

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

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GLAZED AND LUSTERED TERRA COTTA

By SAMUEL HOWE



WITHOUT doubt there is a great improvement in this fascinating material in that it is not only more widely used and more generally understood but that it is more frankly and openly accepted as a color agent in the architectural kingdom, both for interior and exterior work. Not only is it demanded for churches, public buildings and large office skyscrapers, but it is embodied into the construction of private houses. No longer is there in any way an apology for its use—colored clay glazed, unglazed or semi-glazed or even lustered, stands for what it is worth, without any attempt to disguise its true nature or to make it represent some other material such as stone or marble. Indeed it may be truly said that like brick, terra cotta and tile have been restored to their sovereignty in the building world. This restoration is to be seen wherever we look.

The exigencies and caprice of the furnace has been a benefit in that it has given to each tenant of the kiln, just a little shade of difference, a little distinguishing mark of individuality, which is rich and rare and must ever be welcomed in any wall space of our buildings whatever the style. For some reason or other the stone buildings of America, and even the marble buildings, leave much to be desired so far as material is concerned. The wall surface has a way of bleaching out and any little idiosyncrasy or

texture variation which may have added interest to the surface for a time, seems frequently to disappear and be lost sight of under the influence of sun, wind and rain. So that the material we know as clay, in whatever form, is indeed welcome. As a vehicle for color tile seems to be one of the most valuable agents for the architect's use, and it is delightful to find some manufacturers grasping the true significance and function of the tile and realizing that tile is for the lin-



SACRISTY DOOR, ST. LAWRENCE CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, N. C.
MR. R. S. SMITH, ARCHITECT

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TERRA COTTA DETAIL OF ALTAR, ST. LAWRENCE CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, N. C.

ing of a wall, and that its true nature is best shown when it appears separately and distinctly from its fellow, that is, that it does not attempt to cover the whole wall as a slab of marble covers it by a concealment of joints.

Before me is an interesting memorial chapel attached to the St. Lawrence Church of Asheville, N. C. It is interesting for many reasons. Within this small area terra cotta in slab form and tile, both straight and curved, is used for means of construction and for decoration, and fragments of tile is to be seen broken up into mosaic. I can scarcely think of a more interesting illustration of the proper uses of these serviceable clay products. Note for instance the skillful adjustment of the cornice. It is essentially a tile cornice, not one designed for marble, or other material, cut up, jointed that is, indiscrimin-

ately to admit of a tile expression. This is essentially a cornice of tiles from the commencement. In no other material would this particular cornice look so well. The joints help. They form a serious and welcome connection between the architect and workshop. The tile forming a narrow border is very unusual in that it can be readily adjusted to a right angle. It can run over windows that are circular as well as openings that are straight. By the ingenious contrivance of its outline, the tile appears unusually interesting and yet it is simplicity itself. Regarding the small diaper tile which covers the body of the wall much can be said. It is not simply a tile of a curious outline, but the surface is uneven, in that each particular tile reflects light separately. Obviously these tiles have never been submitted to the rubbing bed as too

many appear to have been. The edges are slightly rounded and in a hundred naive and inexpressible ways has the little fragment of glazed clay been able to preserve its own character, which is very important. Were chapters to be written regarding the distinguishing difference between building materials, very little more could be said.

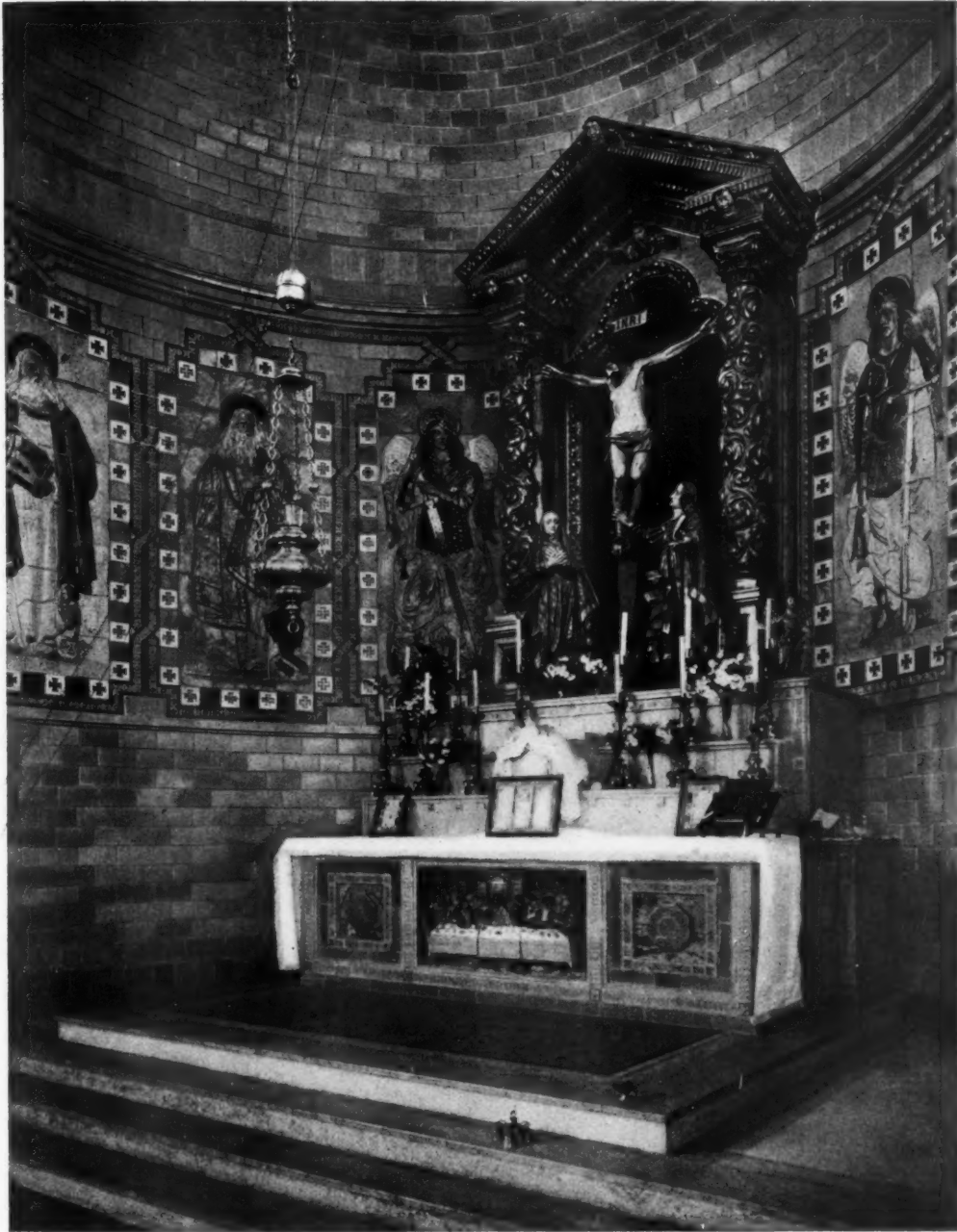
Look for instance at the altar. Examine carefully the border. There is no attempt at a moulded cornice, frankly the small blocks of alabaster which form the top are permitted to overhang. See the different methods of handling the material and the wonderful charm of the architectural detail, the grouping of the figures. Note again above that the skillful manner in which the small squares of polished alabaster are surrounded by tiles of clay, colored and incised. There is no cornice to this, there is no at-

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tempt for form pilasters. It is essentially a tile rendering of an idea complete in itself.

Just how it is possible to classify tiles and

varies in a most remarkable manner. Probably the best known example of the decorative treatment of terra cotta where color



HIGH ALTAR, ST. LAWRENCE CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, N. C.

slabs of terra cotta in general terms I do not know. The materials interchange and overlap and in a certain way the mixture

enters largely in the theme is the Works of Mercy frieze of Ospedale del Cappelletto, Pistoia, Italy, which is very well known.

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Here the material is treated with almost brutal frankness, verily the thick heavy joints seem to tell a whole lot of the story, while the color is vigorous in the extreme and the contrast occasionally startling. It responds wonderfully to the spectator at considerable distance, and yet it has been there for years. We do not, however, have to go abroad to see the widening adaptation of this material to the needs of the architect ever increasing and ever becoming more exacting. The combination of tile with a moulding has not been successful and it should be generally avoided. There are several large and important examples of the free modern use of terra cotta to be seen in the Western cities, and some elsewhere. The Vanderbilt Hotel of this city, illustrated in *The American Architect*, February 14, presents in its cafe a ceiling of unusual importance wherein the interlacing tile of the groining to the vault is of precisely the same material as the tiles forming the corners, which by the way are of considerable charm in color. The theme is blue and white throughout, the blue by the way is full and rich and there is in some captivating manner a number of contrasting tones which intensify the blue and enrich the white. This is possibly a step further in advance than anything we have yet produced on this Continent. But much however remains to be done. Where for instance is to be found a Rouge Flame—a marvelous red and the "Peach Blow," so widely known because of its use in the manufacture of a certain vase. Where is the mottled Haricot, the Sang de Bœuf and the rest of the rich ruby and blood-red colors streaked with blue, purple, gray

or green. For surely the architect needs as wide and liberal a palette as that which is given to the bric-a-brac dealer or the enthusiast for the reproduction of the lost arts of China or of Persia.

The way in which the Italian architects and sculptors felt the need of adding color to their buildings is also shown by their occasional introduction of earthen-ware bowls, roughly decorated with war trophies, and the plates inserted at certain well-determined intervals, spandrels, or arches the spaces between brackets, under cornices and a hundred other positions. Roundels, discs, dishes, tile, plaques are merely names given to certain well-acknowledged shapes occasionally made of the crudest form of clay and then again of delicate porcelain,

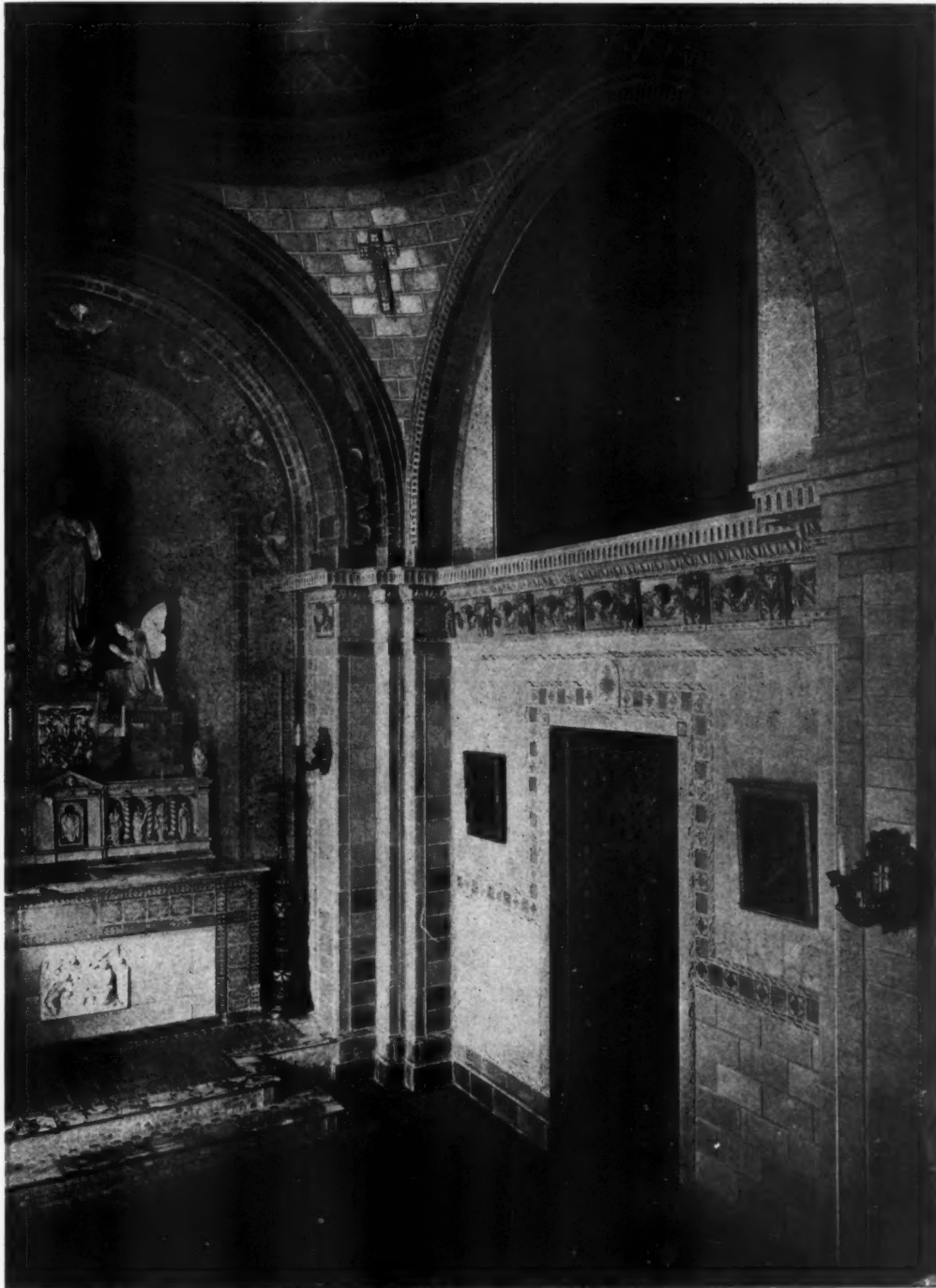


DETAIL, ST. LAWRENCE CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, N. C.

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all for the purpose of introducing color, of bringing to the realm of architecture some jewel-like substance which shall sing as it

were, in the chorus. Again old buildings show the emblazoned arms of the Medicis and other noble families. Some of these



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have the reddish and golden metallic reflexes of Gubbio and others. Italian Majolica, Hispano-Moresque, Persian Faience, are some only of the names by which bright, sparkling, lustre-like materials are today known. True there is still a difficulty in getting the lustres either of ruby or of gold, with iridescence or the brilliant orange yellow, light brown, intense dark blue or the particular green and royal purple which was of so much service to the architects of Italy in the Renaissance period, but that difficulty is getting less every day. The furnaces and laboratories are busy, experiments are being made, and it only remains for the architects to place definite orders in order to have them carried out. There are, at this moment, no less than six or eight manufacturers, not very large ones it is true but large enough, where an attempt is being made to revivify, rediscover the lost art—the art of making and transmitting a glaze to clay, and of adding to it the quality known as lustre. Before me is a tile from Detroit which is very promising and one from Woburn, Mass., still more so. It is small, scarcely three inches long, and yet it is almost alive and is indeed a jewel that sparkles in the daylight, still more when seen shimmering in the sun. Colorado Springs has also produced a wonderful mottle surface, a glaze of unusual depth and richness. Cincinnati is not behind, in that it has given a quality akin to

that of the opal and has transmitted to large surfaces of clay, which might be called terra cotta, a mat-like surface enduring and stimulating. But possibly the most satisfactory of all is the work from Doylestown. It is a long way from Doylestown to Constantinople or to the land of the Moors, and it is years ago since the Oriental first mixed metallic oxides with silica and clays and to judge from the appearances, his mixture was as varied as the glow of his sunlight—yet Doylestown has brought to this land some of the mysteries and the charms.

I have yet, however, to see the deep blue lustre intense as the sea, which the Egyptians and the early Persians produced. I have yet to see among the modern work the tawny yellows and browns, the mottled buff tones and the wonderfully pearl-like whites. These are not dreams. Any student with a sense of appreciation for color who visits the museums will find evidence inclosed within the glass cases. New York City is favored with several hundred examples and the other large cities have sufficient to see the truth of the statement, for it must be remembered that stone perishes, that marble requires repolishing every once in awhile or it deadens and dulls, granite endures, surrendering however its distinction and gets both greasy and filthy, but in glazed tile, brick or faience there is a material that defies the destructive acids in the air.



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COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC INFORMATION

IT is gratifying to note that various A. I. A. chapters have appointed or are taking steps looking toward the appointment of special Committees on Public Information to co-operate with and extend the work of the Committee created by resolution during the Convention of the American Institute of Architects, held in Washington last December. The creation of an Institute Committee was advocated in these columns some time before action was taken and the results have apparently justified our belief that an organized body of the character of the Committee selected was necessary to properly place before the general public such matters relating to architectural practice as seemed desirable and proper, in order to insure correct appreciation of the architect's function, as well as his art. It is a source of satisfaction to feel that the matter is receiving merited attention by Chapters generally and that any statement published affecting the profession if devoid of fact or presenting the subject inaccurately will in all probability have correction in the columns in which it originated. Such action will inevitably have the desired result if persistently followed.

COMPETITIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD

CONDITIONS prompting the very spirited discussion now in progress between the American Institute of Architects' Committee on Competitions, with which have joined the Kansas City and St. Louis Chapters, and the Missouri State

Capitol Commission, finds what appears to closely approach a parallel in the Australian Capital Competition just decided. While in the Missouri competition there is no apprehension or, so far as has been expressed, concern regarding the nationality of the successful competitor, there are grave reasons leading to the fear that if the competition is finally conducted as originally proposed, the State of Missouri may suffer through failure to provide conditions sufficiently fair and just to insure participation in the contest by architects of experience and unquestioned qualifications.

Mr. Ian MacAlister, Secretary Royal Institute of British Architects, recently addressed the editor of the *London Times*, as follows:

SIR—The attention of the Council of the Royal Institute of British Architects has been called to a telegram in your issue of April 16th in which your Sydney Correspondent states that the designs for the Federal Capital have been reduced to a dozen, most of them the work of Americans, Frenchmen, or Germans, and the British designs have only a small chance. In the absence of fuller information this statement would naturally lead your readers to think that British architects have been unsuccessful in competition with foreigners in the planning of the new Australian city. The facts are these. When the conditions of the competition were published by the Minister of Public Works the Australian Institutes of Architects at once protested against their unfair and unsatisfactory nature. There was no proper provision made for the appointment of qualified assessors, and the Australian Institutes warned the Minister that unless the conditions were amended their members would refuse to take part in the competition. The Minister refused to adopt the suggestions of the representative architectural bodies, and they accordingly vetoed the competition. They then appealed for support to the Royal Institute of British Architects, of which they are affiliated societies. The Royal Institute, which entirely agreed with the attitude of the Australian Institutes, endeavoured both by correspondence with the Minister and by deputation to the Acting High Commissioner in London, to induce the Australian Government to put the competition on a fair and proper basis. The Minister again refused to alter the conditions in any way, and the Royal Institute supported the action of its affiliated societies in Australia by issuing a veto to its members against the competition and by informing the American Institute of Architects, and the principal architectural bodies on the Continent, of the action which it had taken in the matter.

There is reason to believe that the great majority of the architects of the Empire have loyally supported the decision of their representative bodies and have not entered for this competition.

IAN MACALISTER, Secretary, Royal Institute of British Architects.
London, W.

It would seem that the Capitol Commission Board of Missouri might profit by the experience of the Minister of Public Works

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of Australia, which does not appear to be in any respect exceptional or unusual, where regard is not given to the suggestions of those qualified to advise in such matters. At best the institution of architectural competitions is in itself none too attractive to the experienced practitioner busy with the work of clients who have already entrusted their work to him at recognized rates of compensation. If there be added to the many distasteful and unattractive though unavoidable features, the possibility of no award

being made, or an award to a competitor, whose name must be known and approved before final decision, there remains little likelihood of the State ever having cause for pride or satisfaction in the outcome of this undertaking. It is to be hoped that modification of plan will be made sufficient to enable architects of standing and reputation to participate in this contest, with the assurances to which every competitor is entitled, before giving both of his time and money to the enterprise.



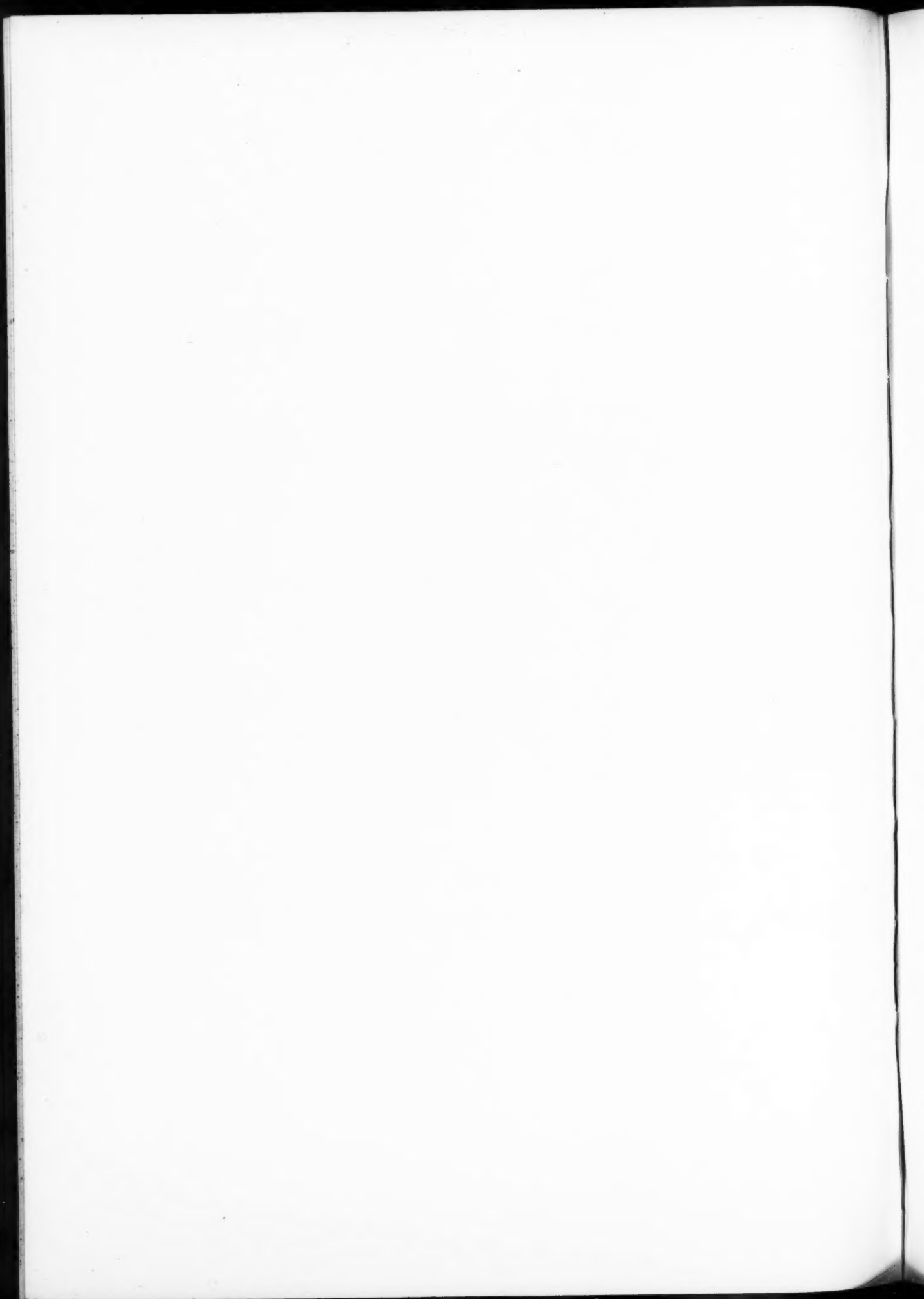
GATE LODGE, "FOXHOLLOW FARM," COTTAGE OF TRACY DOWS, ESQ., RHINEBECK, N. Y.

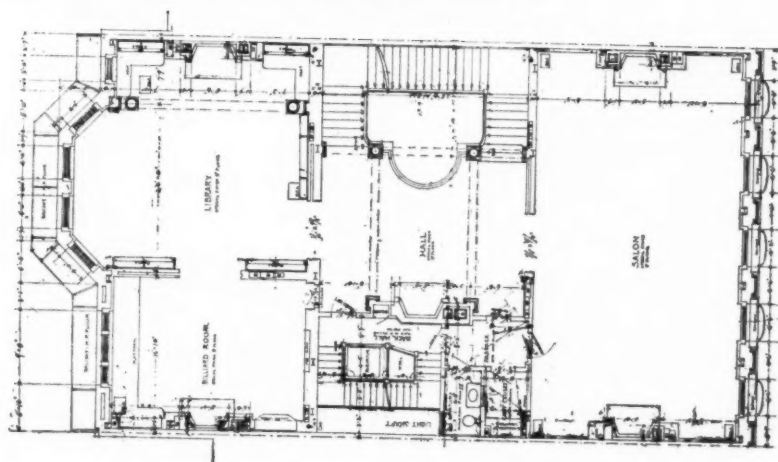
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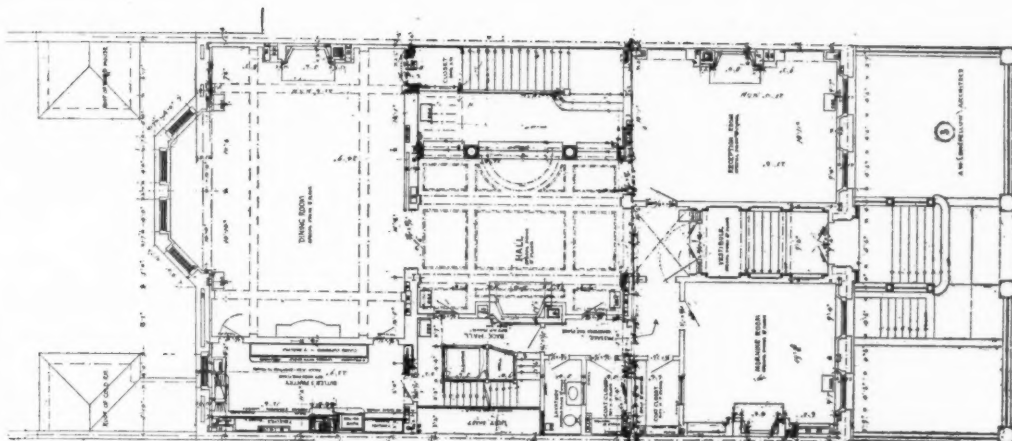




BILLIARD ROOM

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MANTEL IN DINING ROOM



THE MORNING ROOM

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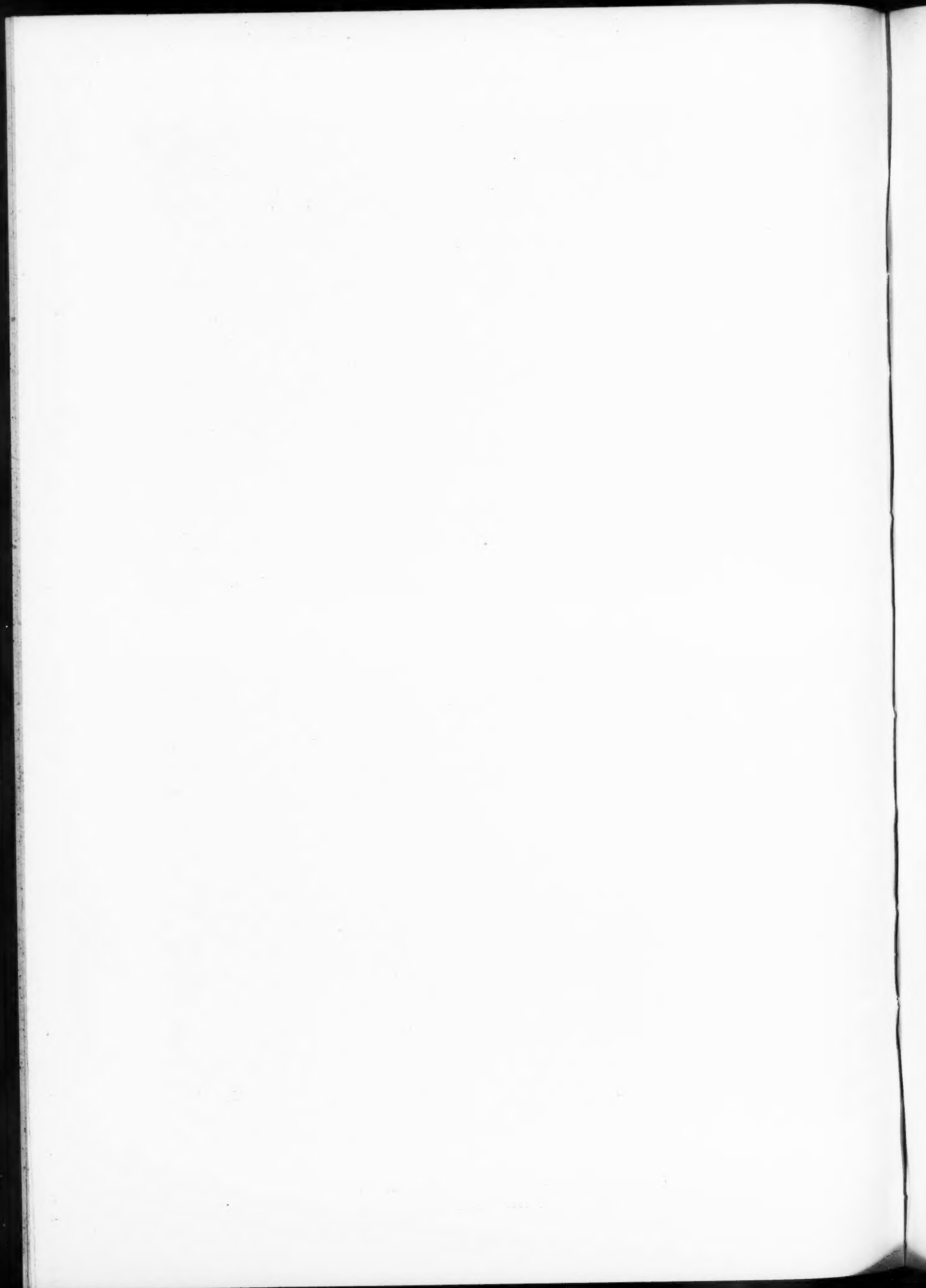
SECOND FLOOR HALL



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THIRD FLOOR HALL



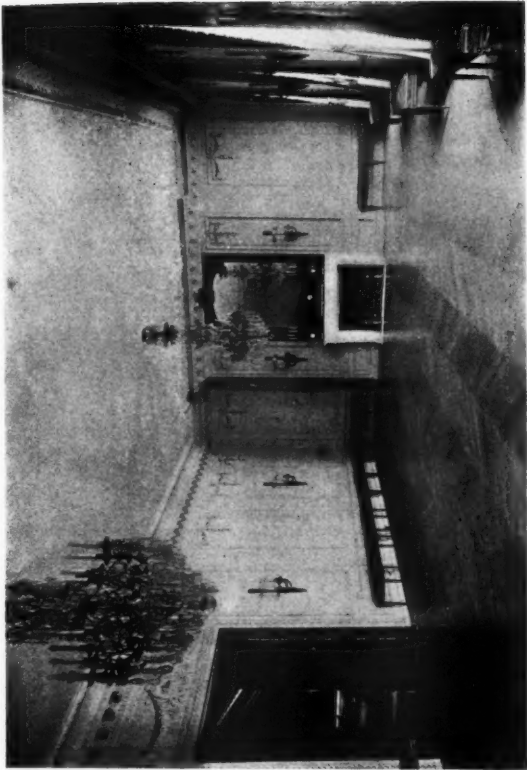
ENTRANCE HALL, FIRST FLOOR

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RECEPTION ROOM



MUSIC ROOM



DINING ROOM



LIBRARY

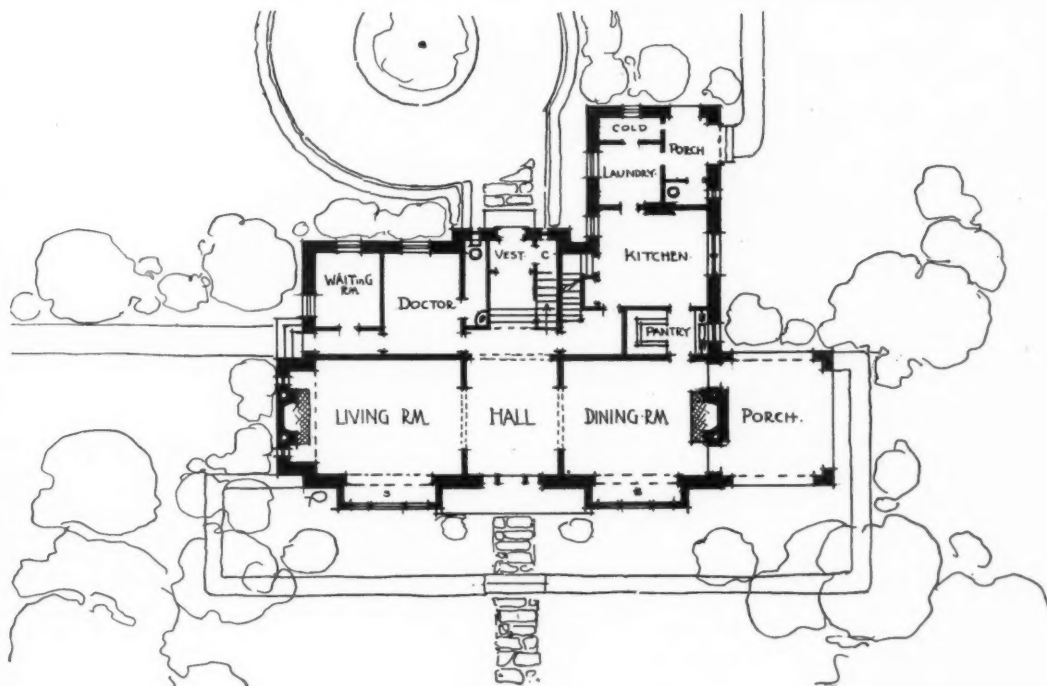
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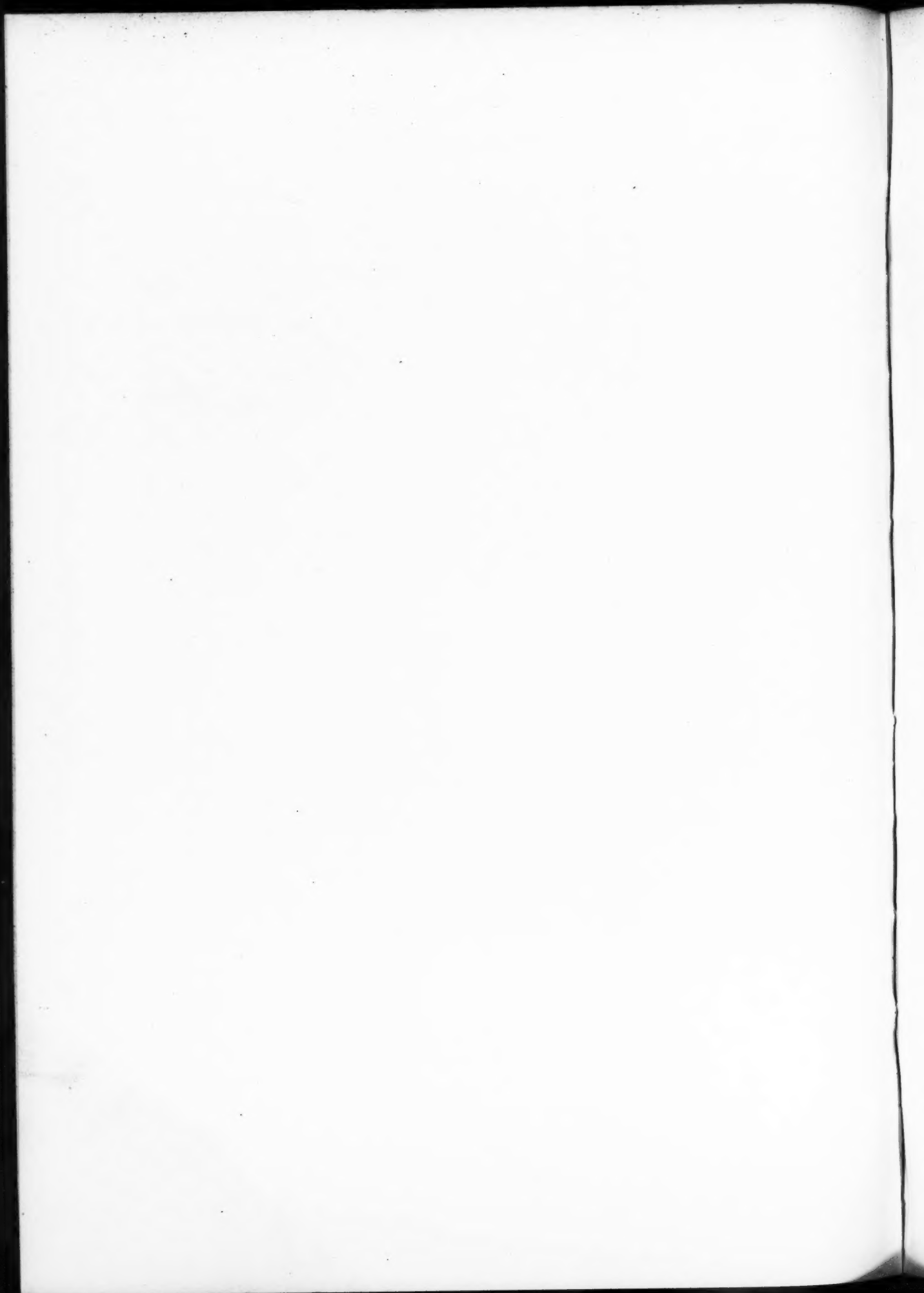
A HOUSE ON YORK ROAD, OAK LANE, PA.

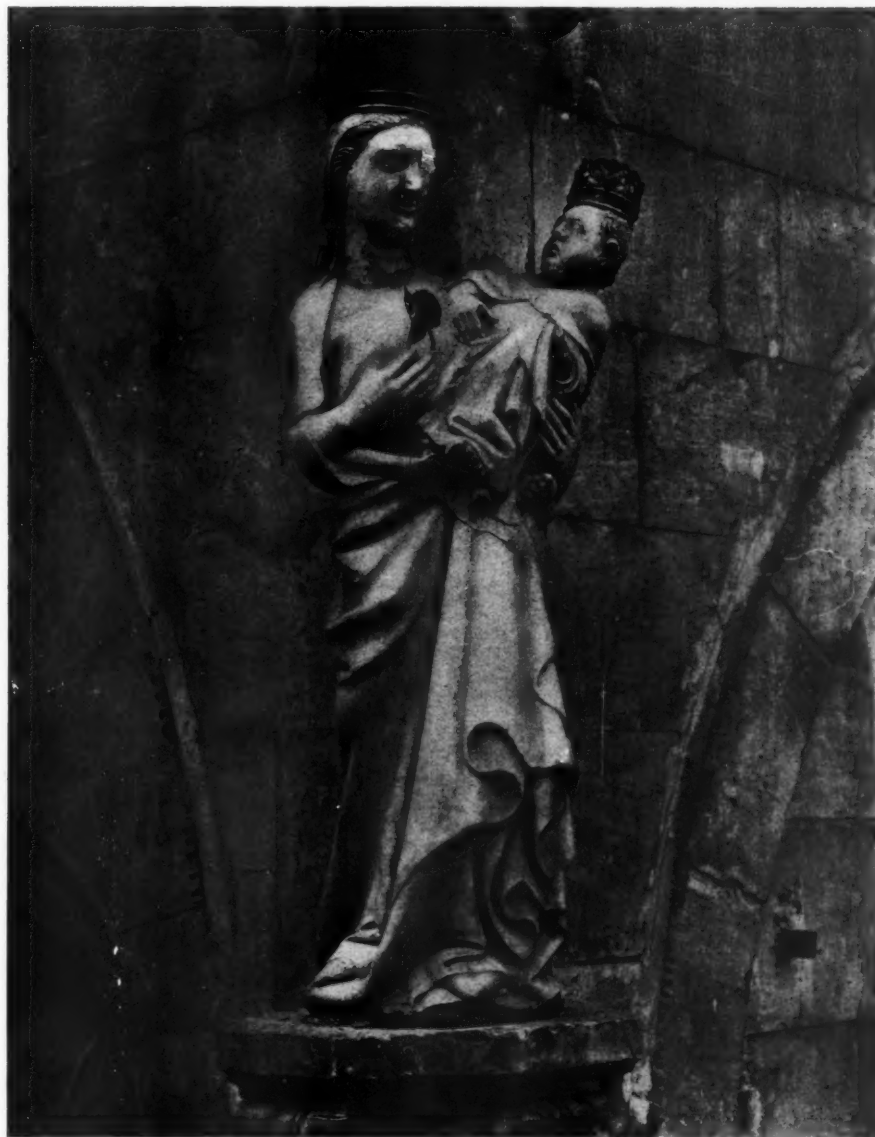
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