BUILDING A WONDERFUL CHURCH ON THE MEDIAEVAL PLAN

Swedenborgian Artisans Consider Only Their Art in Rearing Their Cathedral at Bryn Athyn, Pa.

Smallest Details Worked Out Many Times in Plaster--- No Thought Given to Time or Expense in the Step by Step Advancement Toward Perfect Harmony

THE clock has been turned back in architecture at least once in this twentieth century. In a day of machine made skyscrapers and buildings thrown up over night there is being reared an edifice, a church, leisurely and painstakingly, like a Greek temple or a cathedral of the Middle Ages, its minutest detail worked over exhaustively in plaster of paris and clay before being entrusted to its final dress, its smallest stone carved by hand, not by ordinary laborers but by skilled artisans and sculptors gathered from different parts of the country and welded into a unique organization at Bryn Athyn, Pa.

Bryn Athyn is a Swedenborgian colony about fifteen miles from Philadelphia. Swedenborgianism, or New Church, as the sect decrees that it shall be called, as distinguished from all Old Church, no matter the creed, grew out of the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, scholar, traveller, scientist and religious writer, who was born in Stockholm, Sweden, on January 29, 1688, and died in London in 1772.

The growth of the New Church since its first definite establishment in London in 1789 has not been meteoric, but it has been undeviating. Its adherents point out that five hundred years after the birth of Christ the entire civilized world was by no means Christian and that they, who claim the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Church of the New Jerusalem, as revealed in the writings of his servant Swedenborg, need feel no discouragement anent its rate of growth.

In 1854 in the city of Philadelphia a school of New Church education was started in connection with the New Church society there. It endured despite vicissitudes and frequent changes of residence until, some time prior to 1895, John Pitcairn, millionaire plate glass manufacturer and philanthropist from Pittsburg, Pa.; his wife and Robert M. Glenn, then treasurer of the school, set out to find a spot outside Philadelphia that could be used as a site for the New Church Academy and an artistic Swedenborgian settlement.

They found an ideal spot at Alnwick Grove, afterward renamed Bryn Athyn by them. There, on undulating highland overlooking the beautiful Huntingdon Valley district, about fifty persons settled in the summer of 1895. Residences were started, among them Cairnwood, the estate of John Pitcairn and long one of the show places around Philadelphia.

To-day, twenty years later, the colony has grown into a suburb of unusual charm and beauty. It has four miles of permanent highway, winding walks and paths honeysuckle bordered and tree lined, bits of parklike squares and corners thick with shrubbery and trees, water and electric lighting systems. Behind the honeysuckle borders are at least sixty homes belonging to a population of over 500, many of them converts. This growth has come entirely without aid of commerce or "progress," since manufacturing and business of any sort are tabooed; only the bond of a religion draws men and women there.

Beauty of architecture has been a requisite in building, landscape gardening a feature. The result is gratifying. There are houses modern and stately, with gardens in keeping, miniature estates, terraced lawns, a French chateau, an Italian garden, wisteria hidden balconies and the bungalows of magazine dreams. At one end is the sect's college for men and girls that compares in beauty of campus and excellence of curriculum with any college in America.

And on a hill in the very centre of the settlement, overlooking it and the wilder loveliness of the hills and valleys beyond, are rising the walls of a church that all its builders and makers, from the highest to the humblest, design to stand for ages as a monument to the art love and the symbolism of the religion professed by Swedenborg's followers.

In August, 1913, a winding road was carefully laid out from the hill to a quarry a mile distant, its side fortified by a stone embankment along the Pennypack Creek, its bed built to endure. At the same time excavations for the church began. All granite for the outside of the building is being hauled along this road.

The cornerstone of the church was laid on June 19, 1914. It is unlike other cornerstones—a huge block set up in the rough, without date or inscription, and supporting two girthsome southeast corner buttresses. No memorial windows or tablet, no inscription commemorating architects or donors, will appear in the finished structure. The true Gothic spirit of building, of sinking the individual's identity in the perfection of the whole, is being carried out in every detail of the operation.

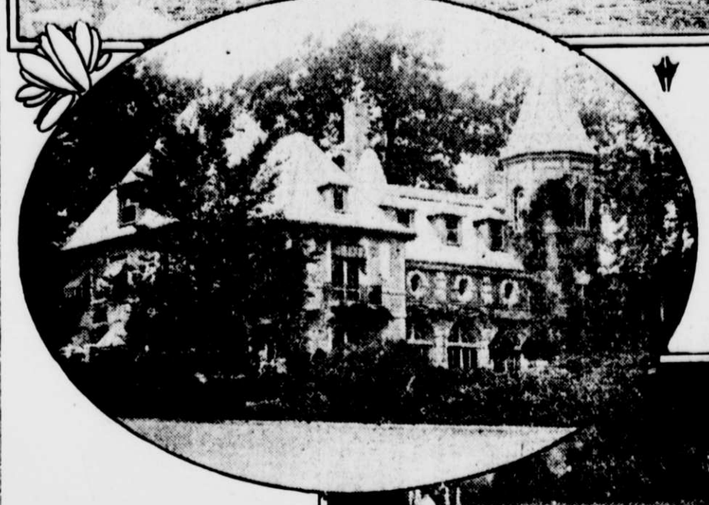
To-day, nearly two years after the beginning of the work, the church has not progressed above the first story. And anything already set up will be torn down and demolished if the final effect of it is not entirely satisfactory to Raymond Pitcairn, the son of John Pitcairn, and the architects and artists associated with him.

When the building was first discussed a simple one was thought of to take the place of the college chapel in which services were being held. When the modest plans were completed and subscriptions called for John Pitcairn stepped in, as he has done so often and so opportunely in the affairs of the colony. He wished to build the church himself as his lasting contribution to Swedenborgianism in America. It was his intention to make it a monument that would endure, as the temples and churches of Europe have endured. And the temples of antiquity and the cathedrals of mediævalism have endured because the men who built them loved their work and had time to do it. They were not day laborers pounding away at so much an hour for a contractor who had outbid his competitors and whose chief demand upon his men was for speed.

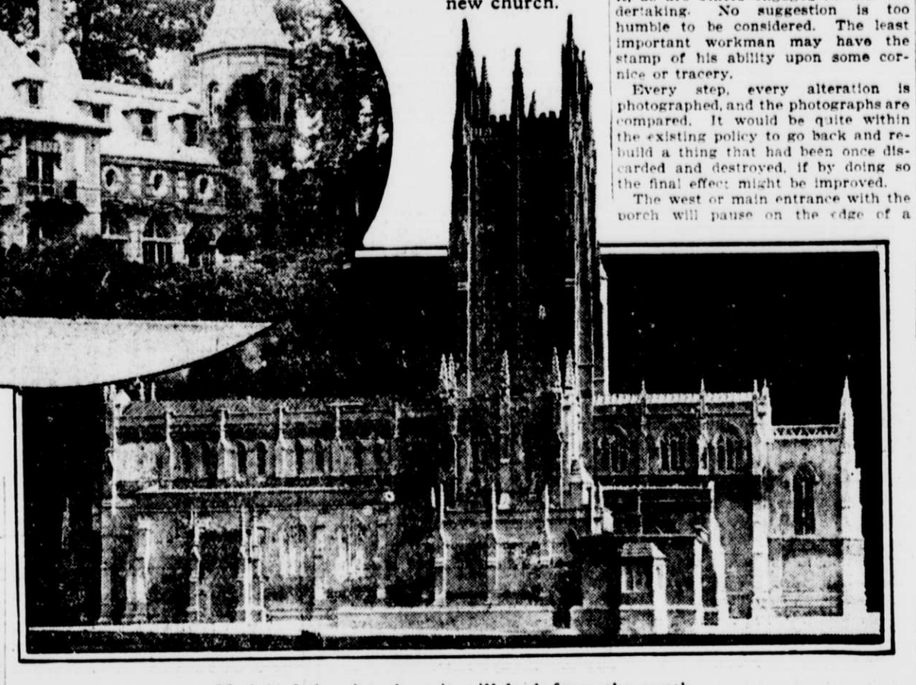
The church is designed to be a notable gift to the centuries, given without thought of fame. For the man whose wealth and the men whose ability make it possible will not have left their names on the stones. What will it cost? No one knows; or those who might will not discuss the subject. Expense is no consideration. Nor is time. It will be completed some day, but when is of no moment. The point is that there will be nothing like it in America.

It will not be called a cathedral. But, inasmuch as it will be the central church of all Swedenborgian societies in the world—in North and South America, England, Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, New Zealand—it will be in function at least a cathedral. But it will not be a vast edifice. Its size is unimportant, but its beauty and permanence are kept ever in view.

Unfinished main entrance of the new church.



Cairnwood, home of John Pitcairn.



Model of the church as it will look from the south.

Flanking the imposing unfinished structure are two great wooden workshops for the men. In the first of these every arch and moulding and column that will appear on the finished church is first modelled in plaster of paris and clay. When approval is given the small model, the work of a man through hours and sometimes days of loving enthusiasm, it is again modelled full size in plaster of paris and set in place in the church. There it remains until Mr. Pitcairn is entirely satisfied with it. The chancel column was modelled six times, four times full size and three of those complete, and it is sixteen feet high. A model may stand among the workmen for months awaiting approval; and the carving that will be done upon it is traced in black pencil.

All patterns are intricate. Swedenborgianism is freighted with symbols and mingled with the stately Gothic of the entire scheme of architecture will be elaborate designs, each to represent a symbol, which, in the Swedenborgians' phrase, stands for some inner significance of the Word on which their faith is founded. In parts already erected and presumably to remain as they are will be found stones now blank that are to be carved later when the peculiar exposition of symbolism needed for that corner is decided upon by the committee now at work on the subject.

This committee, comprising the two bishops of the church, W. F. Pendleton and N. D. Pendleton; Winifred Hyat, artist; Prof. C. Theophilus Odhner and Raymond Pitcairn, will work out the whole scheme of the stained glass windows, in which will be completed the story of symbolism. At present sample combinations of colored glass and a transparent colored paper composition are being tried out in the south casings of the first workshop for effects of sun and light rays. Years if necessary will be given to the perfection of this detail of cathedral windows and it is hoped that they can be made in Bryn Athyn.

In spite of the European aspect of the work, John Pitcairn is resolved that the whole achievement shall be American, thus bearing out his assertion that there are as good men in America to-day as anywhere in the world at any time, if one takes the trouble to seek them out and give them the right environment in which to produce the best in them. This is in contradiction to the published reports that Mr. Pitcairn went to Italy for his labor. All are Americans, from Cram & Ferguson of Boston and New York, the architects, to the last stone cutter of the force that, after two years of intelligent weeding out of the uplift, is truly representative of the spirit which actuated the builders' guilds of the Middle Ages.

In this first workshop are finished models of the whole church and of different parts of it, done in wood and in tiny pieces of cardboard. All are examples of exquisite workmanship, but to none can one point and say 'The church will be like that.' Changes are being made constantly. The roof and central tower have been raised three times—it is now 20 per cent. higher than first planned—the whole edifice broadened and lengthened, buttresses raised, brought out and extended, wings added and expanded. There will be more changes, all tending toward ultimate beauty of line.

One completed model, a thing of signal beauty and finish, is the plan along which the building is being carried on. Perhaps the most notable change made so far in this model is in the west or main entrance. This was completed on the building last fall and the stone steps built. It stood weeks before the critics decided that it would not do. The steps were torn away, the whole entrance discarded. Architects have been working since last Thanksgiving on models of a porch to be placed there, and the work in stone is just about ready to be started. This addition now stands against the rest of the church model, the work of over four hundred hours of a man's time and made of five hundred infinitesimal bits of cardboard full of fine lines and shadings and water coloring, the whole of which can be lifted from top to bottom or side to side between the forefinger and thumb of a woman's hand.

The time, the enthusiasm spent upon every inch of the church cannot be overestimated. Raymond Pitcairn is giving his entire attention to it, as are others engaged in the undertaking. No suggestion is too humble to be considered. The least important workman may have the stamp of his ability upon some cornice or tracery.

Every step, every alteration is photographed, and the photographs are compared. It would be quite within the existing policy to go back and rebuild a thing that had been once discarded and destroyed, if by doing so the final effect might be improved.

The west or main entrance with the porch will pause on the edge of a sheer drop of 100 feet, and a park a square mile or more in extent will be laid out around the entire base of the elevation and down to the Pennypack. Inside the rampart on the south side of the church flower beds and shrubbery will be planted, and on the northwest wing cloisters not yet designed will be erected and surrounded by flowering shrubs and marble arched galleries or arbors leading to the park entrances, the bishop's residence and cultivated woodland retreats.

The view from the main entrance of the church down the long aisle of pillars to the altar in the East will be an impressive one. The pillars and the nave arcade with its clerestory will rise fifty feet to the vaulted roof. The tower will be ninety feet higher. The chancel columns are of sandstone the color of old ivory, but those flanking the aisle are of variegated sandstone with much iron in it, so that bronze tones appear. They and the sandstone walls behind them have the coloring of a Japanese print.

It has been the aim to find stone with warm coloring for all the building. The entire surface of the interior stones of the church, the south entrances and the bishop's study are being handtooled in tiny lines, each succeeding block different; they have the appearance of beautiful wooden blocks to which glints of brown and gold have been given.

Any duplication or sameness in construction is assiduously avoided; the mechanical is shunned. The tracery in no two windows on a side will be alike. They may go in pairs on opposite sides, but that is all. A glance at the photographs will demonstrate. A pair of pinnacles or corner buttresses may be duplicates to preserve balance and symmetry, but variety is aimed at throughout. For instance, all exterior stones are so set in that one perpendicular line does not fall above another and a diversity of tint as well as of length is sought.

The pillars of the aisle are not set in a straight line. They curve, as they did in old Greek temples, and the church is ten inches wider in the centre than at either end. This gives an impression of greater length to the nave. The spacing of the pillars varies; their bases are unlike. Yet all differences so blend that they do not strike the eye as more than an essential of the artistic whole. And the great concrete floors of the church that has been built down, down into the earth until it touched rock, until the walls above will find it hard work to settle or topple; that floor that would stand bombardments and earthquakes and the tramp of thousands of mounted troops, slopes up one foot to the chancel. The congregation will look up to the altar, up to the shrine of the Word.

Some of the achievements in stone masonry already finished are marvels for this day and age. In the south wing alone, within a distance of twenty-five feet, are twelve stone arches and the vista accomplished is like that of a glimpse into a wonderful vast old cloister. The winding stairway leading to the south transept roof was pronounced the finest piece of Gothic in this country by a hundred architects who went together last May to inspect it.

In this stairway the stones are not jointed to bring about an effect. They turn corners and ascend, being hewed out, with many faces to cut. The artisans work from plans and pictures in perspective. The chancel of the little chapel in the southeast wing is arched in solid stone without support. All tools used by the workmen are made in a blacksmith shop erected for that purpose close to the operation.

In the second wooden workshop spoken of is done the stone carving. It is a long, low building with plenty of windows and a dirt floor. Along both sides of the room the men stand, each at his block, and work from plaster of paris models and sheet tin patterns. They work intelligently, with enthusiasm to create really beautiful things; and they are praised when they achieve anything particularly good.

All cutting and carving is done by hand; machinery is employed only to rough out stones. The wood of the church will be white oak, cut down not a dozen miles from Bryn Athyn, where is the finest white oak in this country. The entire roof is being made of these beams hand hewn in sections in the workshop.

A community of persons who believe implicitly and whole heartedly in a heaven where there is government by angels which they can and do emulate in earthly rule, where there are mansions in which spirits dwell and live not unlike human beings still in perfection, is bound to be raised above the commonplaces of the age; and it is entirely congruous to find them building so unique a temple of worship. Their belief is founded primarily on the Old Testament and the revelations on its hidden significance that the Swedish scientist is believed to have received directly from God during the last years of his life when, while his body lay apparently unconscious in his bed, his soul travelled to heaven and dwelt there, communing with the angels.

As the daily living of the New Church people is founded on rules gleaned from the Word and set down from Swedenborg's own observations in heaven a high ethical and moral sense prevails. Marriage is sacred; divorce not forbidden, but unknown. The wedding ceremony is particularly impressive, with an exchange of rings and promises in which the word "obey" has no part. There is "conjugal" love taught in the faith, a thing quite apart from the marriage love of other religions. It is a love that continues after this life is done and unites the couple in their eternal existence.

Large families abound and there is apparently no poverty. On the contrary there seems to be much wealth. And a family of ten or twelve children growing up in robust health with one mother and father is not rare. Deaths among women and babies are few. All live a free, intelligent, unpampered outdoor existence. Sleeping porches abound. The untrained nurse girl is never seen. Instead big and little mothers are in evidence, and in every household each child has a duty which fits him or her for efficiency later in life.

No member of the colony sends his child out of it to school. They have their own school, an academy that is one with the college buildings on the campus, and they support it, employ excellent teachers and instruct their offspring in many branches not offered at public schools—a daily tuition in the Bible, music and Hebrew. It is believed that a knowledge of Hebrew is essential to study of the Scriptures.

A high order of education prevails among Swedenborgians everywhere, for the creed is not comprehensive to unlettered minds, and John Pitcairn's generosity has so endowed the college that every child born in the community, or for that matter in New Church families throughout the world, may be reasonably sure of a college education. All history, philosophy and civic government in the college are taught in the light of Swedenborg's revelations, and the library has a collection of 60,000 volumes, among them the whole environment of the religious and scientific reading that must have been Swedenborg's, an unusual and valuable lot.

At the present time the colony is fighting to be declared separate from the rest of Moreland township, in which it is now enrolled, and to be incorporated as a borough with all the rights and privileges of borough government. The total assessment of the settlement on private property and school buildings averages more than $400,000, and the taxpayers point out that while they have had no help from the rest of the township in perfecting the system of excellent roads within the confines of their own domain, yet they are taxed heavily for improvements outside and for schools to which their children never go.

AN INTERIOR DECORATOR WHO "PLAYS ROOMS OUT OF TUNE"

Henry J. Davison Uses Piano to Show How Colors Can Jangle on the Soul of the Occupant

Why the Houses in Which We Live Should Be Designed to Harmonize With the Temperament

By WINNIFRED H. COOLEY.

JUST to prove that our ear is open, but our eye is not, Henry J. Davison can sit down to an organ or piano and "play a room out of tune," until his auditors fairly shout for mercy at the discord; but the same people would gaze serenely upon frightful inharmonies of color without flinching. Mr. Davison is a "psychological" interior decorator and his knowledge of the effects of color on the soul is exhaustless.

The Bankers Club of America, which he has just completed in New York city, at an expense of $600,000, probably is his masterpiece, although the Lawyers Club comes a close second. Both of these substantial creations are inhabited by plain, practical, unemotional city men who never could be accused of an excess of "temperament." It is safe to say that not a banker or a lawyer among them knows the color of his own soul. Yet Mr. Davison insists that soul tinting is based on science, and that the vibrations of ether set in motion by color actually affect our tempers and sensibilities just as we love certain people and have an aversion to others.

Just to sit amid the gorgeous golds and pinks and peacock greens and blues of the fabrics thrown across chairs and tables in the decorator's offices is like having all the ice cream and candy you want for once in your life. It is indescribable.

"You understand," says Mr. Davison, who, by the way, is a middle aged "man of the world," whom one never would suspect of psychical leanings, "that certain colors have a certain definite effect on masses of people. The human soul has so many prejudices that individuals are affected differently, according to past associations and experiences with certain colors. Just as a strain of music or a waft of perfume recalls to us in a flash some terrific emotion experienced many years past, and supposedly forgotten, so a certain color may be associated with some extremely disagreeable experience and therefore always bring us extreme discomfort. For instance, when we enter a lavender room we suddenly may become pensive and melancholy or perhaps, irritable; and may be wholly ignorant of the fact that the color has brought up disagreeable memories.

"Do not imagine that all this is vague theory. I have made color a lifetime study and deduced facts which sound like didactic statements from literally thousands of instances. That is the only way scientists determine anything; they study innumerable cases, and when they find the same conditions prevailing under the same circumstances every time they deduce a law which operates unfailingly.

"I remember a big piece of work I did in a house, a part of which consisted of a yellow and also of a blue room. Two powerful captains of finance frequented the club. One passionately loved the yellow room. He used to say naively, 'I can sit in the yellow room all day.' Undoubtedly, this was due to the fact that he was a self-made man who had worked hard and never had had any warmth or color in his life. This golden glow meant to him relaxation—the joys of boyhood.

The other man inevitably drifted to the blue room, showing a predilection for blacks and blues; for recesses and shadows. He is a lawyer who protects millions of dollars—an abstractive man, who loves spider webs, the spinning of schemes. Every shadow and recess in a room delights him. He cannot stay away from that blue room. This is because he never explodes or gives way to irritability or passion. Not having the outlet his pent up energies crave the stimulus of color.

"Red is universally aggressive. Orange expresses heat. Have you never questioned why the Italians and Spanish, although living in hot countries, always dress in red and yellow, and eat red peppers and violent drinks? It is because they give out so much heat that they are obliged to restock their heat and energies.

"Blue stands for serenity and coolness. Violet is mystic and contemplative. There is no doubt in my mind that the theological symbolism of color, which is a tremendous study in itself, was founded upon actual knowledge of psychology. You know that even as late as the Italian Renaissance the great painters, such as Raphael, were obliged by the Church to express certain theological symbols, such as blue for the Madonna's robe, signifying religion or faith; green for hope and white for purity.

"Take our everyday lives; although in general the sexes are differentiated somewhat in taste and expression, color is not so much a matter of sex as of temperament. Strong elemental colors are regarded as masculine, while the tinted ones, to which white has been added, expressing subtlety and delicacy, are feminine. Still, I have seen strong, manly men sometimes react to exquisite colors. People of the same sex but different temperament, express wholly different colors and forms.

Henry J. Davison.

"Can you imagine Queen Elizabeth and Marie Antoinette wearing the same costumes and enjoying the same furniture? The dominant, aggressive, masculine queen wore certain costumes and surrounded herself by certain strong, well built furniture. The dainty, aristocratic French sovereign expressed her period by delicate Dresden china figures, spindle legged furniture and all sorts of fragile, rococo and ornate furniture and tapestries.

"If you do not think that color has a real physical effect on people you should see some men almost go crazy if subjected to violet!

"A doctor experimented recently with an apparatus—I think they call it a pulsometer—which showed the pulse going up or down, according as the person was subjected to one or another color.

"In Yale University tests were made which showed that men when subjected to red displayed 50 per cent. more muscular efficiency than under other colors. The effect was measured by instruments on their wrists and it was shown that when subjected to purple the pulse would go away down."

It was here that something was said about "soul portraiture." I had never seen the picture of a soul and expressed some scepticism. It seems, according to Mr. Davison, that rooms in our home express our character, our very soul. Henry VIII., the bluff sensualist, simply could not have endured to live in the palace of Louis XVI. One was virile, the other effeminate, and their costumes and tapestries and furniture expressed their individuality and also the taste of their age.

It was then that the decorator astonished me by saying that he was going to talk about the effect of color "on nations, chickens and people!"

"Nations," he said, "have color, and national tastes change. We could express America by one color, France by another, with real meaning. Chickens have been fed aniline dyes and the egg that forms is in concentric rings, each being of the color fed the hen at the time that portion of the egg was forming. This is a mere physical experiment.

"But it is people who are eternally fascinating. Always and forever we are asking, What is art? Tolstoy answered 'The transference of emotion.' William Morris said 'Art is man's joy in his work.' Color is rejection—or the bouncing away. Color is a language. It has an alphabet, spelling, grammar and paragraphs. The three letters in the color alphabet are red, yellow and blue. Every room must have some of each of these, whatever the proportion. Sometimes I call them the parents. (You know, of course, that there are 3,000,000 colors.) Red marries Yellow and they have one child—Orange. All the rest of the three million colors and tints are their offspring.

"Tints, of course, merely have more or less white mixed in. Mixed color is dirty. Not one house painter in eight hundred can mix colors. Pure color is 'grayed' or 'browned' or 'blacked.' The shade produced depends on time and the effect of one color soaked into another. No dyer can guarantee absolutely what color will finally emerge. Color depends on what company we keep. Colors must be very fastidious; they cannot risk evil associates, lest their blood be debased.

"All artists use the same paint; they are marvellous only in the mixture of the colors and the proportions used."

When asked about our own everyday problems in creating and decorating our homes, Mr. Davison said: "Decoration is applied psychology! If your house does not express you it is a setting without a stone. Your taste may be guided, but if your abode merely expresses the conventional schemes or predilections of a hired decorator it is a Smith house or a Jackson room, but not the emanation of your soul!

"The history of household furniture is intimate and fascinating. It usually is founded on physical facts and customs. For instance, the chair of a certain period had high rungs, because in that age, even in king's houses, there was no sanitation, and garbage, water, dirty little animals and rats might render the floor unfit for milady's dresses. So she kept her feet well up from the stone floor!

"In most forms of art expression, however eccentric they may appear, there is a reason. But when we get away from home furnishings, from tapestries of delicate hue, and spindle legged or carved mahogany, or gilt furniture, and come to the realm of human beings, there enters in a spirit of mysticism, of uncertainty, of eternity. That is why we speak of soul portraiture, which sounds vague and irrational to the dull realists, but are founded of eternal verities.

"If it is scientifically proved that different colors actually affect a person's temper and mood, it stands to reason that we should study not only color effects in general but in their relation to individual men and women. Why torture a sensitive young girl by giving her a blue bedroom if it render her nervous, depressed and melancholy? She may not realize what it is that is affecting her spirits and nerves, but that should be the concern of the color specialist.

"In deciding on your own color schemes avoid affectation and the following of some didactic teacher. Be yourself. Each individual is a facet of the diamond of life. Why should a hustling, rich society woman or a practical, prosperous business woman garbed in a tailor made suit of the twentieth century go in for 'periodism' and dwell in an ornate Marie Antoinette room? Nothing is more absurd and incongruous.

"If folks understood color and harmony there would be no friction and fewer divorces!

"Every work of art is, in one sense, a lie. Painters cannot paint light. They cannot reproduce Niagara on a three foot canvas. Truth is reached through error, as it were—through the great illusion. In entering a crowded, busy downtown skyscraper office building in the heart of New York the visitor must be impressed with distance, with dim, cathedrallike spaces.

"The Bankers Club is, in floor space (100,000 square feet), the equivalent of a 400 room hotel! A decorator not only must select colors which will not throw the occupants of a room into a rage, but he must have a thought for eye strain and ear strain; must regard the nose, the sense of touch, the palate, and even the legs!

"Americans are wearing out their eyes because of the intense light of the many windowed office buildings. The top story of a steel skyscraper has no skyline or vista or partitions, so that the decorator has some problem to make it cosey and homelike.

"People are just waking up to the fearful strain of noise in a big city. The vibrations from hundreds of voices crossing and recrossing each other in a room are as real and assail the nerves as disagreeably as little popguns shot off in every direction! I try to counteract this in color and line and bring about repose and serenity.

"So much for the eye and ear. The nose must not be assailed by unpleasant odors in a club, and the palate must be pleased with the aid of lovely asthetic surroundings. This former takes in ventilation.

"Even the texture of fabrics and leathers have an effect on the temper and the soul, so that the body fitting chairs must have certain materials in upholstery to insure peace."

I could not help wondering if the busy bankers knew they were sitting in chairs calculated to a nicety to soothe their souls.