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ELABORATE CEILING OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE, GENOA

Interior Decoration

By M. STAPLEY



O the decorator who is a dealer in applied objects, walls are naturally a more important factor than ceilings; but to the architect the reverse is true. There, unhampered by such utilitarian interruptions as doors, windows, or fireplaces, he can indulge in a big and imposing treatment. That early architects felt the impressiveness of a fine ceiling needs no repeating; and, now that we are trying to make

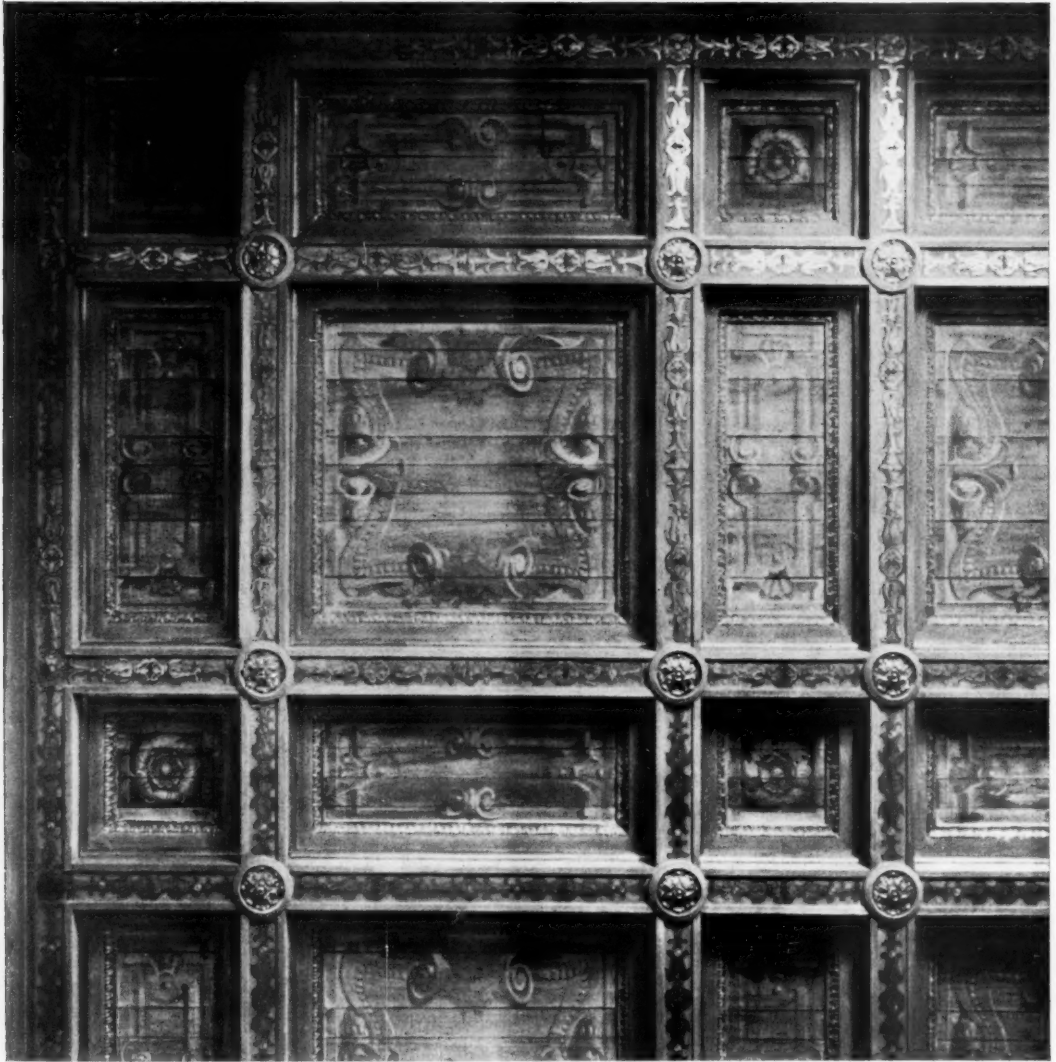
modern decoration more architectural, it is interesting to see what our predecessors did with this feature.

Examining first the possibilities of plaster, which, owing to the scarcity of wood, was in high favor for ceilings with ancient and with Italian Renaissance builders, we find that "It is a clothing," according to the English authority, Mr. George P. Bankart, "to the rougher material that composes the structure of the humblest cottage or the most sumptuous palace. It is intensely sympathetic, susceptible to every touch from the hand of the worker. It can be

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modeled, cast, incised, colored, stenciled or stamped with equal freedom, from the size of a cameo to the vastness of a dome." He might have added one of its great advantages in the eyes of the architect—it can be fitted into unusually shaped spaces. Yet

modeled plaster ornament in the Baths of Titus was made. Raphael and his assistant, Giovanni da Udino, were invited by Cardinal de Medici to see these discoveries and immediately applied themselves to re-inventing the process of modeling in



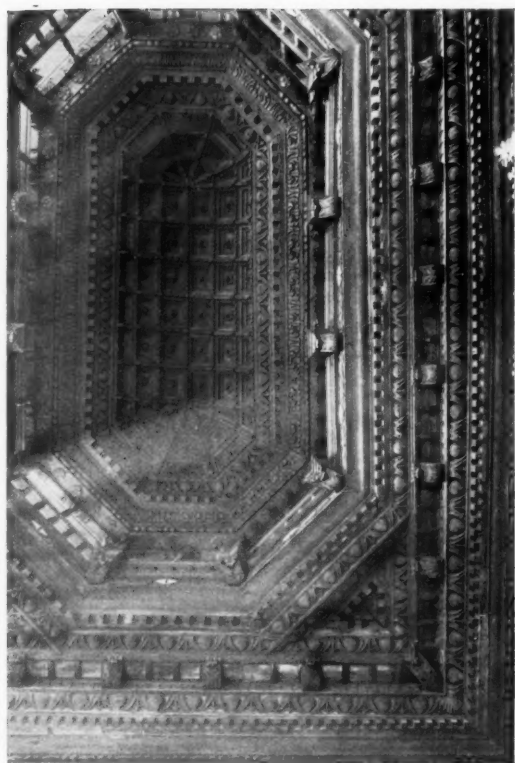
MODERN WOODEN CEILING, PAINTED IN TEMPERA—IN LIBRARY OF EDISON BRADLEY, ESQ., WASHINGTON, D. C.

all of these recommendations, combined with the cheapness of the material itself, contrived to bring it into disrepute with those who wished their houses to bespeak their bank account.

It was in 1488 that the discovery of finely

fine white plaster, with the results that attracted the attention of some of the greatest artists of the Renaissance and spread from Italy to France and England. Every architect knows the plaster ceilings modeled and colored of the Villa Madama, of the

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SPANISH RENAISSANCE CEILING MADE BY
MOORISH WORKMAN IN BARCELONA

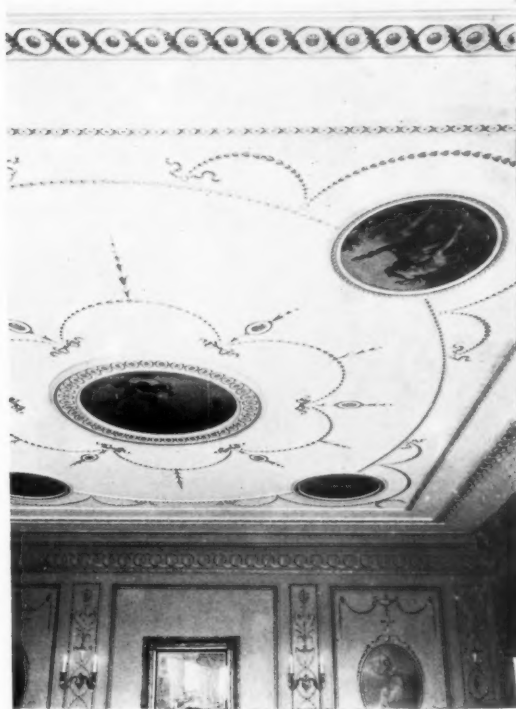
Loggia of the Vatican, as well as the famous Renaissance examples in other countries.

Plaster ceilings began to replace wooden ones in England in Henry VIII's day. They started by imitating timber construction; and as the more plastic material need not, like wooden beams, be kept in straight lines, it was curved into a variety of patterns—some of greater width and lesser depth than the wooden ribs that it sought to suggest. These simulated ribs enclosed a panel here and there, but more often wandered off into spirals and scrolls, and were enlivened at intervals by little ornamental knobs. The human figure was not often introduced, for English plasterers, unlike Italian ones, were not good at figure modeling. They comforted themselves with the decision that ceilings were not favorable places for studying detail and aimed only at an effect of general richness that did not demand close scrutiny. It was not necessary for such ceilings to be flat; indeed, plaster was exactly suited for application

to coved surfaces. Some of the finest English plaster ceilings were constructed at Haddon Hall, Aston Hall, Sizergh, the Reindeer Inn, Beckington Abbey, etc., and it is surprising, when one studies them, to find that although the plasterers carried about with them a number of stock designs, there is but little repetition. The desire to create new patterns was stronger than the desire to do their work with the least possible exertion.

Painted plaster ceilings started with Rubens' visit to England on a political mission in 1629. He had just come from long study of the frescoes of Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael, Perugino, and may be said to have introduced painting as a decorative treatment into Northern Europe. His services were required at every court; and when he came to England Charles I gladly paid him £3,000 to paint the ceiling of Inigo Jones's banqueting hall at Whitehall.

Gentileschi, brought by Van Dyke to England, decorated others in the manner instituted by Rubens—that is to say, with historical and allegorical compositions. Such



ORIGINAL ADAM CEILING WITH ANGELICA
KAUFMAN PANELS



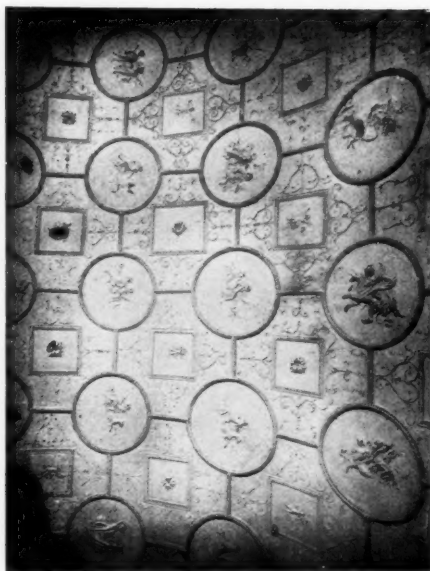
HIGHLY DECORATED WOODEN CEILING OF THE CASTELLO DI BRACCIANO, ROME

luxury got no encouragement during the Commonwealth, but with the restoration it again flourished and was seen henceforth in numerous mansions.

Unfortunately faulty roofs and floors and the general dampness that found its way through English houses have left but few examples of these. They needed, but did not get, periodical restoration. In Holland, where there was much more talent available, every rich burgomaster had ceilings and often all his walls painted with elaborate compositions. With the crowning of the Dutch prince William as King of England, the style had increased vogue. How completely painting, as ceiling decora-

tion, prevailed in France in the eighteenth century is well known, and Boucher and Fragonard were the most prominent artists in this field. The latter's "Lover's Progress," designed not only for ceiling but for the entire decoration of a room, was purchased in 1898 by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan for £50,000.

Most of the early English ceilings, however, were left white. It is not until the Adam period, the latter half of the eighteenth century, when plaster work was degenerating, that we hear of ceilings being tinted with Angelica Kaufman and Pergolesi painting small medallions for them. In truth, it was not plaster at all that the



PLASTER CEILING IN THE VALERI TOMB, ROME, FIRST CENTURY, A. D.

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Adams used, but some kind of gypsum or fibre mixed with a glutinous compound and pressed while hot into metal moulds. As its exact nature has never been known, Adam ceilings are today reproduced in ordinary plaster, the very material which they were trying to imitate. Speaking of the work in Lord Mansfield's house, Robert Adam says: "The grounds of the panels and friezes are colored with light tints of pink and green, so as to take off the glare of the white formerly so common. This always appeared to me so cold and unfinished that I ventured this variety of grounds to create a harmony between the ceiling and the side walls with their hanging decorations." Strange that this Georgian architect, whose walls and wood work were mostly white, should have felt the necessity of coloring his ceilings, while Elizabethans,



VILLA MADAMA MOTIVE IN HOUSE OF SENATOR CLARK, NEW YORK

whose walls were frequently all in dark wainscoting, left theirs white; but then the Elizabethan hall was frequently coved and moreover was not furnished with many windows.

Plaster, although hardly to be considered as a structural material, is in some ways ideal for modern work. So absolutely is it unaffected by thermal conditions that it is a means of fireproofing; in addition, it is comparatively light, an important consideration where a steel frame is used. But uncolored plaster is an unsatisfactory finish,



VILLA MADAMA MOTIVE IN HOUSE OF SENATOR CLARK, NEW YORK

except in a Georgian or Colonial interior. Yet many glaring white ceilings are found in well-lighted American homes and offices, simply because the man who sat at his board and designed them never went to see his design after it had been executed and placed.

Plaster ceilings are naturally difficult of removal to any great distance. It is surprising, though, how successfully some of them have been taken down in sections and re-installed in new houses in England. Here in this remote country we have to be content with casts—and of only a quarter of the ceiling at that, the rest to be filled out here by plasterers who are none too skillful



VILLA MADAMA MOTIVE IN COLOR IN HOUSE OF SENATOR CLARK, NEW YORK

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MUSIC ROOM IN HOUSE OF EDISON BRADLEY, ESQ.,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

at their work. For this reason those who want old ceilings secure wooden ones whenever possible. Many famous examples, carved, painted and gilded, derived chiefly from England, are to be found in American houses.

The comparatively few wooden ceilings that exist in Italy are very richly wrought, those of unpainted cedar in the Farnesi palace being justly famous. In France, even before Francis I began importing Italian artisans, the wooden ceiling was the point on which the Gothic workman lavished much skill. But it was in England that it reached its greatest development and became in Elizabethan and Jacobean architecture a peculiarly English feature, the outcome of native tradition and but slightly influenced by Italian models.

The predecessor of the all-wood English ceiling was one composed of exposed wooden beams enclosing plaster panels as at Haddon Hall, and this is often repeated in modern work. It is to be regretted that architects designing them have not always insisted that the cutting of the beams, either for chamfer or mouldings, should never extend clear out to the extremities of the beams, as would necessarily be the case if they were cut by machine. Instead chamfer or in-

cised mouldings should return out to the rectangular some six or eight inches from the wall.

In the oldest forms of all-wood ceilings the heavy second-story floor boards were laid directly on top of the first story ceiling beams and pegged to them so that the underside of the boards formed the panel between. The practical objection to this simple construction today arises from our being more sensitive to noises overhead, which even double flooring and deafening felt cannot overcome. The same structural effect, however, can be produced by furring down and making false beams and ceiling, and such falsities of construction are not objected to as they would have been

in olden times.

Perhaps, though, for sheer beauty of execution, no wooden ceiling is comparable



SGRAFFITO WORK ON PALAZZO DE MONTAIRO, FLORENCE, ITALY

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A MODERN WOODEN CEILING IN HOUSE OF EDISON
BRADLEY, ESQ., WASHINGTON, D. C.

to that made (mostly of cedar wood) by the Moors, and called, from its form of an inverted trough, *artesonado*. It claims no constructive merit, for the Saracens in Spain never attempted vaults or domes, but were content with an easily constructed timber roof, with separate wooden ceiling underneath on which they expended their genius for elaborate detail. However, their ceilings never violate structural forms; and the cunning carpentry with which they filled in their trough with hundreds of pieces of wood, radiating often from a central star, is well worth study—especially if one can find an example that has never been painted or gilded. The Audiencia or Town Hall in Valencia contains a magnificent unpainted chestnut *artesonado*, the work of Moorish artisans who remained in Spain after the expulsion. These same expert

workmen executed, under Christian architects many a Spanish Renaissance ceiling which, because of their inherited skill as woodworkers, is finer than anything else of its kind in Europe.

Stone ceilings have proven too expensive even in this land of wealth, and the few that exist are plain vaulting, with but little ornamentation. But terra cotta has proven in the last few years the ideal medium by which the architect, looking for a more structural substance than plaster painted, may realize his desire for polychrome decoration. To be sure, it is a material that does not suggest coziness and consequently, when employed in the home, is found in large salons and domical rotundas. Its success is well merited by the manufacturers who themselves have spared neither time nor expense in experimenting with glazing and inevitable shrinkage—now reduced to a minimum. One of the most charming uses to which terra cotta has been put is for ceilings of bath rooms *de*

luxe, several of which in New York show, in beautiful mellow coloring, motifs from the celebrated stucco-duro ceiling of the Villa Madama.

A new form of decoration (or more properly the revival of an old one), which promises to come into great favor for ceilings, is *sgraffito*, or black and white plaster. This was made known to Andrea Feltrini through the excavations of the Baths of Titus and practised by him with beautiful results. Florence has some specially fine exteriors in *sgraffito* by Di Cosimo. The method is to cover the surface with black plaster, which, while still wet, is covered with a white stucco. To this the cartoon is transferred and the outline is hatched over with a graving-iron so as to expose the coating of black underneath. Heywood Sumner, an English architect, has recently decorated

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some Manchester buildings so successfully that his results cannot fail to attract the attention of American architects to the possibilities of sgraffito.

The sort of ceiling chosen will depend, of course, on the purpose of the room; for good decoration is not a mere hit and miss procedure, but has underlying rules as inviolable as the rules of grammar. Just as the architect expresses on the exterior of the house something of its purpose so he, or the decorator, will express something of the purpose of each room by his design and color scheme. The vestibule will be

entirely formal; the reception room, where brief calls are made and perfunctory conversation exchanged, will never be serious. Passing on to other apartments—conservatory, dining room, library—there will be an ever-increasing intimacy, a greater assembling of decorative units of the sort that the owner might personally have acquired. It seems generally agreed that warmth of tone and added sombreness best indicate this intimacy and these fittingly reach their culmination in the library.

We are indebted to Messrs. Maek, Jenney & Tyler, Messrs. Litchfield & Co., and The Atlantic Terra Cotta Co., for illustrations of examples of modern decorations shown in this article.



ORIGINAL ADAM CEILING BUILT INTO A LONDON
RESIDENCE

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

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AUGUST 2, 1911

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THE THAMES NATIONAL BANK, NORWICH, CONN.

PRIZE WINNING DESIGNS, PARIS PRIZE, SOCIETY OF
BEAUX-ARTS ARCHITECTS

FRONTISPIECE:—

DETAIL OF A WINDOW, CUBBIO, ITALY

STREET DECORATIONS

JUDGING from the photographic reproductions that have appeared in English magazines, we are inclined to the belief that the temporary street decorations erected in London to enliven the city and make it attractive during the Coronation ceremonies can scarcely be said to have been artistically successful. Perhaps when viewed in bright sunlight with all the attendant colors the effect was somewhat mitigated, but in most instances the designs or decorative treatments selected appear to have had little or no relation to the general architecture of the streets which they were intended to adorn.

It seems unfortunate that on occasions when a city is thronged with visitors and it is particularly desirous of appearing most attractive the means adopted to

achieve this end should be so hastily conceived and so poorly executed.

We are perhaps even more culpable in this country. No later than the recent Hudson-Fulton Celebration in this city, the decorative treatment of our streets and the design and arrangement of the many "floats" that made up the parades were so poorly conceived as to call forth protest and invite unfavorable criticism. Just why the services of individuals and societies competent to design, plan and carry forth these projects to a successful conclusion should be ignored is difficult to comprehend. The most successful results in street decoration ever accomplished in this country were those on the occasion of the return of Admiral Dewey after his conquest of the Philippine Islands. So pleasing were certain of the features then employed that there was at once a demand on the part of the public that the Dewey Arch on Madison Square and the Washington Arch at the lower end of Fifth Avenue be perpetuated in enduring materials. Fortunately, by means of private subscriptions, the Washington Arch, designed by the late Stanford White, has become one of the permanent and beautiful monuments of the city. The Dewey Arch, which represented in its sculptured features the combined artistic effort of the members of the National Sculpture Society, was left to the care of our city government and was demolished, much to the regret of everyone who witnessed the spectacle.

If it is worth while to lavish time and money on the decoration of our streets in celebration of an important event or occurrence in history, would it not be equally worth while to construct at least some one worthy feature in permanent materials so that the occasion might have daily suggestion to the people on our streets in years to come?

FIRE PROTECTION LAWS AND THEIR ENFORCEMENT

IMPATIENCE and a certain degree of dissatisfaction on account of the time that has elapsed since the Asch Building fire centered attention on the hazardous conditions prevailing in many factory buildings, with no tangible progress made toward safeguarding employees subjected to

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similar risks as those who lost their lives in the Triangle Waist factory fire, are probably in a measure justified. Investigations have been undertaken and legislative bills have been drawn and passed, but to the man in the street matters appear to have changed very little.

It is not difficult to appreciate the public attitude under all the circumstances, and that there is immediate need of additional provisions of law to entirely protect the lives of employees in the larger factories there is no doubt. Efforts being made along these lines are commendable and it is hoped that they will meet with early

and complete success. At the same time, the situation is not perhaps as bad as it is sometimes pictured. There are laws already on the statute books which, rigidly enforced, would go far toward preventing a recurrence of the disasters that have shocked the country during recent years. The difficulty has not been so much due to the lack of adequate provisions as to the failure to fix responsibility for the enforcement of the laws. New legislation, however wisely drawn, will fail unless the responsibility for its enforcement is definitely fixed and the officers charged with the administration of the law chosen with unusual care.

The English Staircase*



DURING that period of decadence in the last century, when domestic architecture generally sunk to a lower level than at any time previously, the staircase, in common with other features, lost much of its dignity and became, like its predecessor in the Norman castles, little better than a ladder to enable access to the upper stories of the house.

It is perhaps to the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods that we must look for the best of the earlier good examples of the staircase, and in our present day for equally commendable design founded on such good precedent.

While that period preceding the Elizabethan was fertile in good construction, and the staircase had become an important and often stately and dominating feature of the interior, its material was mostly confined to stone. It was for the Elizabethan period to produce the joiner, who, in the method of his work, exercised the same care as to structural strength, but was largely

influenced in his design in following out in wood the same massive lines of construction as his predecessor in the more massive stone. It was not until the Renaissance and the importation into England of the Italian workman that the staircase, in common with other structural details, began to take on the lighter feeling in construction and receive those lavish additions of ornament with which the workmen of the period were wont to dignify everything they undertook.

The earlier forms of staircase were two in number, and were built to serve entirely different purposes. One, a straight flight between two walls, was constructed where it was daily used by large numbers of people. The other, a circular or "newel" stair, formed of winding steps of stone that circled about the central "newel," generally located in a small well, and in the earlier examples in the corner towers of the castles or halls. These winding staircases it has been claimed by a writer were constructed in that manner to make their ascent difficult and enable the defenders of the castle to better repel an invading force and prevent an attack in numbers.

It is from these early examples that the English staircase has its origin, and it is interesting to trace in Mr. Godfrey's work the influence of architectural periods on their design and construction.

*The English Staircase. An historical account of its characteristic types to the end of the XVIII Century. By Walter H. Godfrey. Illustrated by more than one hundred photographs and measured drawings. Full cloth 7 x 10 inches. Price, \$7.50 net. London:—B. T. Batsford. Imported by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

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It was during the last half of the XVI Century that the wooden type of staircase was introduced into the domestic architecture of England and with this type dated the introduction of the balustrade. Although there had been attempts at an earlier period to construct staircases of this type, the balustrade being formed of stone, it is important to note that when wood had been substituted, and at a later period iron, how assiduously the artistic ingenuity of the workmen of the period set about to impart that artistic touch to their work to



STAIRCASE, CASTLE HEDINGHAM, ESSEX

which we have already referred. It was at this time that the turned baluster was introduced, and this method has held its own in staircase construction up to the present time.

Much ingenuity has even been displayed by the craftsman in filling the space between the hand rail and the string of the staircase. The baluster form has been referred to. With the introduction of wood in staircase construction and before the end of the reign of James I, 1625, many new methods had been employed. In its sim-



ASHTON HALL (1618-35) WARWICKSHIRE

pler form the method was merely a thin wooden screen, pierced in pattern in keeping with the decorative custom of the period. With the introduction of carving, this thin



IRON BALUSTRADE,
CHESTERFIELD HOUSE, LONDON



STAIRCASE WITH STONE BALUSTRADE
DOWNHOLLAND HALL, NEAR ORMSKIRK



STAIRCASE WITH CARVED BALUSTRADE
DUNSTER CASTLE, SOMERSET

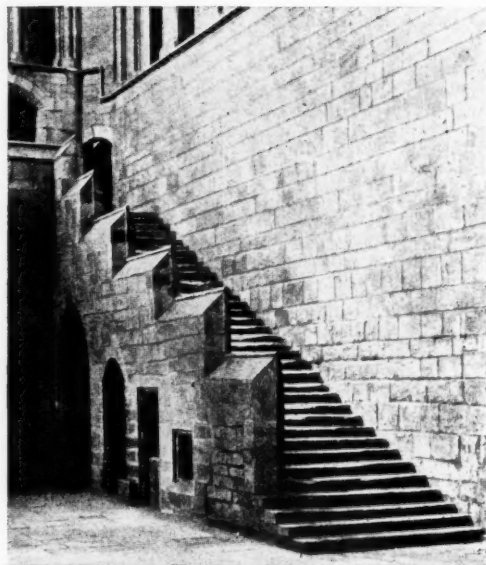
partition was replaced by a heavier one and received at the hand of the wood-carver, whose work was beginning to exert a large influence on the interior treatment of buildings, much lavish and intricate design.

At a later period when marble and other colored stones were introduced into the construction of the staircase, this space between the hand-rail and "string" was filled with iron work, and particularly during the Renaissance, when the introduction of the beautiful craftsmanship of the Flemish worker in iron produced staircases that stand today as marvels of

skill in construction and the highest degree of artistic conception.

We regard Mr. Godfrey's book as among the very best of recent contributions to this always interesting subject, and believe it will prove of much interest and value to architects. The illustrations are particularly well rendered and present the best accepted types of various periods described. These periods cover the three hundred years from 1500 to 1800 A.D.

The accompanying illustrations are reproduced from Mr. Godfrey's book by permission of Charles Scribner's



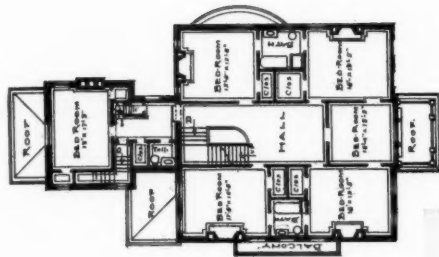
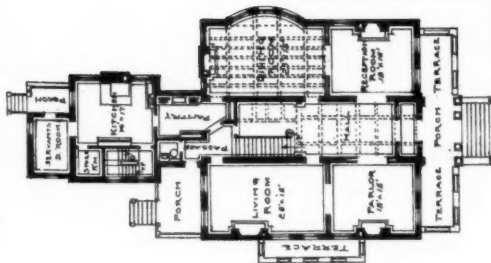
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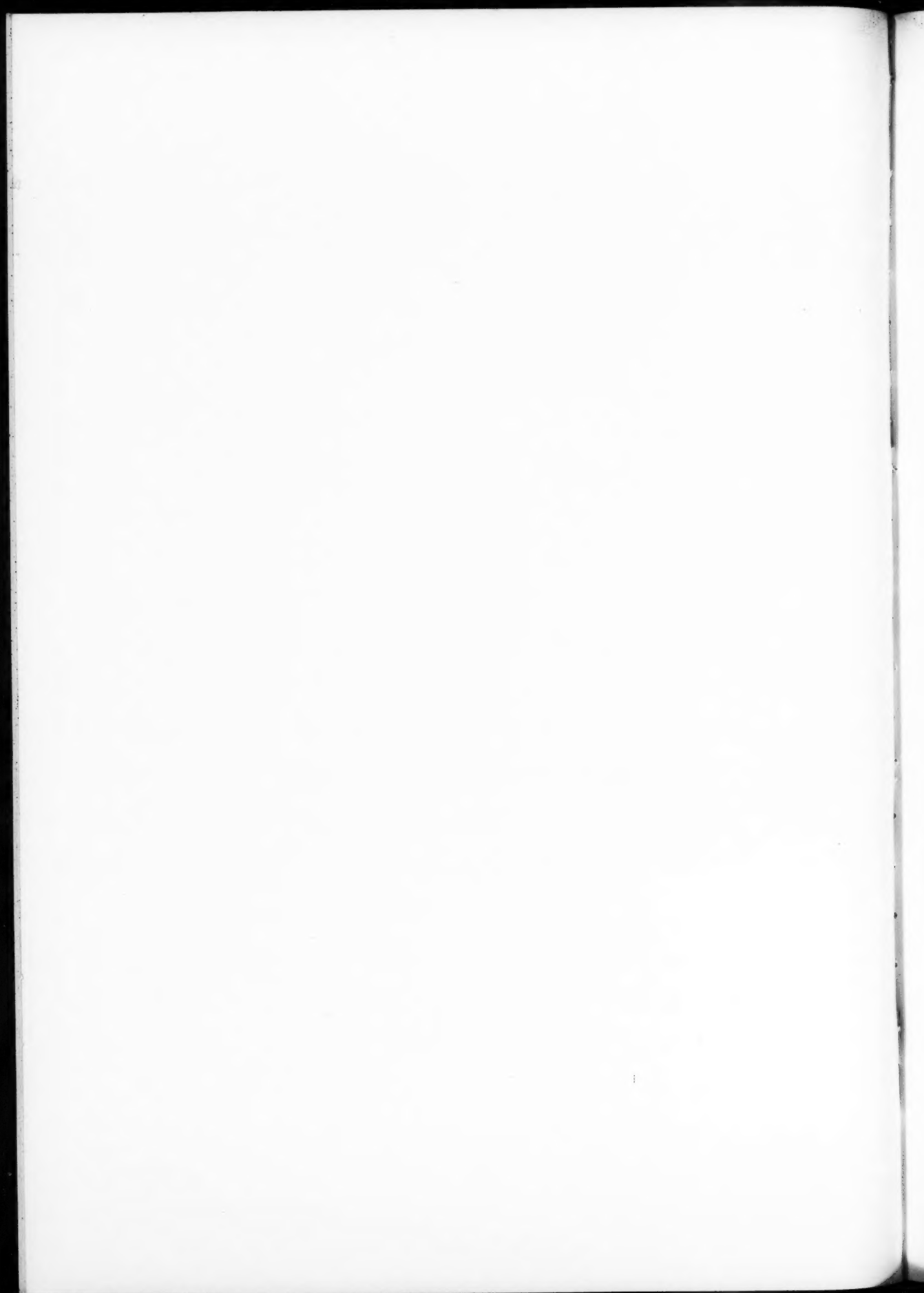
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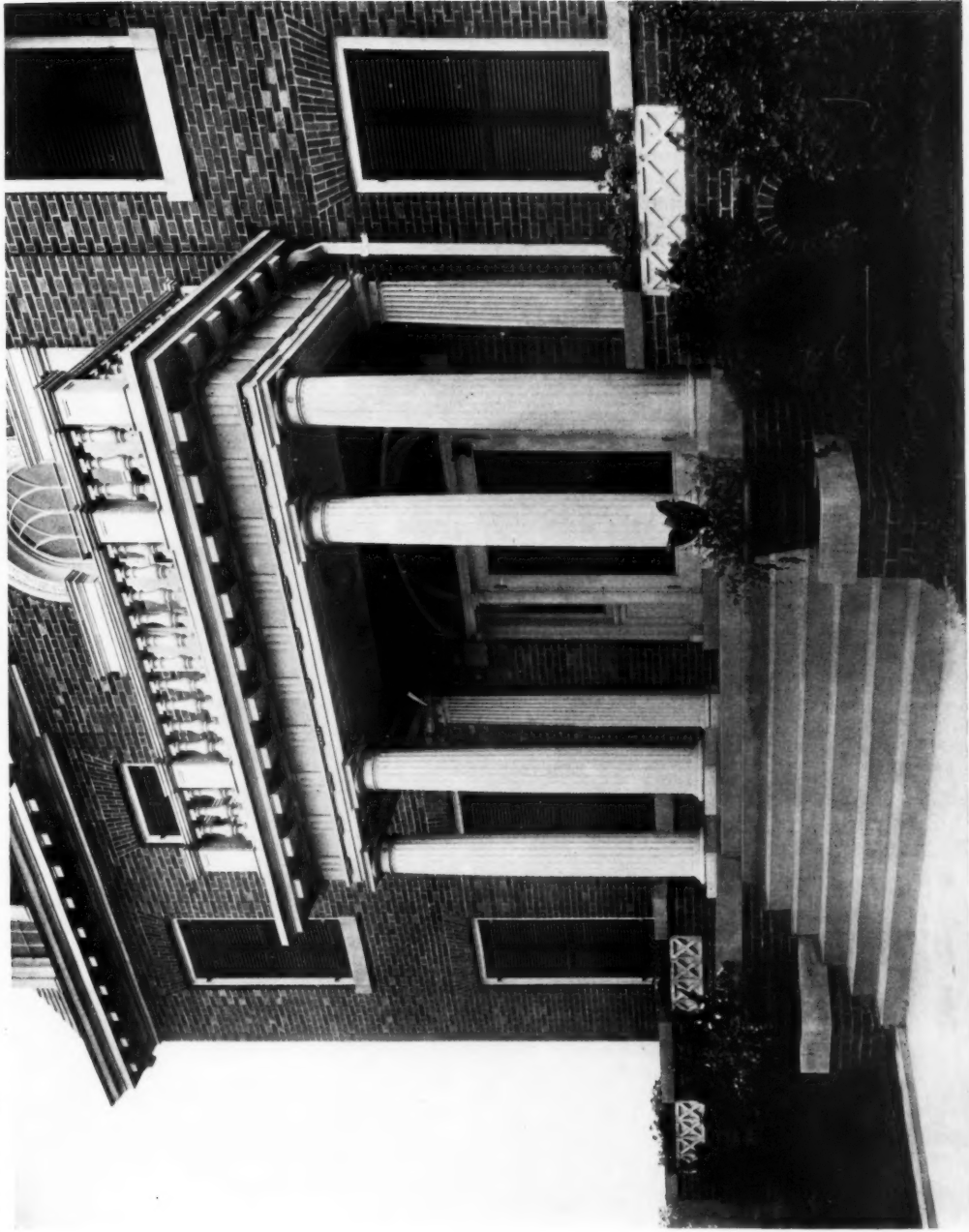
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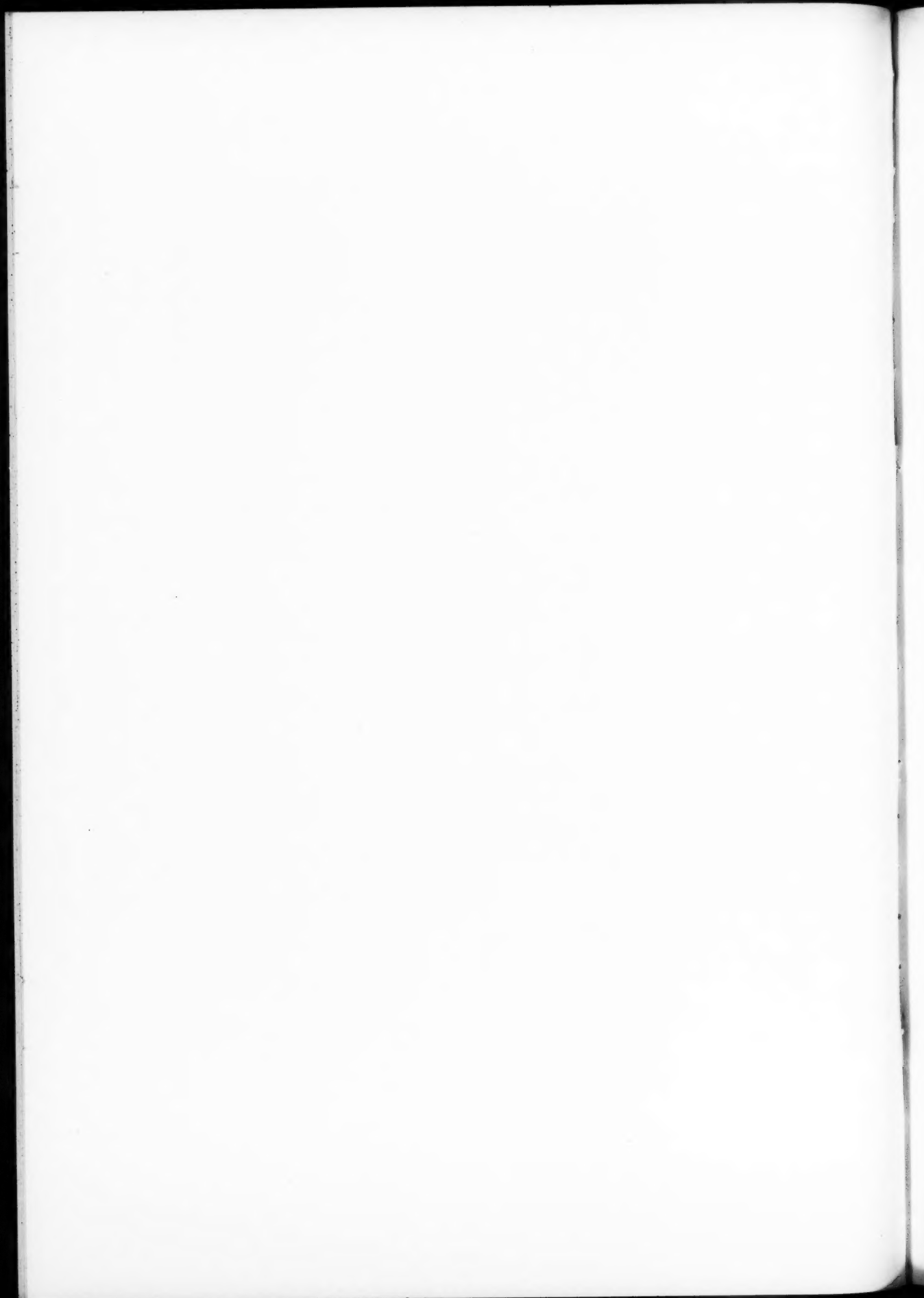






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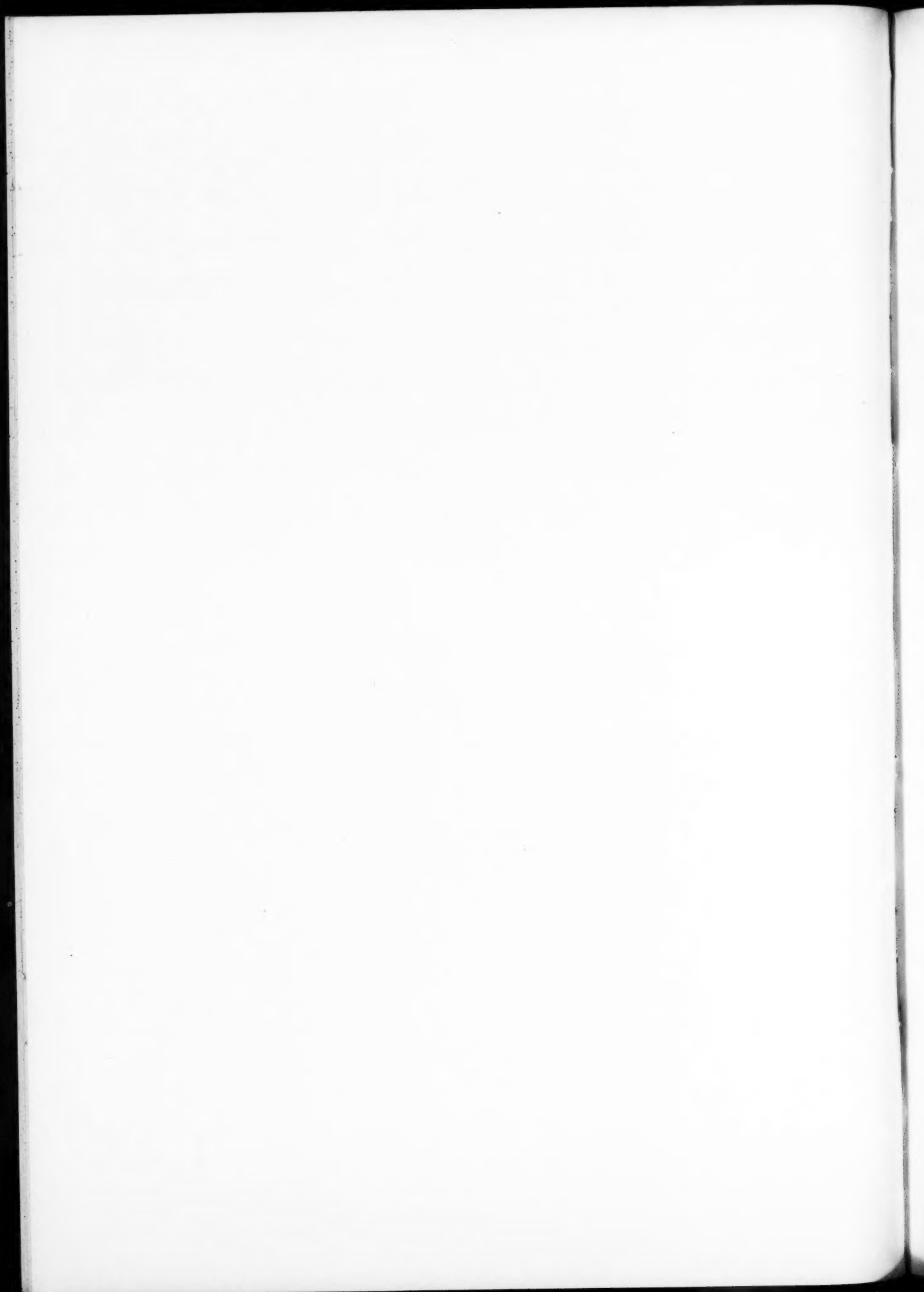
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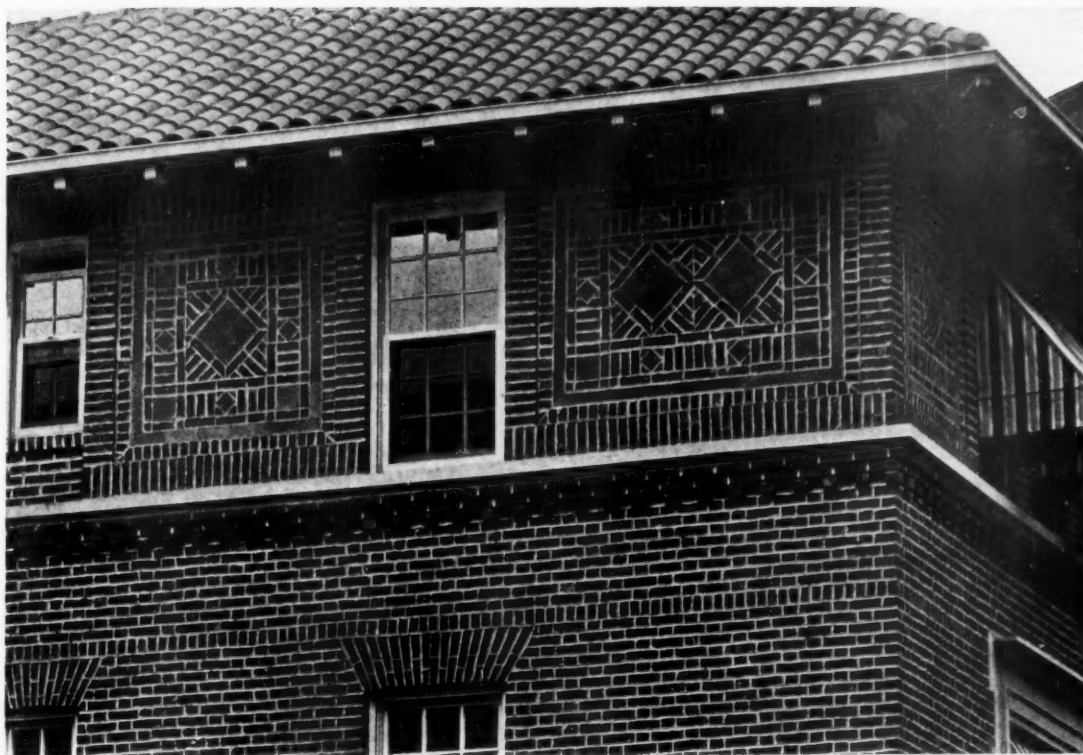




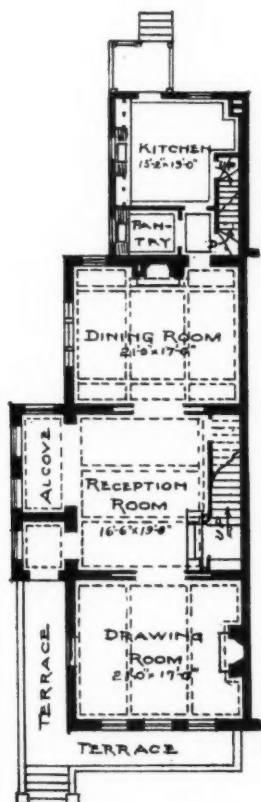
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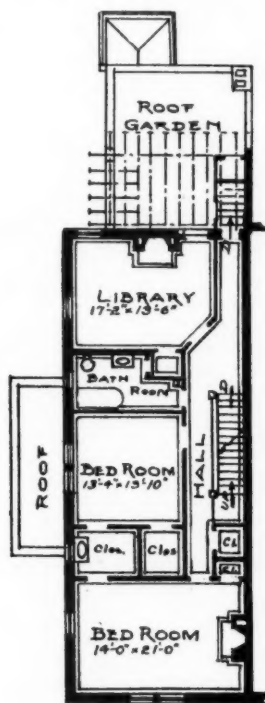




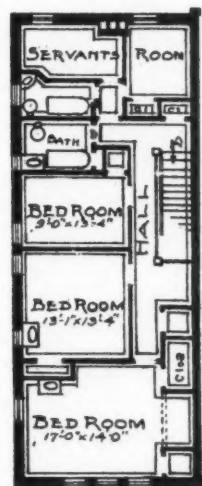
DETAIL OF TILE AND BRICKWORK, THIRD STORY



FIRST FLOOR PLAN.



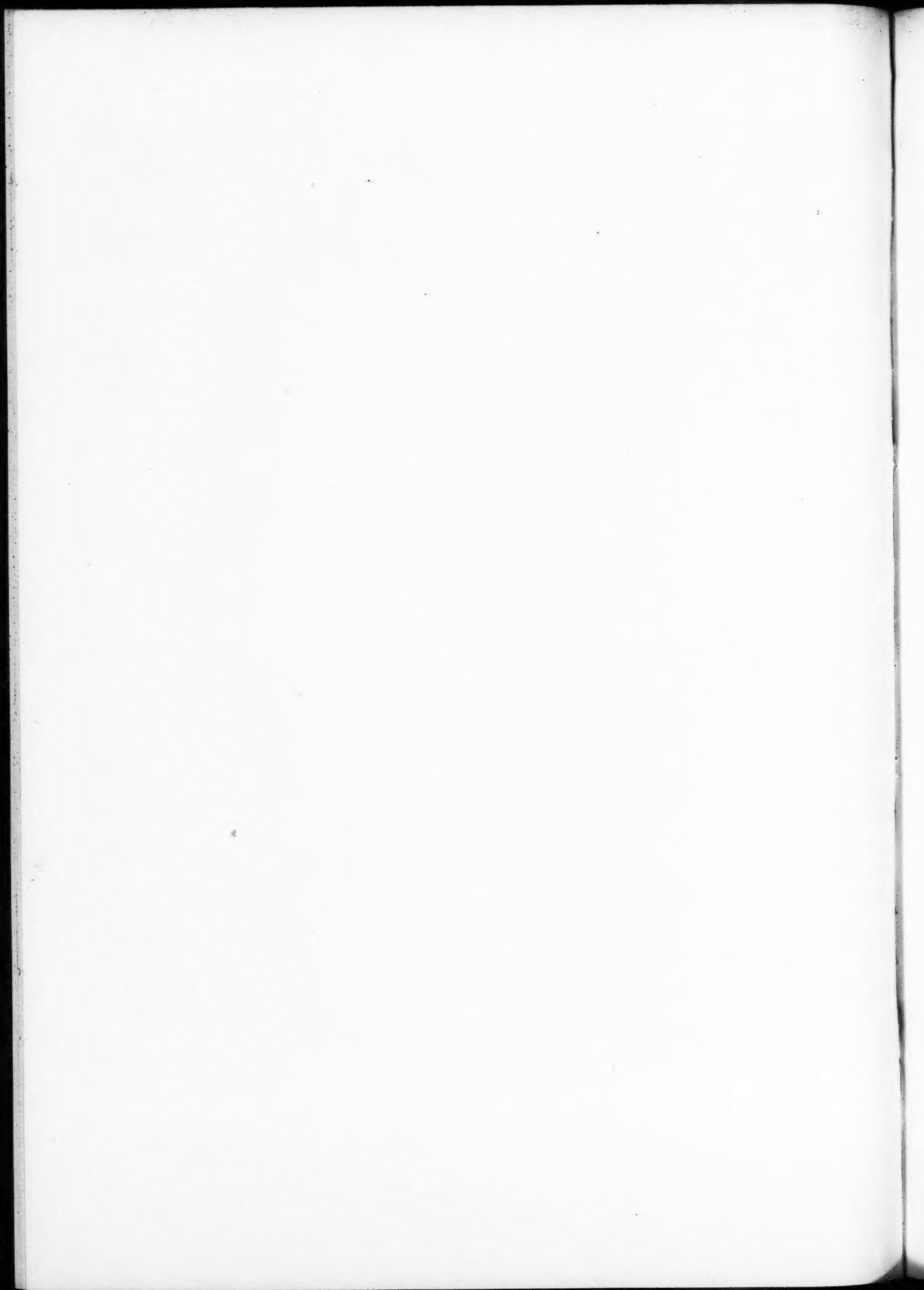
SECOND FLOOR PLAN.

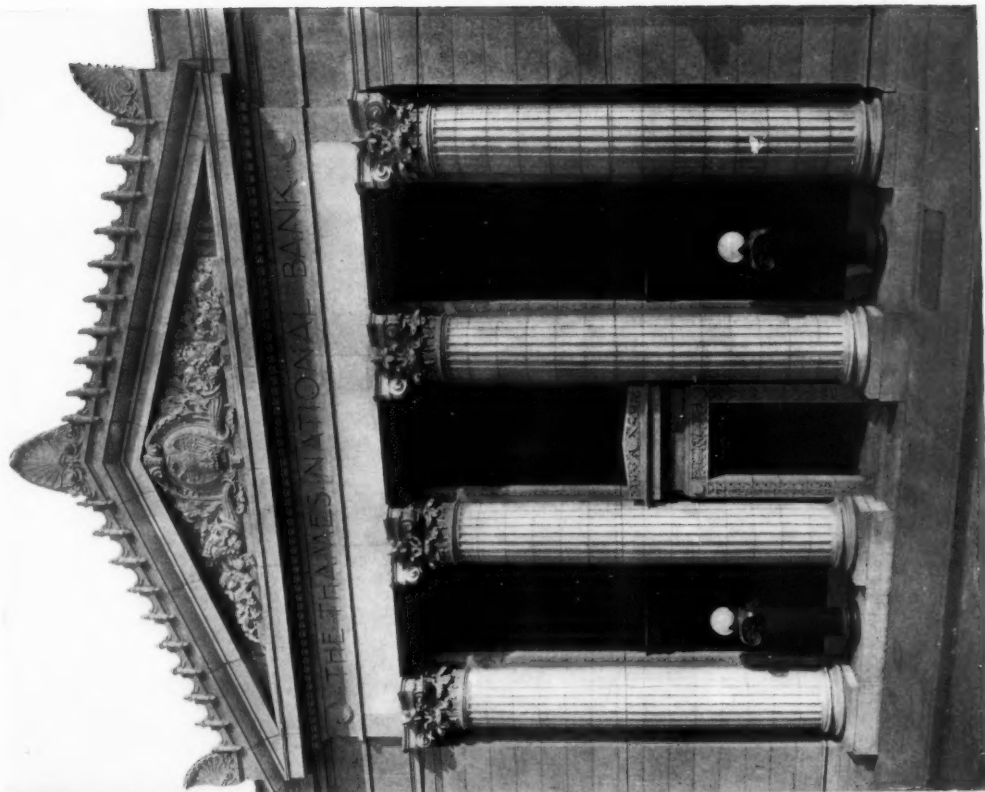


THIRD FLOOR PLAN.

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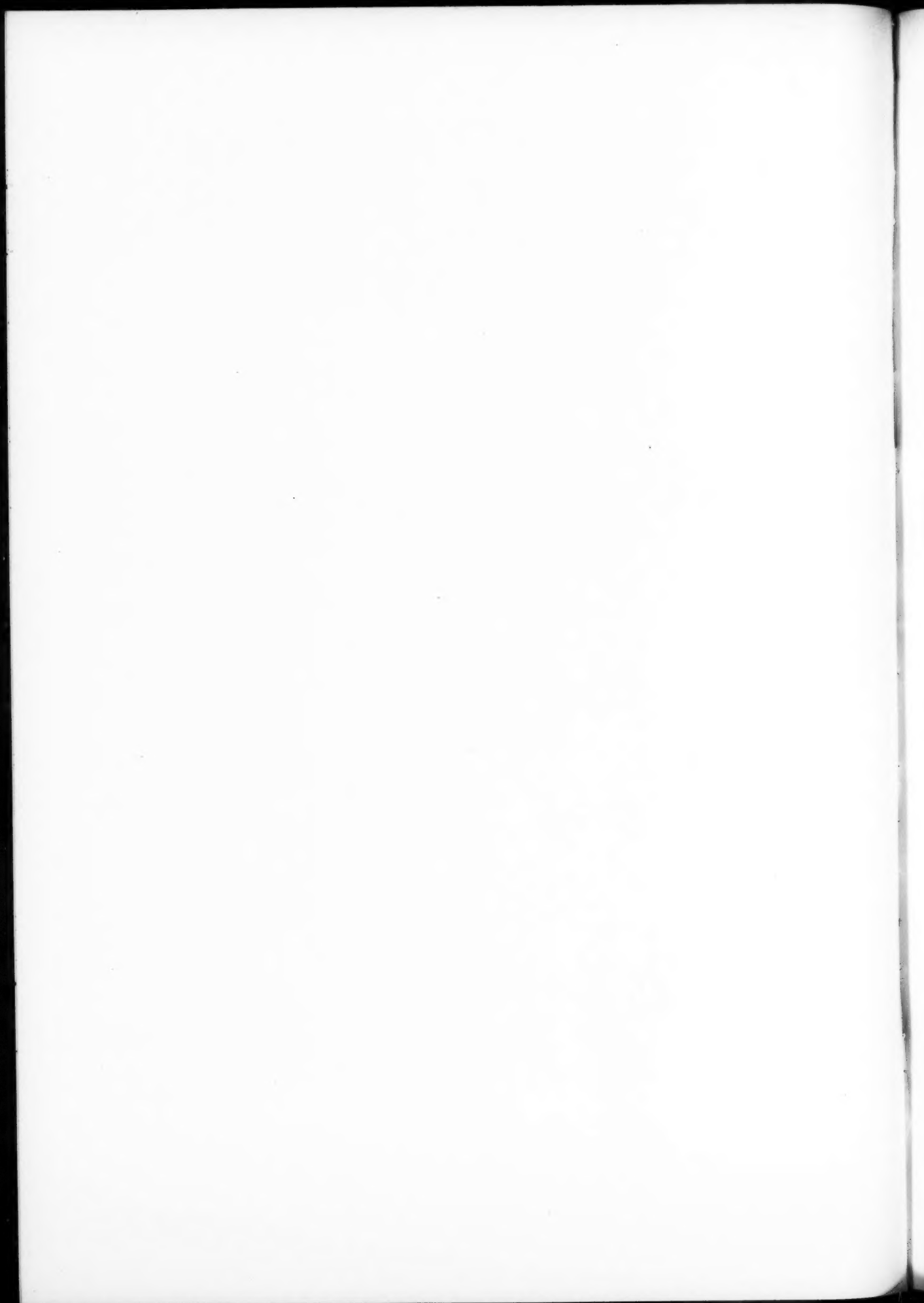
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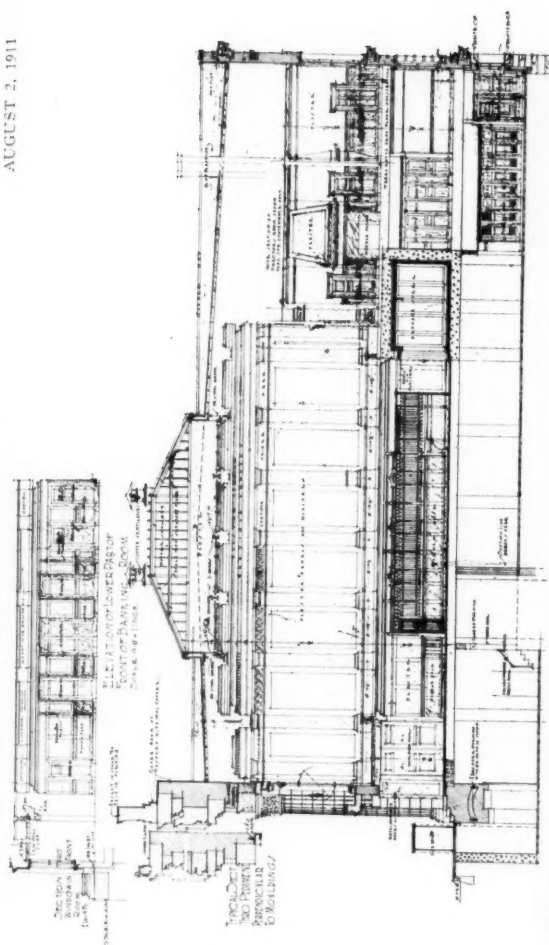




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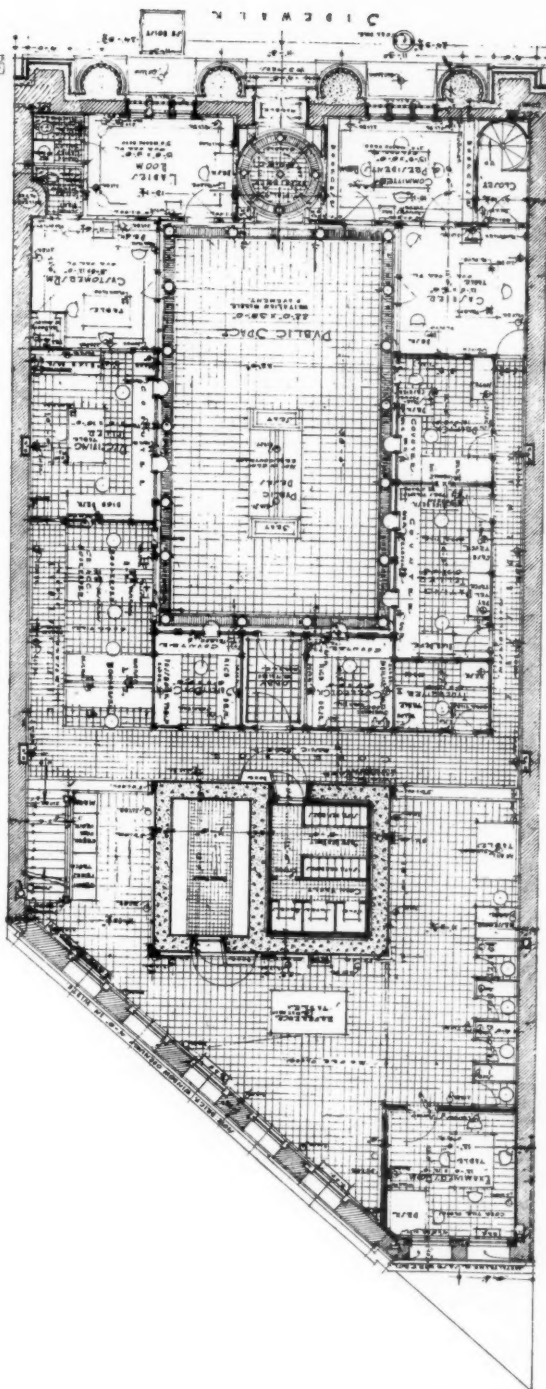
MESSES. ROWE & KEYES, ARCHITECTS

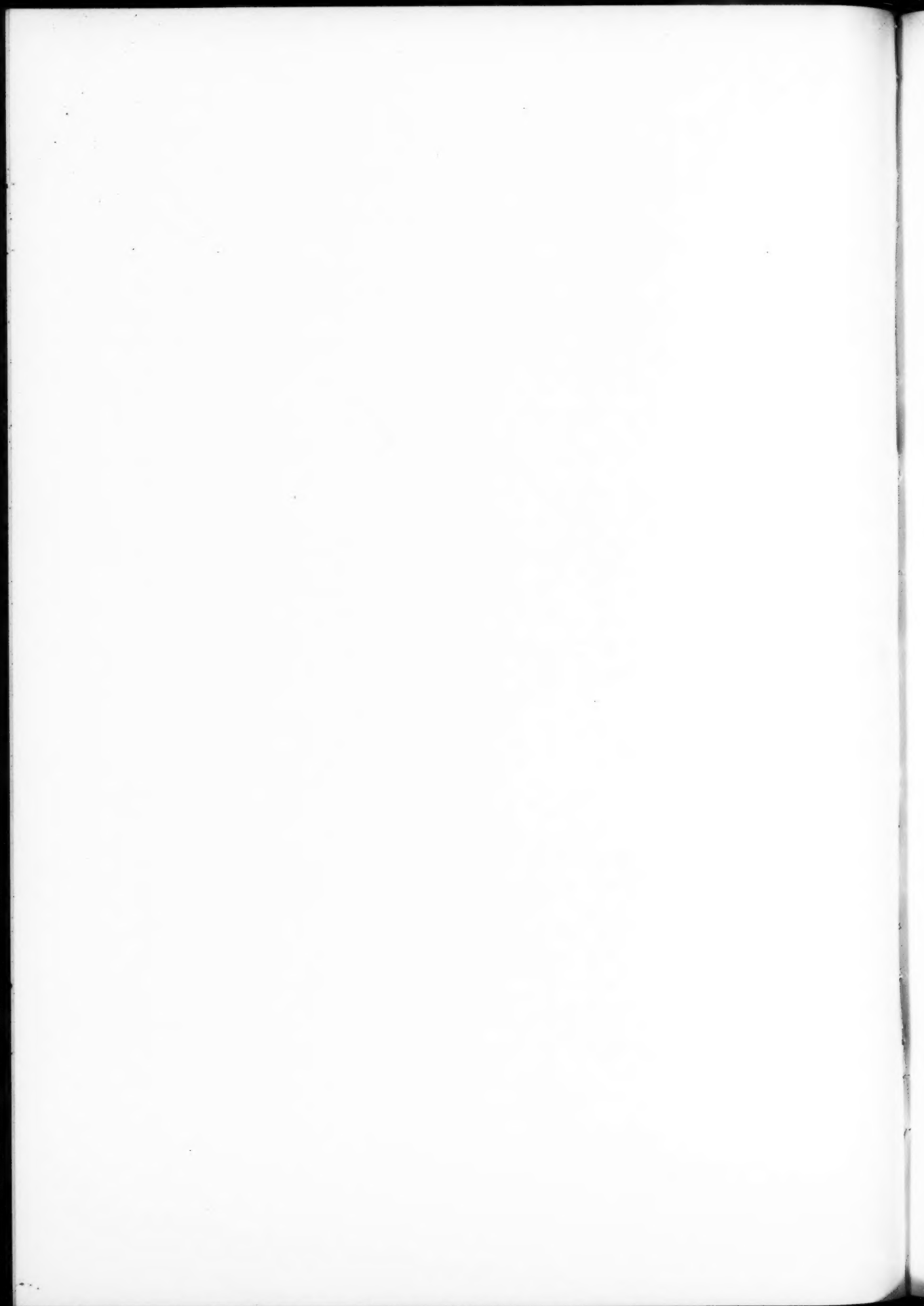


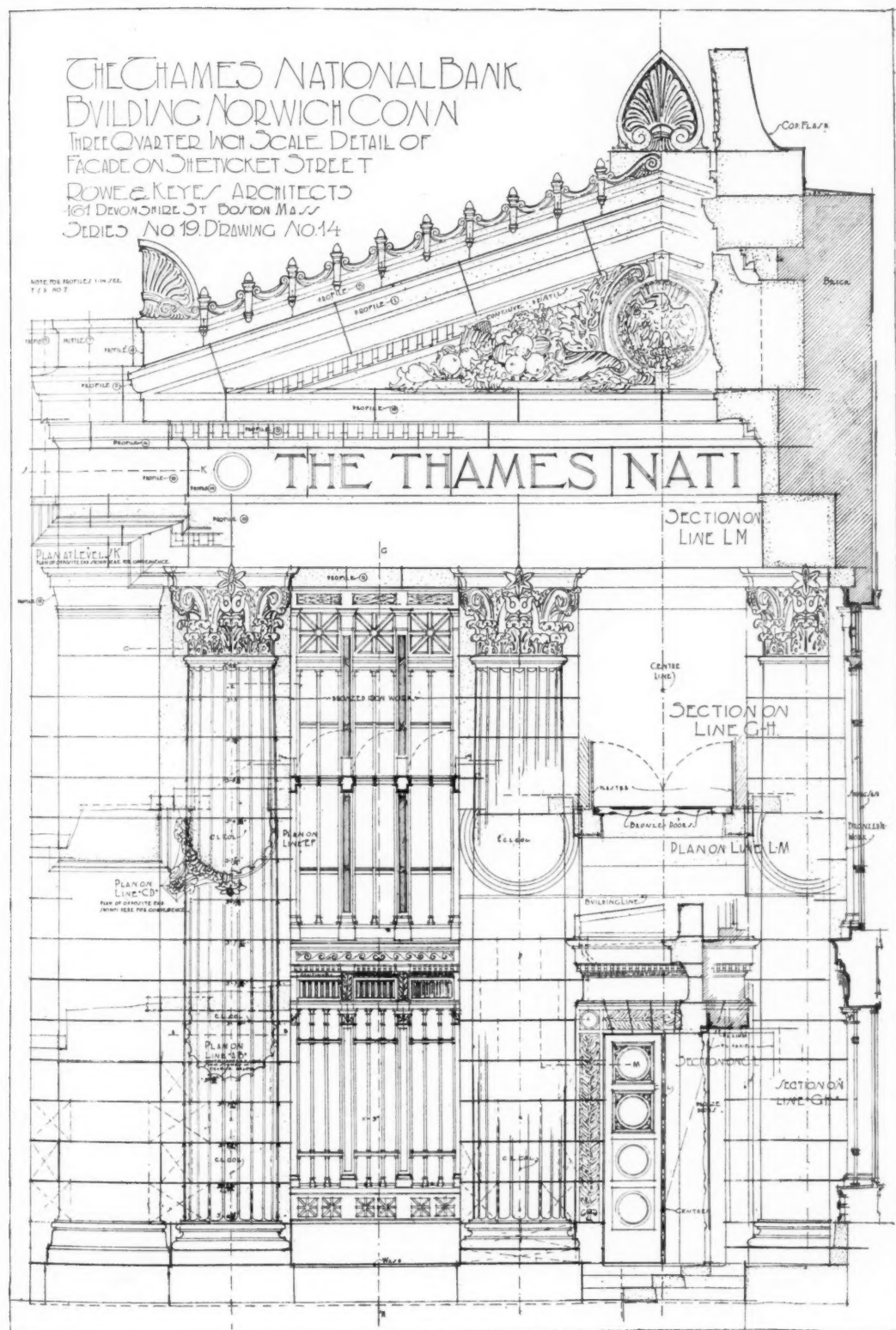


THE THAMES NATIONAL BANK
NORWICH, CONN.

MESSRS. ROWE & KEYES
ARCHITECTS



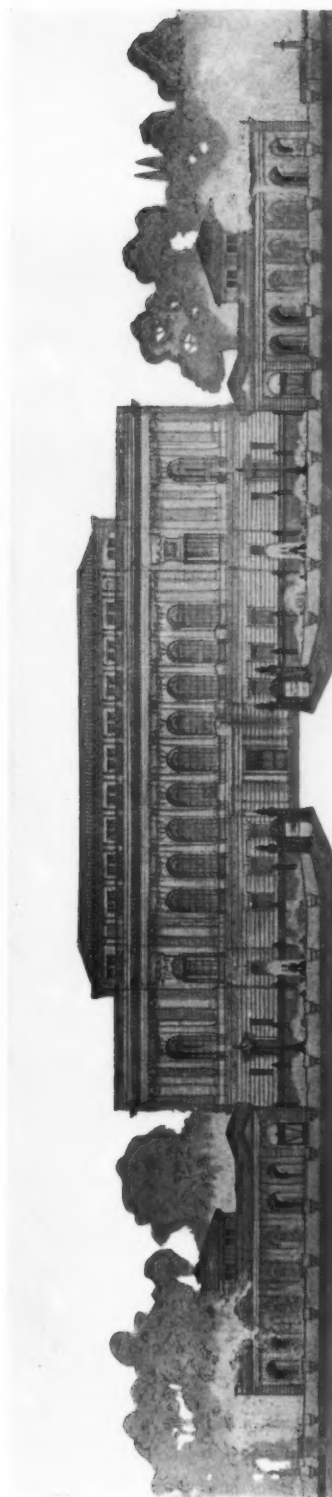
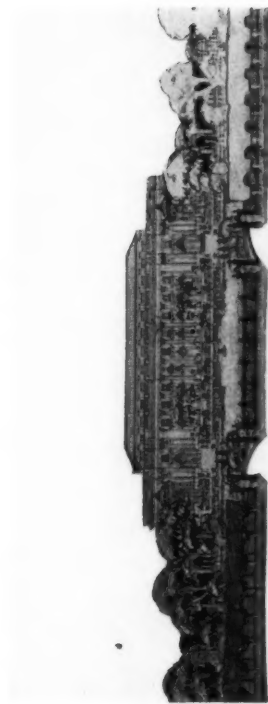
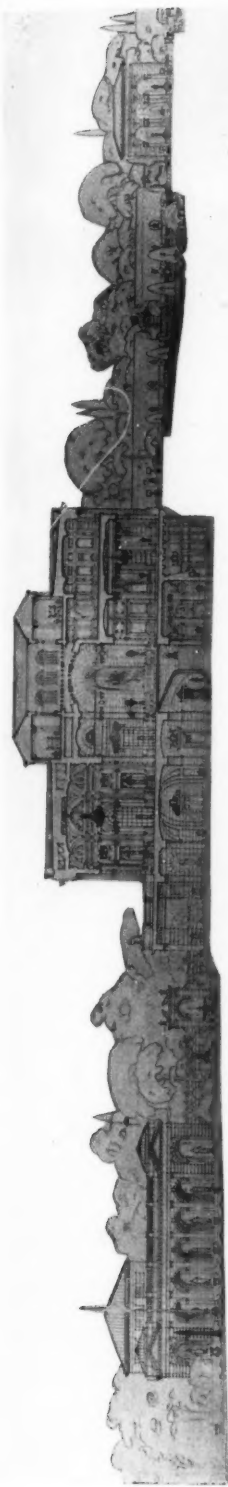




THE THAMES NATIONAL BANK, NORWICH, CONN.

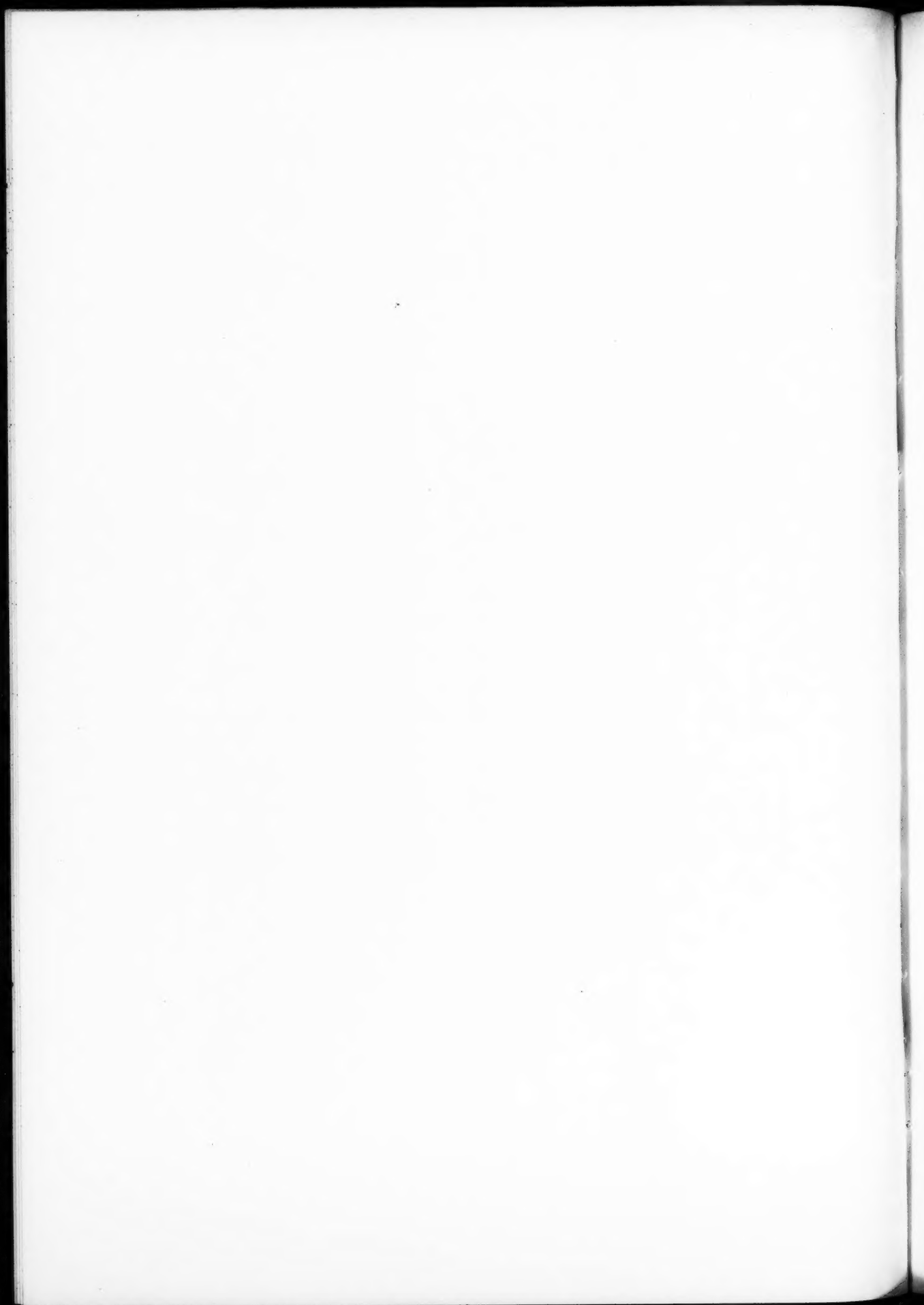
MESSRS. ROWE & KEYES, ARCHITECTS

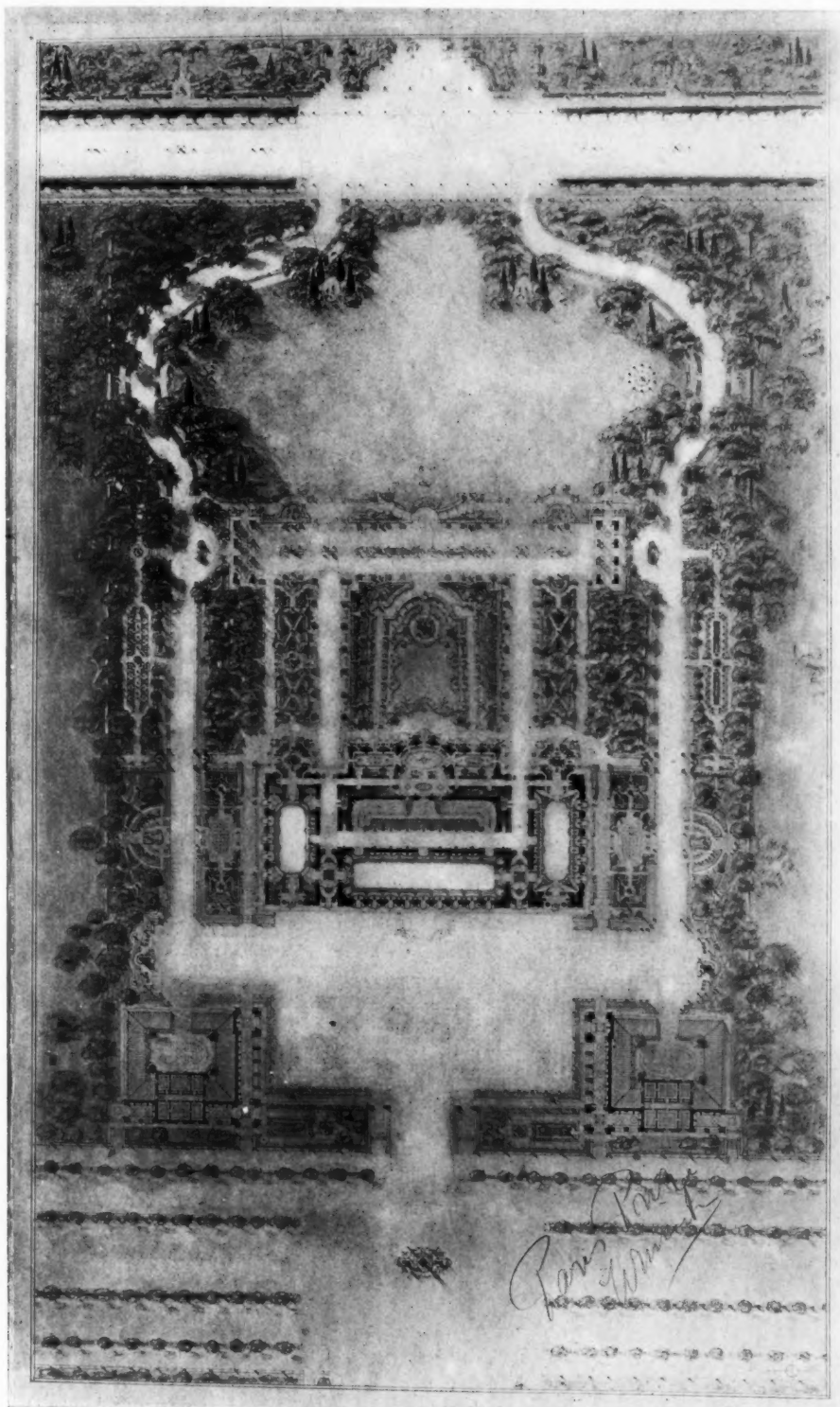




PARIS PRIZE:—AWARDED TO C. E. HALL, ATELIER HORNOSTEL

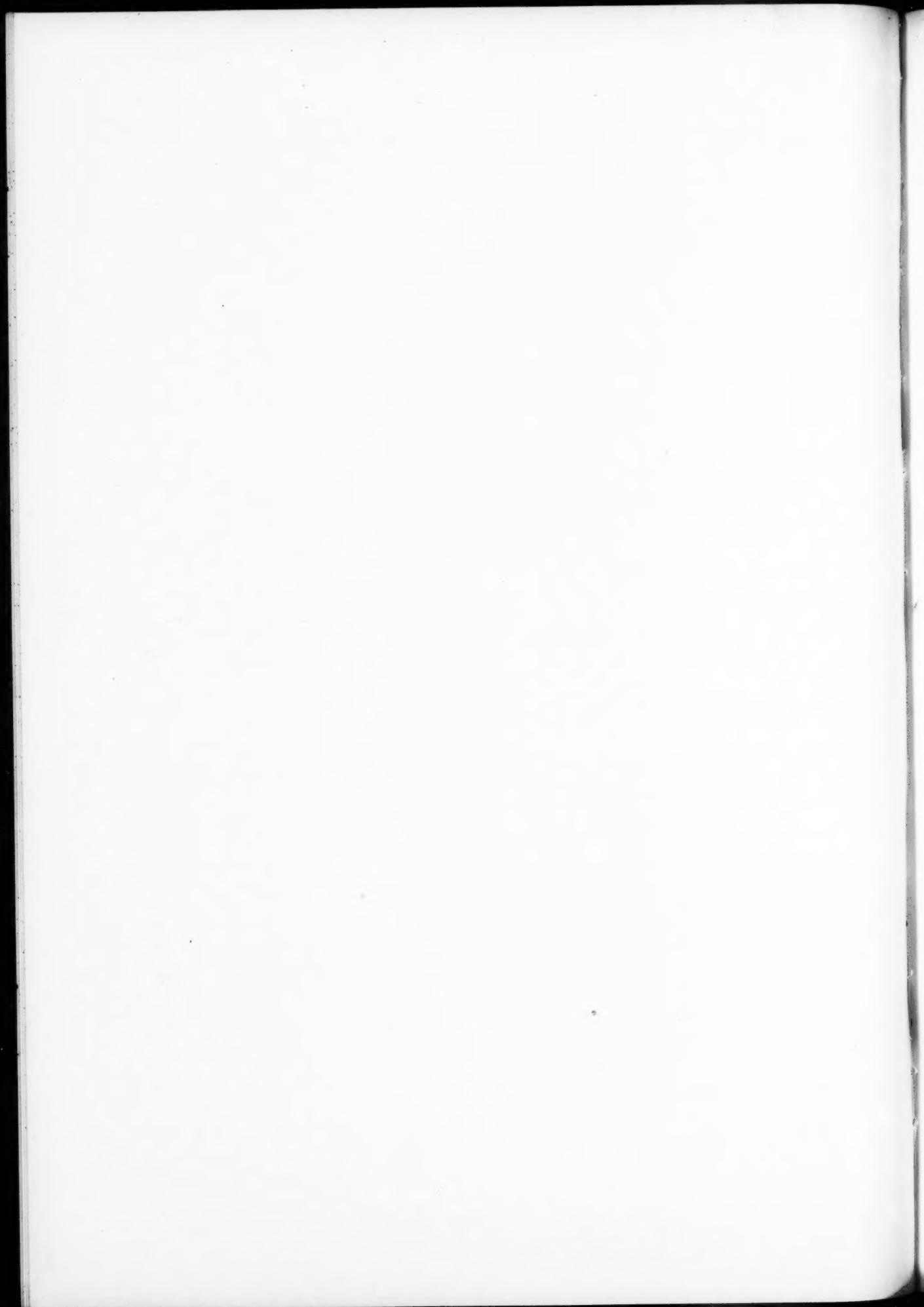
FINAL COMPETITION FOR THE PARIS PRIZE
STUDENT WORK, SOCIETY OF BEAUX-ARTS ARCHITECTS





PARIS PRIZE:—AWARDED TO C. E. HALL, ATELIER HORNBOSTEL

FINAL COMPETITION FOR THE PARIS PRIZE
STUDENT WORK, SOCIETY OF BEAUX-ARTS ARCHITECTS

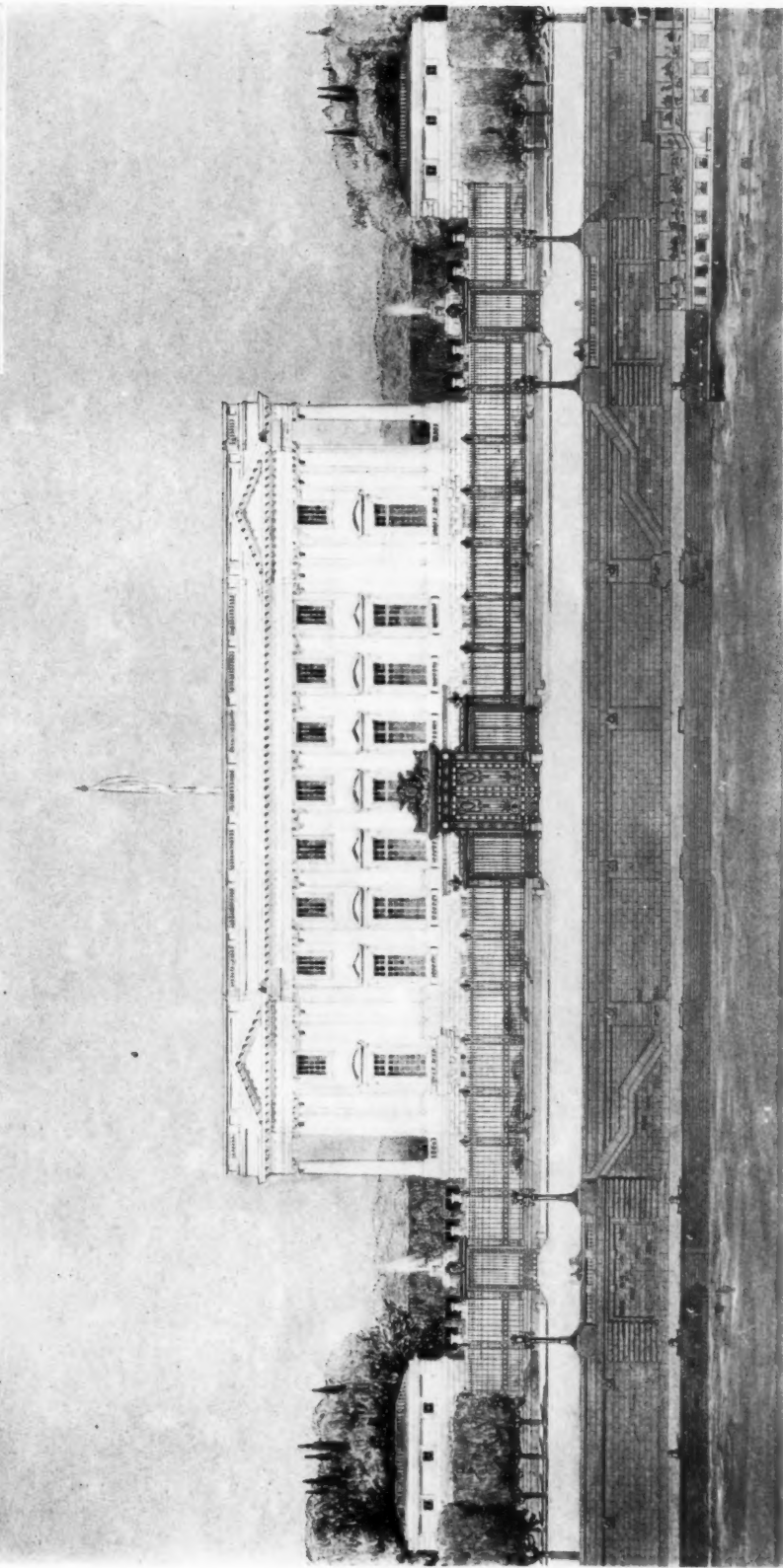
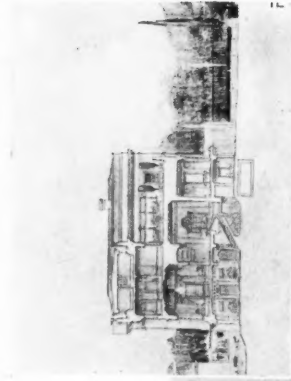
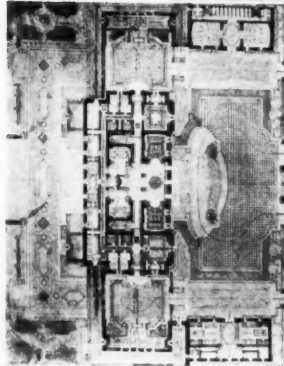


THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

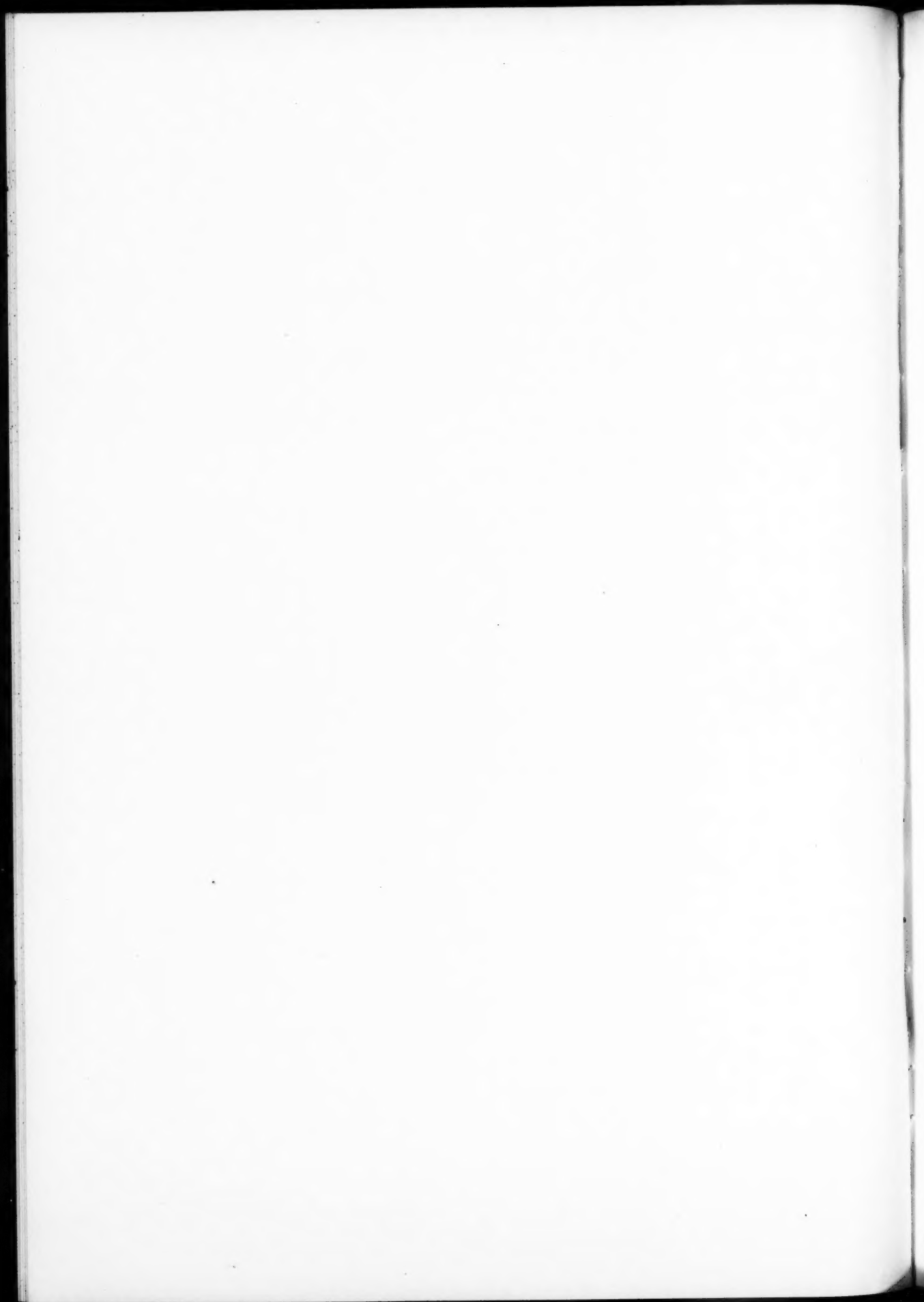
AUGUST 2, 1911

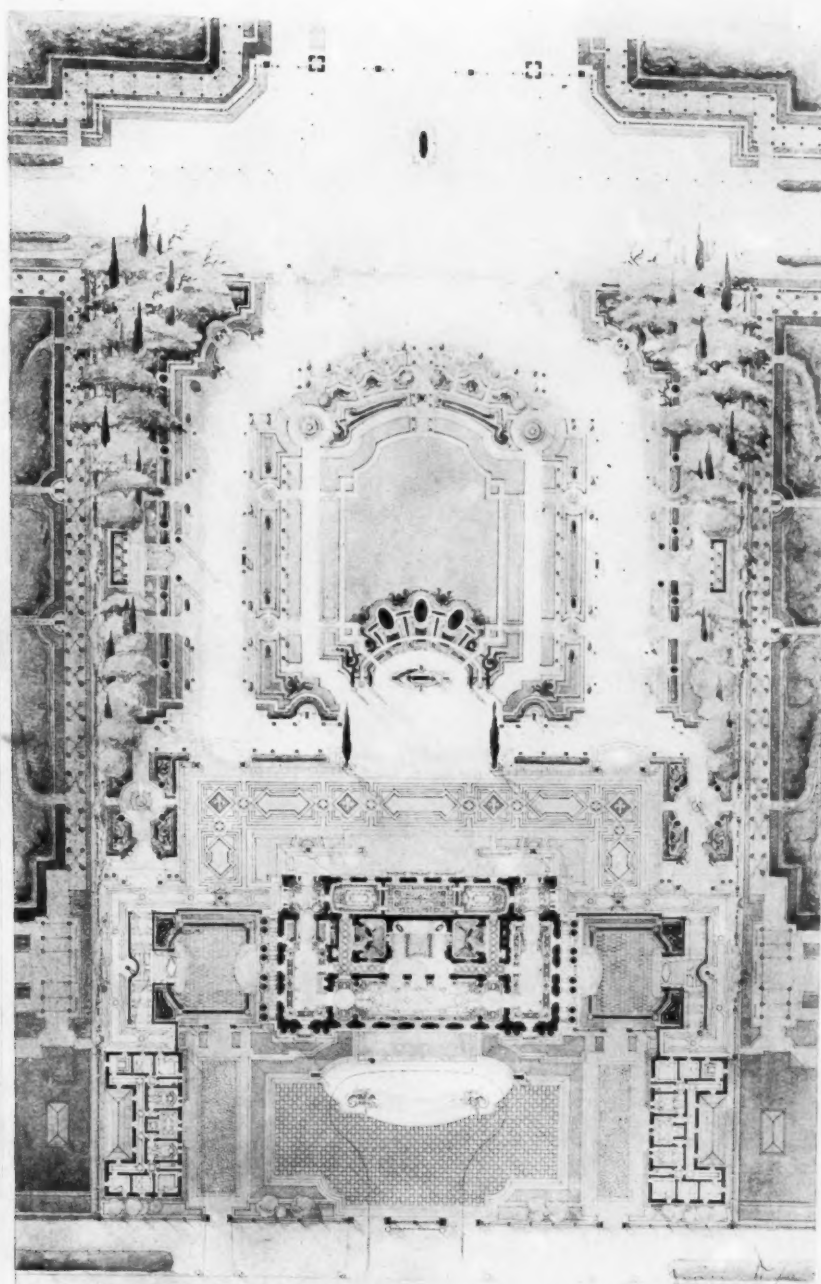
PLACED SECOND

DOUGLAS D. ELLINGTON, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA



FINAL COMPETITION FOR THE PARIS PRIZE
STUDENT WORK, SOCIETY OF BEAUX-ARTS ARCHITECTS



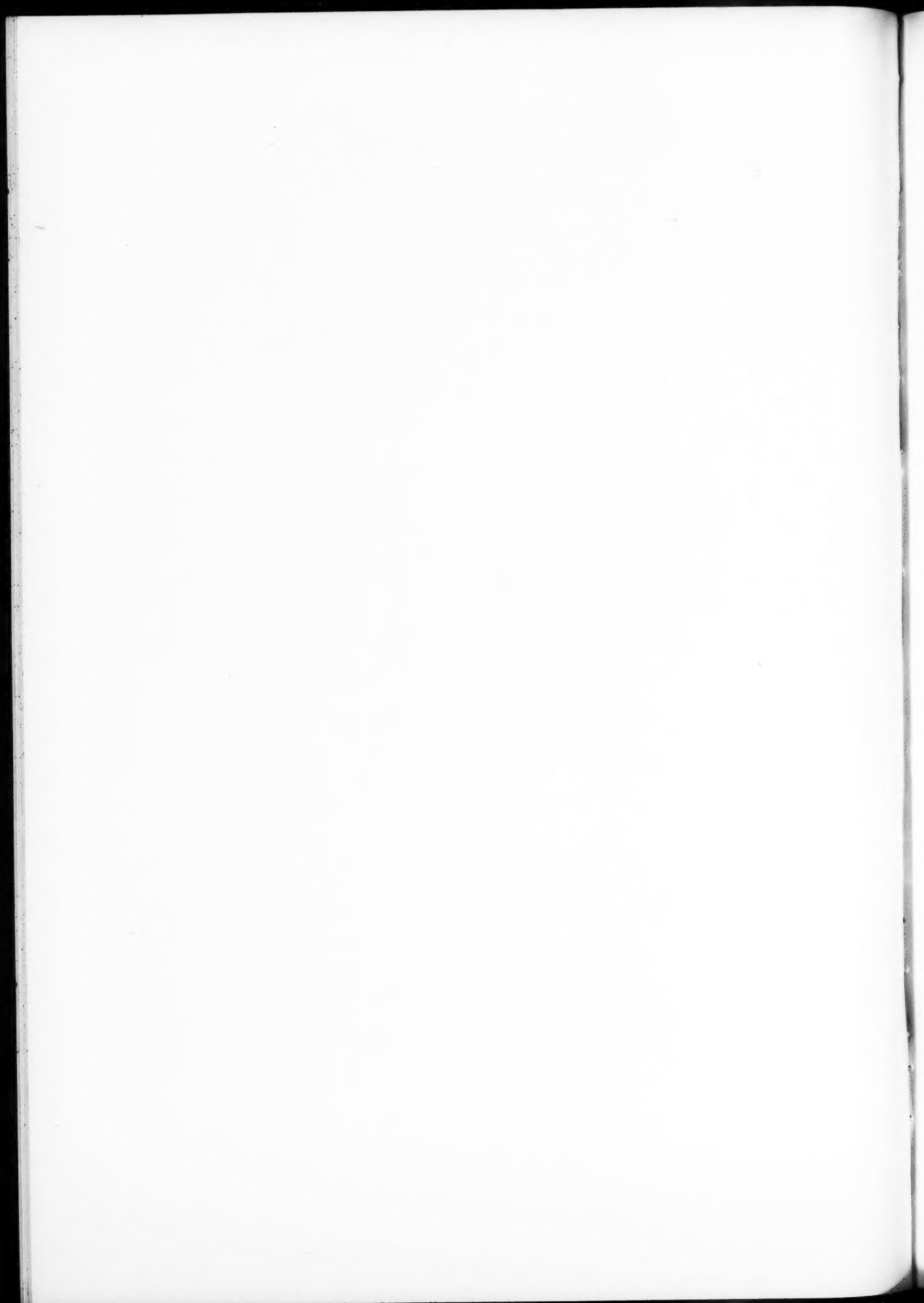


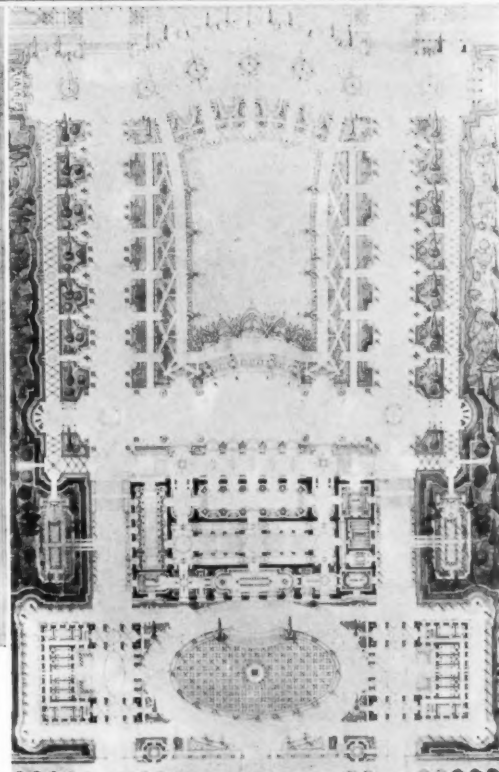
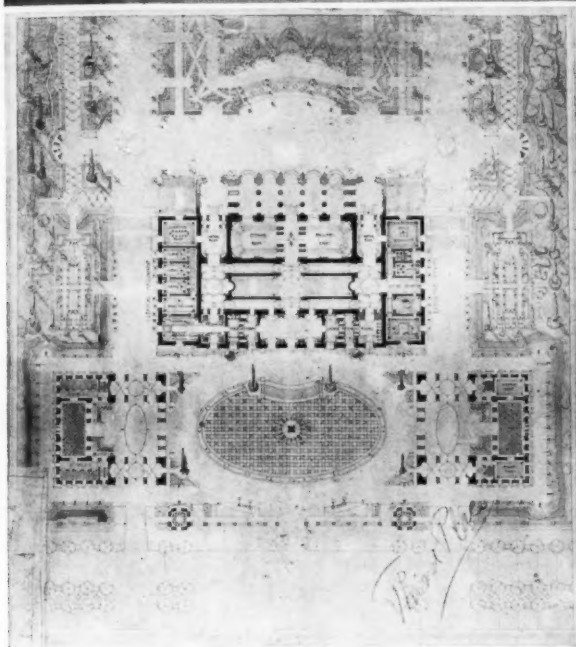
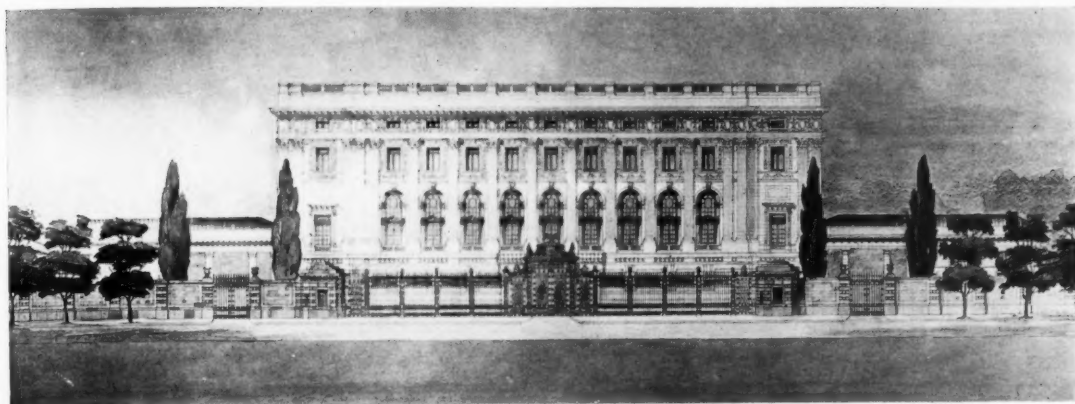
PARIS PRIZE
COMPETITION

5

PLACED SECOND:—DOUGLAS D. ELLINGTON, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

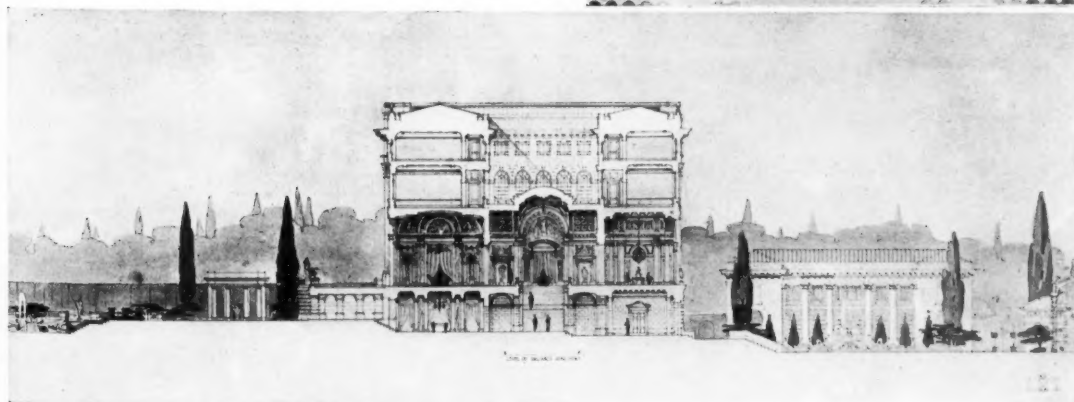
FINAL COMPETITION FOR THE PARIS PRIZE
STUDENT WORK, SOCIETY OF BEAUX-ARTS ARCHITECTS



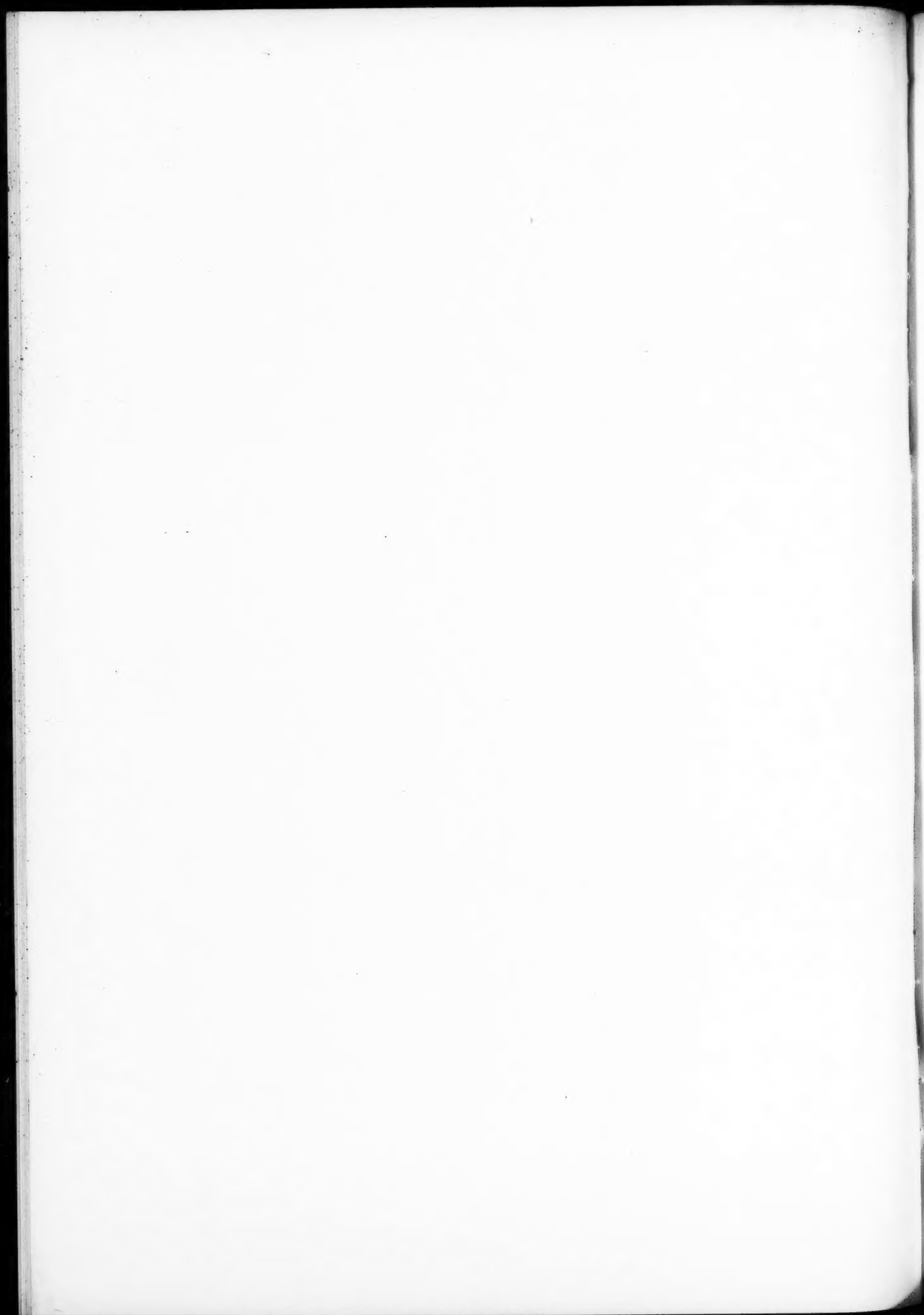


PLACED THIRD

JOHN W. INGLE, JR., COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



FINAL COMPETITION FOR THE PARIS PRIZE
STUDENT WORK, SOCIETY OF BEAUX-ARTS ARCHITECTS





MONUMENT TO POPE PIUS VI, IN THE CATHEDRAL, MILAN, ITALY