

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

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THE PORTICO, ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, NEW YORK

THE THREATENED DEMOLITION OF SAINT JOHN'S CHAPEL IN NEW YORK

BY RANSOM W. HADDON

IT is a fact, unfortunate as true, that most of the people here in America take little interest in the few remaining good examples of early Colonial architecture that have escaped destruction. Many of the best buildings, erected about the time or following the important period when the Colonies were in revolt against the mother

country, have been razed or allowed to go to ruin without protest from the people, whom we might naturally expect would take greatest interest in their preservation.

A good example is offered by St. John's, one of the chapels of Trinity Church, in this city, now menaced by the proposed widening of Varick Street in connection with



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, TRINITY PARISH,
NEW YORK

DOTTED LINES INDICATE PROPOSED NEW BUILDING LINE

the extension of Seventh Avenue from Greenwich Street, through Varick to West Broadway.

Unless some action is speedily taken, this venerable building will soon be razed. Of the very early history of this, like most of the Colonial churches, very little is known. No meetings of national importance were ever held here, nor was it ever used, like St. Paul's, as a barracks by British soldiers, nor was it ever honored by the presence of a President of the United States at its services. Its life has been a singularly quiet and uneventful one.

A simple entry in the minutes of the corporation of Trinity Church, on September 13, 1802, gives the first intimation of the movement for a new chapel which finally led to the erection of St. John's. Again, on the following Friday we find that it was decided that the square at the corner of Duane, Hudson and Jay Streets "be reserved for the new church." A month afterwards, however, the committee was asked to consider Hudson Street as offering a more suitable site. The change was approved and an order made that the new church be commenced immediately. Up

to this date there seems to have been little time spent in considering the employment of an architect, but on May 12 we are told "that several plans having been laid before the Vestry, one prepared by John and Isaac McComb was adopted."

It was finally decided to build on the east side of Hudson square. In those days that part of town was considered to be quite out of the city, and property there of so little value that the trustees of the Lutheran Church are said to have refused a gift of six acres of it, on the ground that "it would not pay to fence it." But later, after the chapel was finished, it became the fashionable part of town, as the chapel faced "a charming pleasure ground."

This park was surrounded by the homes of the wealthiest and most fashionable members of New York society, and on its east side was one of the noblest ecclesiastical edifices in the city, with lofty spire, and deep porch receding from its massive colonnade of stone. In fact, prior to the completion of the City Hall in 1812, St. John's was considered to be the finest building in the city.



ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH, LONDON

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ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, CHARLESTON, S. C.

A report on the condition of St. John's was prepared on May 14, 1807, which recommended that the church be opened with as little delay as possible, and a committee was authorized to rent the pews.

Early in 1807 the building was consecrated and on June 4 it was announced that regular service was to be held for the first time on the following Sunday in "this elegant building." The total cost of the building was very nearly \$200,000. The builders were T. C. Taylor, Henry Hedley, Danial Domanick and Isaac McComb.

It was only a few years ago that this building was defended by a general expression of public indignation against what seemed to be the threat of its owners not only to abandon but to destroy it. For a while it seemed that it had been saved, but when the Board of Estimate had the plans for the widening of Varick Street drawn, they seem, for some reason or other, to have entirely ignored its existence, and if it were not for the interest which Borough President McAneny is taking in its preservation it would probably have been torn down long ago. Through his efforts a new plan has been proposed, which if adopted, will let the porch extend into the street, with the sidewalk running under it as those of both St. Michael's and St. Philip's at Charleston do. There is every reason to believe that this plan will eventually be adopted. In fact nothing but the consent of the corporation of Trinity to the proposed rearrangement seems needed in order to effect the change.

This seems to leave the Trinity corporation directly answerable to the people of New York for the outcome.



TRUTH IN ARCHITECTURE*

BY JOHN BEVERLEY ROBINSON

PROFESSOR IN CHARGE OF THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



A GENERATION ago, Ruskin, "from whose lips flowed speech sweeter than honey," in the "Seven Lamps of Architecture," laid down the principle that truth should be observed in all good architecture, but found difficulty in drawing the line between reprehensible and excusable architectural falsehood. Nevertheless the idea of truth as a principle in architecture still survives, somewhat expanded into the idea of "sincerity," the belief that not only should the structure and decoration of a building be what they seem to be, but that both structure and decoration should betray the purpose for which the building is used, and the functions of its various parts. Thus a dome should not be placed on top of a building that has no great central hall within, to which the dome serves as covering and of which it is the æsthetic indication. In brief, the exterior should be the natural, almost necessary, outgrowth of the interior, as the interior is the outgrowth of the uses to which the building is to be put; and the parts of the structure in detail should have a structural, as well as an æsthetic, function to fulfil. All of which is true enough, with some reservations.

Besides the utilitarian aspect of architecture, in which the essential requirement is that a building must serve its purpose, from an æsthetic point of view there are two considerations: first, it must be pleasing to the eye; and second, it must not offend the judgment. Both of these are variable quantities. It is notorious that we like what we are accustomed to see; and moreover, the judgment of the engineer and that of the untaught layman would differ as to the adequacy of a steel truss to support the roof of a railroad station.

*An address delivered before the students of the School of Architecture of Washington University.

The most complete architectural untruth is obtained by means of paint. Whether the paint is used to imitate the grain of wood or the veining of marble, the imitation can be so perfectly done that the eye cannot detect it. As long as it remains undiscovered no great harm is done, but once found out, there is no doubt a revulsion of feeling in the spectator that goes far to neutralize any pleasure that may at first have been felt.

In some Italian churches the columns are of colored marble as high up as they are likely to be damaged; above that point, they are of plaster, painted to imitate the marble so cleverly that the line of junction of the two materials can be distinguished only by the touch, the cold "feel" of the marble at once identifying it, not at all by the eye. There is no doubt that as soon as this fact is discovered, the impression is received that all Italian Renaissance church interiors are scenic decorations, pretty enough, perhaps, but evanescent, built like Exposition buildings to be pulled down at the end of the season.

So with the painting of architectural accessories. Even Ruskin had to admit the beauty of the Sistine Chapel, where the figures of the arched ceiling are set in a framework of painted columns and pediments and architraves. These, however, he points out, are not "realized," are not painted so that we think they are really columns and architraves, but so that we see at a glance that they are only pictures of columns and entablatures, as clearly as we recognize the figures to be pictures of men, and not real men sprawling on the ceiling. So that there is no deception to discover, no shock to the judgment, and the eye enjoys the pleasure of the work undisturbed.

A similar case occurs in the Stanze of the Vatican, where the lower part of the walls is painted with what are evidently pictures of architectural objects, used as a dado. A very different effect is seen in

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such a church as the cathedral of Ferrara, where the whole interior is of plain, flat plaster, but painted to produce a deceptive semblance of columns and statues and other architectural parts, easily detected, and laughable to all but the sternest moralists, who find them "reprehensible."

A large part of our contemporary architecture, especially of the monumental kind, is admittedly superficial. Our stone buildings are really brick buildings, with an outer facing of stone. The classical ordonnances of the exterior have but little to do with the real construction, and on this ground they are denounced by purists. Criticism is just in this case, but why denunciation? If we are Romans in taste rather than Greeks or Mediaevals, how can we help it? Personally I prefer more constructive styles to the Roman, but it is hardly a matter for profound emotion either way.

As for the exhibition outside of a building of what is occurring inside, it is agreeable when it can be done, but not always practicable and very often not practised. Take the Hotel de Ville in Paris, for example, a building that is generally admired by both the unsophisticated and the *illuminati*. The high roofs of the central and flanking pavilions might be shorn off and flat roofs substituted without impairing in any way the interior working, nor are there any special rooms inside of which the importance is marked by these high roofs. The parts of the building between the pavilions are lighted by dormer windows, alternately of stone and bronze. The dark bronze frames of the intermediate dormers merge into the dark slate behind so that only the stone ones are noticeable. If all had been of stone they would have coalesced to form a continuous wall. Why should it not have been a continuous wall, carried up to the height of the pavilions, and included under the same flat roof? But that would destroy the design, you say. Truly it would; yet this is to admit that the design is a purely artificial and supererogatory thing "tacked on" on top of the building, merely to be looked at.

After all, why should it not be? The greatest works of architecture in all ages have been built largely to be looked at. What are all the towers of the Middle Ages for? Some few of them for defense, but

of the rest what can we say—to hang bells in? But many Renaissance churches have bells in some unnoticeable corner which seem to serve their purpose as well as if they were in a tower. Moreover, if we must have bells in a tower, why should we have two towers, as is so often the case in mediaeval churches and as is still seen to-day? One of the towers must be superfluous.

Whether one or two, how can we justify a spire on top of the towers, an undeniable superfluity? Or, to pass to another matter, what shall we say of the great, stone-vaulted ceilings that were the crowning glory of Gothic architecture? They were begun in an effort to make a fireproof basilica, but before they were developed to perfection a separate wooden roof over them was found necessary, leaving the vault and the flying buttresses that sustain it a piece of pure theatricalism.

To go still further back to the masters of the world in art, the Greeks, what justification was there for the peristyle of great columns wherewith they encompassed their more important temples? That the service of the gods did not depend upon a peristyle is shown by the number of temples that had none. The peristyle was built, like the Gothic spire, chiefly to be looked at. No doubt, having constructed it, the people could walk in it, conduct processions in it, but they got along without it very well in innumerable cases. Why not in all? And in detail the Greek temple is as much open to criticism, if we are disposed to criticise. A cornice is constructively the edge of a roof, intended to throw the rain-water clear of the building, and the Greeks so used it at the sides of a building; but they carried it up the slope of the roof as well, where it was not of any use. Or, if we let that pass, what shall we say of the horizontal piece of cornice that they carried across under it, forming the triangular pediment? They used it as a shelf on which to put statues, and, as such, one would think that they would at least have made it strong enough to hold the statues. Recent investigations show that they did not—that the weight of the statues was taken by iron supports fixed in the wall of the pediment behind them. The truth is that these cornices, and almost all cornices since, including those of the Strozzi and Farnese

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palaces, were built simply for looks, and they undeniably look well. The same is true of most intermediate cornices, string courses, and base courses. They are used because they look well. Their fancied utility constructively is only fancied; a plain, flat wall where there is no offset would serve the purpose better.

The only conclusion is that it will not do to be too hasty in laying down general principles, nor to allow ourselves to become arbitrary in advocating our ideas. Truthful construction, expressive design, may be admirable, but if a little untruth, a little less expression, make the result more admirable, why not use them? "That indignation which we profess to feel at deceit absolute is indeed only at deceit malicious." And there is no malice in architectural equivocation.

STA. SOPHIA, CONSTANTINOPLE

DISQUIETING news has come to hand of the dangerous condition of Justinian's great church at Constantinople. It has been authoritatively declared that without extensive reparation the great dome cannot be considered to have a more than twenty years' lease of life from the present moment. It appears that some two or three years ago a well-known French architect, M. Prost, assisted by an Italian architect made an examination and report on the building by request of the Turkish Government, but both were so little pleased with the treatment their report received that they withdrew it and quitted the field. M. Prost, either last year or the year before, exhibited at the Salon a complete set of measured drawings of the building, showing, among other things, the serious cracks in at least one of the main piers supporting the dome. The question is, What is to be done? Sta. Sophia is such a wonderful building, so absolutely unique as an example of dome construction on a great scale, that its preservation is a matter of interest for the whole civilized world; and it is in very bad hands at present. Turkey

cannot find much money to spend on the building, nor can the Turkish authorities, even if they had money, be trusted to do the best for the building. If money is the principal obstacle, the Governments of the leading countries of the civilized world ought to combine to find the necessary funds.—*The Architectural Review* (London).

"FAME AND THE ARCHITECT"

MR. DARCY BRADDELL, in a recent number of the *Architects' and Builders' Journal*, recalled the story told of the late Sir Edward Burne-Jones, that when he was at the zenith of his fame he came across an old gentleman in Birmingham who had been his drawing master in very early days. "Why, if it isn't Ned Burne-Jones!" said the old man, and thereupon stopped and talked to the great "B.-J." At the end of their conversation the old gentleman blandly inquired, "Are you still keeping your drawing up?" This story is probably quite untrue, but that is of no matter. The fact remains that Burne-Jones was a famous man during his lifetime as well as after. "Now," writes Mr. Braddell, "supposing that, instead of expressing himself in paint, he had been drawn by his love of mediævalism and mysticism into the meshes of architecture, the whole point of the apocryphal little story would have fallen to the ground for the very simple reason that he could never have been a famous man. The modern architect is not famous if compared with the leading men of the sister arts of painting and sculpture of to-day. Should anyone have doubts on this point, I ask him as a member of ordinary cultivated society to enter any drawing-room he pleases, and discover of the occupants thereof three architects practicing to-day whose names are household words as are Mr. Sargent's, Mr. Frank Brangwyn's, and Mr. J. J. Shannon's. I think it can be safely said that he would have a difficult task indeed."—*The Architectural Review* (London).

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THE PRESERVATION OF ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS

THE truth of the adage, "familiarity breeds contempt," finds a certain degree of exemplification in the apathetic attitude of people of all countries toward the venerable landmarks that have in many cases formed the theater wherein have been acted the stirring incidents of a nation's history; or which perhaps mark periods of highest architectural or artistic achievements.

If familiarity with many of our architectural monuments has not inspired contempt for them it seems to have at least occasioned a feeling of indifference, as a result of which no protest is made or objection offered when their destruction is threatened.

The entire subject of the restoration and preservation of ancient landmarks and architectural monuments seems to need most careful attention and determined action on the part of men competent to undertake the work, else the damage will presently become irreparable. In this country where few monuments are still extant, it behooves us to exercise most solicitous care lest we find that through a spirit of indifference the structures representing what remains of our early architecture—an architecture, by the way, which has not been excelled in later years—have been allowed to crumble or have been razed by the hands of icono-

clasts who have no veneration for our traditions and no appreciation of our Art.

A case in point is St. John's Church in this city. Even its owners do not appear to be imbued with the proper spirit regarding its threatened demolition, and it is only by reason of a well-defined public sentiment and a commendable appreciation shown by Borough President McAneny that this church will probably escape destruction.

Various Chapters of the Institute, notably Philadelphia and Boston, have shown zeal in conserving the landmarks and monuments to be found within their jurisdictions. We believe the Institute might with advantage make this work general and create a special committee whose function would be, acting through various dependent bodies, to put an end to the reckless destruction of the few priceless examples of our early architecture that still remain.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL CITY COMPETITION

IN sharp contrast with the dignified attitude assumed by the R. I. B. A. toward the recent competition is that of the allied Australian Society, the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects. The R. I. B. A., so far as we are aware, has refrained from any adverse criticism of the award or unfavorable comment concerning the professional ability of the jury that conducted the competition. The Australian Society, however, in an article in the Journal of Proceedings, issue of May, 1912, descends to an undignified attack directed against the Jury of Award and questions its ability to intelligently sit in judgment. Added to this is a severe arraignment of the Minister who appointed the jury, which tends to create a doubt concerning a calm and judicial state of mind on the part of the publication itself or the organization which it represents. This doubt is increased by the apparent inaccuracy of the statement that "the British, American and Australian Institutes urged their members not to compete." In so far as the American Institute of Architects is concerned, this statement is unquestionably incorrect. In fact, the Code of Competitions adopted by the A. I. A. does not apply to contests held

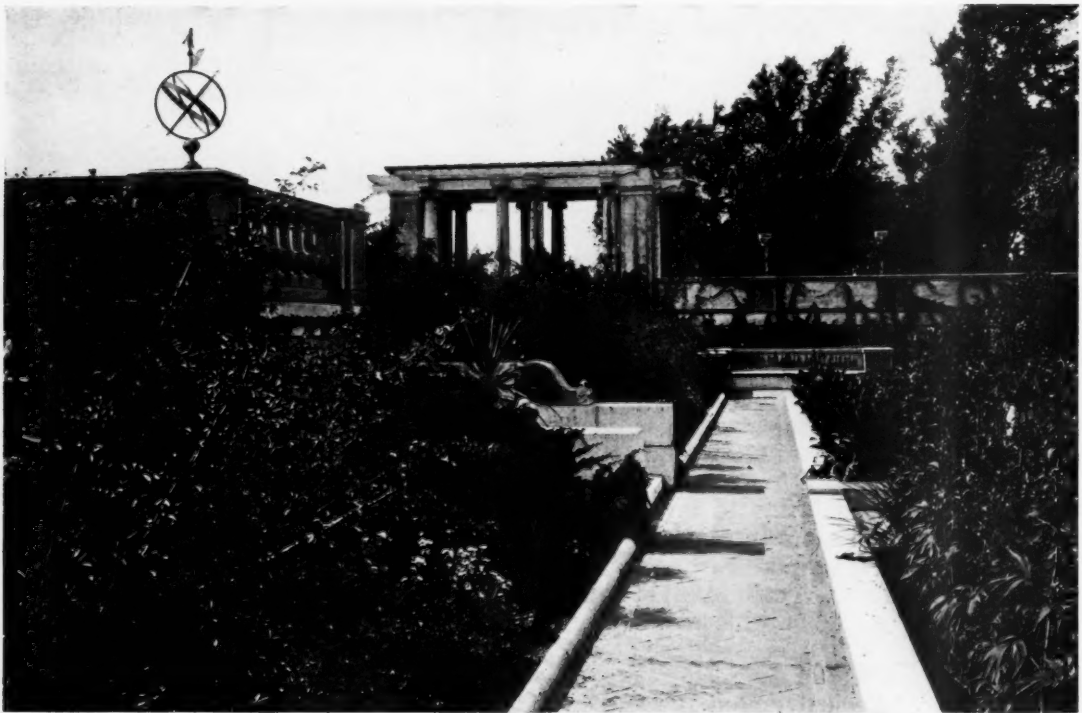
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elsewhere than in the United States, its territories and possessions, and it would therefore manifestly be impossible for the organization to take official cognizance of the Australian competition.

Whether participation in a contest that would be considered unprofessional if conducted in one part of the world is proper and permissible in another is an ethical question concerning which much difference of opinion apparently exists. The fact remains, however, that this feature of

territorial limitation affecting the code has not infrequently been taken advantage of by members of the Institute, who would otherwise have been unable to compete.

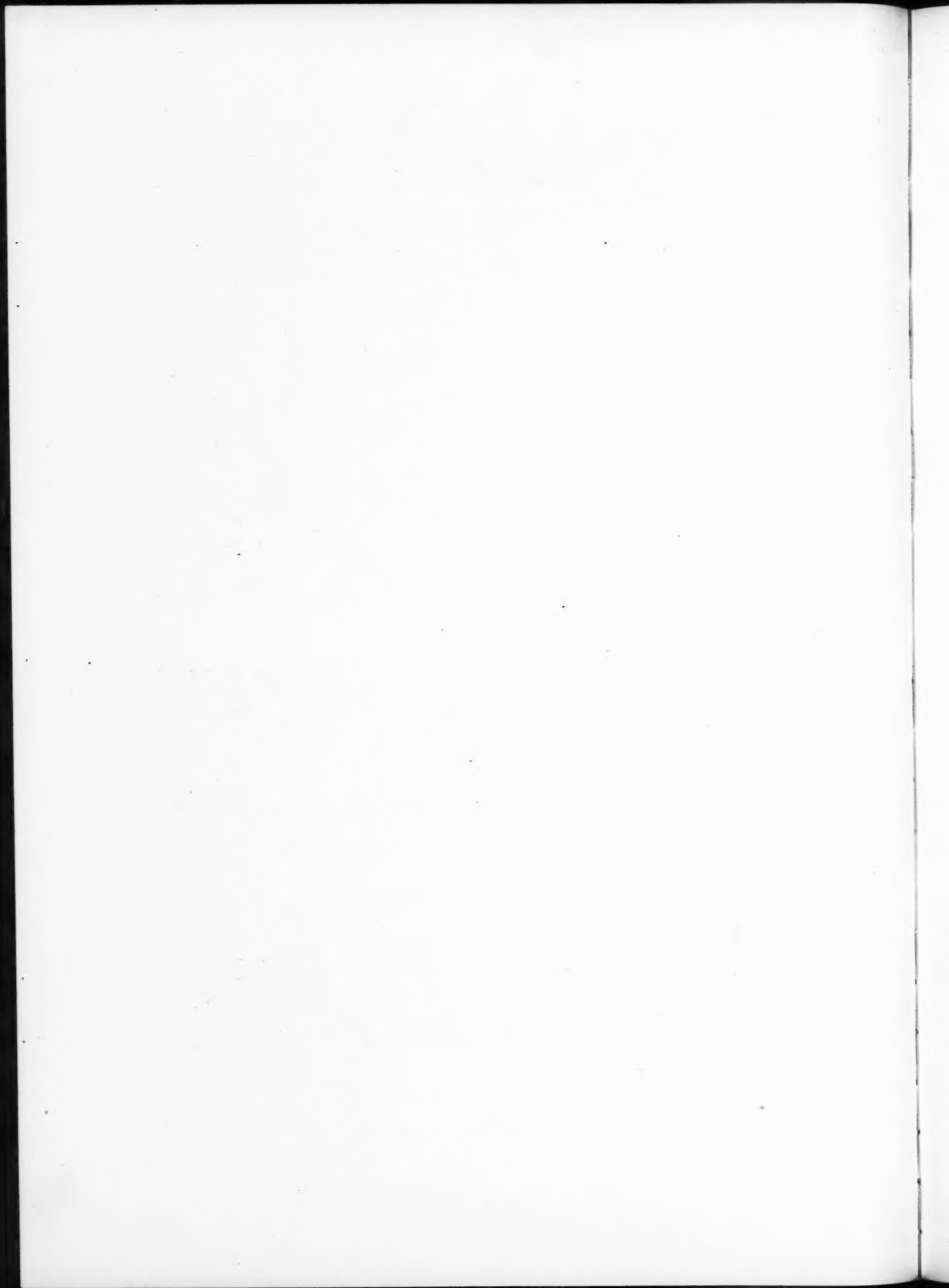
We are not taking the position that criticism of the manner in which the competition in question was conducted is not at least to a degree justified, but a cause is never strengthened by inaccuracy of statement nor by too palpable evidences of disappointment, to which criticism or heated comment is liable to be attributed.



DETAIL OF A GARDEN, MR. CHARLES A. PLATT, ARCHITECT



TWO INTERIORS
MR. CHARLES A. PLATT, ARCHITECT



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THE ENTRANCE HALL, HOUSE OF JOHN T. PRATT, ESQ.
MR. CHARLES A. PLATT ARCHITECT

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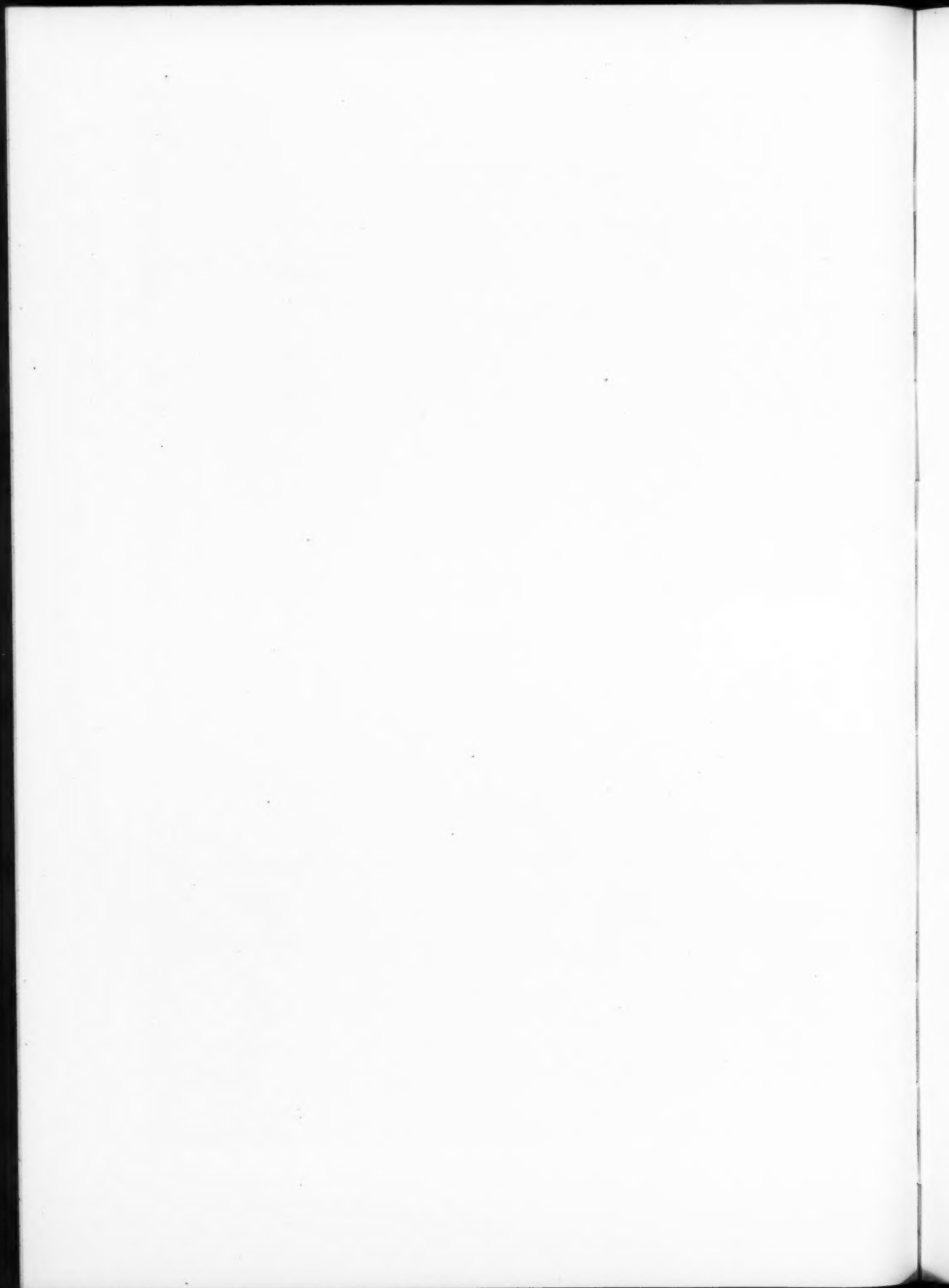
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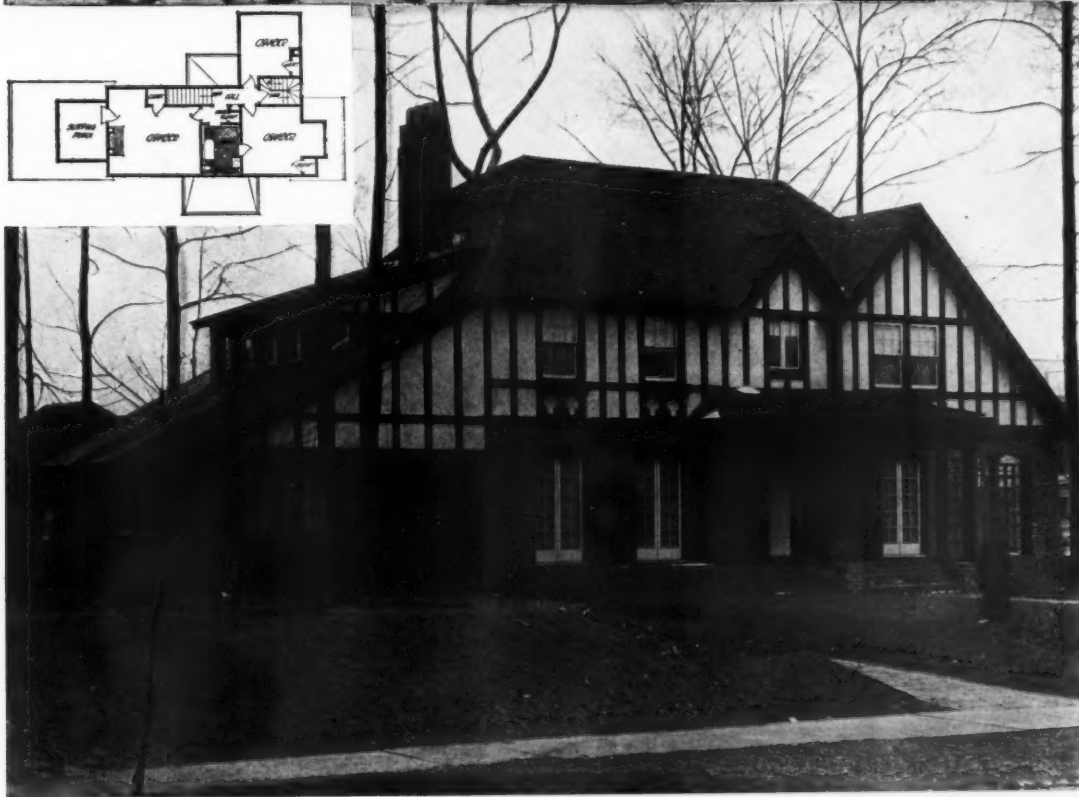
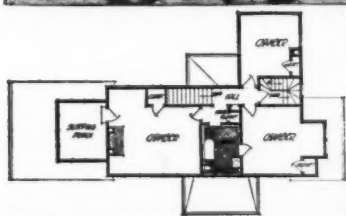
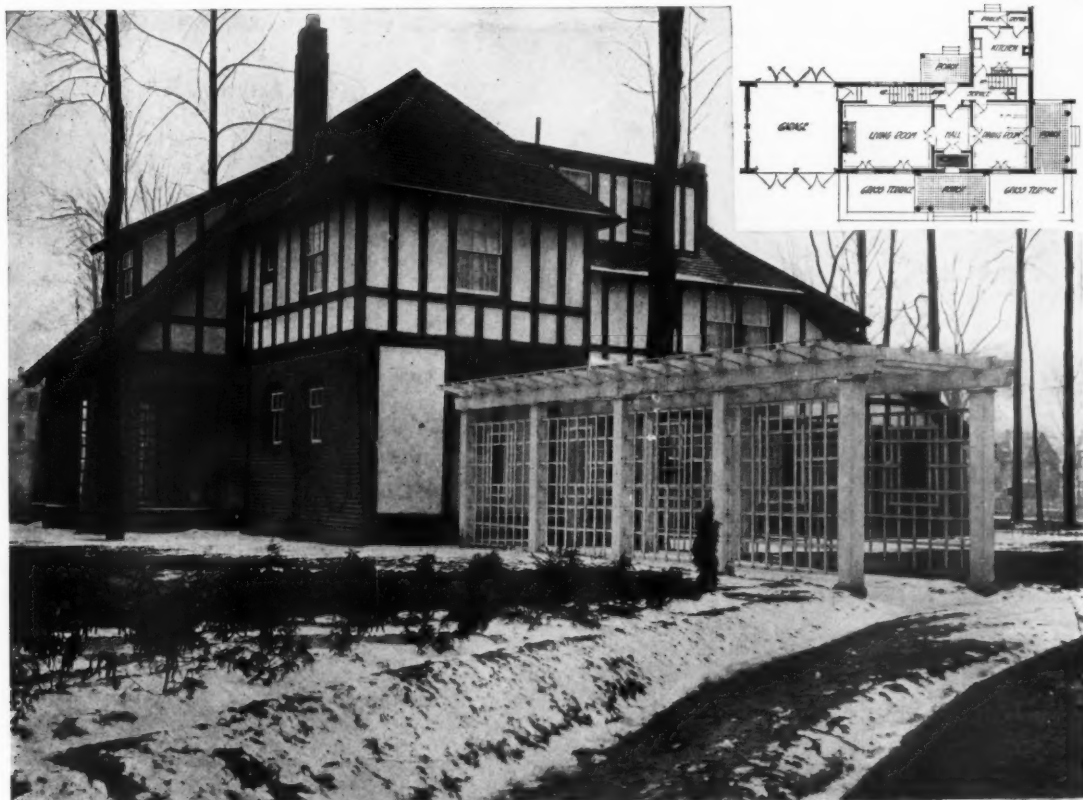
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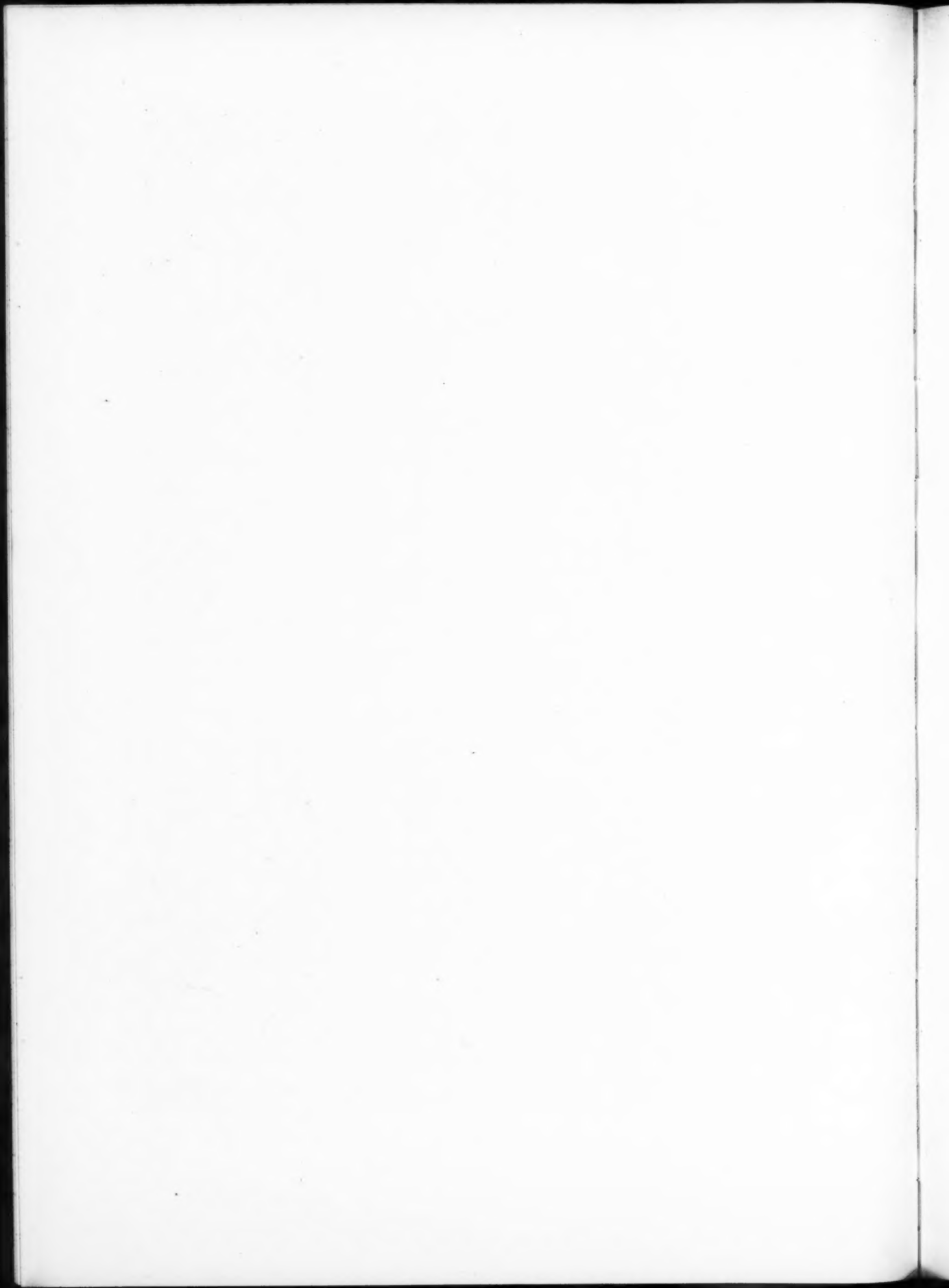
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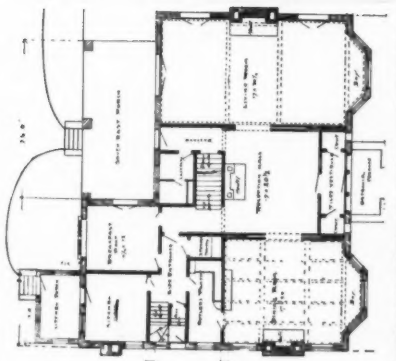
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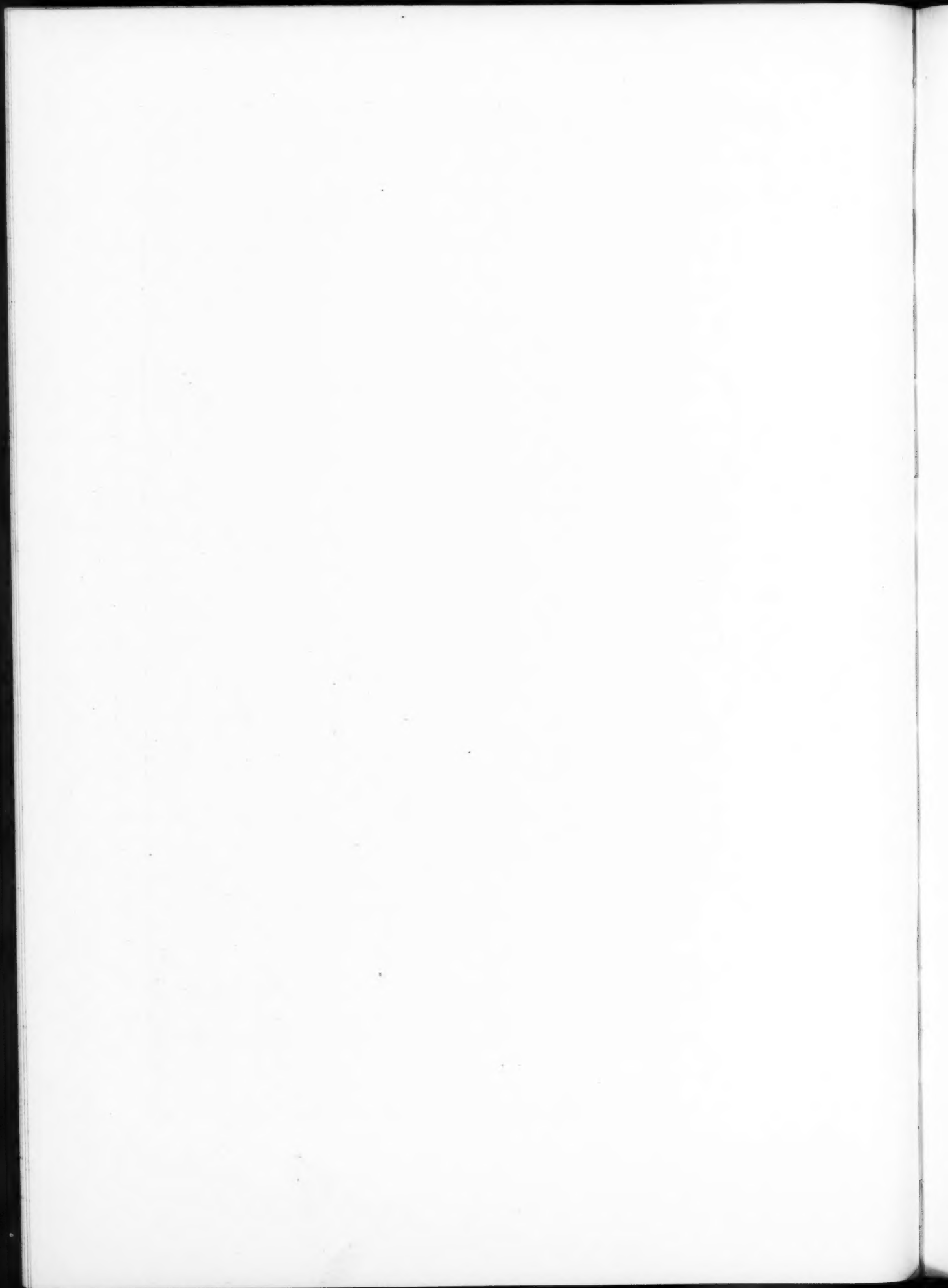


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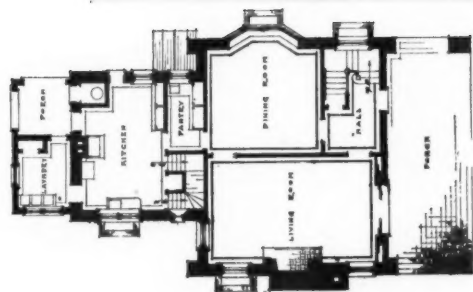
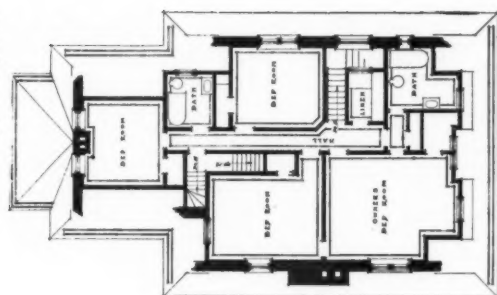


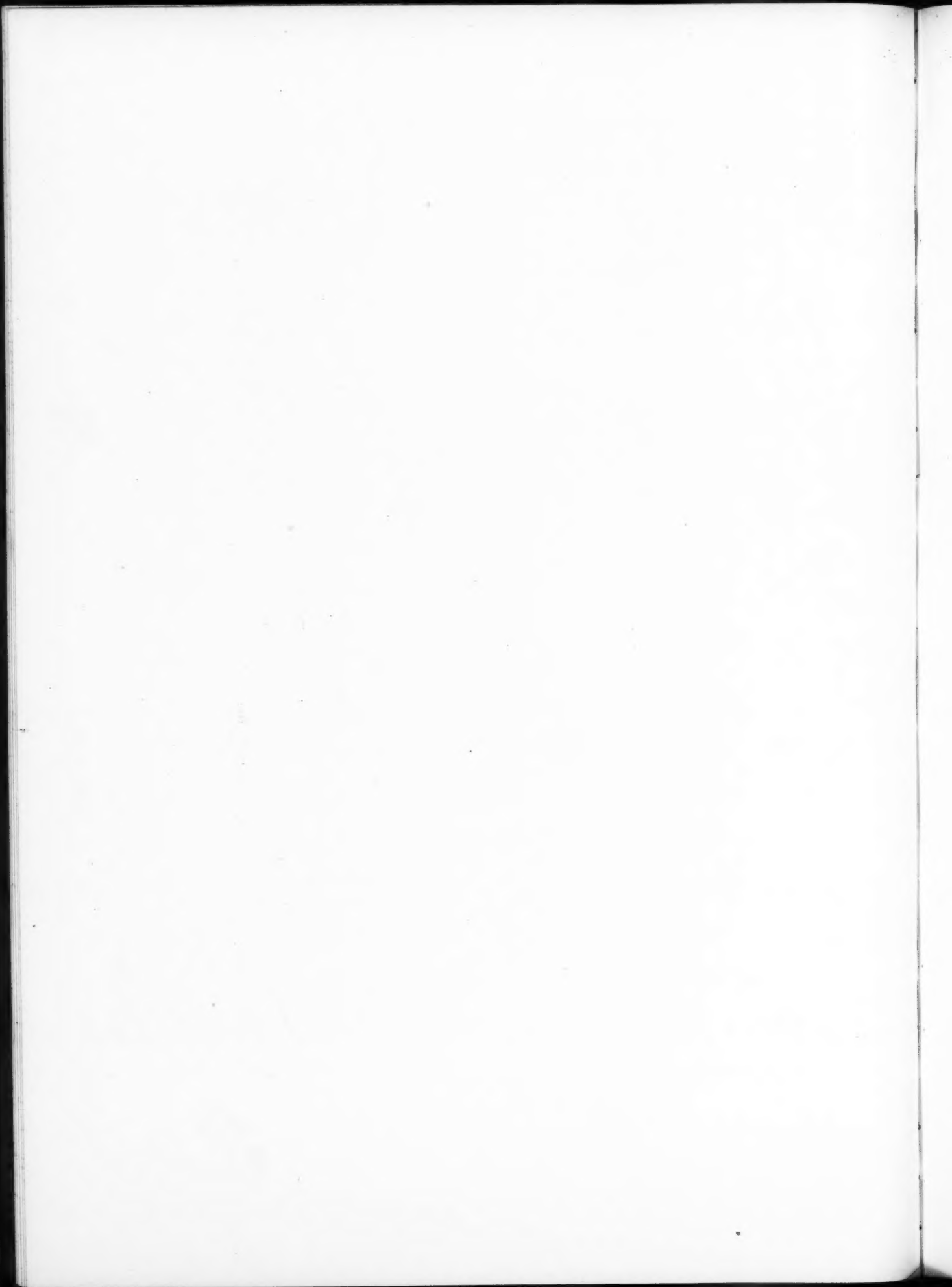
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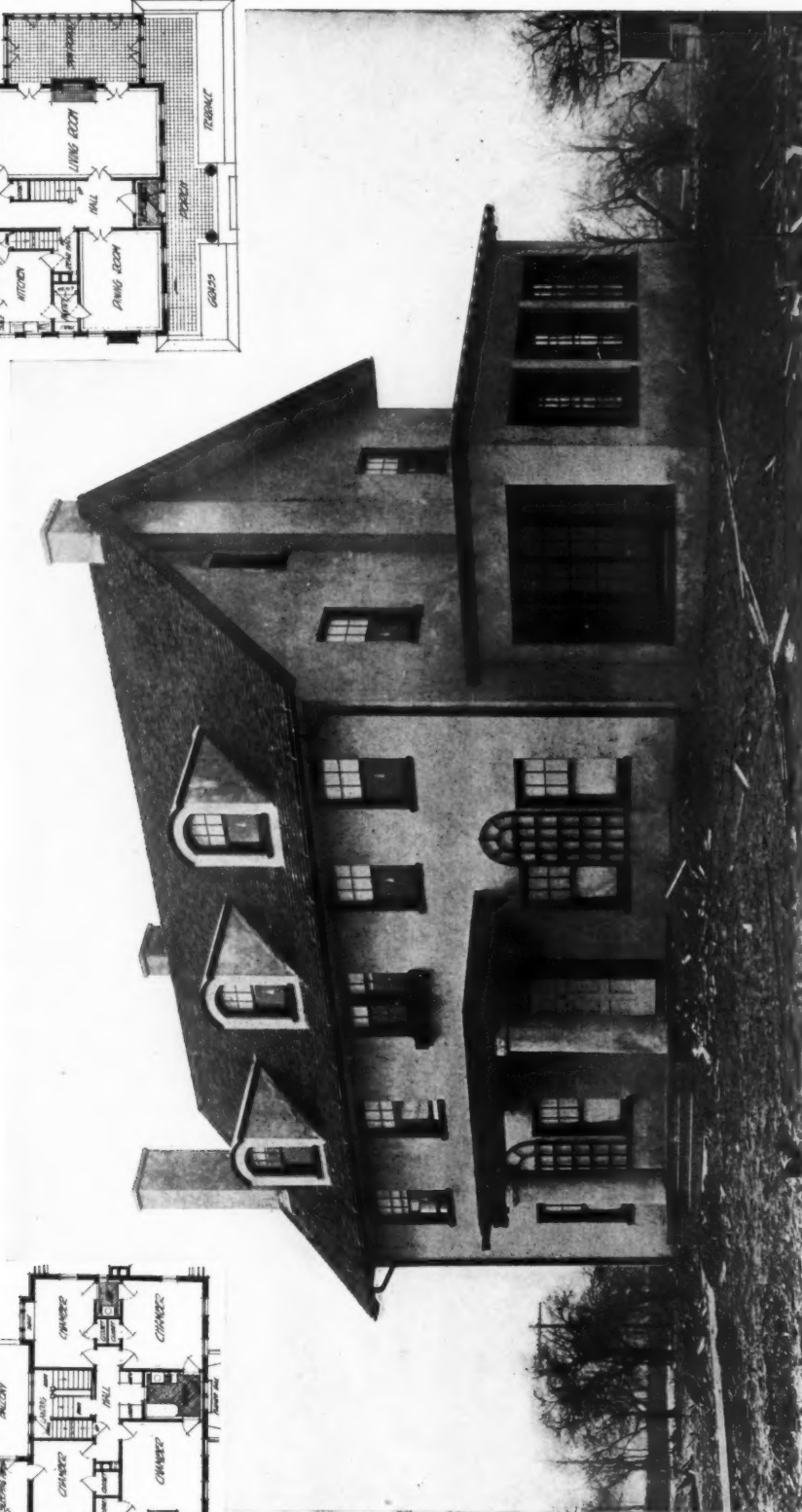
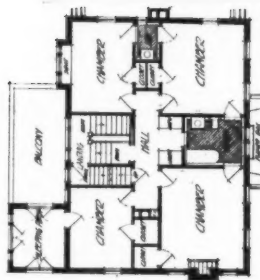
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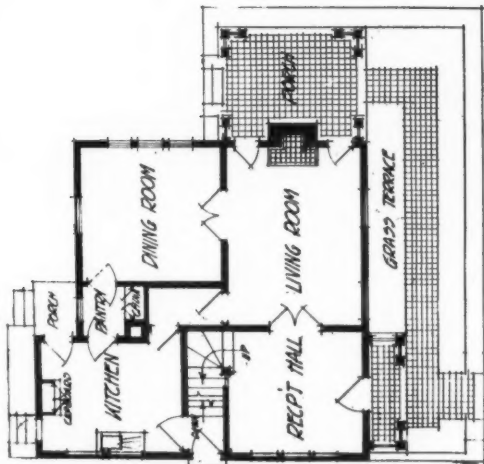
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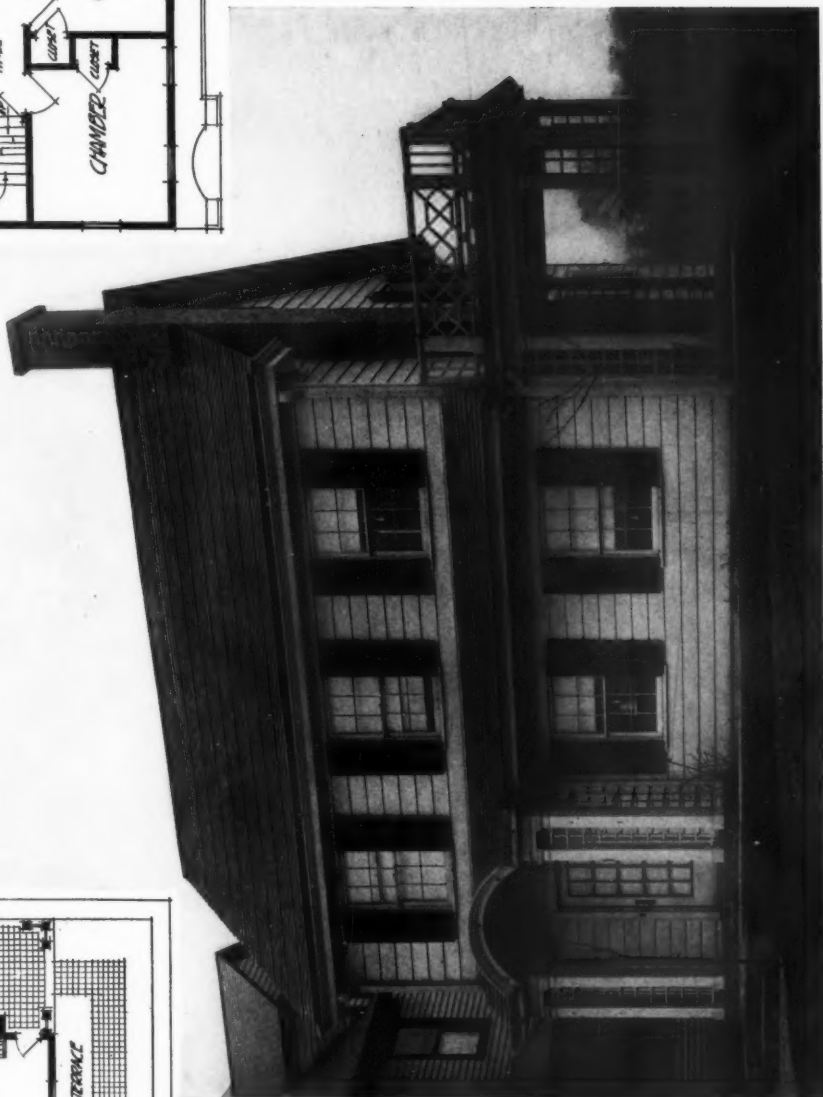
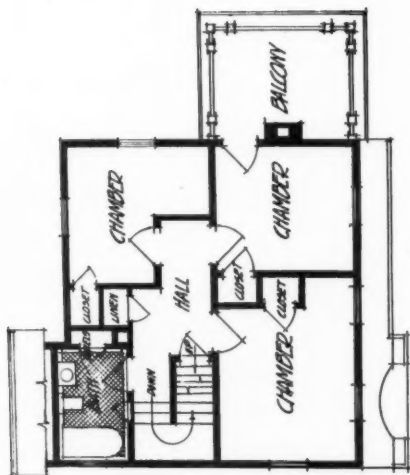


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WALL DETAIL, SMALL APARTMENT ON THIRD FLOOR, SHOWING DECORATIVE MOTIVES

THE DAVANZATI PALACE, FLORENCE, ITALY—II