it was doubly interesting to meet Professor Goodyear (through whose interesting exposition of the matter, both in the columns of the

AMERICAN ARCHITECT and in the wonderful collection of photographs and surveys on exhibition at the Brooklyn Academy of Arts and Sciences, we had become acquainted with the theory) at Pisa. For Pisa—as everyone knows who has looked into the subject—is, of all

and various levels of foundations and string courses in the cathedral, as well as in some of the minor churches. In ruder examples of the builder's art, much might be ascribed to unintentional inaccuracy by thoughtless sceptics; but in Pisa Cathedral, one is brought face



CHURCH OF S. MICHELE

PISA, ITALY

places, the best (excepting perhaps the Pantheon itself) in which to demonstrate the intentional practice of asymmetry and curves, for the sake of the effect thereby attained. We spent much time with him verifying his numerous observations, sighting along the gallery walls

to face with a complete mastery of the technical side of building, and is obliged to admit that neither settlement nor miscalculation can account for what is so obviously done for the express purpose of creating an optical vibration, with an enormous increase in beauty.

Mr. George Coffey, M.A., M.R.I.A., of the National Museum at Dublin, in his interesting lecture, "A Lost Principle in Art," says of these refinements "practised by the old architects," that they have "gradually disappeared out of art, and that our sensibilities have become so blunted that we no longer look for these, and they have only recently been rediscovered. Their rediscovery is principally due to Mr. Goodyear, of the Brooklyn Institute. In 1895 that institution sent him on a commission with a skilled photographic and surveying draughtsman, to tour through Italy, inspecting architecture there, and he discovered many refinements in the architectural works of that country."

To briefly detail the history of this subject: It was supposed that in the ancient Greek temples all the lines that appeared to be straight were straight, and that the columns which appeared to be perpendicular were perpendicular. But the late Mr. Penrose discovered that, so far from it being a symmetrical building, a Greek temple was full of the most wonderful refinements, so that there was not a straight line in the whole building. The seemingly erect columns all leaned about 0.22 of a foot in thirty feet, so that by prolonging these columns they would meet at a height of nearly 6,000 feet. He found also that the whole platform on which the temple was built, instead of being flat, was most delicately curved. These peculiarities were noticeable in the Parthenon; and he found that the columns, instead of being all spaced equally, were so arranged that the space between no two columns was equal, and a delicate rhythm occurred throughout the spacing of all. The major faces of the pediments lean inward, and the minor faces, cornices, filets and acroteria, lean forward. Every single part of the building seemed to have been considered, not so that it would measure right, but so that it would look right. It was as if in a freehand drawing a sense of touch was given to the whole building, every line being considered with a view to its artistic effect. It was, in fact, a most carefully worked



INTERIOR, S. M. MAGGIORE, TOSCANELLA

Note the intentional placing of the Ciborium off axis, toward the side on which pulpit occurs.

out scheme of irregularity, or asymmetry, to use a word that had come into use to describe it. In modern architecture, owing to repetition, the sense of touch was lacking. The principle of asymmetry had come down from the Egyptian, through Greek, even into mediæval architecture, and had only disappeared about the year 1600."

The lecturer then proceeded to illustrate his remarks by a splendid series of limelight views, showing various examples of ancient and mediæval architecture. In describing them he said the idea of the old builders was never to repeat themselves. They recognized the fact that the principle of symmetry was death, and of asymmetry was life. Nothing that lived had both sides the same. It was only when a number of objects differed among themselves a little that a system could be completed in which there was an organized relationship.

A feature of refinement very remarkable in the ancient buildings was the leaning forward of the fronts. In a great many cases it was considered as settlement, but it was eventually discovered to be intentional in several cases. The use of the lean seemed to be to meet an optical requirement. It showed the front of the building better, diminished the foreshortening of the carvings, gave a larger appearance, and an idea of mystery to the whole edifice. Instances were to be found in the cathedral of Pisa and S. Ambrogio at Genoa. The widening of buildings at the springing of arches was also done to produce an optical effect, and give the idea of trueness which is not produced by vertical walls. The irregularity of the plans of some of the ancient churches was often thought to be symbolical. Their cruciform shape was considered as representing the body of the Saviour and the placing of the choir to the one side to indicate the lean of His head.



DOORWAY, CHURCH OF S. M. MAGGIORE, TOSCANELLA

But this was not the case. It was an artistic principle that was followed to give interest to the whole scheme. They would find a number of these things existent in the early Romanesque architecture of Ireland, if they looked for them, notably in Cormac's Chapel, on the Rock of Cashel, and at Roscrea.

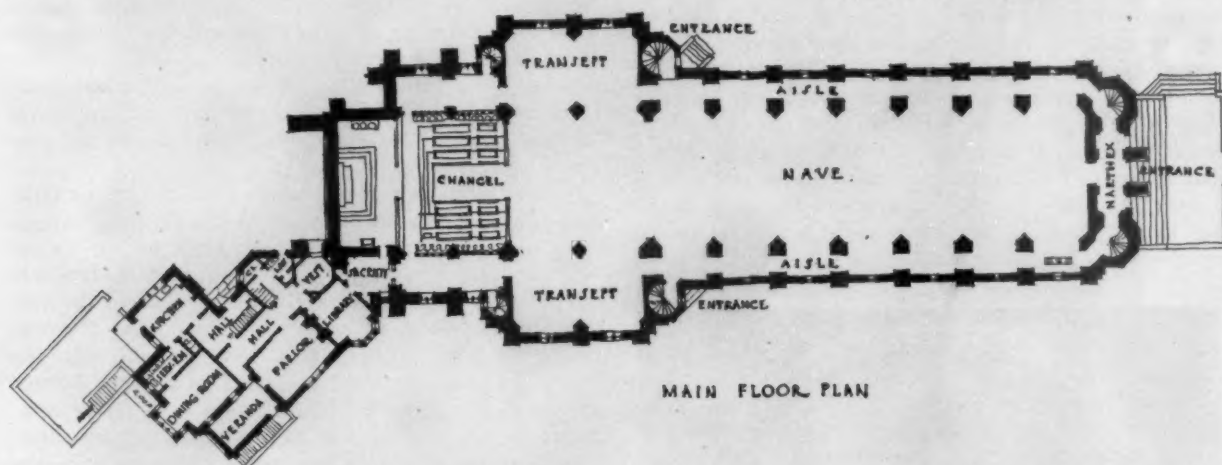
In conclusion, he would impress one or two lessons drawn from a study of the subject. One of these was that all attempts at repetition were really part of a tendency towards uniformity, which ultimately meant death. No manner of manifestation of power could ex-

ist without differences. The principle of life in the world was the creation of differences—the creation of centers of energy. The efforts of the world in prolonging its existence were always to break up uniformities as soon as men made them, and get new vitalities. The whole idea of the present day was to turn out things mechanically; but commercial men, seeing the defects of the practice, invented machinery with eccentricities to mimic life which it could not give. They had done at the present day with art. It died about the year 1600.

THE CHAPEL OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

Situated on an eminence almost three hundred feet above the Hudson River at its foot, the new chapel of the Military Academy at West Point is one of the most advantageously placed buildings in America and one in which the character of the design measures up to the natural advantages of its situation. From this lofty site its tower rises one hundred and thirty feet. The plans published herewith and the illustrations of exterior and interior will give a fair idea of its architectural handling. Only a visit to West Point could convey a more faithful impression of its appropriateness

brings the southern side of the chapel into view, unbroken now by any growth of trees, but devoid of adequate planting, which will, no doubt, be placed later. Here one may study the lines of the building, its mass and silhouette, together with the well-laid masonry and cleverly conceived ornament. The tower above the roof is in two stories; the first and smaller, the bell-ringer's story, and above the great belfry. Along the parapet, immediately above the clerestory windows, is a row of curiously designed and well-modeled bosses by the sculptor Lowrie, depicting incidents in the Quest of the Holy Grail. This ornament is typical of the carved embellishment oft recurring in the work of these architects. To interweave ornament into an architec-



THE CHAPEL OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT, NEW YORK

to site and purpose and the skill of its architects in turning to advantage the opportunities offered them. The low detached stone parapet on the upper terrace and shown in several of the illustrations was not contemplated in the architects' design.

The approach to the chapel, starting from the Post Headquarters, is by a winding road, and thence in a northwesterly direction up the steep ascent. At different points along the road one catches glimpses of the chapel perched on its eyrie until one passes along the steep slope on the northern side. At this point the building may be more critically studied. The effect is as if the building, springing from the ground, literally grew out of it. Winding along to the left, the road, by a sharp turn,

tural composition so that the decorative forms will remain subordinate to considerations of mass, to spiritualize and strengthen the design of the whole and place the ornament that its significance will increase and become more impressive on closer observation would seem to be the highest use of applied ornament and decoration. These qualities Messrs. Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson are entitled to claim for the ornament in their work and pre-eminently for the ornament of the Military Academy chapel.

The chapel may be entered by any one of three doorways. The main entrance, at the ecclesiastical west front of the chapel, is approached by the winding road heretofore described, or by a flight of stone steps from the

(Continued on page 100)

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Report of the Commission on the Leaning Tower of Pisa.—The Application to Modern Practice of the Principles of Architectural Asymmetry.

ILLUSTRATIONS: The Chapel of the United States Military Academy, West Point, N. Y., Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, architects.

Frontispiece: Church and Piazza of St. Lawrence, Florence, Italy.

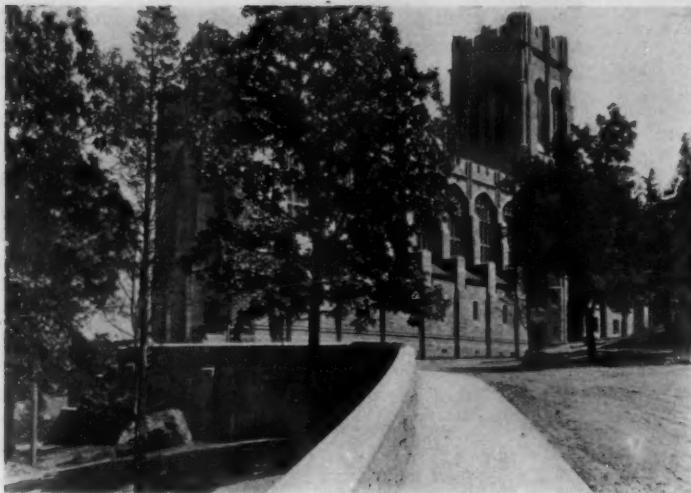
THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT will publish, exclusively, in its issue of September 28th, an analysis by Professor William H. Goodyear of the report of the Commission on the Leaning Tower of Pisa, proving that *there has been no increase in its inclination since the careful and authoritative observations of M. de Fleury in 1859*, and that, therefore, the tower is in no danger of falling as has persistently been maintained. The computations of the Commission supposed to be based on the authoritative observations in 1829 of Cresy & Taylor were, it appears, made on knowledge obtained at second-hand from an Italian authority containing important errors as to the plumbs taken in 1829 and vitiating, therefore, the computations of the present Commission. It appears, also, that the Commission's figures, giving the rates of inclination per meter, are incorrect, both for 1829 and for 1910. The Commission's conclusions are, consequently, in doubt until some explanation is made, and, unless a marked movement has taken place since July 6, 1910, the tower is safe.

It is to be feared that steps may rashly be taken to carry out the intention conveyed in a recent dispatch that the Commission proposed to take down the tower and rebuild it perpendicularly. It is in the urgent hope that no such steps will be taken until the matter can be more carefully considered that publicity is given to Professor Goodyear's analysis.

MR. WILLIAM WELLES BOSWORTH'S contribution in this issue takes up a subject to which we have repeatedly called attention. Both common

sense and true artistic feeling favor the point of view expressed therein, and his quotations from an eminent British critic elaborate and support the author's ideas. The difficulty of applying these ideas to modern buildings lies in the mechanical and fixed traditional habits of modern masons and modern designers. This is more true of the mason than of the designer; for if the contemporary architect be convinced, as he widely is, of the truth of Mr. Bosworth's ideas, he has still to contend with the masons and very possibly with the habits of his own draughtsmen besides. In mediæval work the architect was himself a mason and the masons themselves had the capacities and talents of the designer in many directions. They were accustomed not only to execute but also to project and invent their own decorative details, and these, consequently, had always the merit of variety. The mediæval architect being himself a mason, a little farther advanced than his fellows, had, therefore, their sympathy and their intelligent co-operation. The modern architect, on the other hand, is compelled by modern conditions to ask what it will cost to apply these ideas of asymmetry and the answer must be that, for reasons given, it will cost more in modern work, although it did not cost more in mediæval work. Here the employer steps in, the element of competition as regards cost is introduced, and the artist must go to the wall. Progress can, perhaps, best be made by educating the employer, and here the Brooklyn Museum exhibition of architectural asymmetries is of greatest value. If the employer were made to understand, by such an exhibition, that the best cathedrals have never, as yet, been *copied*, he might be willing to pay for such a *copy*, because he has already been trained to consider that the excellence of a building lies in its being a good *copy*. The architect, on the other hand, would know that the old building could never be copied and that he could apply to his own work only its principles, thus leaving him ample opportunity to exercise his talents and ingenuity.

It appears to us that the immediately hopeful prospects for the application to practice of Mr. Bosworth's point of view lie in country house architecture and for the simple reason that the employer has long been accustomed to picturesque irregularity in such buildings and has even grown to demand it. There are very few country houses in which a common-sense design made for interior comfort and wholly from the standpoint of interior plan will not produce an agreeable exterior asymmetry. There may be no refinements in it, but the effect and the principle are the same. There is a modern hotel on the Lido at Venice which is an excellent illustration of this point. The façade is absolutely asymmetric, but only because the doors and windows are irregularly placed, where they are called for by the interior plan. Moreover the architect, Sardi, is one of the most enthusiastic apostles of the "old-new" idea, as found in Venetian buildings. Another point in favor of the applicability of asymmetric ideas to country-house architecture is the fact that it was Mr. F. W. Deas, an Edinburgh architect (whose work is wholly in the domestic field), who first suggested and brought to issue the exhibition of the Brooklyn Museum material in Edinburgh in 1905.



CHAPEL OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT, NEW YORK

(Continued from page 98)

north slope. Both the road and the steps lead the visitor to the broad stone platform that fronts the entrance (see view of detail of western doorway). It is much to be regretted that the quickly sloping grounds around the chapel make it impossible to get a direct view of this entrance. Many of the best points of view are similarly impossible to secure by the camera. This western façade is rich in ornament, artistically executed and cleverly symbolic. The other entrances are to the south aisle and transept gallery and on the north to the Sunday school and crypt.

The interior is two hundred feet long and seventy-two feet wide across the transepts. Entering by the west or principal entrance, one notices an arrangement of aisles that promises ample circulation and assures good sight lines, and a triforium which is effective with its impressive range of windows, even though these are filled temporarily with inexpensive glass, in which no effort has been made to do more than obtain tone, variety and color. The great chancel window, which, when completed, is expected to be an example of the highest achievements of the stained-glass art, has been, for the present, filled with plain monotone glass.

In the transepts are galleries connecting with the passages to the triforium.

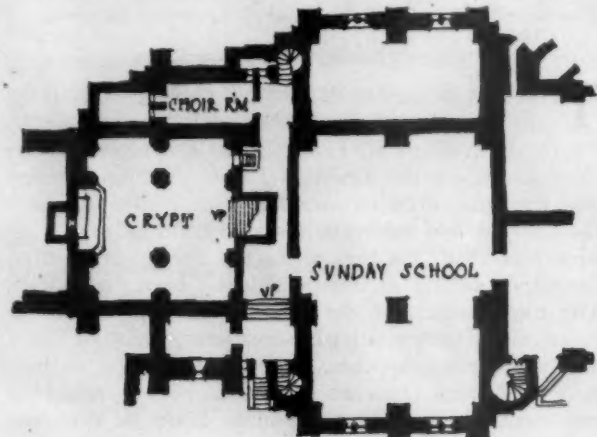
The vaulting is four-part, of stone ribs with interesting tile filling; its crown is fifty-five feet above the floor of the nave. The tile filling ranges, in color, from the darkest sienna to the lightest ochre, and on a bright day the sunlight, filtering through the multicolored glass in the clerestory windows, produces a most impressive illumination. The decorative stone carving of capitals and corbels in the interior is worthy of study. The good judgment and taste of the academy authorities is shown in the exposition of the regimental colors from the triforium, recalling similar arrangements in St. George's chapel at Windsor and the church of St. Louis at Les Invalides in Paris. Special attention is to be called to the carving of the woodwork in the choir and chancel. The marble altar and the dossel which hangs behind it will be studied with interest.

Below the chancel and reached through an opening in the center of the choir floor and covered by a three-ton slab in three sections is the crypt where it is intended to entomb the bodies of illustrious military dead. Through this opening a flight of stone steps leads down to the crypt, which is about forty feet square. It has a massive stone vaulted ceiling supporting the masonry floor of the sanctuary above. Four short stone pillars, each about five feet in diameter, support the vaulting. The capitals of these pillars have received decoration, and here again we recognize the artistic skill of the designer. It was necessary in the decorative treatment of the chapel to avoid the introduction of any symbolism that might be construed as controversial in its character or sectarian in its suggestiveness. Decorated capitals in the crypt illustrate how symbolism has been imperson-

ally treated throughout the building.

The subjects selected in the crypt are death and the resurrection. Running through the design are ingeniously inserted motives of moles, rats, owls, earthworms and the like, all typical of the night and of that great underworld with which we commonly associate the conception of death and burial.

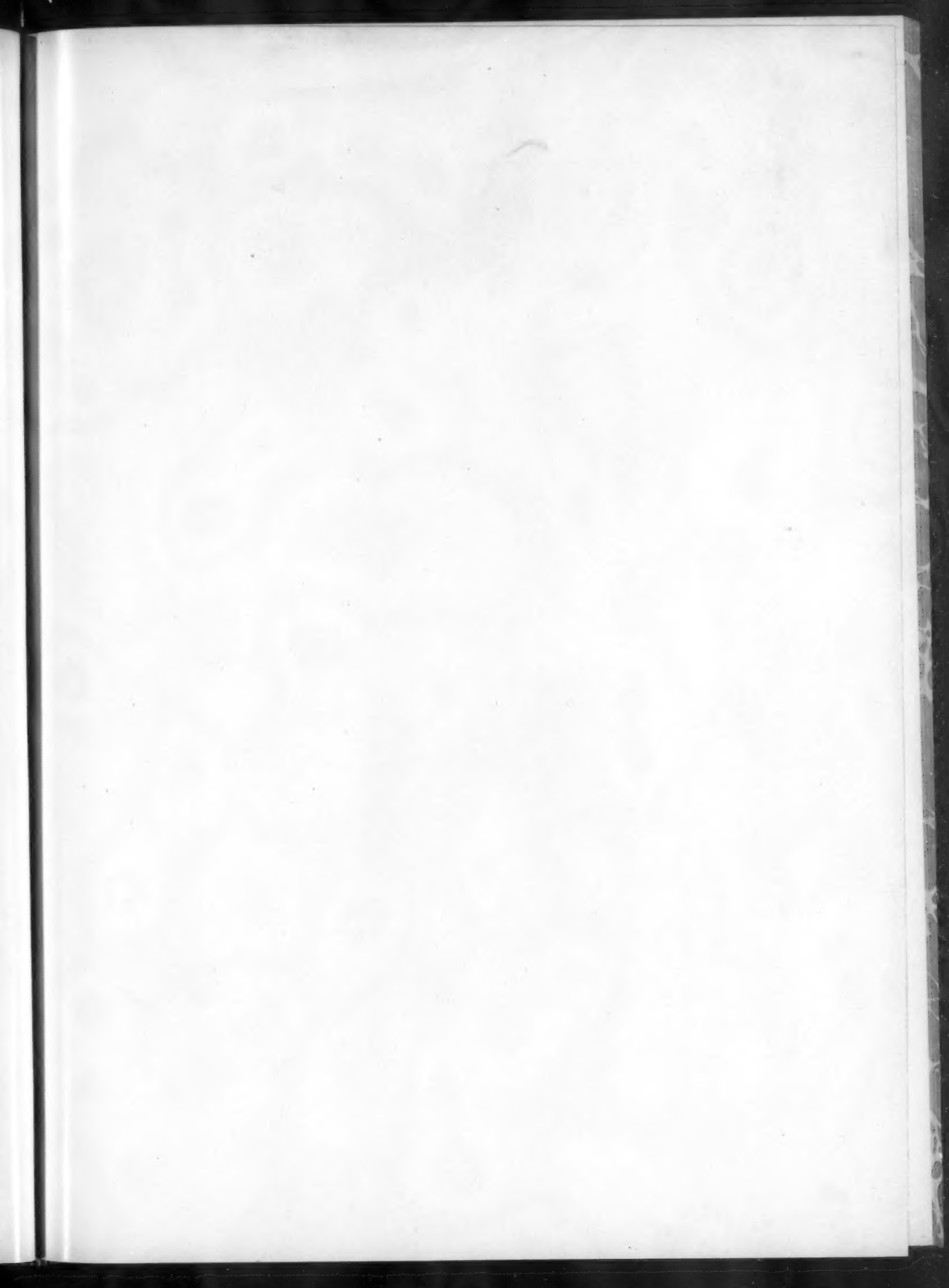
At the northeast corner of the chapel (see large plan)

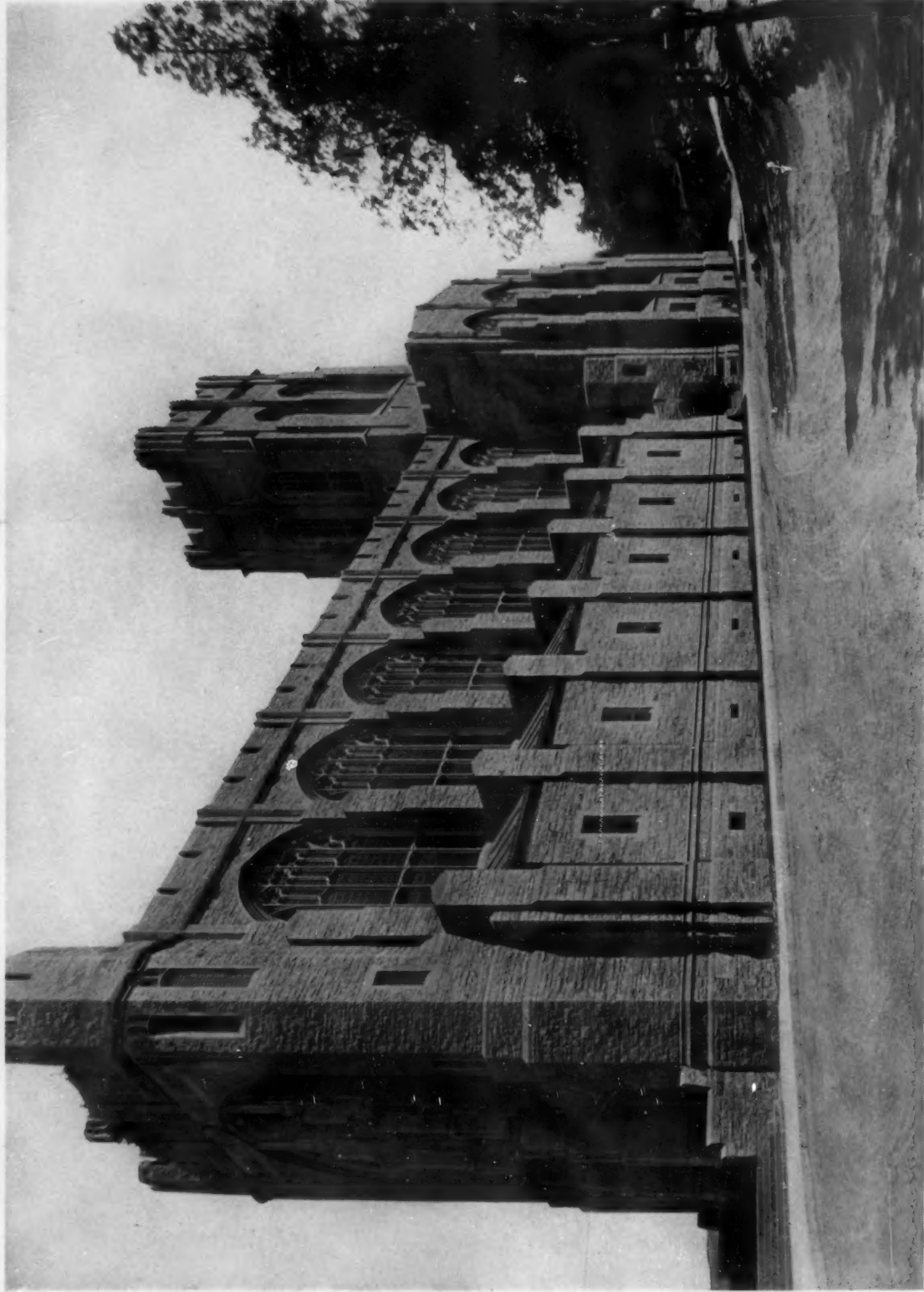


PLAN OF CRYPT—CHAPEL OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT, NEW YORK

are the chaplain's domestic quarters, from which a concealed passage gives access to the robing room, adjoining the chancel. These quarters are fitted up in keeping with the chapel and with such surroundings as would naturally be features in the home life of a man of culture and refinement.

It is always a difficult problem for the architect to so place and design the dependencies of a church edifice, especially when that edifice is of considerable extent and height, that the smaller parts will seem to belong to the composition of the whole and not appear as extraneous issues with a consequent loss of scale. How well this difficulty has been overcome in the chaplain's quarters of the Military Academy's Chapel is worthy of note.

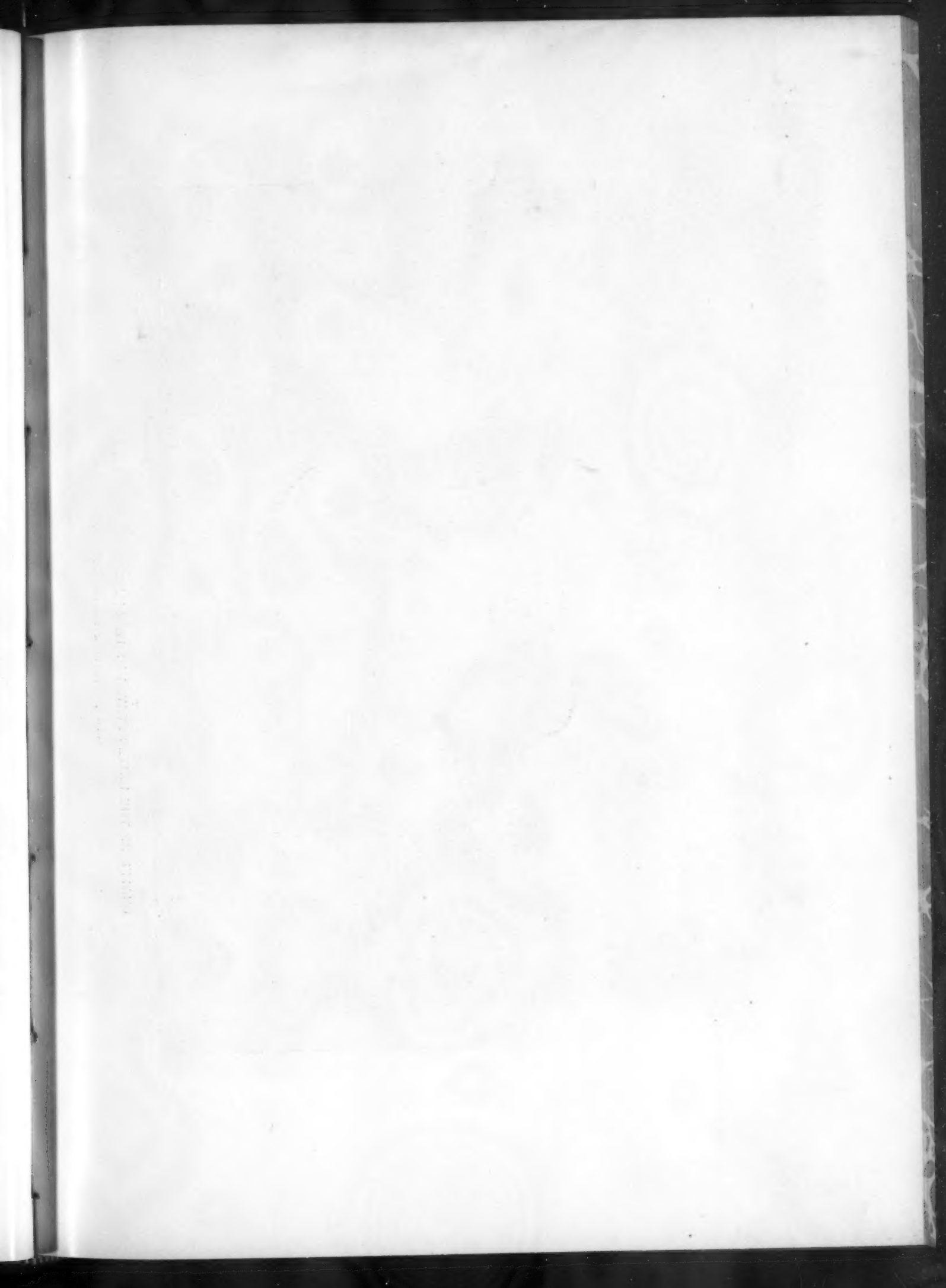


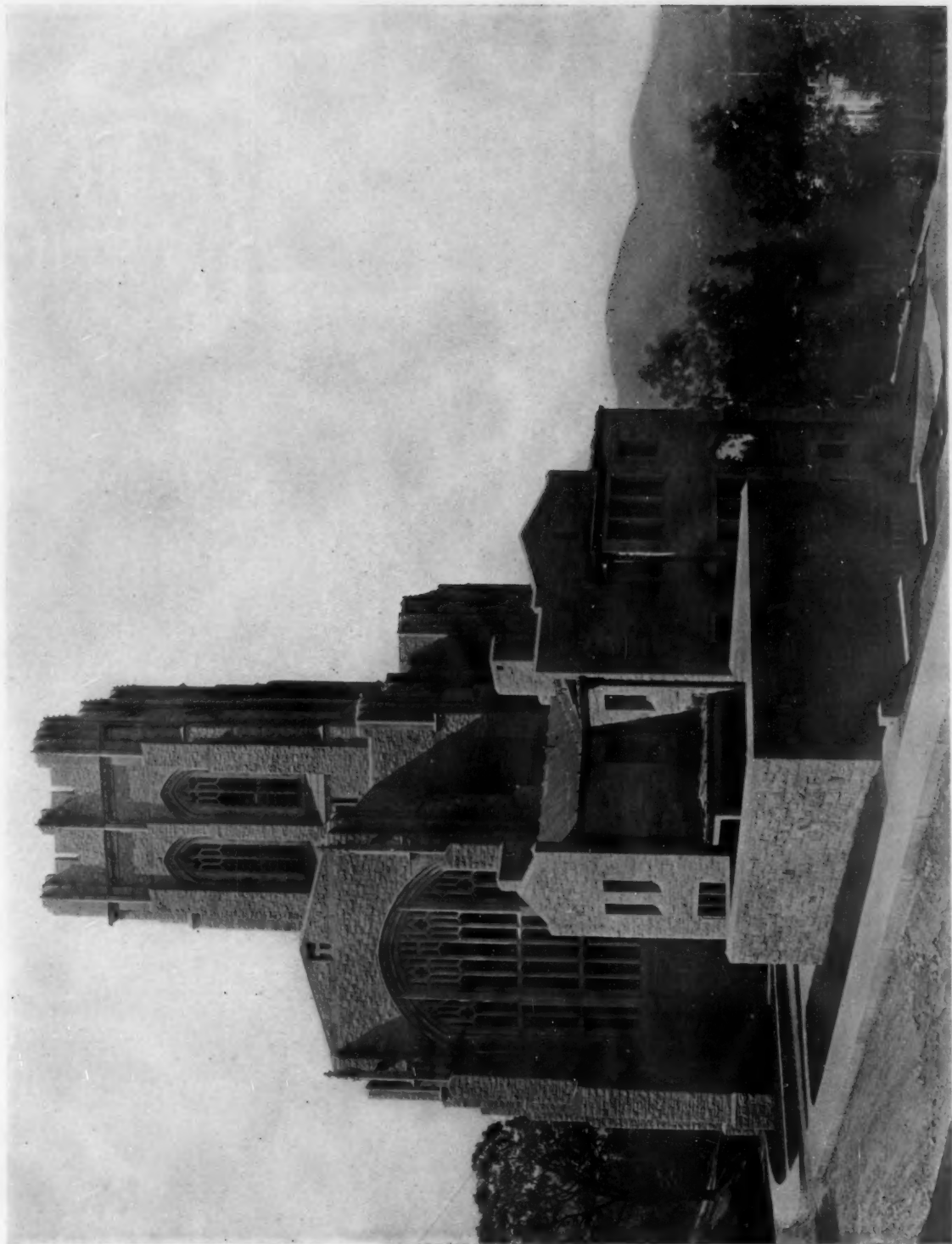


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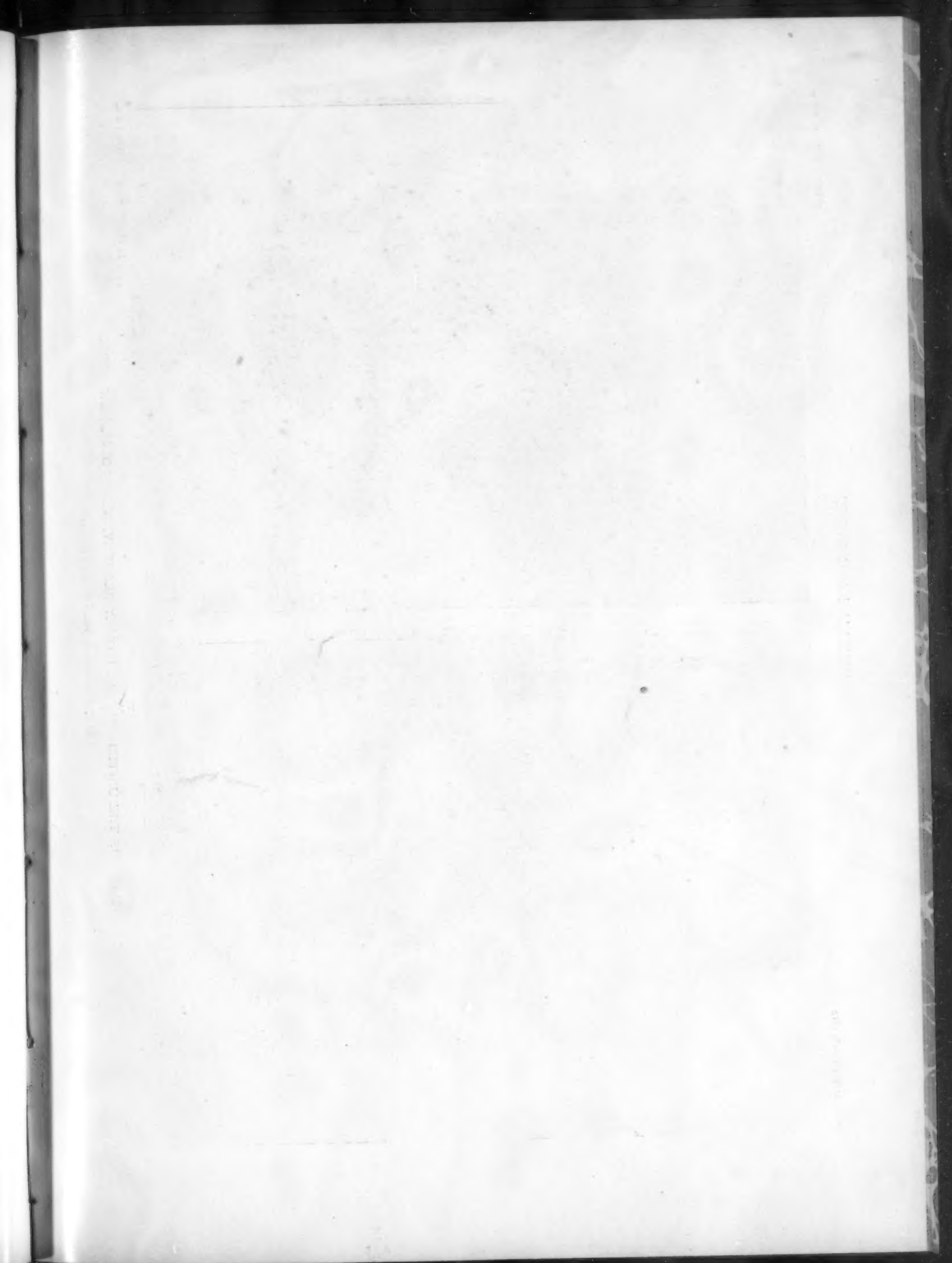


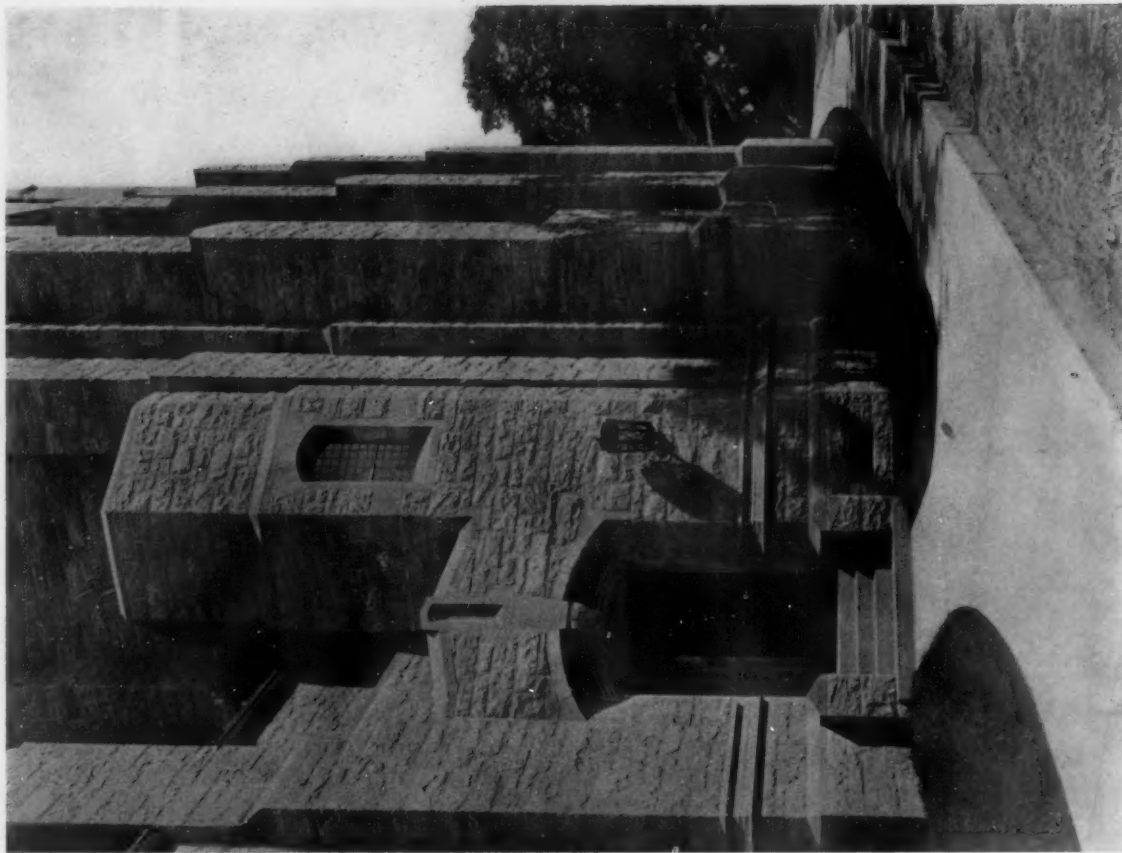
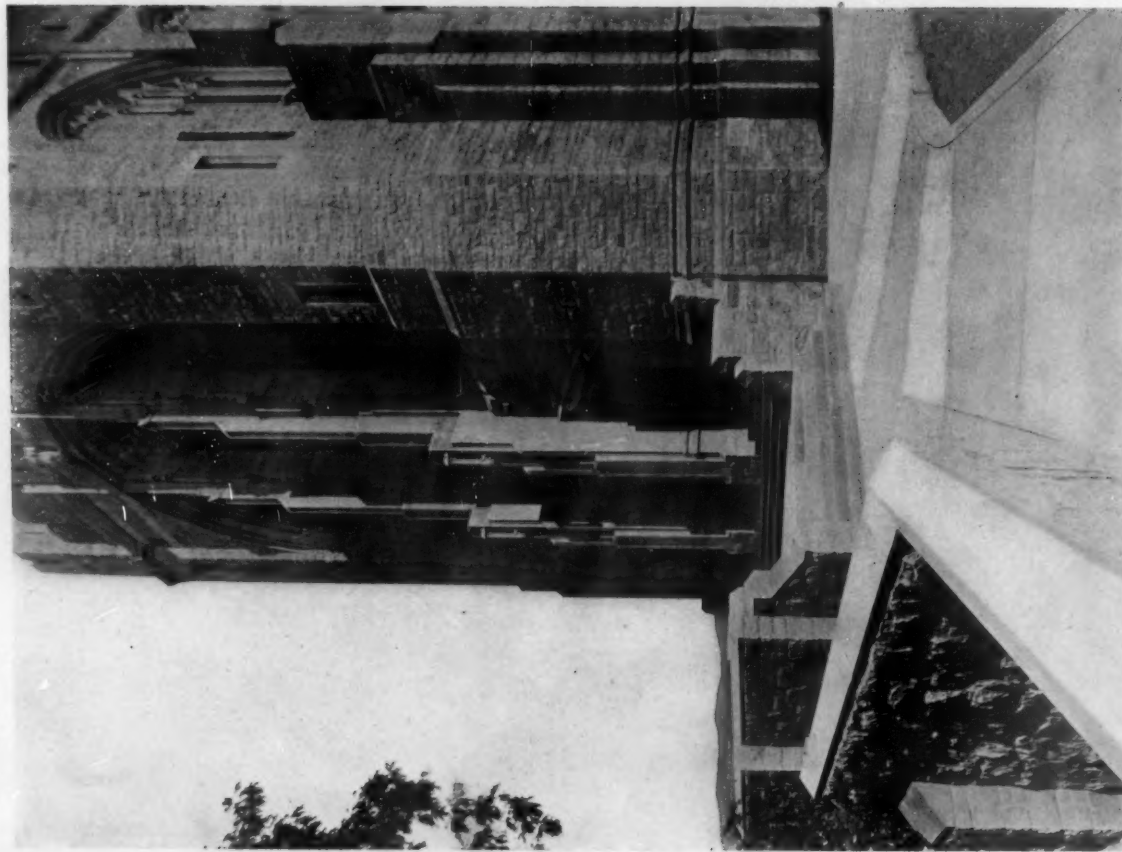


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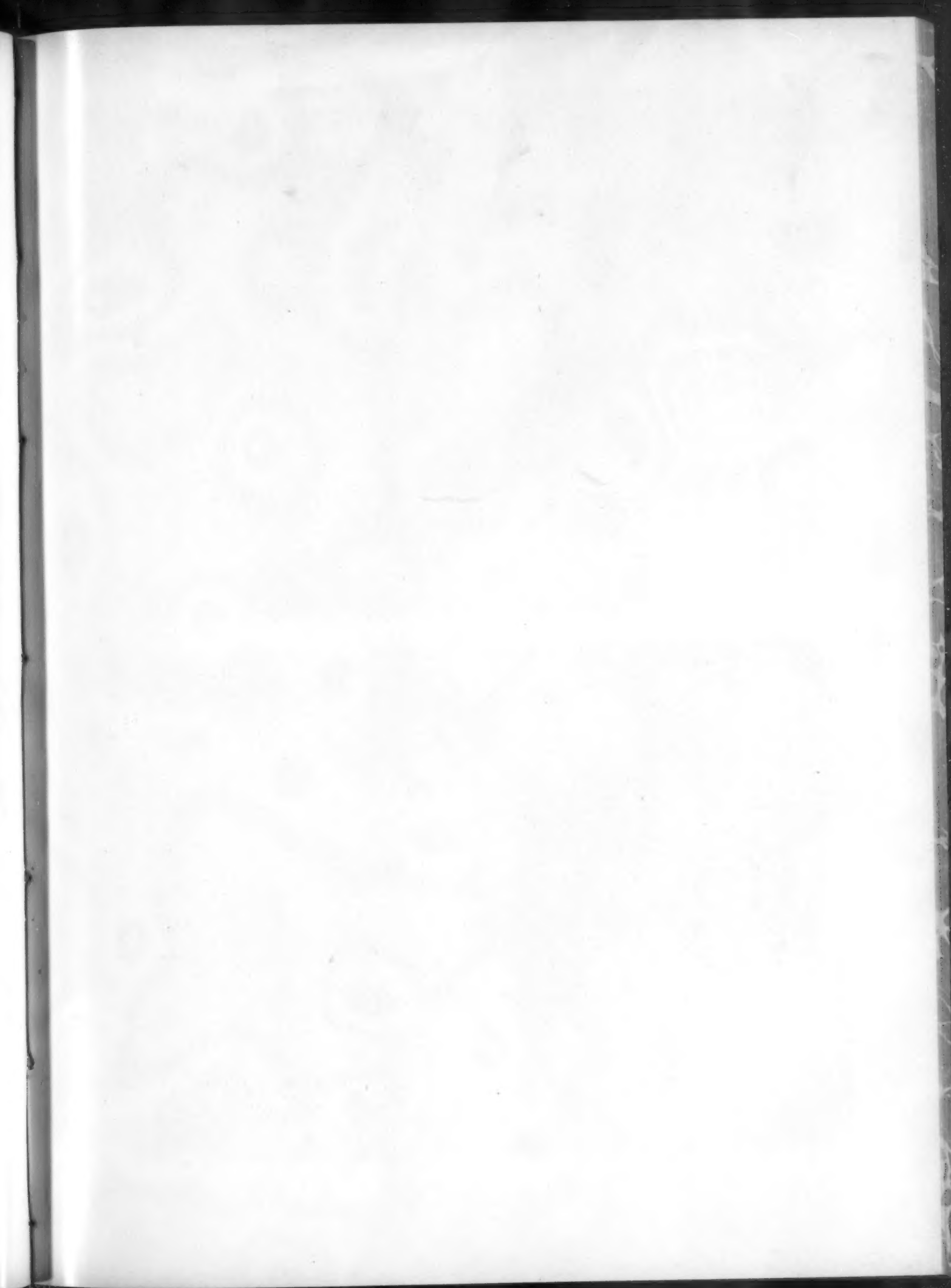


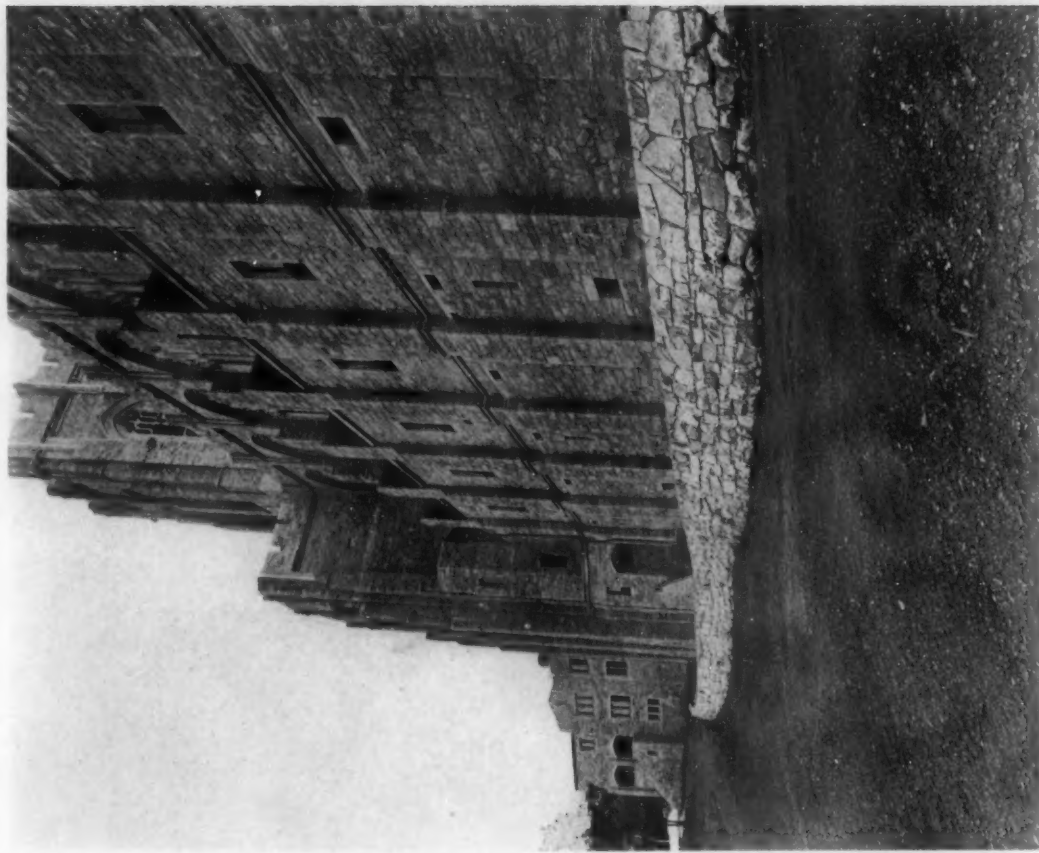


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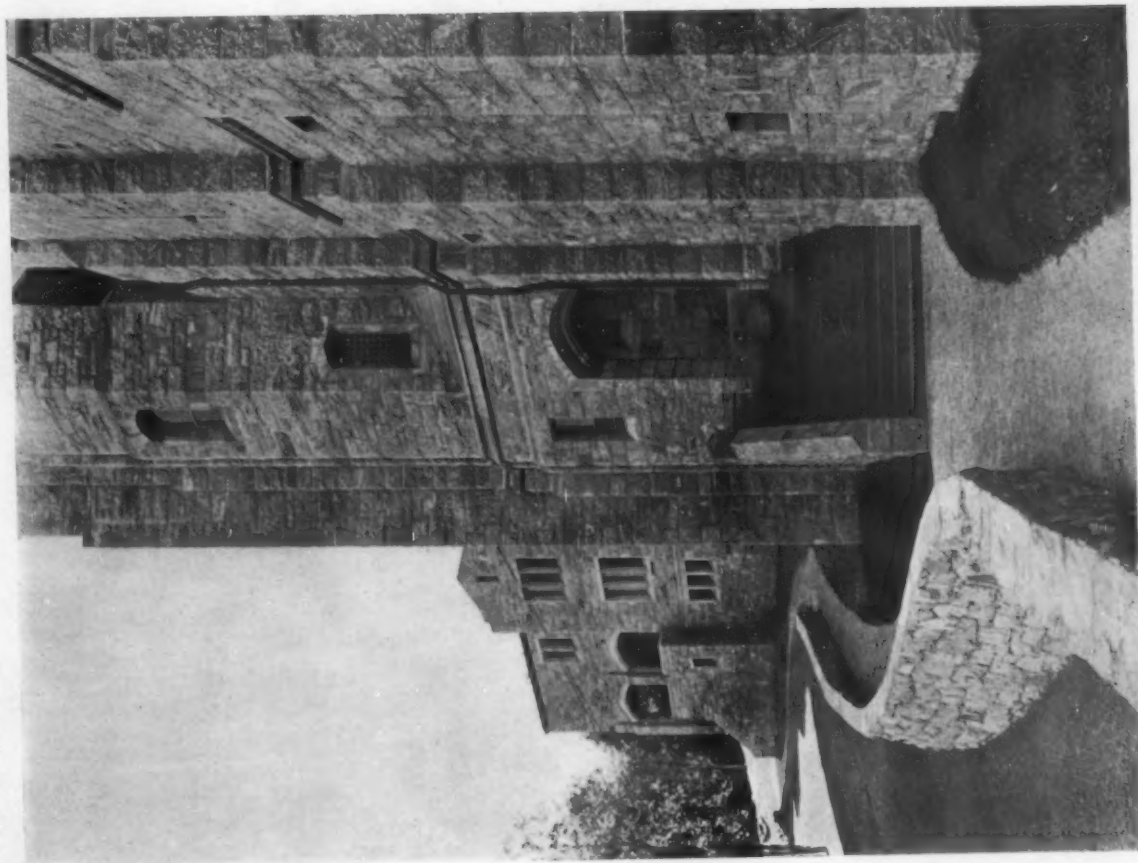




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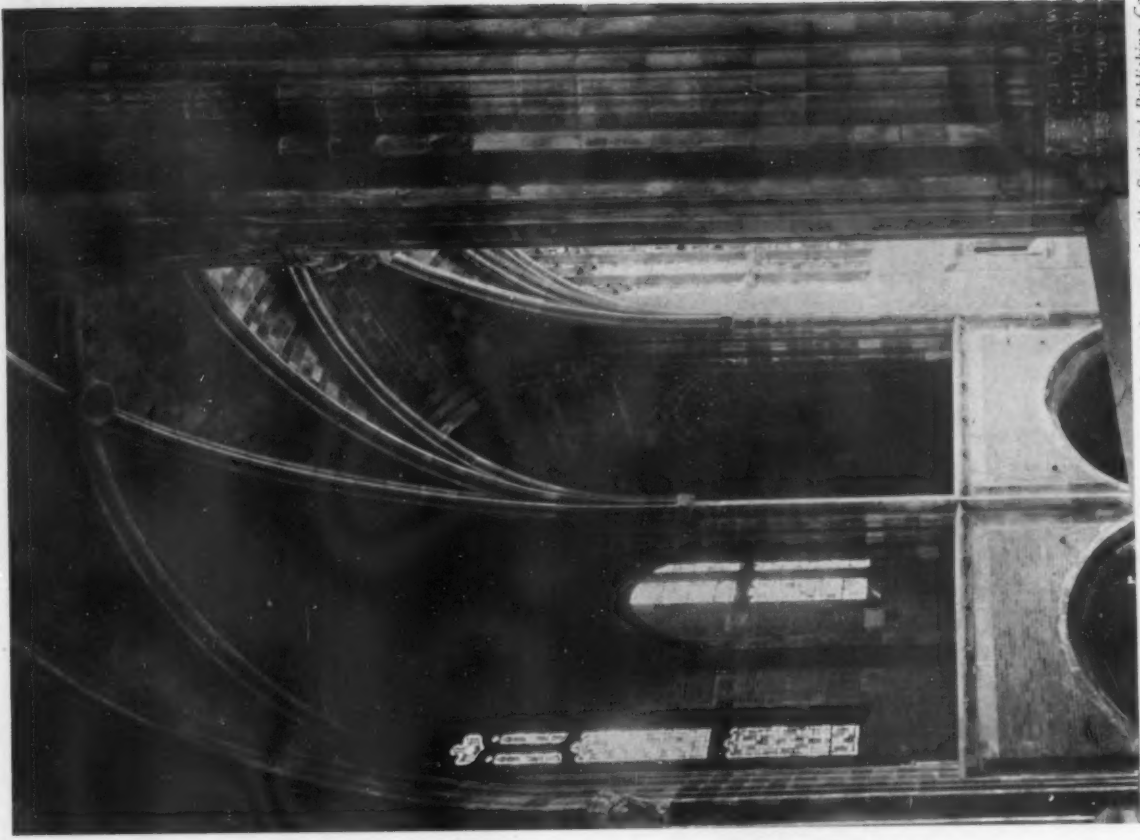
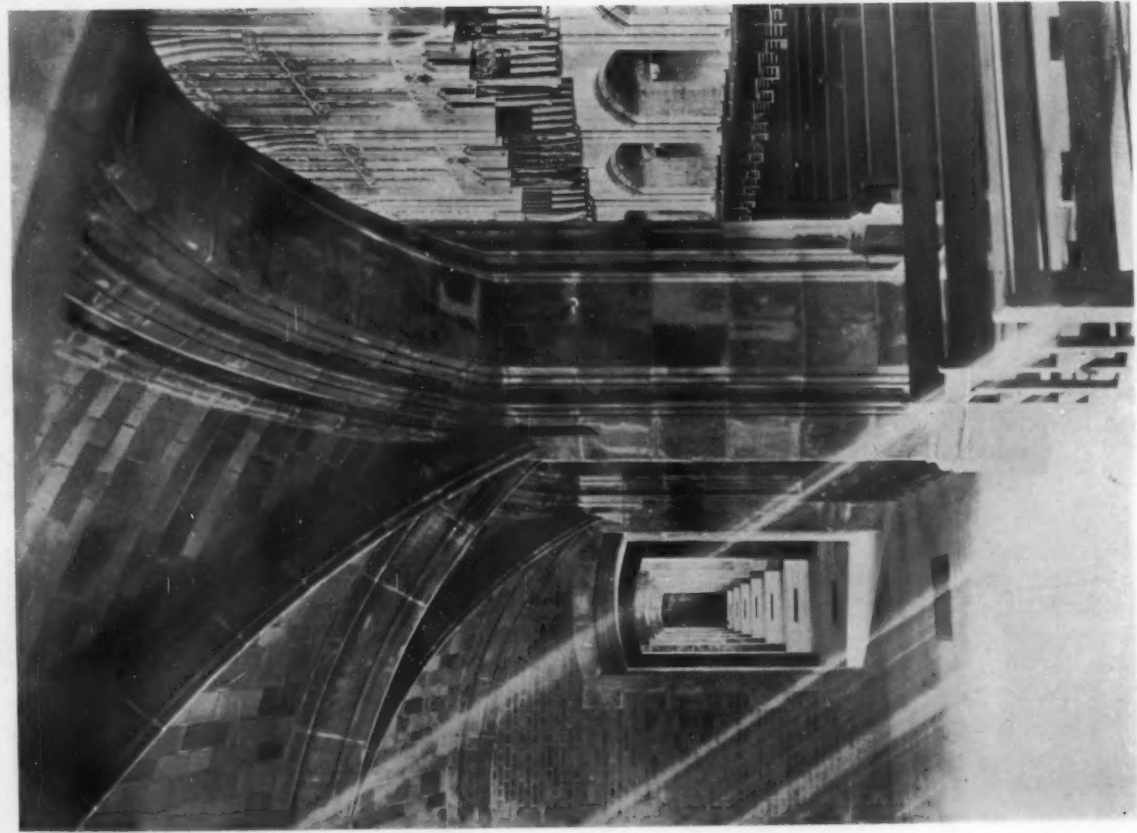
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