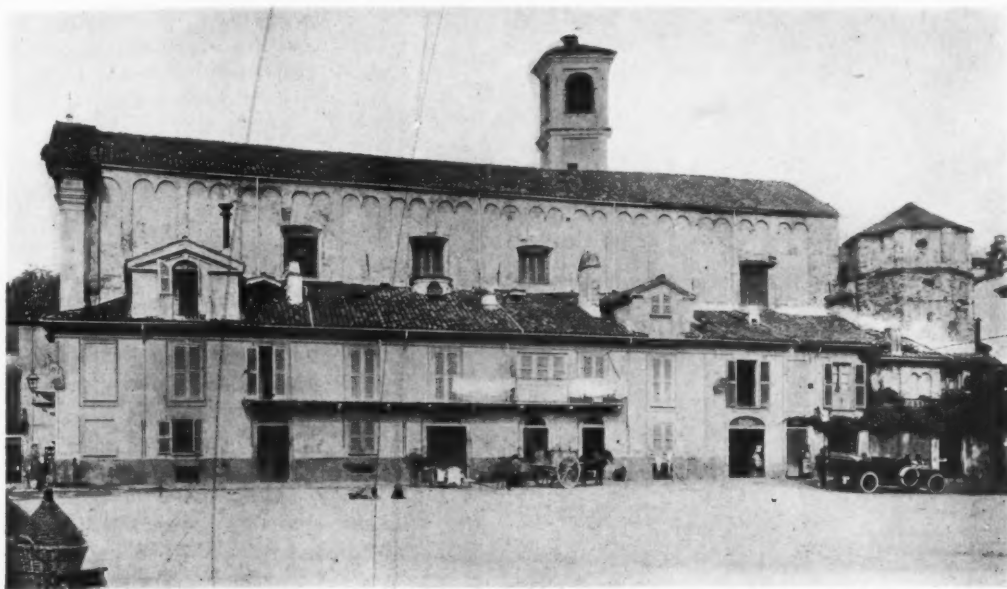


THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

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S. PIETRO. VIEW FROM THE SOUTH

ACQUI

By A. KINGSLEY PORTER



DO not know who first made the classical remark that Italy has always been the cradle of the arts; and I have forgotten who cynically replied that she has also always remained so. True or untrue as the epigram may be of music, literature and sculpture, it is entirely to the point in regard to Romanesque architecture. The researches made in the last few years by students of mediæval archæology have, I think, established the fact that in Lombardy in the eleventh century was discovered and developed that manner

of building which first as Romanesque and later as Gothic held Europe from Sicily to Scotland its enchanted captive for five centuries, and whose monuments, by their poetry and sincerity still bewitch even us world-children of the twentieth century.

The importance of the rôle played by the so-called Lombard style in the general history of architecture has not up to the present been altogether appreciated, owing, I suppose, to the singular fact that a great number of Romanesque monuments of northern Italy are still unknown, not only to the general public, but even to archæologists and historians of architecture. A number of causes have contributed to bring about this result. The hand of time has



VIEW OF S. PIETRO, FROM SOUTHWEST

weighed more heavily upon the terra-cotta edifices of Lombardy than upon the more massive structures in stone which were erected north of the Alps in the Middle Ages. Even heavier has been the hand of man. Nowhere else in Europe did the barocco centuries wage such a relentless war of destruction against everything mediæval. Hardly a single church, unless abandoned, escaped the stucco and white-wash of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century restorers. Lastly, but not least, in the amount of damage wrought, came the so-called archæological reconstructions of recent times—reconstructions which no doubt mirror with accuracy the modern architects' conception of a mediæval building, and which would be amusing examples

of archæological ignorance, were it not for the sad fact that they have almost invariably ended by spoiling, if not out and out destroying, the little that time and the barocco centuries have spared. Thus it has come about that the study of Lombard architecture presents many of the difficulties of classical archæology; from a capital, a fragment of cornice, a bit of wall, the student must reconstruct the original church, imagine it as it was when its walls were covered with frescoes, its capitals, cornices, jambs, string-courses and mouldings gaily painted with gold and red and green, its pavement bright with polychrome mosaic, its windows filled with colored glass.

Perhaps, however, the principal cause that has contributed to prevent the monuments of Lombard architecture from becoming known has been the very artistic wealth of Italy. Archæologists have been so absorbed by the charm of Roman antiquity, art students by the painting, sculpture and architecture of the Renaissance, that they have found no time

to devote to the less assuming art of the eleventh century.

Notwithstanding the important and numerous (how numerous I imagine few who have not specialized in the field would believe) researches already made, the work of making accessible the treasures of art of even the great cities such as Rome and Florence, has hardly more than begun; the scientific journals are full of accounts of new classical works of art excavated, lost frescoes brought to light, forgotten masters rediscovered. While the cities are thus as yet imperfectly explored, it is natural that the smaller towns and country should suffer from neglect. One who has not traveled extensively in Italy can hardly conceive of the number of monuments,

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

classical, mediæval and Renaissance, possessed by the smaller towns and villages in a prodigality that is at once the delight and the despair of the art-lover.

One of these provincial cities, and a typical one of the class is Acqui; a town of considerable importance in the early Middle Ages, but now shrunk to a handful of houses clustered about the hill on the summit of which rise the melodramatic ruins of the castle. The place is of a fascination peculiarly Italian; I know not which exerts the greatest charm—the landscape with its vineyards and soft rolling mountains, the memory of the stirring scenes that history has seen enacted on this smiling stage, or the intrinsic architectural beauty of several of the monuments.

In the bed of the Bormida, just outside the gates of the city stand the romantic arches of the old Roman aqueduct, whose skeleton scarred by the floods of the river, the devastations of barbarians and Saracens, still stands to bear witness to the importance of the city even in antiquity. The healing properties of the hot-springs of Acqui were as renowned in classical times as they are today; but of the Roman bathing establishment there survives only a fragment of the mosaic pavement with inscription, found some years ago near the spring of the "Bollente" and now placed in the neighboring arcade.

It is however with the mediæval period that the great interest of Acqui from an artistic point of view begins. The history of the two principal monuments is strangely intertwined with each other, and with the history of the town itself—a history full of romantic incidents, the bloody pages of which are touched with poetry here and there by the gentle legends of San Guido. The church of San Pietro was the first

cathedral of Acqui; before the eleventh century the episcopacy of Acqui is always called by the name of the prince of the apostles in the charters and diplomas, and at S. Pietro were buried many of the early bishops. In the early years of the eleventh century the Bishop Primo began the construction of a new cathedral within the city walls. In 1023 the Bishop Dudone transferred thither the canons from S. Pietro, but established in their place a monastery of monks, who immediately reconstructed the church of S. Pietro as we have it today. The construction of the new cathedral, on the other hand, progressed slowly; it was consecrated only in 1067 by San Guido. Since the documents all speak of the edifice as his work, we must



S. PIETRO, APSES. ACQUI



CATHEDRAL, ACQUI, FROM SOUTHEAST

conclude that his predecessors Primo and Dudone had erected comparatively little. Both S. Pietro and the cathedral suffered severely from barocco alterations, so that they at present appear on first glance to be edifices of the late Renaissance; it is only upon a close examination that it becomes evident that the ancient Romanesque structures still survive almost intact beneath the later stucco, whitewash and gilt.

As a monument of 1023 S. Pietro is of importance especially for the ornamentation in blind arches of its apse, quite similar to that of S. Vincenzo of Galliano (1007) and for the corbel-tables grouped two-and-two of its flanks, which recall those of S. Maria Maggiore of Lomello, and help establish the date of the latter Church (c. 1025). As a monument consecrated in 1067 the cathedral is one more link in the chain of evidence that proves S. Ambrogio of Milan anterior to the year 1100. The nave of the church, it is true, was not vaulted, but the piers are of fully developed compound type, the side aisles were covered with groin vaults; and certain capitals show remarkable analogies with those of Lodi Vecchio.

One of the treasures of the Museum of Turin is a fragment of the figured mosaic

pavement of the crypt of the cathedral at Acqui. Until recently, this together with a few other similar fragments at S. Savino of Piacenza, San Michele of Pavia, Cremona Ivrea, Aosta, etc., were the only known examples of the colored mosaic pavements with which the floors of all Romanesque churches in northern Italy were undoubtedly covered. Now, however, the existence of entire pavements apparently perfectly preserved, has been established by test excavations at Bobbio and Gazzo Veronese, and as soon as the excavations in

these two places are completed, it will doubtless be possible to judge much better than at present of the artistic effect of this characteristic form of decoration. In the meanwhile the rich deep colors and the somewhat exuberant design of the Acqui fragment are sufficient to stimulate the imagination. Few scholars and no architects have realized the rôle which color played in Romanesque architecture, especially in the Romanesque architecture of Italy. Unfortunately there is not a single monument well enough preserved to give a concrete impression of what early mediæval color effect must have been. The interior of the church at Issoire, near Clermont-Ferrand, notwithstanding restorations, may serve to give some notion of the general effect



THE CLOISTERS CATHEDRAL, ACQUI



INTERIOR, CATHEDRAL, ACQUI

of Romanesque color decoration, and this monument is certainly one of the finest examples of polychromatic architecture in existence, surpassing, in my judgment, even St. Mark's in Venice in the richness



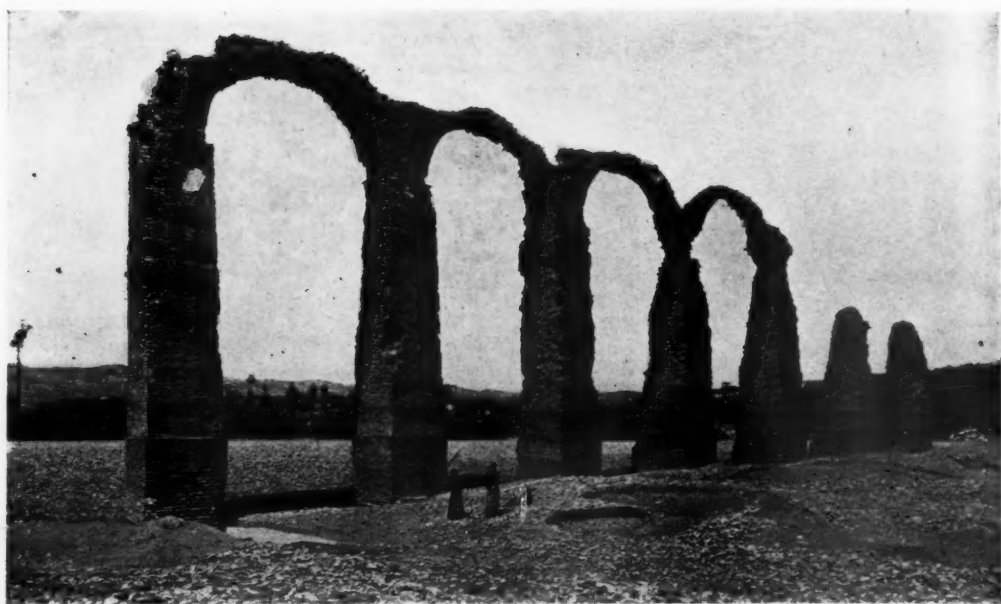
THE CATHEDRAL, FROM THE NORTHWEST

and depth of its tones. But Issoire is in France, where the architects depended for their effects more upon their superior materials and on the architecture itself, than in Italy, where the terra cotta building was made merely a frame, designed primarily to display the frescoes with which the walls' surfaces were entirely covered internally and externally. In France the colors were applied principally in the form of pure ornament; in Italy on the other hand—although pure ornament was not lacking—the walls were covered with heraldic figure-



MAIN DOORWAY, CATHEDRAL, ACQUI

frescoes, possessing all the dignity and architectural character of mosaics but with warmer and more varied tints. These figures were surrounded by painted frets and other ornaments; the capitals and sculptures were painted with gold, deep red, clear blue; in fact, the whole edifice from foundation to roof was a mass of those deep Romanesque tones which are perhaps the richest and most beautiful that have ever been applied to architecture, if we except alone Gothic stained glass. Traces of this color decoration exist in great



RUINS OF ROMAN AQUEDUCT, ACQUI

numbers of Romanesque churches in Italy, but its significance has been entirely overlooked. The current idea of Romanesque coloring is derived from recent restorations, which, unfortunately, frequently pass as ancient work. The history of the color scheme of these restorations—which consists in smearing the walls with sickly greens and strange border patterns and painting sunbursts in the vaults—is curious. It is derived from S. Ambrogio of Milan and was the uninspired creation of one of the architects who restored that basilica in the early part of the nineteenth century. Subsequently these decorations were quite properly destroyed, but before their destruction were unfortunately seen by Landriani who carefully copied them, believing them ancient. Subsequently Landriani became architect-in-charge of the restorations of S. Ambrogio, and replaced the decorations from his sketch. Hence they have been copied throughout the length and breadth of Italy even in restorations carried out in churches in which existed clear indications of the ancient painted decorations, about as different from Landriani's sickly tints and sunbursts as may well be imagined.

In reconstructing in the mind's eye the cathedral of Acqui, therefore, one should think first and primarily of color, of an

edifice whose walls internally and externally were covered with majestic frescoed figures of saints, scenes of sacred and legendary history, all splendidly architectural, a symmetrically placed and interspersed with painted bands and string-courses of pure design. One should imagine the pavement of mosaic covered with similar figures and designs, the capitals painted with red and gold, the sculptures highly colored. Lombard architecture was evidently a very different, and far more beautiful art, than has been supposed from its bleached skeletons.

In later Romanesque architecture the builders came to rely upon sculpture almost as much as upon painting for their decoration. The cathedral of Acqui, however, built in the first dawn of the Romanesque style shows itself archaic in the sparing use of this medium of decoration. If reliefs existed in the façade (which may well be doubted) they have disappeared; there is little carving even of purely ornamental character in the church, but the capitals, string-courses and cornices are left for frescoed ornamentation. Only in the cloister, where the capitals were exposed to the weather, was carving substituted for the more perishable fresco. The capitals of

(Continued on page 260)

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STREET SIGNS

THE sentiment already strongly adverse to the erection of disfiguring sign boards along the main thoroughfares of both urban and suburban districts has recently been considerably strengthened in New York by reason of a flagrant offense that now exists on Riverside Drive, where the roadway is carried over Manhattan Valley on a viaduct. The area lying between the Drive and the river at this point has been utilized by private interests, to which the ground belongs, as the site for several buildings whose roofs reach the approximate level of the viaduct roadway. In most instances, although perhaps the circumstance is to some extent accidental, these buildings have not obstructed the view of the river or the Palisades beyond. Thousands of people on foot and in vehicles of various descriptions cross this viaduct daily and the view afforded has been acknowledged one of the most attractive to be obtained on the upper West side. With perspicacity and industry worthy of a better cause, the proprietors of roadside advertising sign boards have recently secured permission from the owners of various of the buildings above referred to and have erected upon their roofs huge and intensely inartistic signs in positions that entirely obstruct the hitherto enjoyable view obtained from certain points of this viaduct. In all probability, they have acted well within their

legal rights in doing as they have, but it seems perfectly apparent to anyone interested in the artistic appearance of our city streets and the views ordinarily obtained from various points, that if this be so there is grave need for remedial legislation. When conditions are such that the welfare and enjoyment of the public can be seriously interfered with for the personal gain or advantage of an individual interested as in this instance in the sale of certain goods or materials, something should be done. Letters appearing in the daily press indicate a disposition on the part of the public to take a similar view of the situation. Borough President McAneny, in his official capacity, has stated his thorough accord with public feeling, but finds himself powerless to move in the matter or to invoke present laws.

Under all circumstances, it would seem that the time for vigorous action had arrived. In fact, instances of flagrant disregard of public interest and even decency by the display of hideous and insistent posters and designs of various kinds along streets and roadsides, are increasing to such an extent that restrictive legislation practically becomes imperative, unless we are willing to see the attractiveness of our thoroughfares ultimately destroyed by this growing evil.

THREATENED DESTRUCTION OF ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL IN NEW YORK

PREVIOUS reference has been made to the possibility of the demolition of St. John's Chapel in this city, in order to accomplish the proposed widening of Varick Street, and a way has been pointed out whereby the razing of this building might be avoided without sacrificing the ends sought by the proposed improvement. The suggestion consists essentially of extending the sidewalk under the portico of the church, and has good precedent in the cases of two churches in London where buildings of unusual architectural or historic interest were involved.

The project for the widening of Varick Street, although originated some time ago, is by no means lying dormant, and unless public sentiment is aroused and vigorous

protest made, it is probable that this venerable and architecturally interesting church will be destroyed. We have altogether too few of these landmarks remaining on Manhattan Island, and it seems as though every effort possible should be made to prevent further reduction of this number. In the meantime, until it is definitely determined that the structure itself can be preserved, it hardly seems worth while to proceed with other schemes involving St. John's as a nucleus for a civic center, or improvement of any kind.

An active organization, having for its purpose, first, the determination of buildings of real historic and architectural interest, and second, means for their protection and

preservation is of more than moderate value to any community as has been many times demonstrated, but in the Eastern and New England States, originally rich in examples of our colonial architecture and various historic monuments, the general existence of such bodies with broad fields of activity would seem to be a necessity if we are to prevent the utter and complete destruction within a few years of practically all the buildings still remaining to indicate the course of architectural development in this country at the close of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Early and thorough organization offers the only effective means of furnishing protection to our ancient landmarks.

ACQUI

(Continued from page 258)

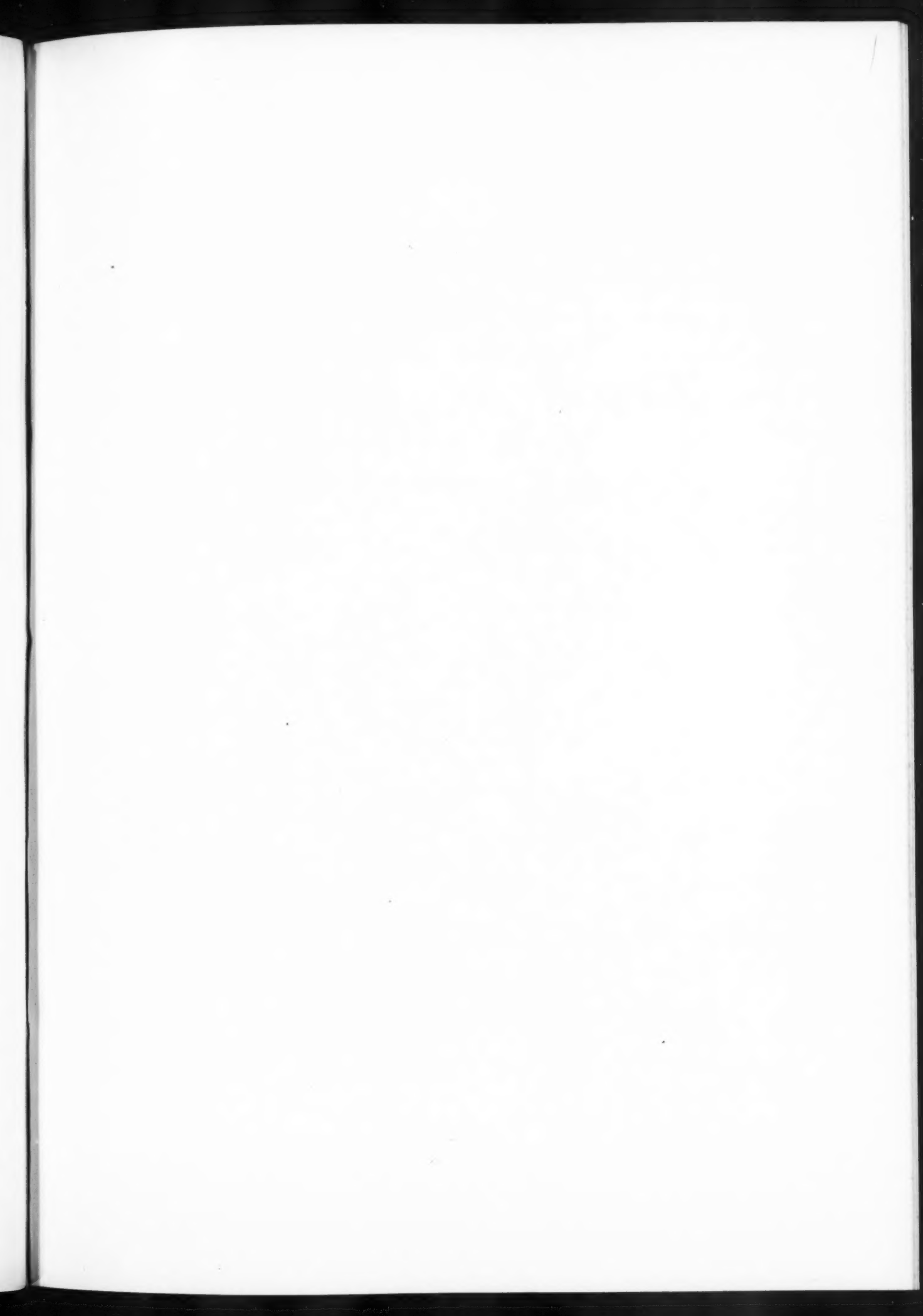
this part of the edifice are precious examples of the architectural carved ornament of c.1067, the more valuable that little of this epoch has come down to us. One is even carved with figures, and shows a rude attempt to depict the resurrection of Christ with Peter and the two Marys. It is one of the earliest, stumbling endeavors of an art that was soon to bear such fruit under the chisels of William of Modena, Nicolao, Guglielmo, Benedetto (miscalled Antelami) and a host of unnamed or lesser artists; and as such deserve respectful attention, even if Christ does, both in his anatomy and expression, bear an unfortunate resemblance to a jack-in-the-box.

The Renaissance in general—if we except a few paintings such as the delightful *Quattrocento S. Guido and Four Fathers of the Church* in the *tribuna* of the *Duomo*—seems to have brought to Acqui mutilation of earlier works of art, rather than the erection of new ones. The nave of the cathedral, it is true, possesses a certain quality of splendor and gorgeousness, marred by comparatively few aberrations of taste, although it leaves an impression of lifelessness and lack of interest, and ill compensates us for the earlier art it replaced. The portico before the cathedral, another barocco addition, possesses a lightness and grace rare in this period. The jewel of Renaissance art at Acqui, however, is the

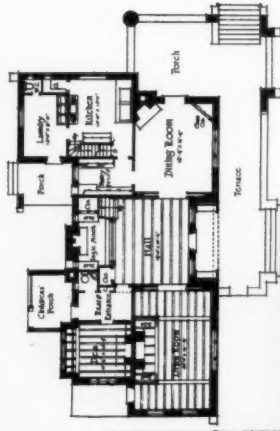
western doorway of the *Duomo*, executed in 1481. It is a fantastic creation of the first dawn of the classical revival, in which are combined a feeling for the delicacy and charm of the works of the Florentine masters with a certain love of the Gothic, one might almost say Romanesque. Adorable cherubs of the Renaissance mingle with strange grotesques and fantastic animals of the Middle Ages, classic scrolls find their place besides Gothic chains and mediæval mouldings.

The picturesque cloisters of the cathedral were built in their present form at the end of the fifteenth century (1495) but capitals of the time of S. Guido were employed. The campanile of the cathedral was also finished in the fifteenth century (1420) but must have been begun much earlier.

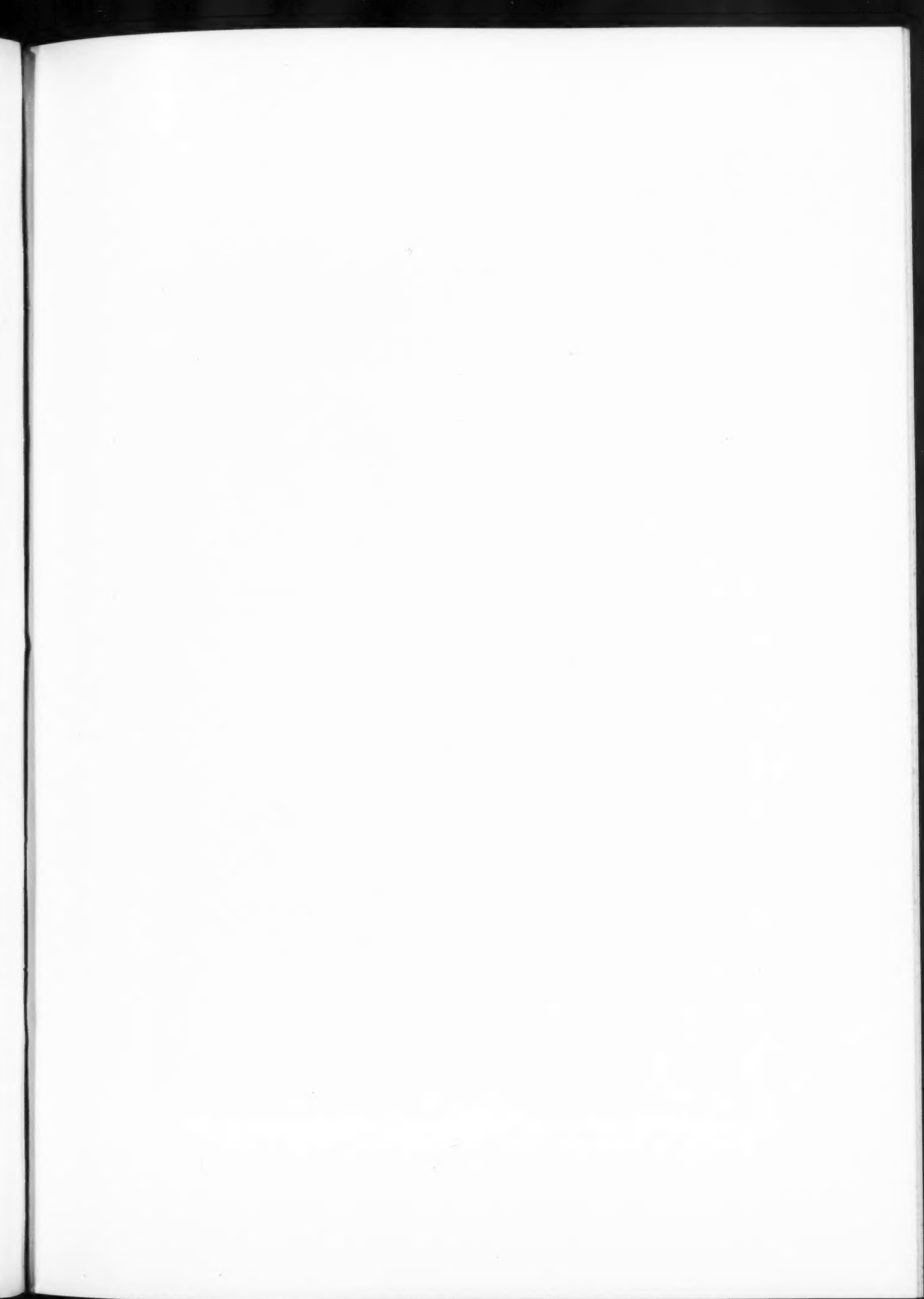
Thus Acqui possesses noteworthy monuments of the architecture of all times from classical antiquity to the barocco epoch. It is, however, particularly for the two Romanesque churches of S. Pietro and the cathedral that it merits the attention of art students; and these two, although hitherto unknown and unpublished, are among the most important examples of Lombard architecture extant. Indeed the fact that they are unknown may be said to be one of their advantages; for they have thus escaped that final *coup de grace*—a modern restoration—which has destroyed so many mediæval monuments, robbing them of their artistic charm, and placing in the hands of the archæologist falsified documents.

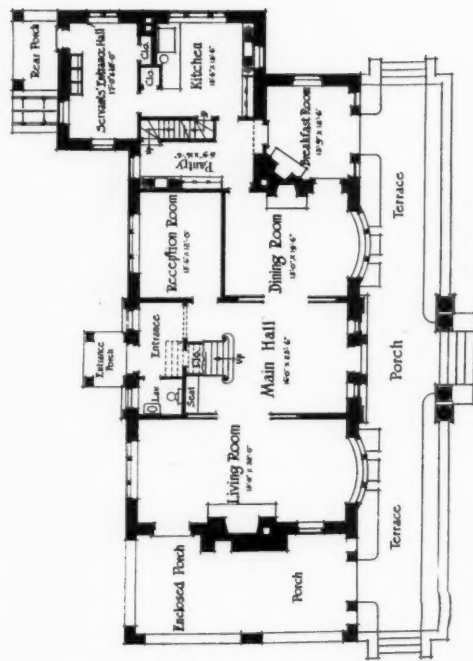


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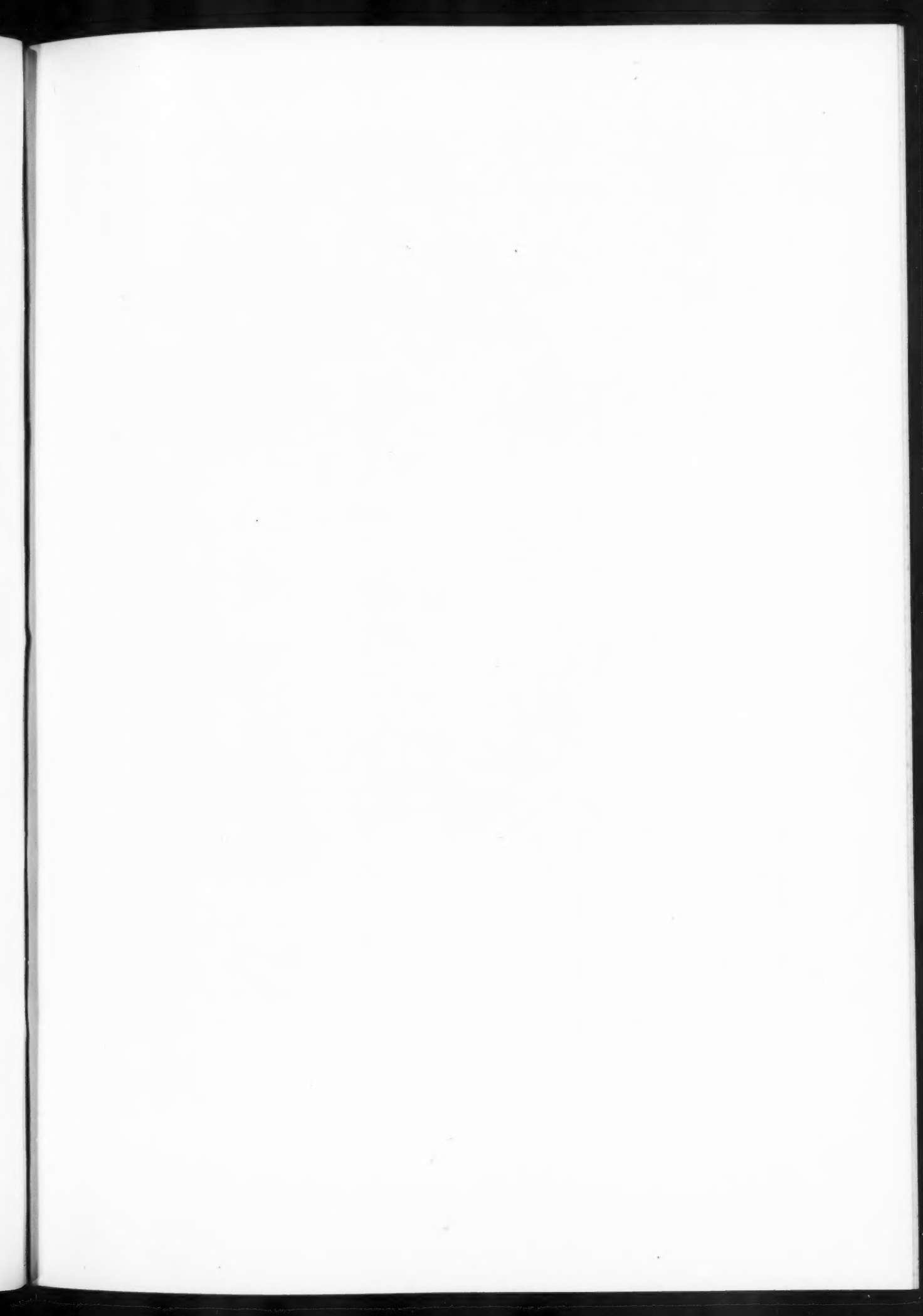


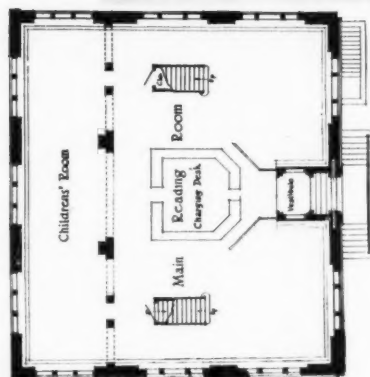
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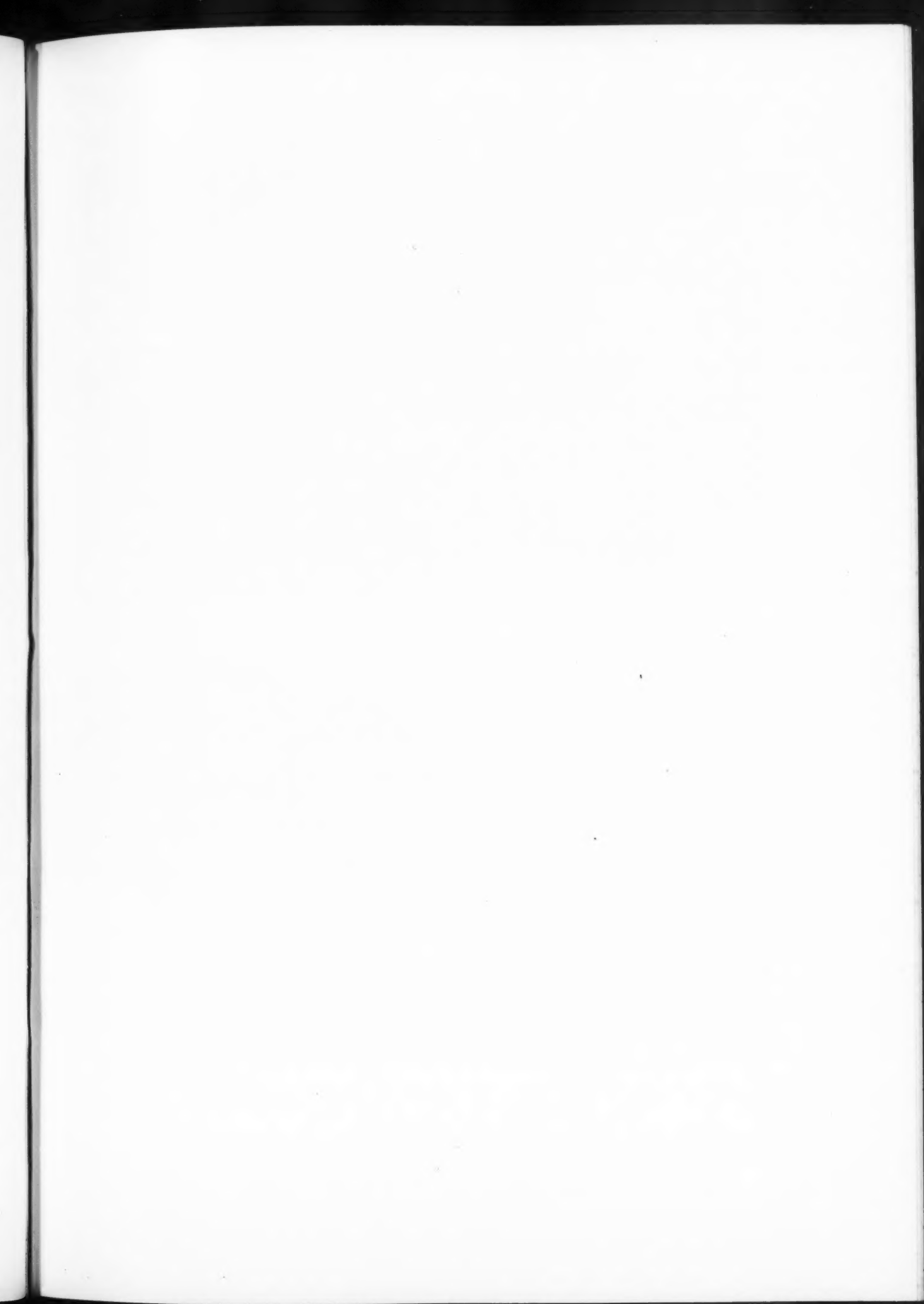
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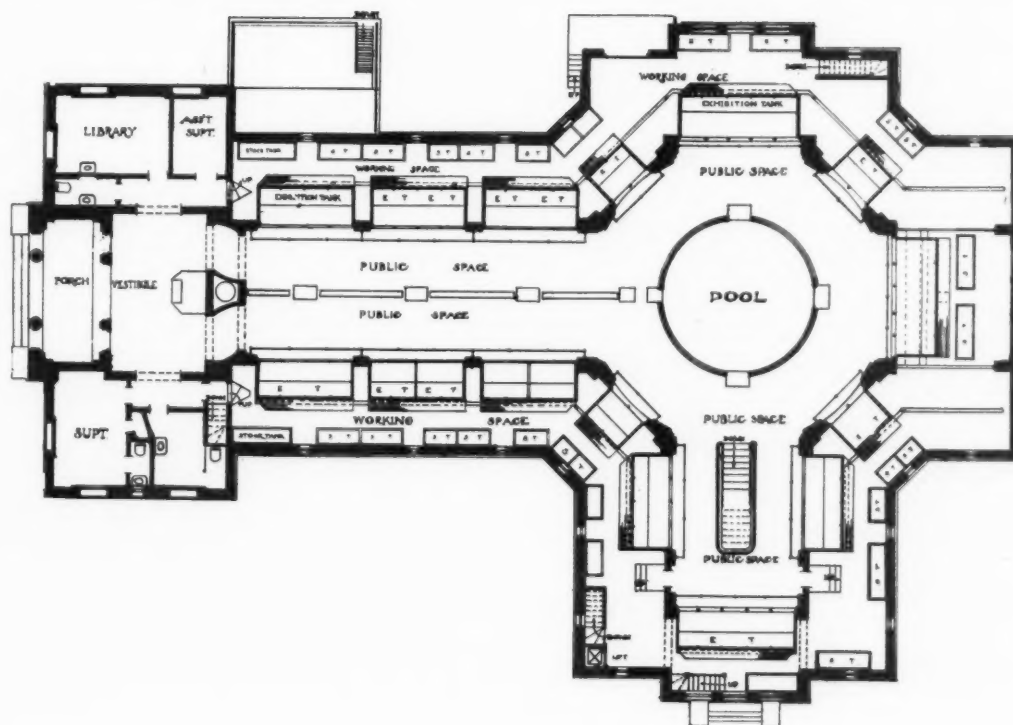
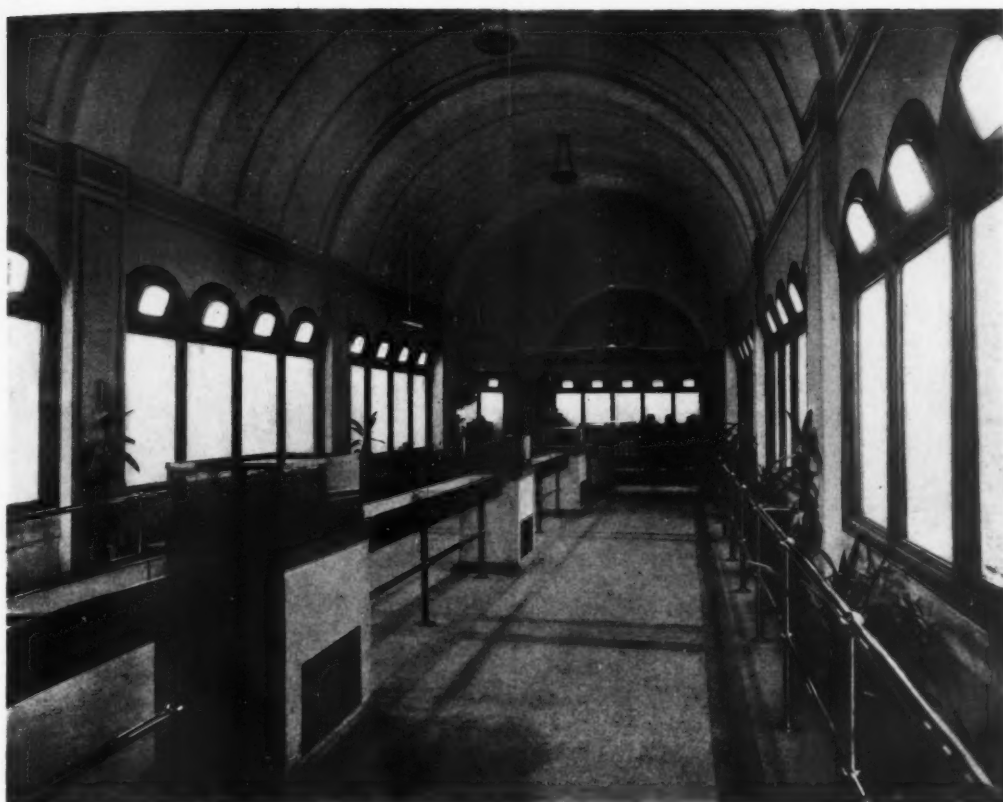
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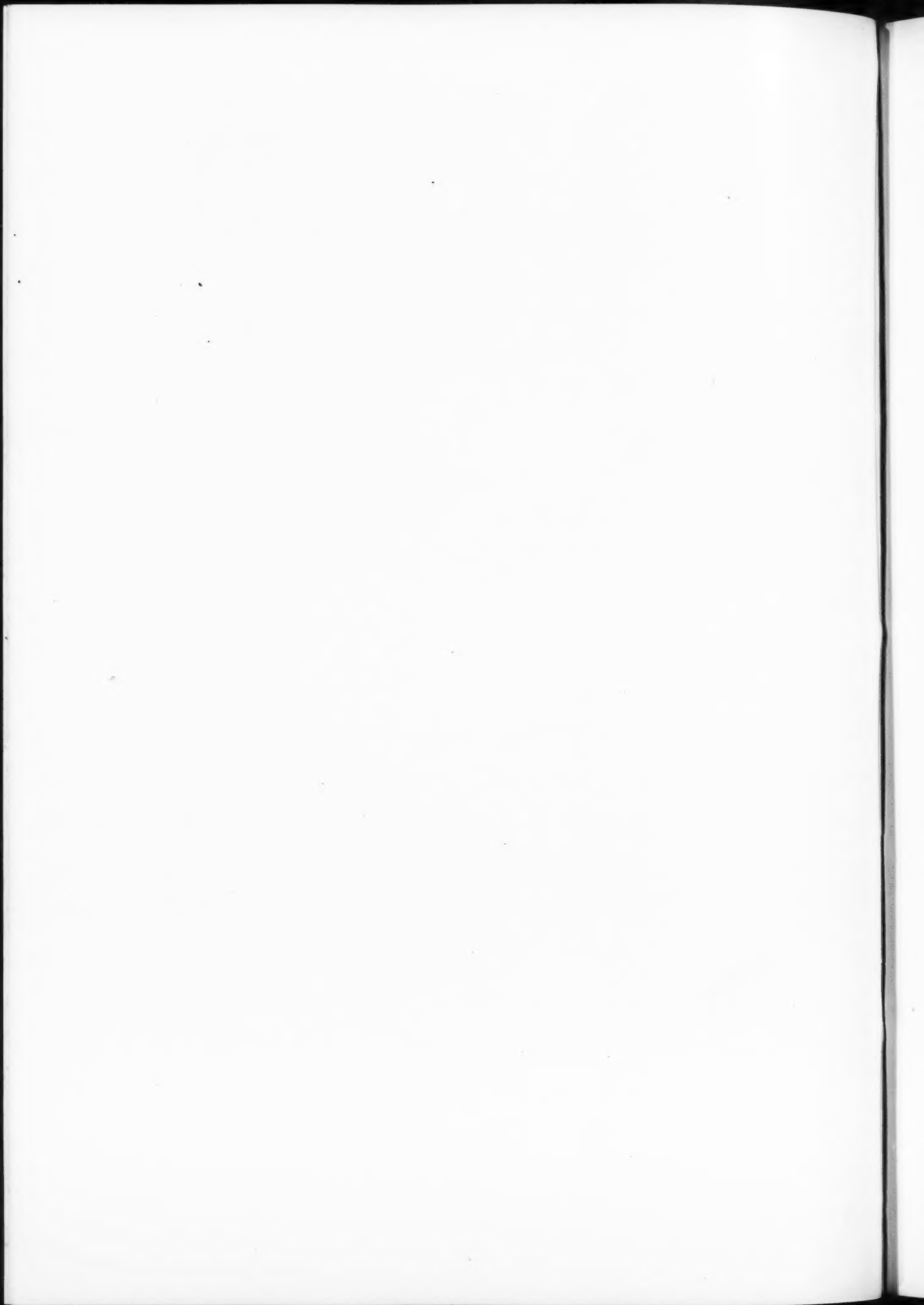


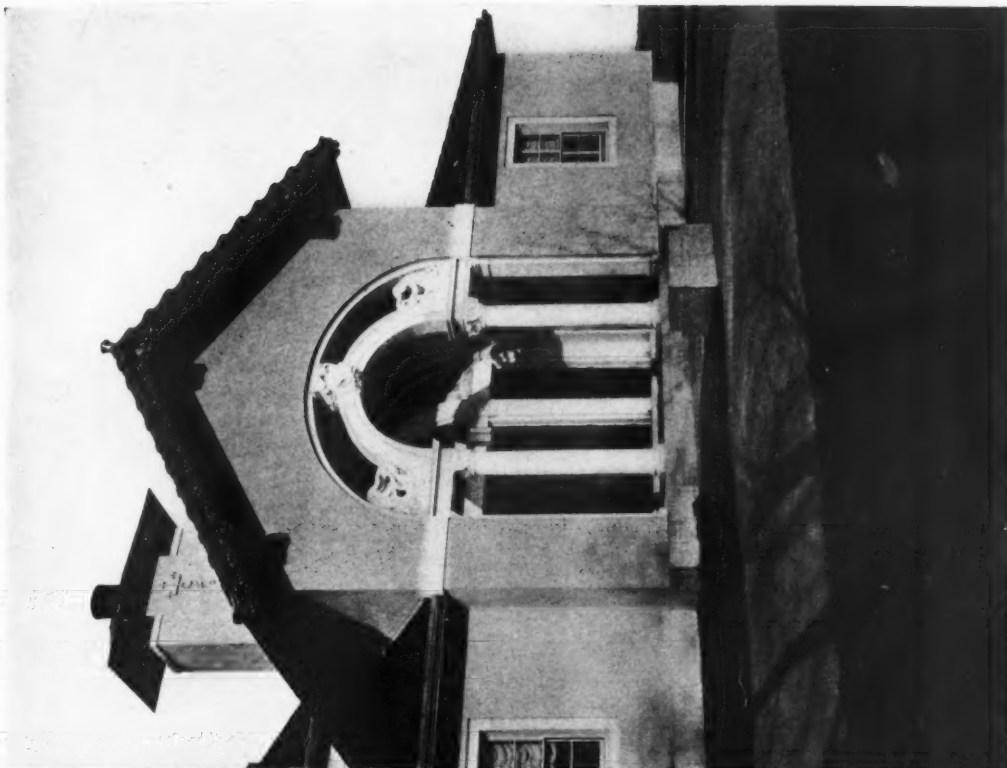
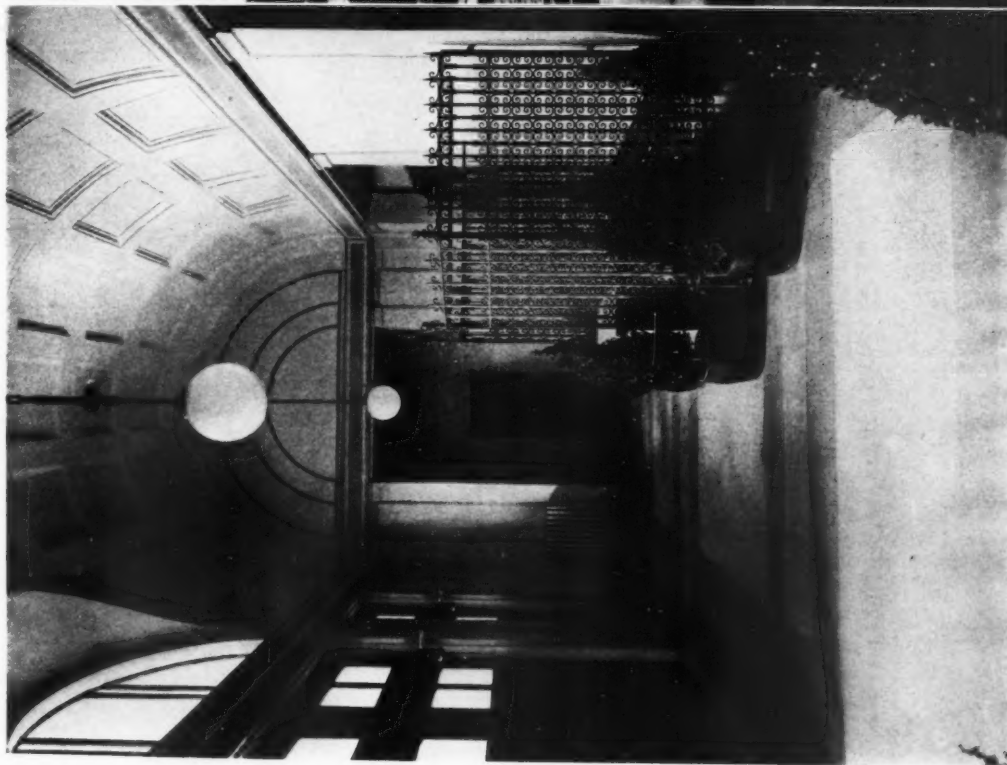
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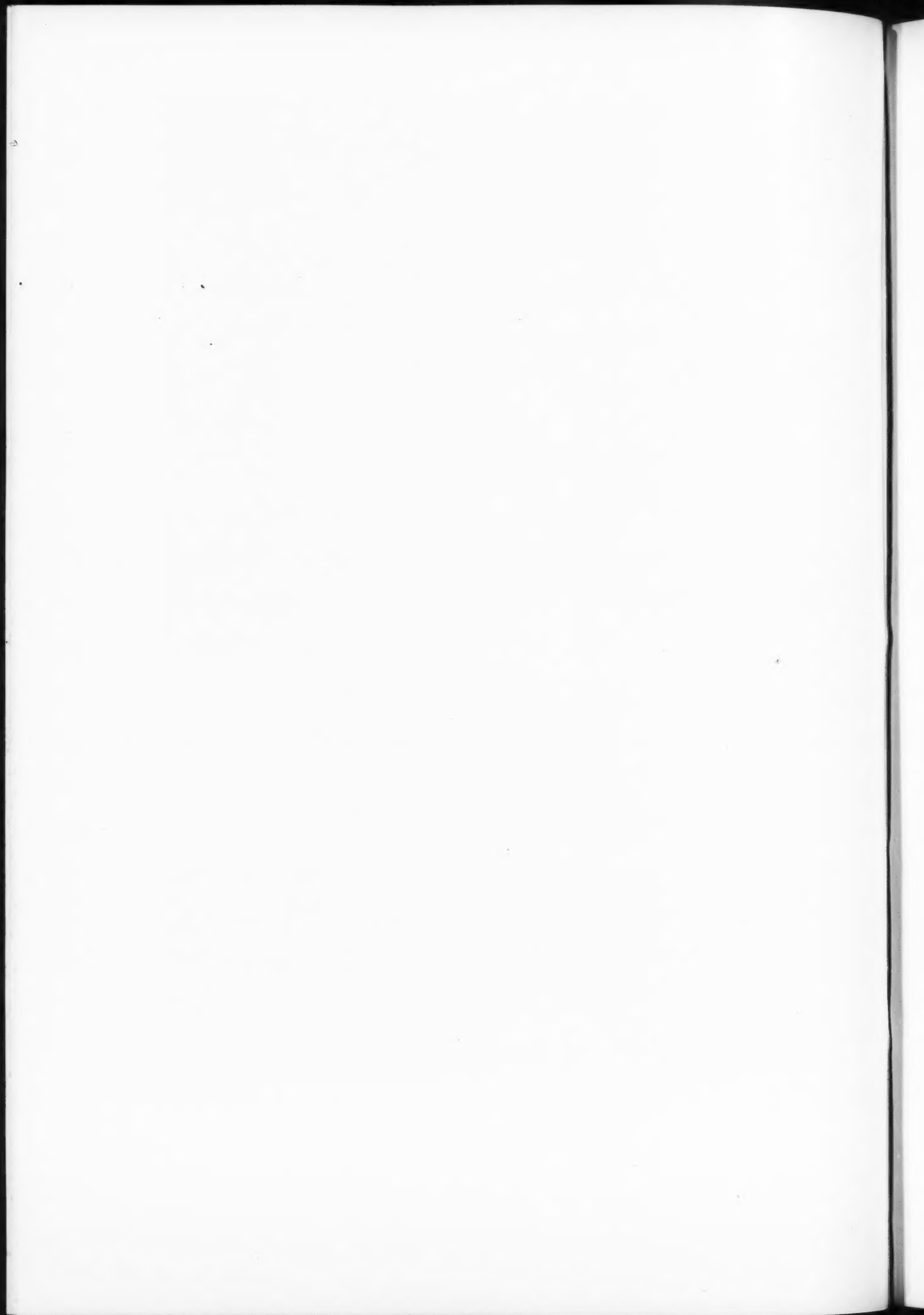
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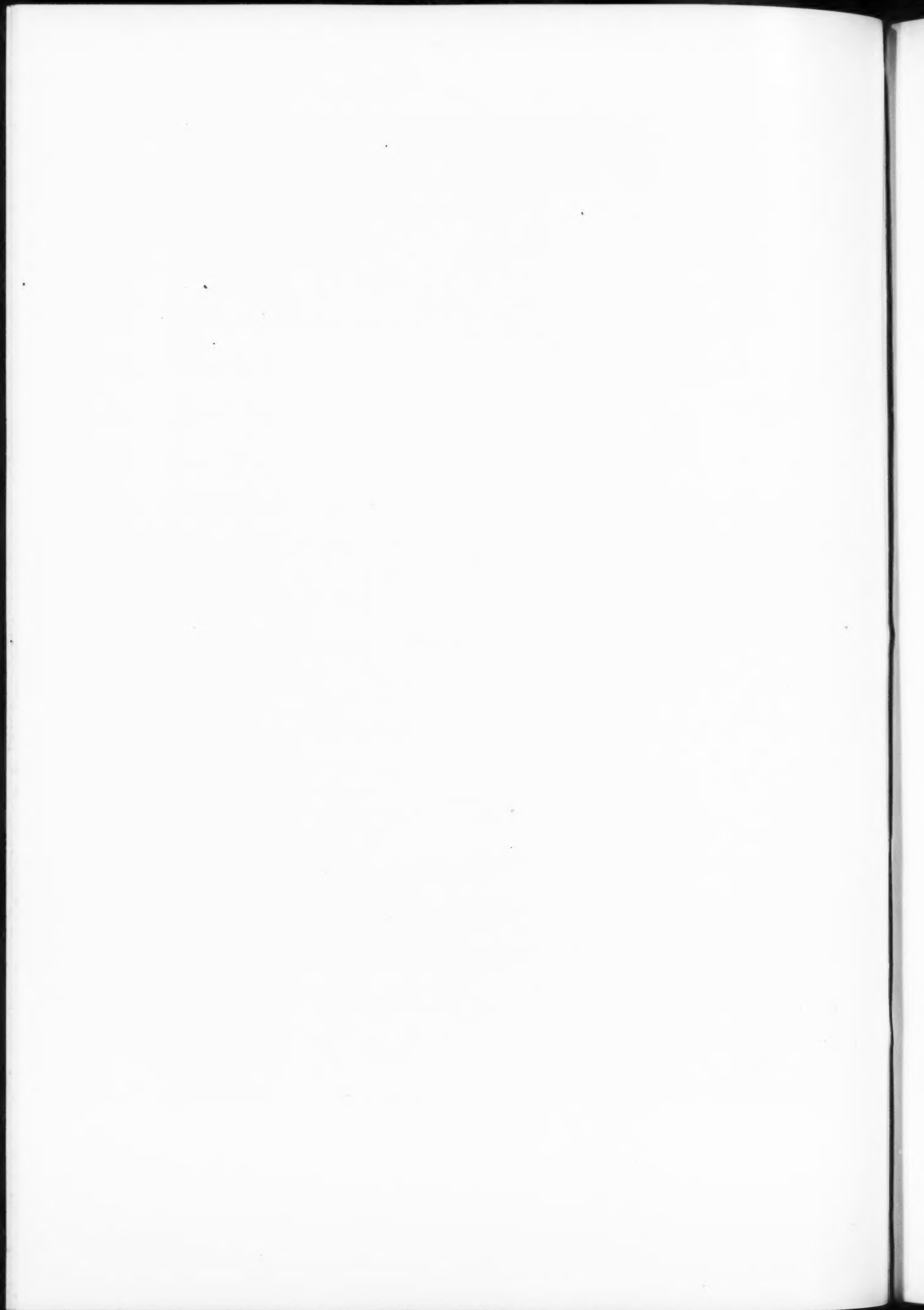
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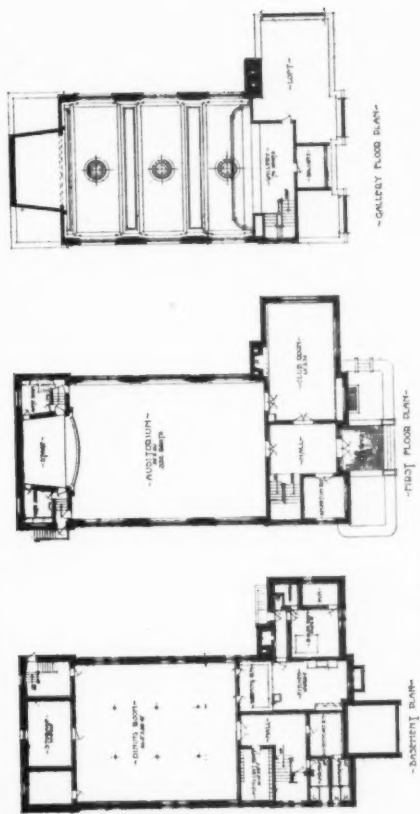
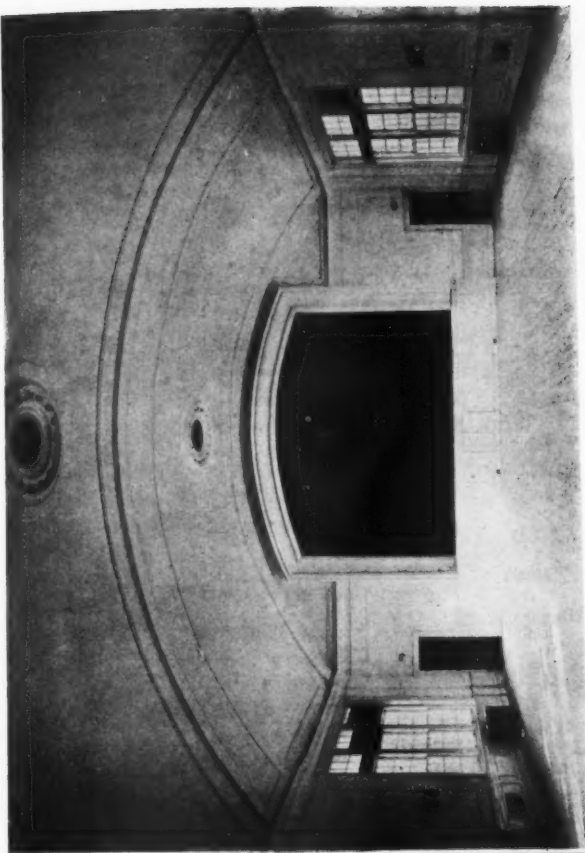




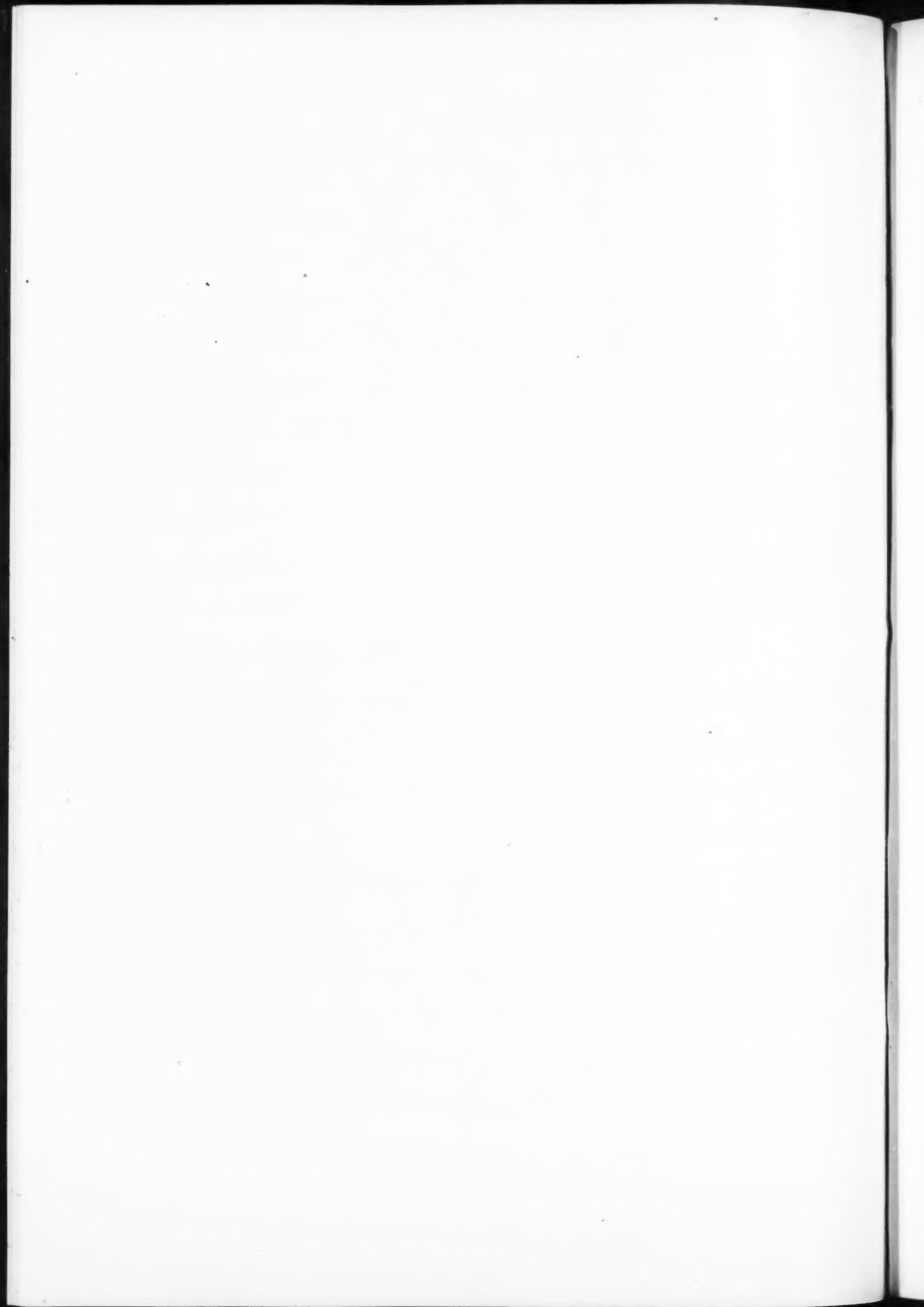
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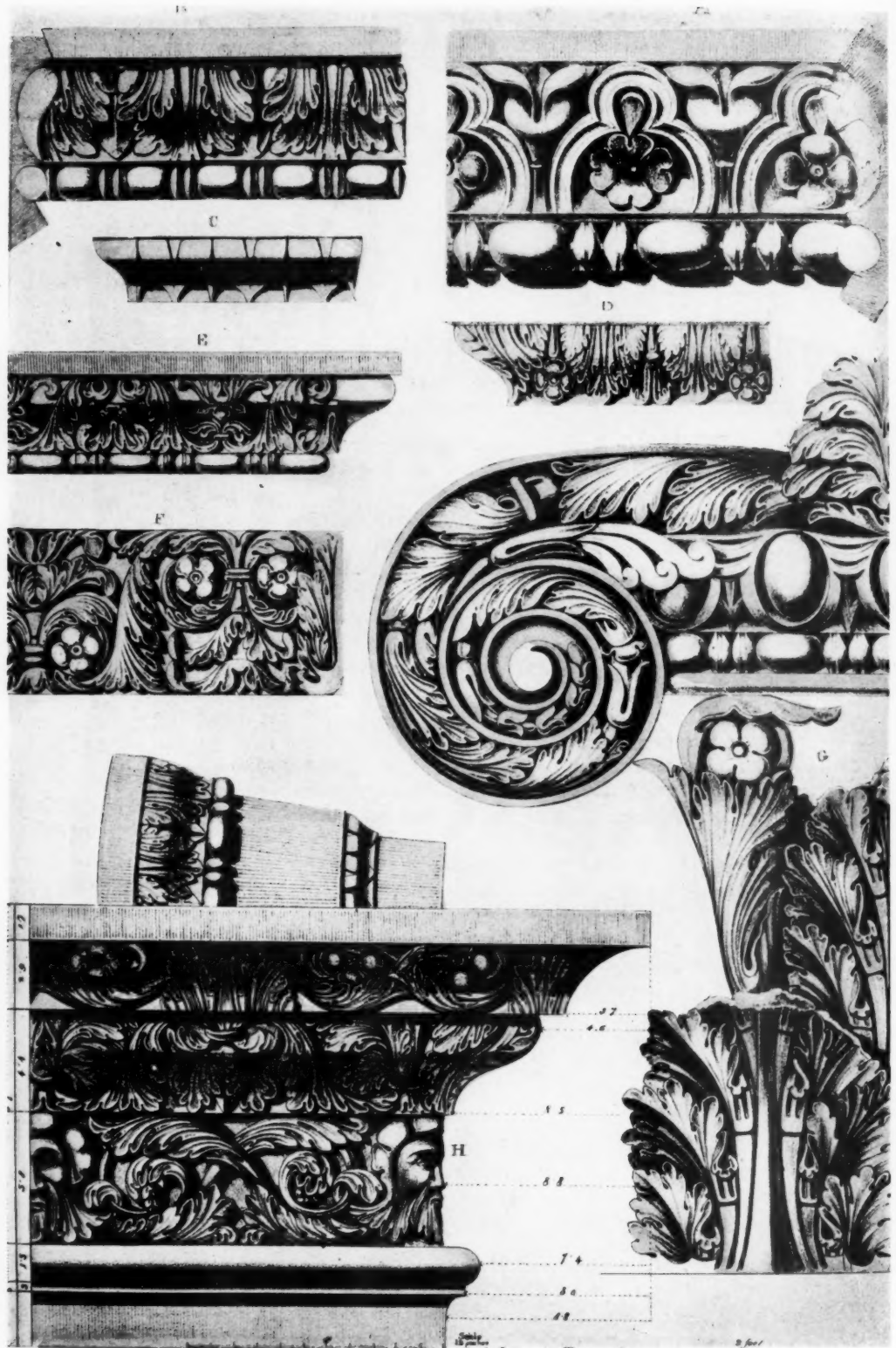
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THE ARCH OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS AT ROME

Various ornamental details

THIS Triumphal Arch was erected by the Senate and citizens of Rome in honor of the Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211 A.D.) for the victories which he obtained in the east in conjunction with his two sons, Caracalla and Geta. It is constructed of white marble and has three passages communicating with each other by lateral or cross arches. On this plate is illustrated the cyma reversa (A) of the attic cornice; the moulding (B) of the long panel in the attic; the moulding (C) over the dentils of the main cornice; the lower moulding (D) of the impost cornice of the centre arch and the upper member (E) of the impost cornice of the side arches; also the decoration (F) of the neck of the latter; the volutes, foliage, etc. (G) of the capitals with the ends of the leaves, of which there were eight of each size, destroyed; also the impost and archivolt (H) of the communicating arches between the centre and side passages. The moulding above the corona of the main cornice and the upper member of the main architrave are precisely the same in design as the cyma reversa of the attic cornice but vary a trifle in size. As a whole the quality of the ornament of this arch is somewhat inferior to that of some of the earlier works; with the exception of the ornament on the cyma reversa of the attic cornice, it lacks that spirit of simplicity and broadness of treatment which is indicative of the best period, and therefore is less effective.



THE ARCH OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS, ROME, ITALY

(For description, see preceding page)