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CAN DESIGN BE REDUCED TO RULE?

PART II

By JOHN BEVERLEY ROBINSON, *Professor of Architecture, Washington University*



WE have found, by the empirical method (the word empirical used to be a word of scorn; it is now the approved scientific method), that the fronts of almost all buildings are composed of one, two or three masses. It follows that the first point to be observed in designing a front is to see that one or the other of these arrangements is carried out,—that no feature is introduced which may oppose or obscure whichever one of these motives we may have settled upon. Long use and familiarity with these dispositions make it really difficult for an architect to diverge from them. He designs in such masses instinctively and without thinking about it.

Throwing aside the established custom, let us see what happens if we fail to keep the masses distinct from the links.

Taking a building of three masses, such as the City Hall, or the Public Library, or the Pennsylvania Terminal, let us ignore the connecting function of the links, and treat them as architects have always been

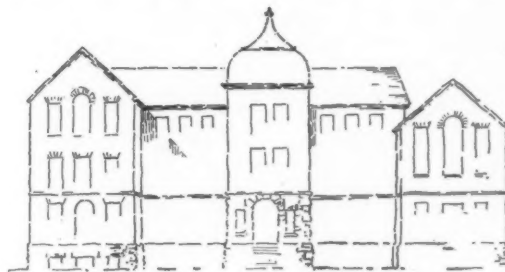


SKETCH A

in the habit of treating masses; let us put pediments on them, as in this sketch. (Sketch A.)

The result is strange indeed. Instead of receiving the impression of a single building,

we have that of a row of buildings, one following the other, like a train of cars. Restless, most critics would call it, if they would condescend to criticise it at all. The truth is that we have lost that unity



SKETCH B

—that hanging together of the parts—which is the fundamental requirement of all art, and the parts appear as dislocated parts, not as a united whole.

We have treated the parts that should be connecting parts—the links—as if they were the principal parts—the masses. Whence we learn the importance of treating links as links, and masses as masses.

There is a building at the southwest corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 104th Street, of which I cannot obtain a photograph, but must content myself with this crude sketch. (Sketch B.) It has plenty of other faults, but what is now under consideration is that the link is not treated as a link.

The building is evidently intended to be a composition of three masses, connected by links, but the mass on the right hand is lower than the link which is supposed to attach it to the central mass. The link runs off into space above, and is not subordinate to the mass, as it should be; conse-

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

quently a feeling of dislocation instead of connection results.

Here, in Fig. 1, is a church like hundreds of others that have been built, in which, between the two towers, is a large gable. Were it not that our senses are dulled by familiarity, this would be almost as impossible as the pediments in our first sketch.* In the great days such a church front was rarely built, never in the buildings that we must admire.

In the first place when a gable was used, as at Tours, it was narrow, not any wider than the towers that it connected, and of course much lower, while in the finest examples, as at Paris, Amiens, and Reims every effort was made to obtain a horizontal line of connection.

Notice, in Fig. 2, the cathedral of Paris, the horizontal arcade that obscures the face of the gable. The same sort of arcade is used in the same way at Amiens and Reims,



FIGURE 1

the desire being to make the link as far as possible a horizontal link and not a pointed form.

*I have no intention of especially denouncing this particular building, but merely of pointing out what seems to be one reason why modern churches fall short of the ancient ones.

And now, if such generalizations interest us, two thoughts come to the mind. First, the conviction that the links must be kept subordinate to the masses, and secondly, a question: Why is it that pediments and spires and pointed forms generally look well on the masses, and not on the links?

It is well known that a pyramidal arrangement in painting or sculpture is pleasing; that it groups together the heterogeneous parts, and enables the eye to grasp the whole as a single individual.

The same is true in an architectural



FIGURE 2

composition, whether the pointed effect be obtained by a number of parts, gradually towering one above the other, until it culminates in the highest, or whether it be obtained by the simple pointed lines of gable or pediment or spire.

So it seems simple and natural enough, when we think of it thus, that the individual pointed treatment should look well when applied to the individual masses that are to be connected, whether two or three, and that horizontal lines should as naturally be used for the links that connect them. This is the reason why the architects of the great churches of the flowering time of Gothic architecture took such pains to connect the two masses of their fronts by a horizontal gallery; and the skill with which they did it, by means of an open arcade, which masked but did not entirely conceal the gable behind, cannot be too highly praised.

Not all masses indeed are pointed. Often they are as horizontal as the link itself, but this is where the whole building is of



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4

the horizontal type. The distinction between the horizontal and the vertical is of prime importance, and I might write pages upon this subject alone. We will not dwell upon it further at present.

No one can go far in the examination of photographs or of the buildings themselves, without finding that there are other parts, besides the main masses, that admit of classification,—parts that are manifestly more important, that is to say larger, more conspicuous or noticeable, than such minor objects as windows or columns.

Such are projecting portions that are yet not of sufficient importance to rank as primary masses, wings, porches, some porticos, and large bays, oriels or dormers.

It seems not unreasonable to classify all these together, as minor or secondary masses. It will be found that these are used in much the same way as are the primary masses, only that instead of standing up against the sky, connected by the other parts that we have called links, they are placed upon the main masses as a background, and are usually sufficiently connected by the mass behind them.

I cannot show what I mean better than



FIGURE 5

by these illustrations 3, 4 and 5 all by the same hand, all in the same style, and showing respectively one, two and three large dormers as their most noticeable feature.

So far we have spoken only of matters of fact, and have classified the facts as we found them.

Now we come to a matter of opinion, on which any one does well to speak with diffidence; yet I think that it is hardly open to the charge of pedanticism or idle speculation to say that buildings seem to look better when such secondary masses are kept subordinate, and not made so large as to be mistakable for primary masses.

The classification of certain minor parts as secondary masses is not a hard and fast one. Sometimes there is doubt whether a dormer perhaps is large enough to count as a mass at all, even a secondary mass.

Sometimes again the secondary parts are so large that still others are placed upon them, which would logically be called tertiary masses. This however is rare, and so much nomenclature is confusing. I think, however, that what has so far been discovered is defensible and will prove of service in criticising designs.

THE SKINNER MEMORIAL CHAPEL, HOLYOKE, MASS.

MESSRS. ALLEN & COLLENS, ARCHITECTS

THE Skinner Memorial Chapel, recently built in connection with the Second Congregational Church of Holyoke, rises on the south of the church, and is separated from it by a court. On the east and west sides of this court run low cloisters connecting with the church. On the west side the cloister forms a vestibule to the chapel, and is enlarged in the bay next to the church into a porte cochere common both to church and chapel.

The exterior of the building is of the same stone as the main church, a red sand-stone, general in the Connecticut valley. The tracery of the windows is cut in Indiana limestone, in order to correspond with the facing of the interior walls, and because limestone is considered a more durable material for delicate work.

In plan the chapel consists of six bays of equal size, terminating toward the east in an apsidal form. The entrance on the west is marked by a low stone porch with canopies carved on either side and a ribbon over interlaced on the tracery. Through this porch one enters into a cloister or vestibule with low, groined ceiling and tiled floor. Beyond this opens an arched door into the nave. This doorway on the inside is richly ornamented with a cut stone screen, containing canopies and niches and a scroll above. Over this memorial rises the "Te Deum" window, a wealth of color, in stained glass.

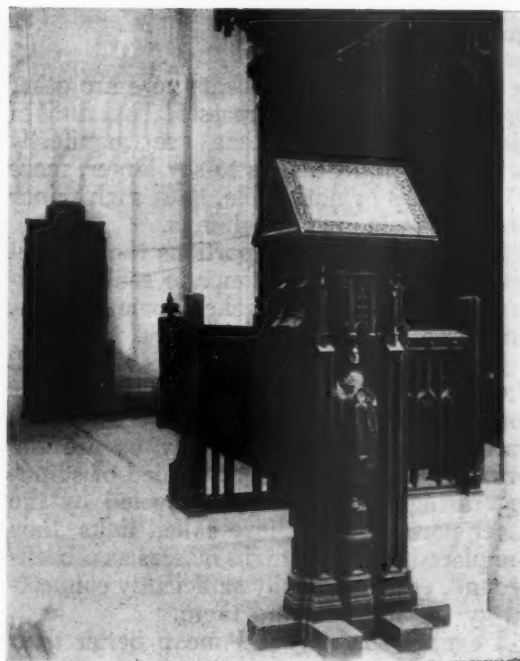
The view down the nave on entering is pleasing, as the eye travels along the stone columns and nave windows on either side to the richly ornamented chancel and apse at the further end, lighted by the coloring of the stained glass windows above the chancel screen. The nave columns rise to support a rich dark oak ceiling with hammer beam trusses carved in the form of angels, which hold in their hands the sanctuary lamps to light the chapel.

The chancel at the easterly end is marked

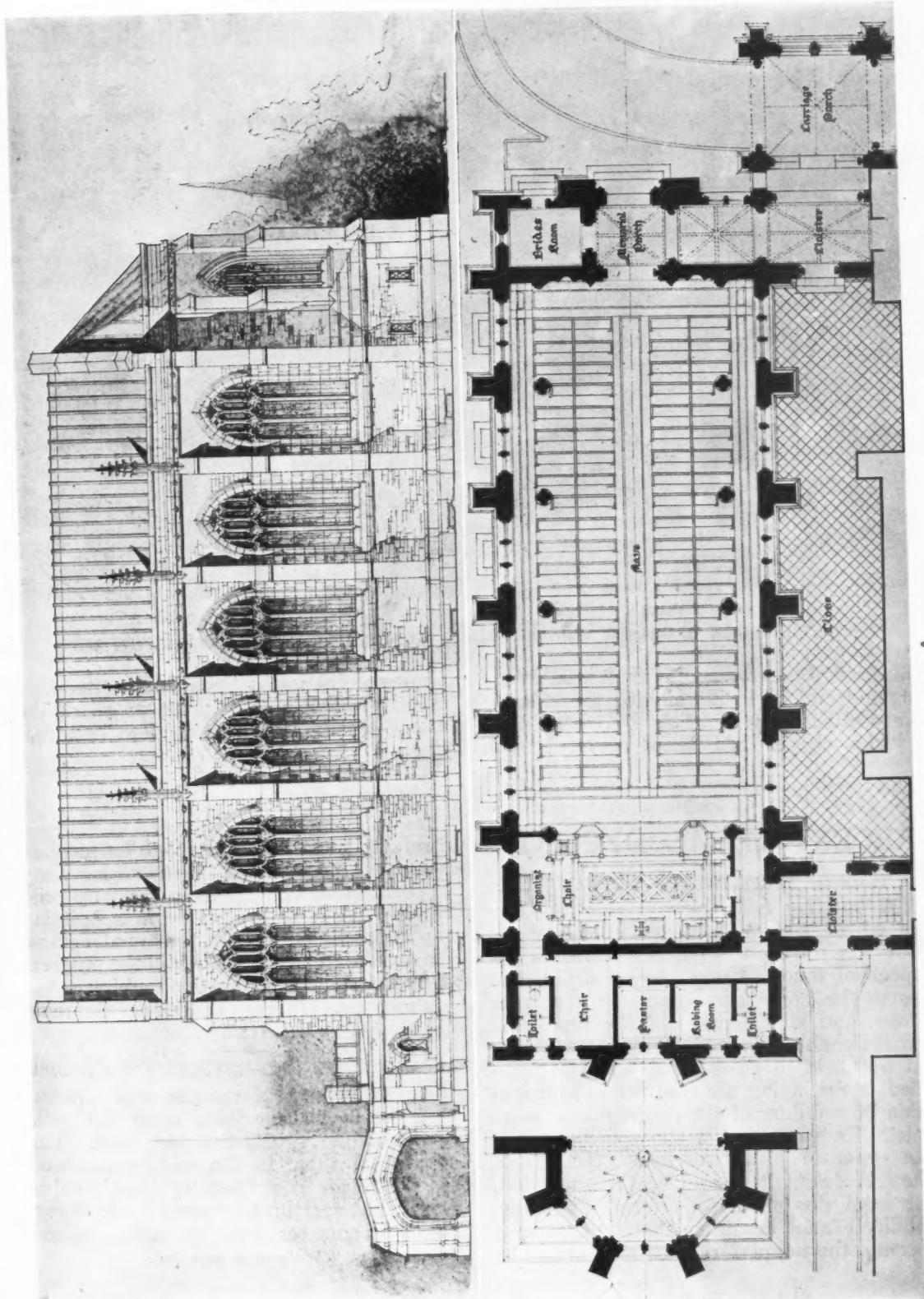
by the insertion of the organ between the columns of the sixth bay, which are surmounted by four single angels in stone. The organ case is elaborately carved and is finished in dark oak similar to the chancel furniture. The chapel was scientifically laid out before construction, in order that the best acoustics might be obtained and the calculations at that time are borne out by excellent results.

At the rear of the chancel is a richly carved stone screen surmounted by four angels bearing instruments, symbolic of the flanking organ. This screen forms also the rail to the choir gallery in the apse raised above the chancel. Under this choir gallery at the level of the chancel are the vestry and choir rooms.

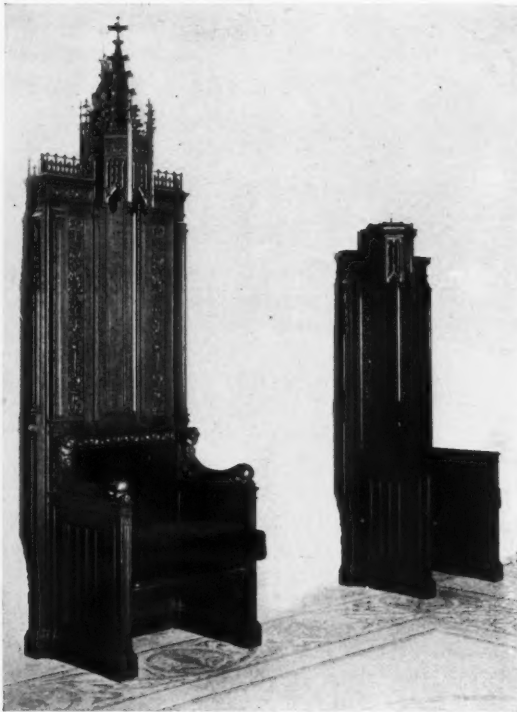
The ceiling of the apse is a stone fan vault with elaborately carved corbels at the



THE LECTERN



ELEVATION AND PLAN
THE SKINNER MEMORIAL CHAPEL, HOLYOKE, MASS. MESSRS. ALLEN & COLLENS, ARCHITECTS



CLERGY SEATS



THE ORGAN AND CONSOLE

SKINNER MEMORIAL CHAPEL, HOLYOKE, MASS. MESSRS. ALLEN & COLLENS, ARCHITECTS

junction of the ribs. This vault is indirectly lighted and when illuminated the effect is very satisfactory.

The chapel has been provided with

approved heating and ventilating apparatus and is complete throughout in all of the minor details known to modern construction.

RECENT LEGAL DECISIONS

TIME OF PERFORMANCE—FORFEITURE

A building contractor was actively engaged in the performance of his work, but was unable to complete it within the specified time. There was no defalcation as to the grade and quality of the work done, and an extension of the time limit would enable him to perform his contract. It was held that the owner was not justified in rescinding the contract in anticipation of a failure of the contractor to complete the work within the specified time. In order to justify rescission, there must be actual default, unequivocal renunciation, or legal disability to perform. The disability cannot be anticipated; but, after it occurs, the nonperformance may be. The

disability must be so complete as to place it beyond the power of the defaulting party to perform his obligations in every material respect. A forfeiture clause in a building contract will be strictly construed against the owner, and a mere delay in the progress of the work will not justify forfeiture.

Brady v. Oliver, Tennessee Supreme Court, 147 S. W. 1135.

APPARENT DANGER—ASSUMPTION OF RISK

An experienced carpenter was directed to assist in placing joists upon the walls of a building twenty-five feet high. The support of these in the middle consisted of a stringer composed of pine lumber two by six, sustained by posts made of two pieces of lumber two by eight, spliced

(Continued on page 220)

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THE EXTENSION OF NEW YORK'S PIER LINES

MANY vital questions affecting municipal improvement in general are contained in the proposed extension of the pier lines and the erection of new piers along the Hudson River frontage of Manhattan Island, now under consideration. These questions, however, so far as discussions have appeared in the daily press or have been recorded in the deliberations of the Board of Aldermen, seem to concern only the purely utilitarian aspects of the matter. There does not appear to have been included anywhere in the discussions or deliberations any consideration worthy of mention of the architectural features involved. In fact, that the construction of new piers together with their approaches would bear a direct and important relation to future artistic development of the water-front of New York does not seem to have been realized, although a moment's reflection should be enough to convince anyone that such an undertaking will present possibilities of much importance to future work. It would be extremely unfortunate if new piers were designed and placed simply with a view to their present utilitarian necessities, as has heretofore been the custom. Structures of a public nature erected in New York, and particularly those of so conspicuous a character as the proposed piers are bound to become, in connection

with any scheme of water-front improvement or city plan, should receive adequate architectural treatment and their locations should be selected with a view to ample approaches designed to avoid traffic congestion. Matters of this kind cannot wisely be considered independently. They should form a part of a well-considered scheme looking to future development and improvement that may reasonably be expected to meet all requirements developing within the next half century, at least.

It is believed, therefore, that any conclusion in this matter that does not embody the best architectural and town planning experience will lead to grave and expensive errors. The time to prevent mistakes is before any definite action has been taken and the proper means and methods to be employed in this instance would seem to be apparent.

A PROPOSED FOREST RESERVE

OF all the many addresses delivered before the Civic Federation Convention recently held in Baltimore, that of James Bryce, British Ambassador, was of especial interest, as suggesting a larger and more comprehensive plan of civic and national betterment than any now before the public. A means of beginning such work is provided in a plan proposed, by which the Government would acquire land lying between Baltimore and Washington and convert it into a forest reserve. The suggestion was received by the Convention with many indications of approval. Such a plan appears in many ways more desirable than the project advocated by many of constructing a road from Washington to Gettysburg as a memorial to Lincoln. The reclaiming and beautifying of the land between Baltimore and Washington would be in a sense the development of a section that is perhaps of more than usual importance by reason of being one of the most used approaches to the nation's capital.

It is realized that many plans advanced at conventions of this character are so purely theoretical as to fail to commend themselves to practical men. But here appears to be a suggestion from a man whose accurate knowledge of conditions in this country has many times been shown that would entitle

it to the most careful consideration. It is hoped that the subject will be pursued till some definite action is taken along the line suggested.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF COPLEY SQUARE, BOSTON

THE scheme proposed by Mr. Frank A. Bourne for the improvement of Copley Square in Boston appears to have received general approval and promises to set at rest, at least for the present, the war of ideas that has been raging concerning proper treatment of this important section of Boston.

The essential features of the scheme proposed appear to be in brief as follows: Broad roadways on all four sides. A central portion will be sunk two and one-half feet below the general level and approached by flights of broad stone steps. The central feature of the plaza will be a monumental column similar in its design to Trajan's Column in Rome or the Vendôme Column in Paris. At the end of the Square toward the Public Library, it is proposed

to place a sculptured fountain and another will be located beside Trinity Church. Taken all in all, the plan promises an improvement of very real importance and one that makes the presence of the ubiquitous trolley lines with their cars of varying degrees of antiquity, concerning which, so far as noted, there is no plan contemplating their removal from the square on foot, particularly incongruous. It is unfortunate that in a dignified scheme of this character distracting features of street car traffic should be so obtrusively present. But Boston is not unique in this regard. Other cities are confronted by the same problem and it seems safe to predict that one of the real difficulties to be encountered by cities planning civic betterments will be to divert street car lines and other public service utilities to streets and sections of the city where they will not interfere to such a great degree with artistic developments. In this, as in all other similar projects, public sentiment will probably accomplish more than any other means at hand, and the development of general appreciation of the value of æsthetics thus becomes of first importance.

RECENT LEGAL DECISIONS

(Continued from page 218)

together and braced, to which the stringer was nailed. Joists had been placed on the walls and stringer over one-third of the building. The carpenter went out on the stringer with another workman beyond the joists, drew up eight or ten pieces of lumber to make four or five joists, and he and his fellow workman were nailing these together on the stringer, when an upright below gave way and he fell. He brought suit against his employer. There was no latent defect in the structure. The plaintiff knew the materials of which it was composed, the size of the posts and of the stringer, the way in which they were made, and that the posts either had no braces or but one each. Having had previous experience in this kind of work, the alleged defect in the structure was unavoidably obvious to him, and the risk and danger of placing two men driving nails and the material for four or five joists on this stringer in front of the

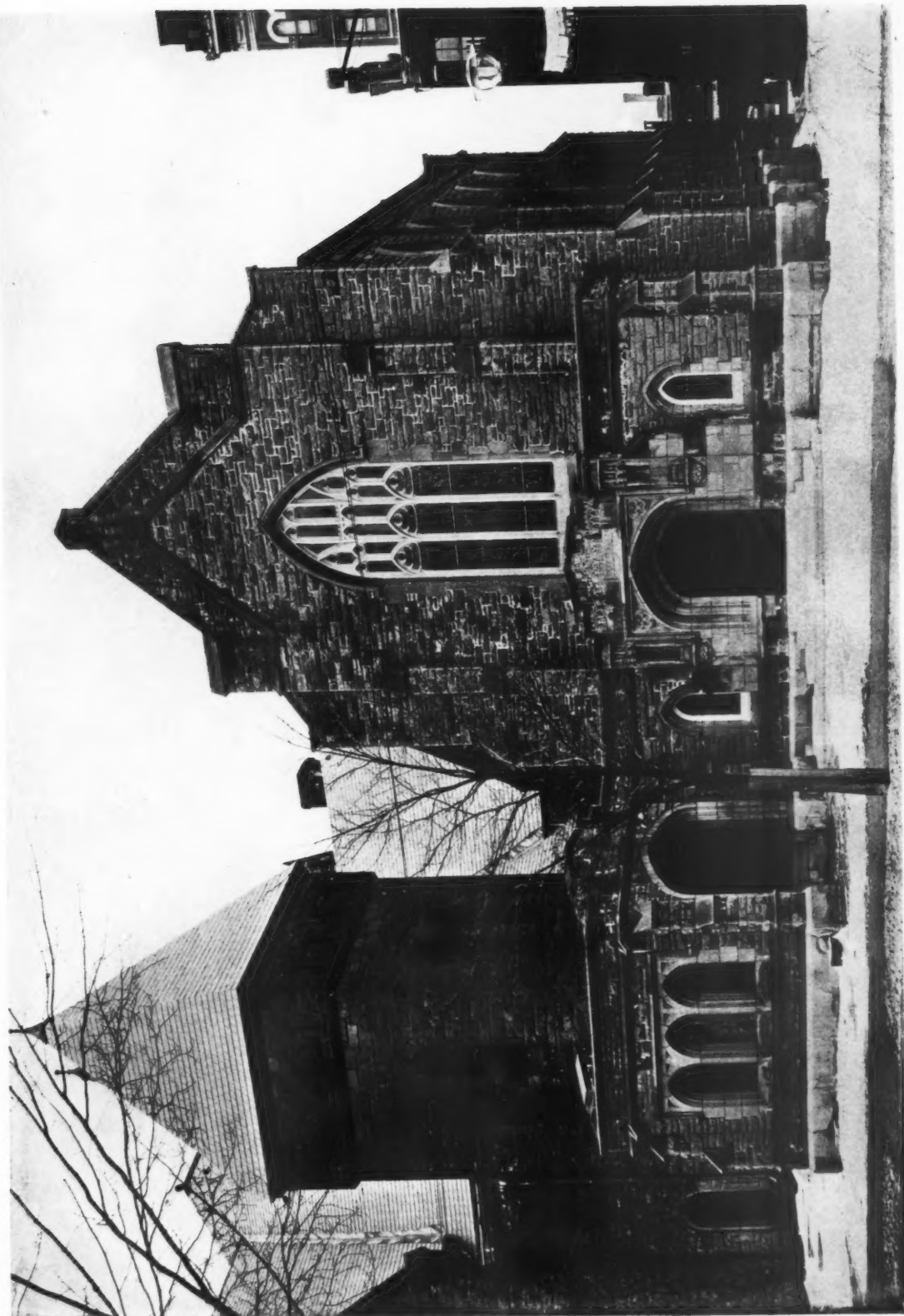
deck was necessarily apparent. It was held that he assumed the risk, and judgment for the plaintiff was reversed, and a new trial ordered.

Chicago B. & Q. R. Co. v. Shalstrom, C. C. A., 195 Fed. 725.

COMPLETION BY OWNER—EFFECT

A contract for the erection of a church and rectory provided for the owner's taking possession on the builder's failure to perform any part of the contract, and completing the work under the contract; after the work was finished, the excess of the contract price above the expense incurred by the owner in completing it to be paid to the contractor. The owner terminated the contractor's employment by notice and took possession, using the building as it was and expending nothing for its completion. It was held that the owner was bound to pay the unpaid balance of the contract price.

Wakeham & Miller v. Church of St. Paul, N. Y. Ap. Div., 134 Sup. 736.



THE SKINNER MEMORIAL CHAPEL, HOLYOKE, MASS.

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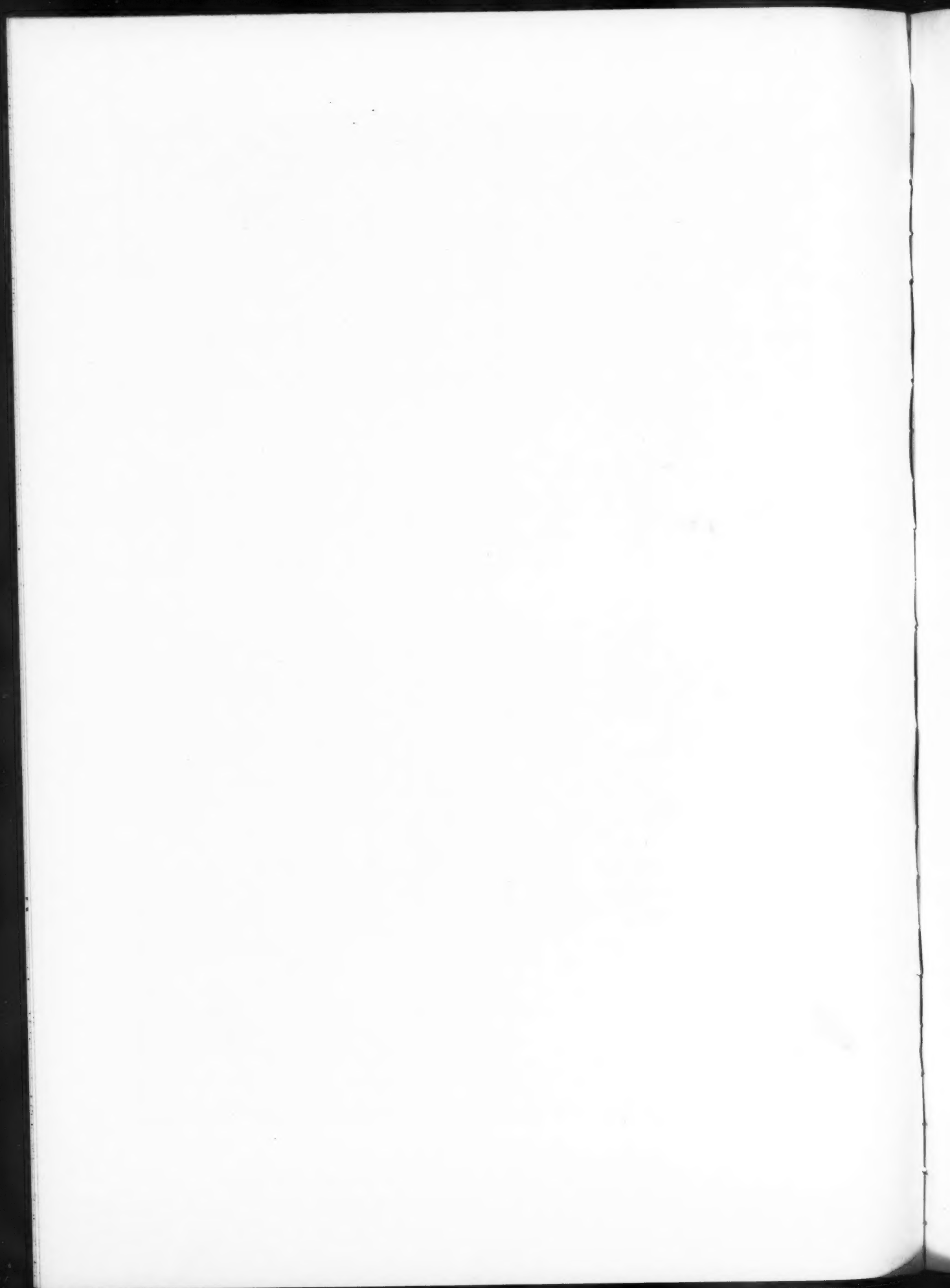




THE CHANCEL

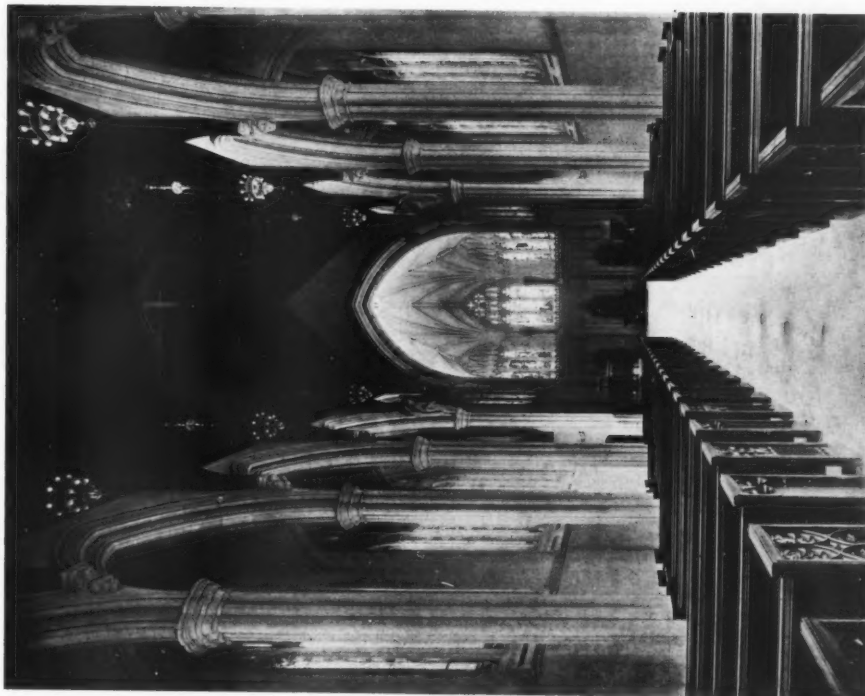
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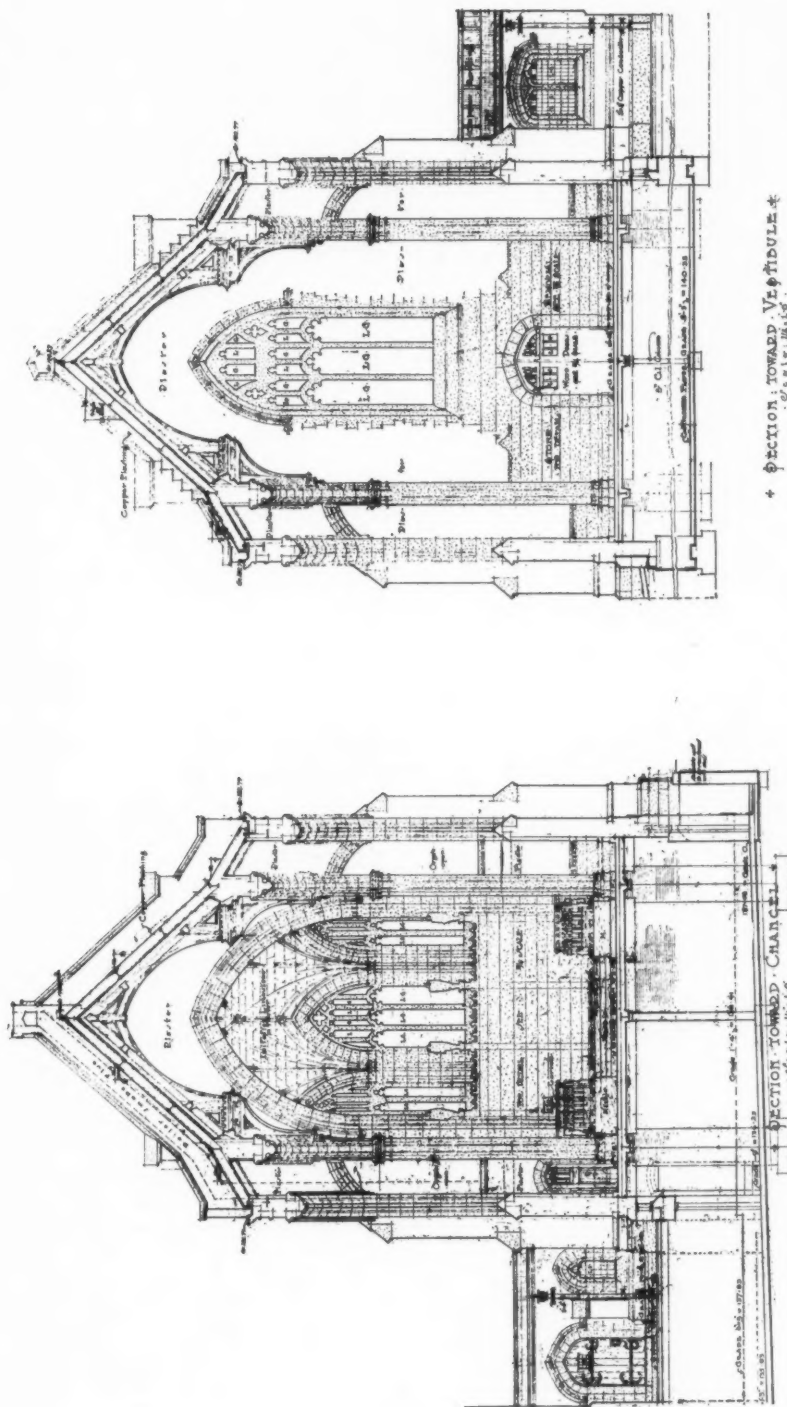
THE CLOISTER



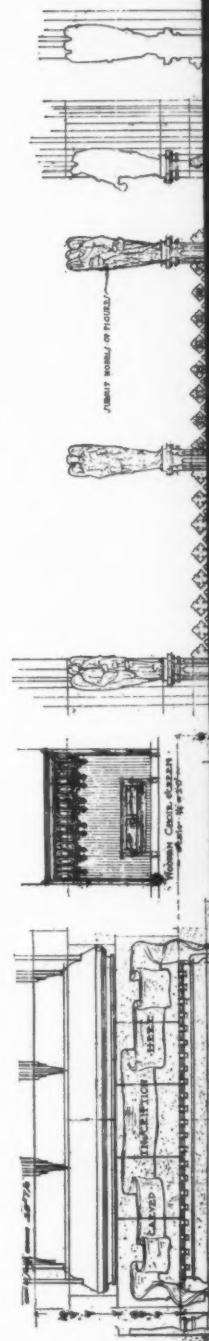
LOOKING TOWARD THE CHANCEL

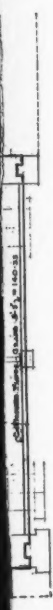
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THE SKINNER MEMORIAL CHAPEL, HOLYOKE, MASS.



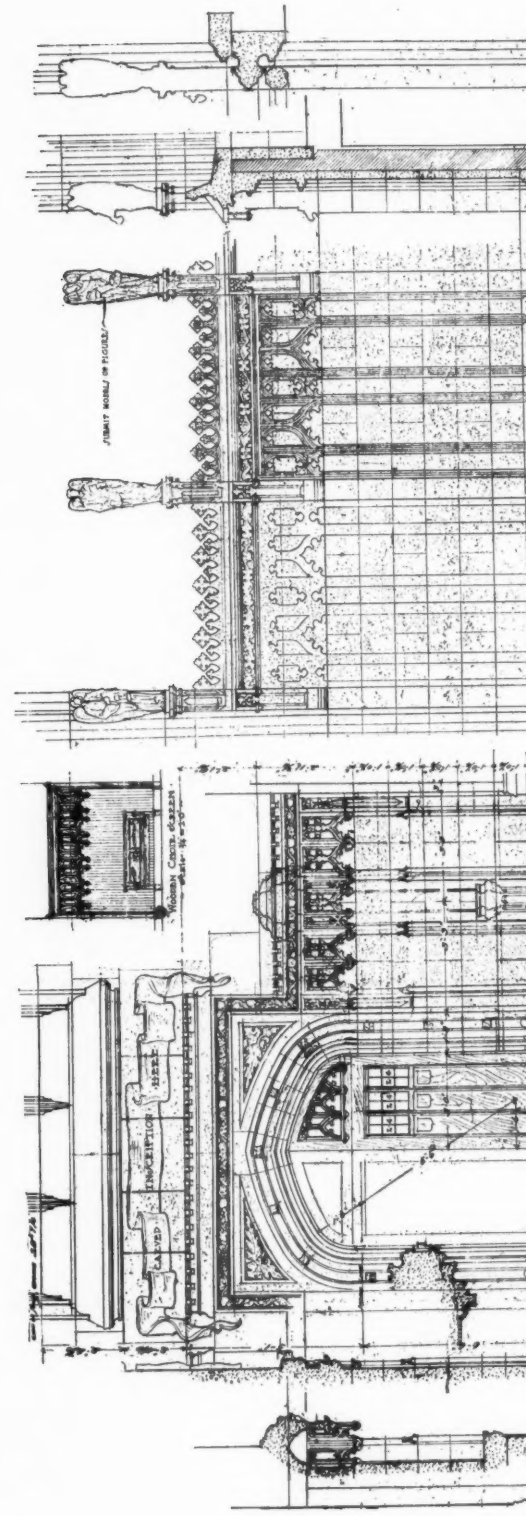


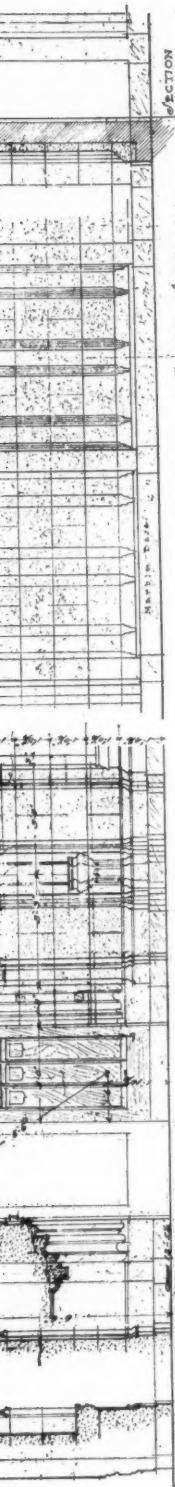
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* SECTION TOWARD CHANCEL *
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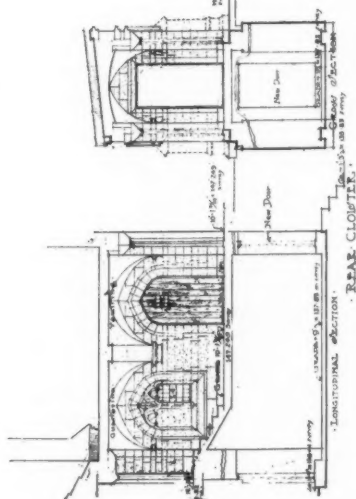




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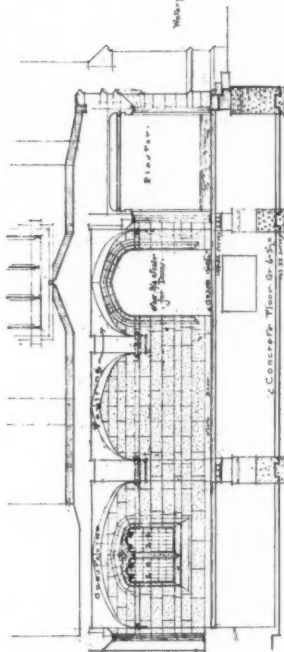
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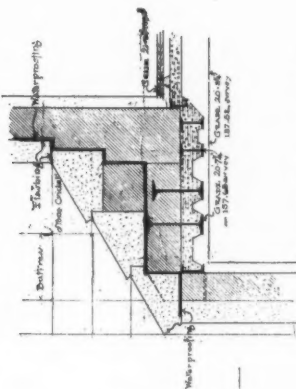


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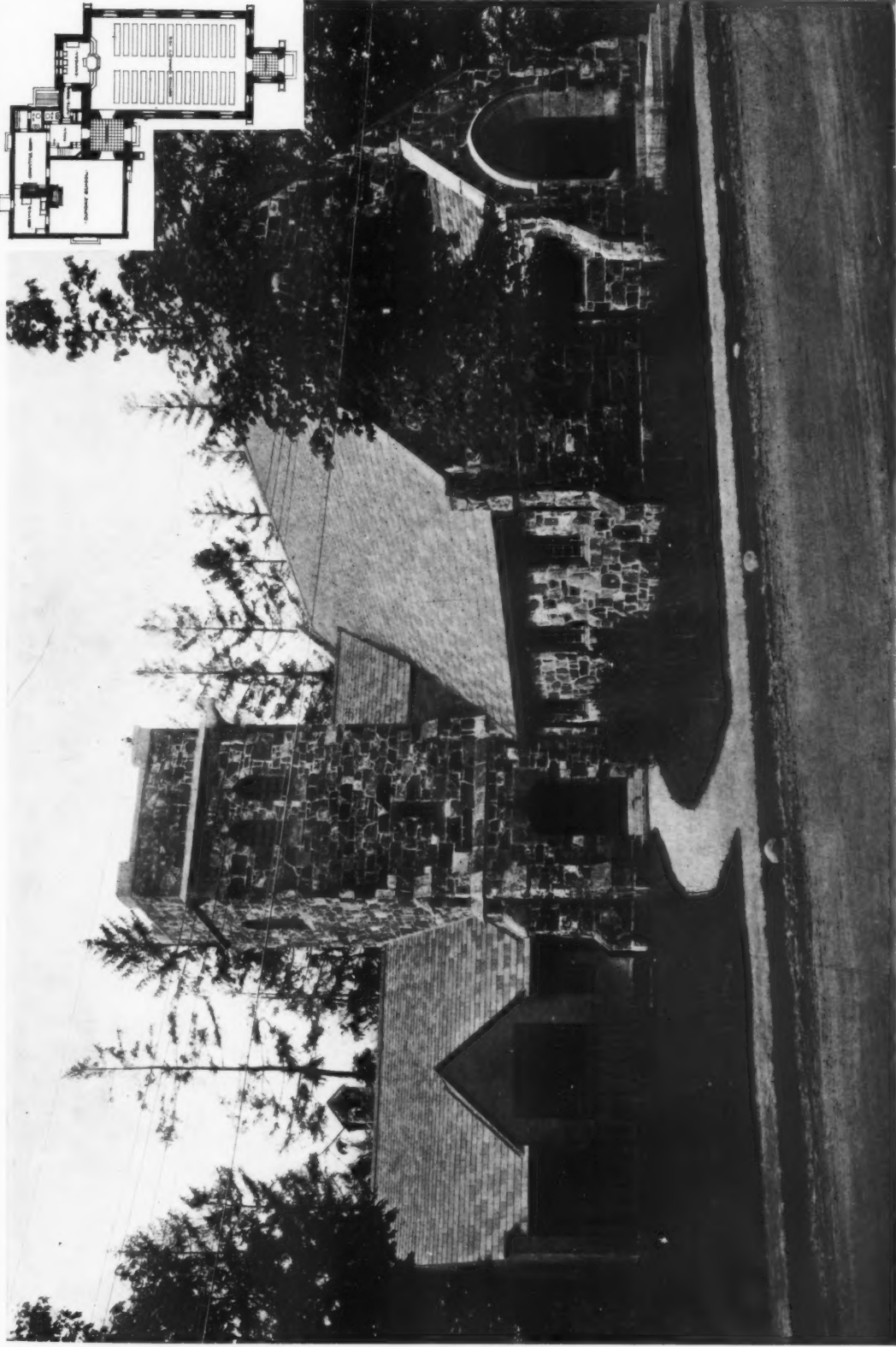
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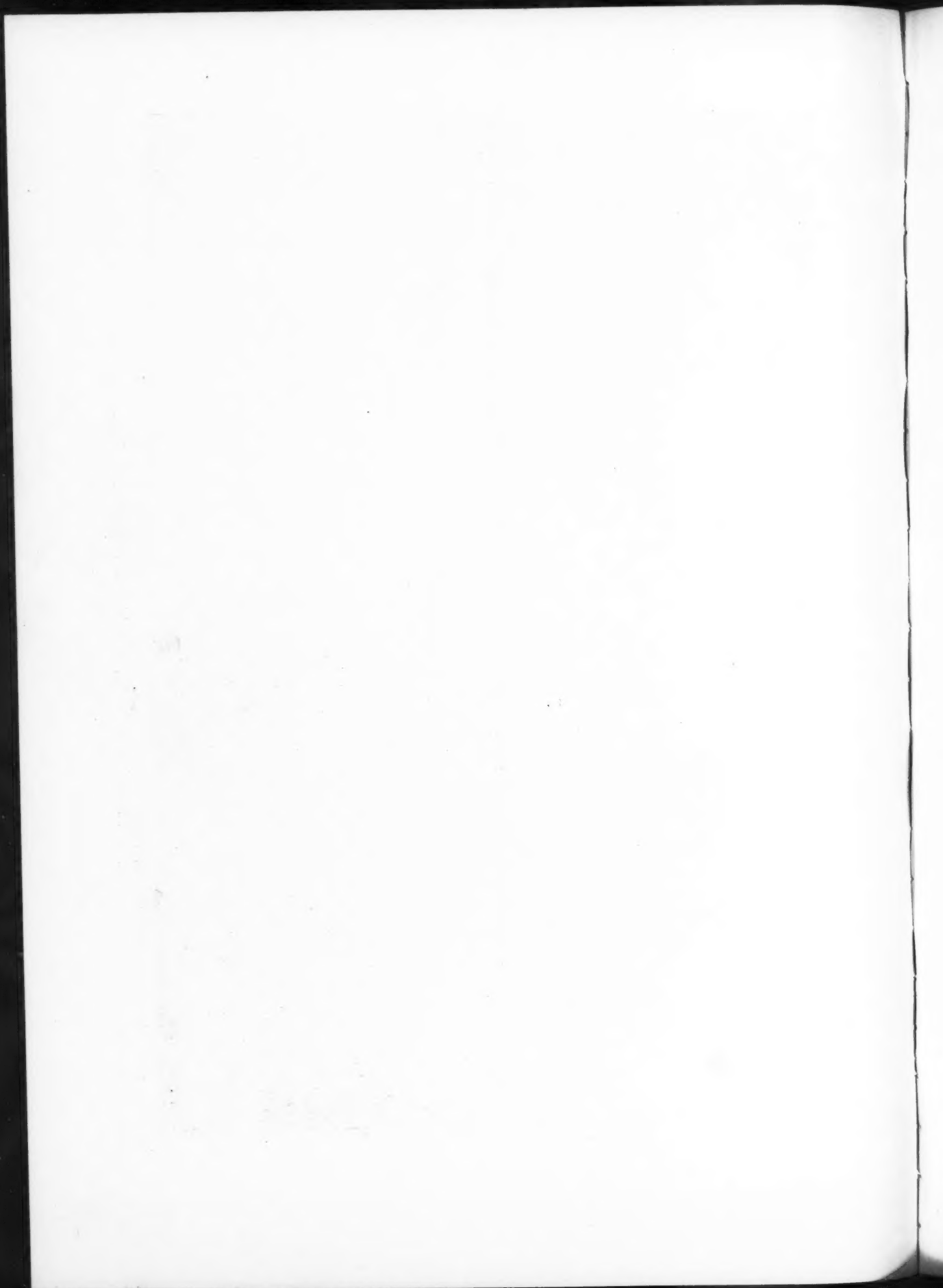


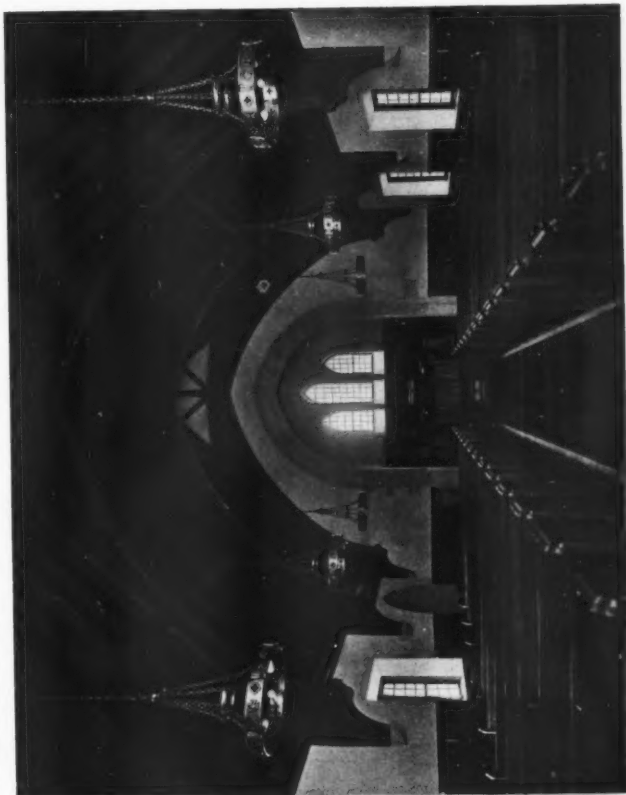
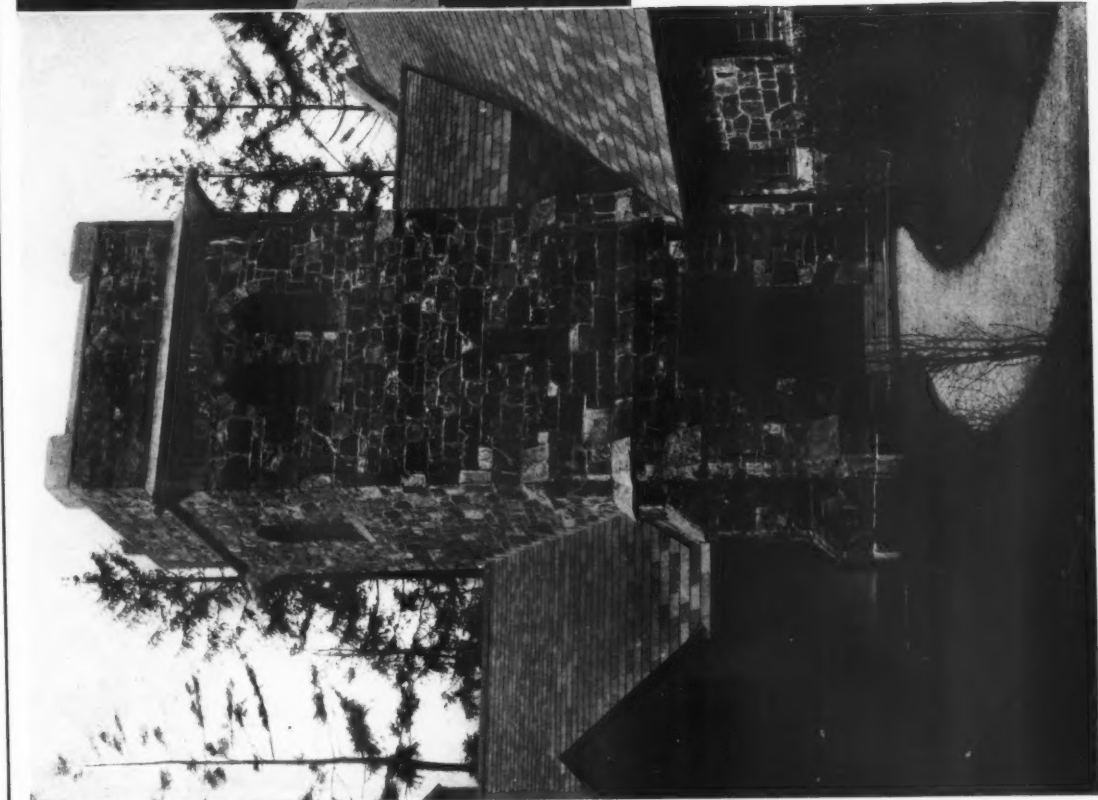
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FIRST CHURCH, CHESTNUT HILL, MASS.

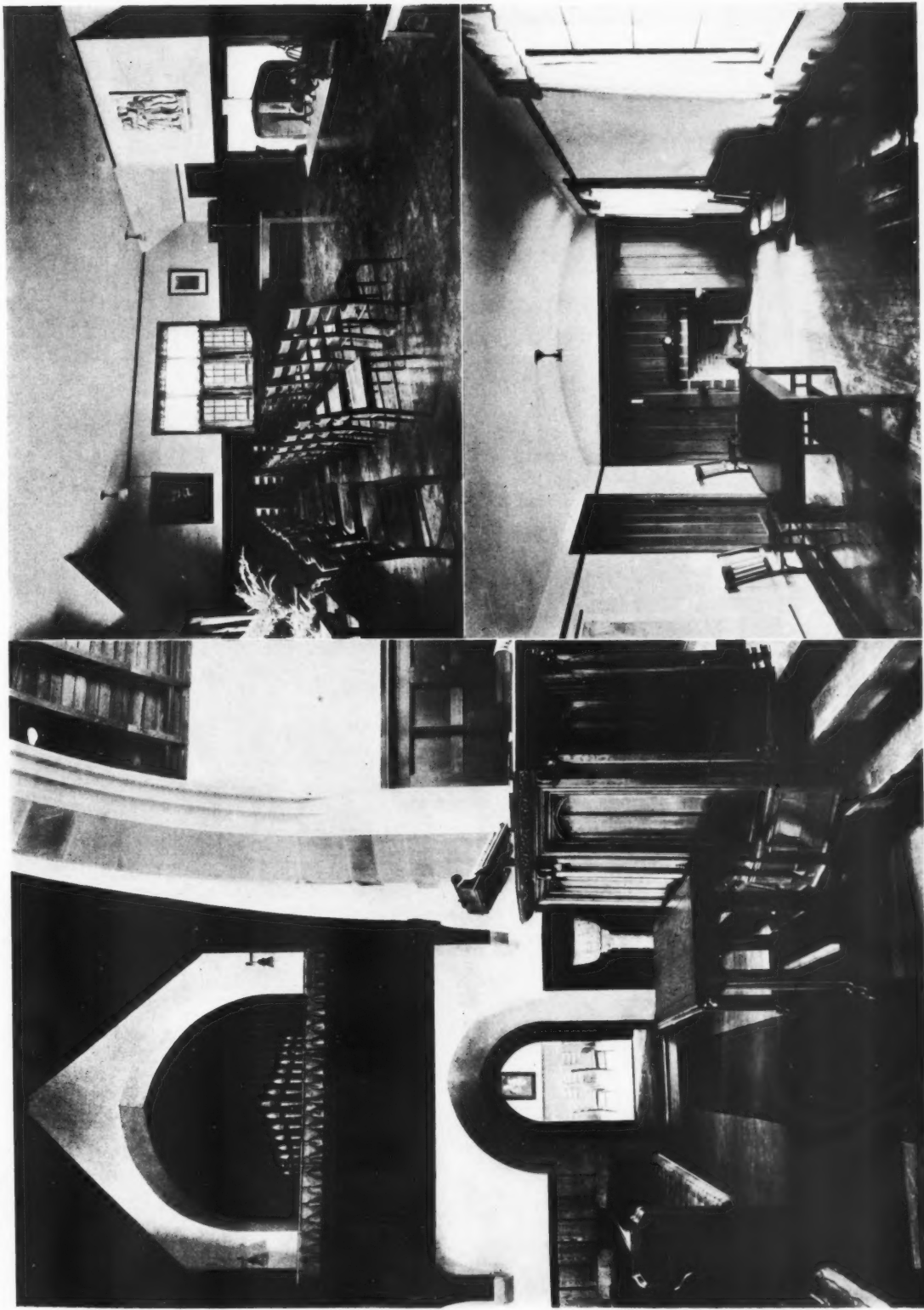
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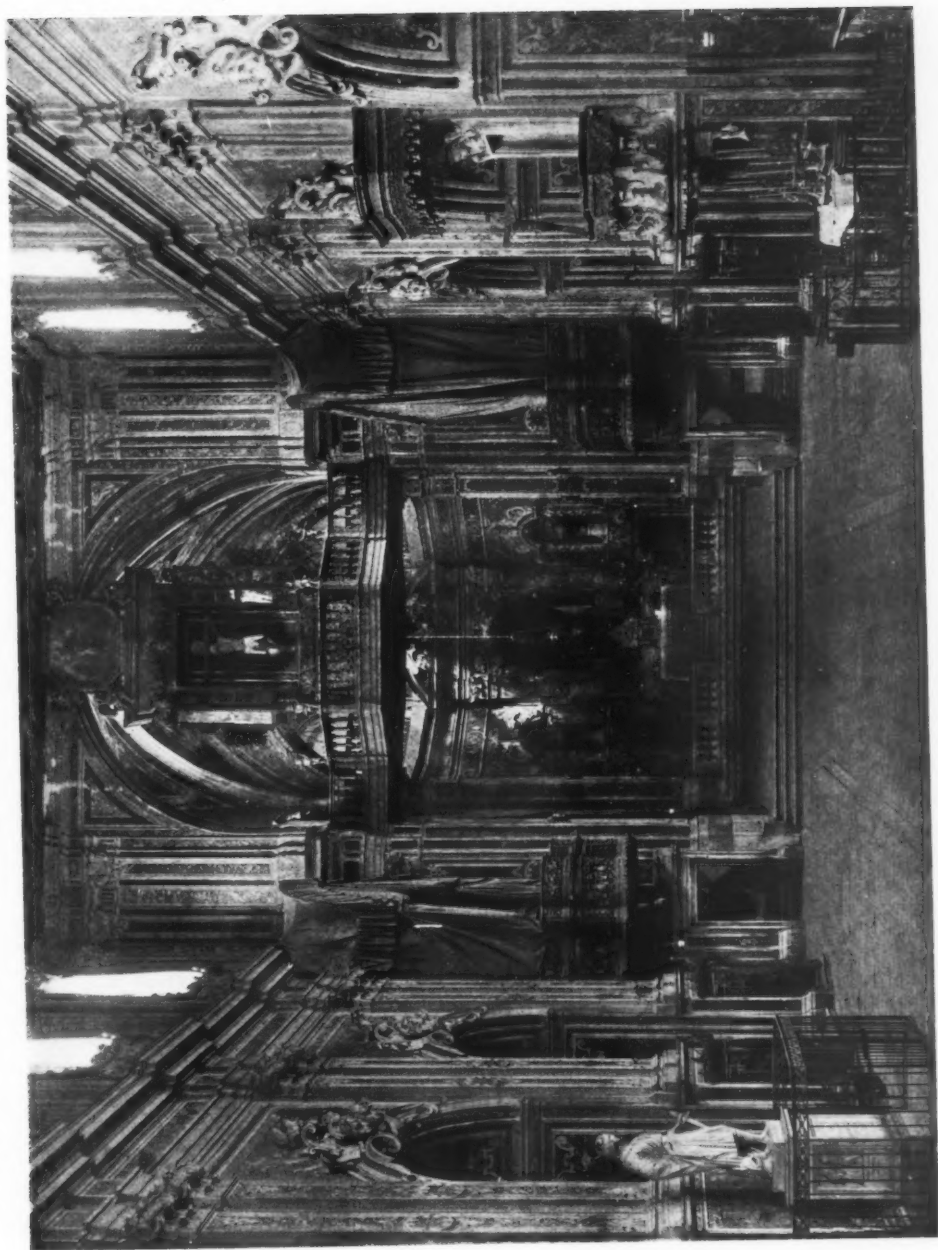
FIRST CHURCH,
CHESTNUT HILL, MASS.

MR. J. LOVELL LITTLE, JR., ARCHITECT



FIRST CHURCH, CHESTNUT HILL, MASS.
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CHURCH OF S. MARIA DEL CARMINE, NAPLES, ITALY