

UPTON SINCLAIR'S

Colony to live

AT HELICON HALL

Luxury in Cooperation, and there may be some compromises just at first.

HERE is nothing of "The Jungle" about co-operation as it will be practiced by Upton Sinclair's colony. The unappreciative world may have a notion that when the social reformer cuts loose from the ordinary modes of living and takes up the True Life he goes into bare barracks, pitches his tent in a desert, sleeps in a cave, or otherwise deports himself like an all-round ascetic. The world, however, as frequently happens in such matters, is quite wrong in this supposition. The True Life, as the Sinclairites have finally determined, should be palatial in its housing, while for its bill of fare there should be—but the "New York Home Colony" has not yet decided on the bill of fare, the question of food being still fraught with weighty considerations and likely to become a matter of heartless compromises. The house, however, has been taken, and by the first of November it will be filled by the followers of reform.

On the Palisades of the Hudson, in the State of New Jersey, not far from Englewood and within an hour of New York, stands the building that the New York Home Colony has chosen to make famous. Helicon Hall is its name, and it is filled with every thing that the traditional ascetic does not want. For instance, there are a huge swimming tank, a bowling alley, a theatre, a glass-covered court in the centre of the hall, wherein plays a fountain perpetually in the midst of tropical plants, among which rises a gigantic rubber tree—"the largest to be found north of Mexico." I was told by one enthusiastic Sinclairite. Surrounding this splendid patio there are about fifty rooms, not in the least of the hall-bedroom variety, and furnished with an eye to ease and comfort that would have set Diogenes rolling in his tub with frenzy. Viewed from the outside, Helicon Hall, ornamented with goodly porticos, rows of white pillars, and ivy-covered walls, does not belie its name. It stands in the centre of a park containing nine and a half acres of cultivated land, and the Home Colonists are exuberant over the fact that a fifteen-mile forest stretches from it northward along the Palisades, offering the finest kind of jungle world in the future, when co-operation in the park begins to flag.

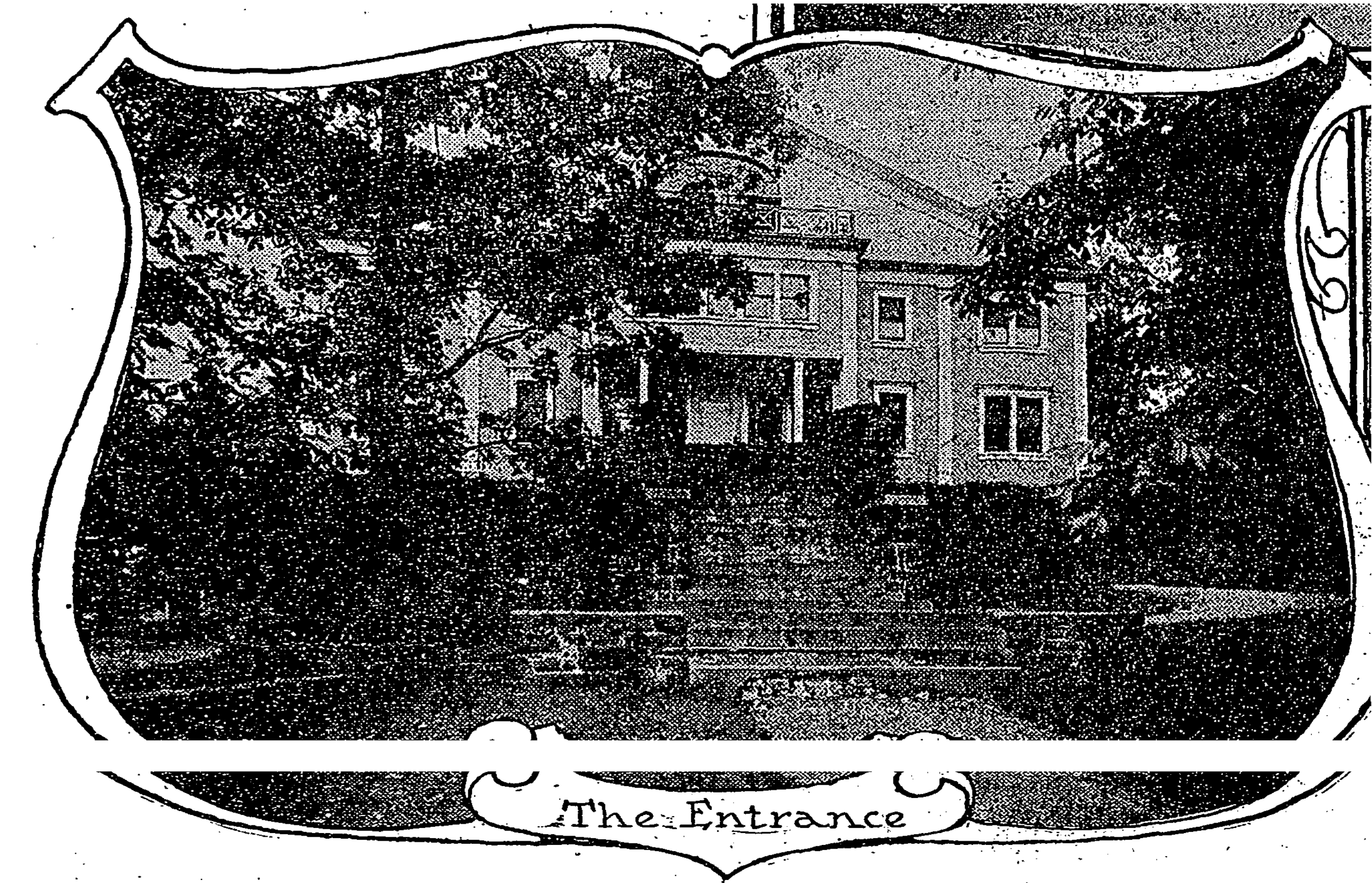
The transaction making Helicon Hall, formerly a juvenile educational institution, the property of the New York Home Colony was completed last week, and the colonists are expected to move in between now and November. After the deed conveying the property was signed and sealed Upton Sinclair retired to the Adirondacks, to await further developments and incidentally to fit himself for a theatrical career, while among his lieutenants there seemed to be some mystery as to what was going to happen. L. A. Malkiel, a lawyer from Russia, is the man who drew up the important document. He was found at his office, 116 Nassau Street. He is adorned with a magnificent growth of blonde hair and sweeping mustachios, and nervously clutched the awful paper that was lying before him on the desk.

"No! no!" he said hurriedly in reply to my inquiries, "I think not I am at liberty to divulge this business. I can tell you some great things about the Japanese war, something secret—but not now can I speak about this affair on the Palisades. Do not ask about it. It is not Socialism, only co-operation. Yes, that is the name. And there will be twelve families at first, for experiments this Winter. Then we will all go in, after we see what happens, 100 families perhaps. Will you hear about the Japanese war? But I can't tell you how those families will live together on the Palisades. No, no, I cannot divulge. It is all here, all in this paper. The affair is co-operative. Yes, I can say that. There is no harm to say that. And in the Spring I, too, will go there and live in this co-operative colony. But I cannot tell what will be done now. If you ask about the Japanese war—this other business, no! that will not do."

Edwin S. Potter, who signed the deed with Upton Sinclair conveying Helicon Hall, I found more communicative. Mr. Potter is not a Russian, his long, raven locks and dark eyes reminding one of the melancholy Dane as portrayed by the late Mr. Booth. Mr. Potter runs some kind of news agency, besides publishing a monthly periodical devoted to the propagation of advanced thought, and when found in his little office at 150 Nassau Street he nodded gravely on hearing the purpose of the visit.

"Yes," he said meditatively, "it is right that the public should know about this matter. We want publicity. This is something that touches the public welfare. The success or failure of this important experiment means, as you can see, a great deal to us all. There has been considerable debate on the subject, starting with the public meeting in Berkeley Hall in July. Committees were appointed at that meeting, and these committees have been busy ever since formulating certain general principles, settling the cost of living, and fixing the plan and scope of a co-operative, not a Socialistic, colony—please mark the distinction. Then, in August, we had more public meetings, to which all of those paying an initiation fee of \$10 for investigation purposes, were invited, and that there might be perfect freedom and equality, every member, by getting two indorsers, had the right to have his thought printed and sent out with the committee reports to all the members for their written votes. By this method we have solved the co-operative problem and have taken the first step to put it in practice.

"Now, in regard to the experiment that is about to be tried at Helicon Hall, try to get this initial idea straight. It was my own scheme for solving the financial part of the question, and I think it will work well. In fact, I am proud of it. You see, the New York Home Colony Association is made up of two kinds of people. There are some of us who have capital and others whom you might call clerks, working on a salary. Well, those who have capital get together, put up certain sums of money, say \$1,000 each, and buy the property on which the co-operative experiment is to be made. These capitalists thus form a stock company, so it might be called elsewhere, and they operate the land, buildings, &c., as a landlord would, for the other members, but not for profit—that is, comparatively speaking. For instance, if you invest your money in Wall Street you would expect to get from 20 to 40 per cent. on your capital, would you not? Well, the stock company in this association will get 6 per cent. and no more on the money they invest in Helicon Hall. They can also be residents of the colony and vote on all questions with the other members. Then, for the remaining class, those whose lack of capital prevents them from belonging to the stock company will become residents at Helicon by being elected to the colony club, as we call it, and by paying for their board and



lodging at prices fixed by the association and complying with other regulations. They will also enjoy the privilege of voting at the town meetings on such matters as the servant problem, the financial questions being always reserved for the stock company, or capitalists, of the association.

"This seems to bring about a thoroughly democratic arrangement, one in which there is perfect equality among the colonists. You think it involves something of a class distinction? Not at all. That is really only on the surface, and in the nature of a compromise with what we hope to have some day. In reality there can be no class distinctions in our colony. To become a member of the Helicon Hall colony is very simple. If you should want to join, for instance, you would apply to the Secretary. Your personal character would be investigated. If you stand that test and if you are a detached man—that is, a bachelor, you would hire a room in the central hall, just as you would at a hotel. If attached—that is, with a family—you would rent a piece of ground of the stock company and build a house on it, subject, of course, to certain rules of architectural decency and propriety as laid down by the association. This house would be yours as long as you cared to live in it. Should you desire to leave the colony the company would take your house at its appraised value. This is all a priori theory as yet, please observe. But we have decided that we will do what is just and right in all cases that come up for our consideration.

"Now, here comes one of our most vital points. Please get it right. Every cottager will be compelled to pay for his meals whether he takes them or not. Do you see the admirable justice involved in this law? In the central clubhouse meals will be provided for all, and will be paid for by all, no matter whether these clubhouse meals are eaten or not. Thus, don't you see, any possible reversion to the barbarous custom of duplicated kitchens and the keeping of hirelings, known as cooks, will be discouraged."

"Will it not be possible for a man to have his own private kitchen?" I asked.

"Well," answered Mr. Potter after a prolonged pause, "if he wants to carry on a chafing dish of his own, perhaps we will be unable to prevent him. But a private kitchen—as yet we have not faced that problem in the concrete, and I hope we never will. You see, a private kitchen is, theoretically and practically, extremely undesirable. One thing, however, is positive: No member of the colony, under any circumstances, will be allowed to hire a servant of his own, either as cook or for any other menial office. On that point our laws are final. There will be no compromise. But, of course, if a man and his wife, after mature deliberation, decide that they wish to conduct a kitchen, with their own hands, mind you, and in their own house, as a hygienic or, we will say, scientific experiment, it might be allowed—although it would probably have to be passed on at a town meeting. You see, we do not wish to discourage individual choice or freedom in any way. We have decided, however, that we must eradicate from our community such blemishes of civilization as the kitchen, the laundry, the backyard, the slopbucket, and the hired servant or menial."

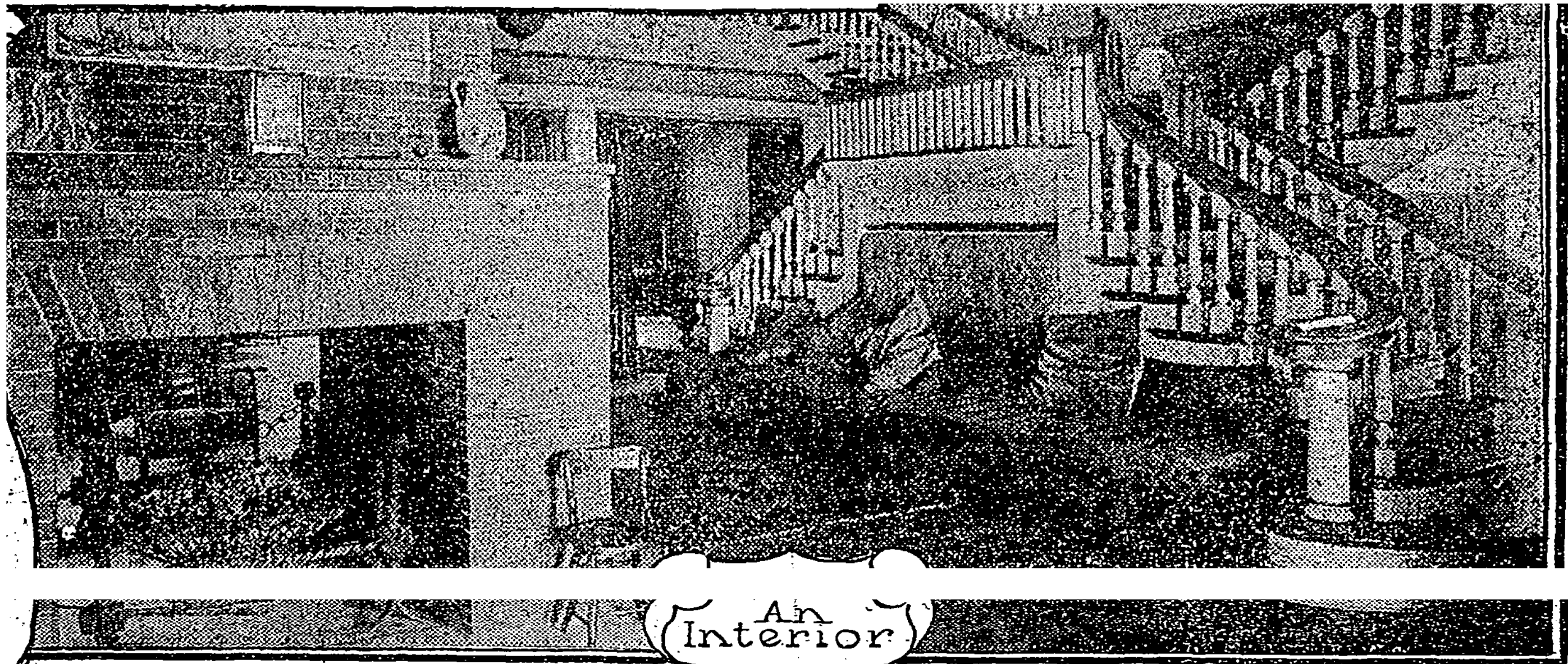
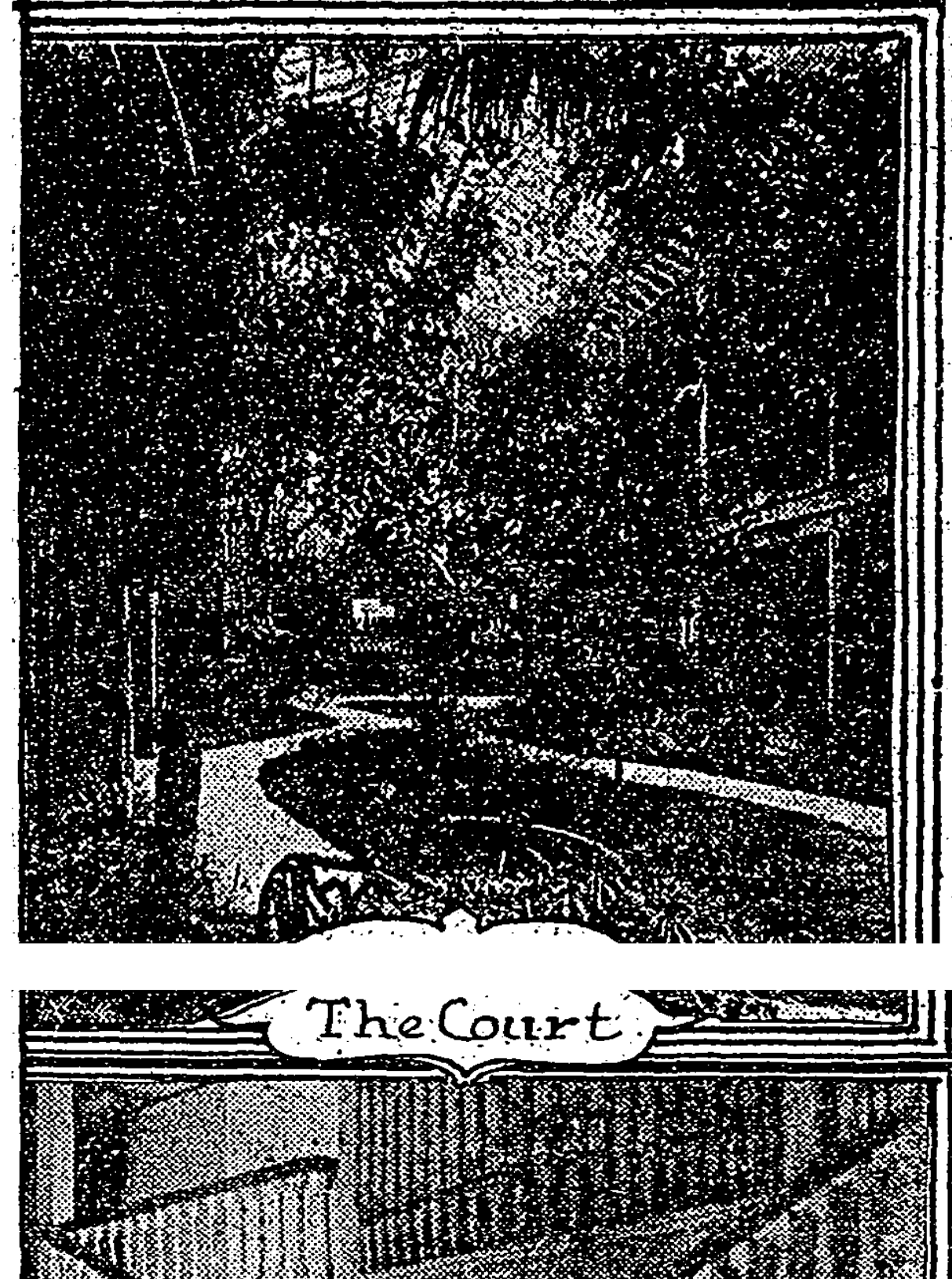
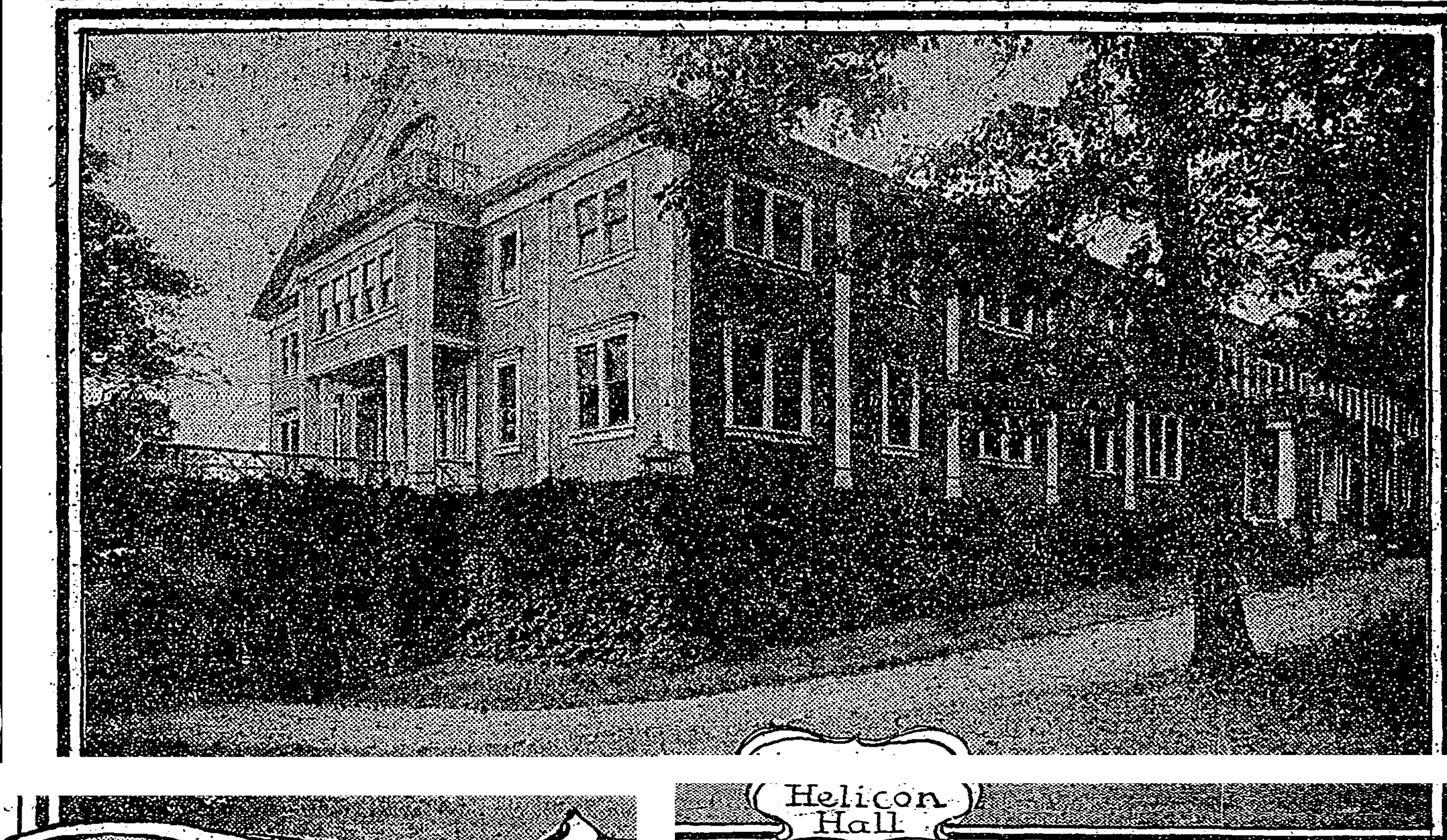
"How about cooking the meals in the central hall?" I asked. "Will that be done by a hired servant?"

"I am sorry to say," said Mr. Potter gravely, "that for the present it looks very much as if we would have to compromise our principles in this important matter to the extent of hiring a cook—temporarily, you understand. Right here, too, you might make it clear that living in the house near Englewood will necessarily involve a compromise with some of our principles until we are able to erect cottages. At present the families entering Helicon Hall will be compelled to herd together communistically in one building. Indeed, outwardly the experiment will be more communistic than we had at first planned, and I have no doubt that some facetious people will say that we are trying to set up a second Brook Farm. Each family, however, will occupy its own separate rooms in the hall—all except the children. For the children we will have one general dormitory, also a general playroom where they will be cared for by two lady members of the colony, who will take turns by day. A third member will sleep with them in the dormitory at night. There will be no hired nurses, you observe, with the commercialized disregard that such persons always have for the welfare of their charges. By reason of the co-operative principle we will get this service for our children at a less price, probably, than what is paid for a maidservant, or menial. And, then, consider the advantages!"

"What will be the price for board? Just what it costs the colony to provide it. The whole cuisine and house will be watched and governed by a carefully trained expert—"

"On a salary? Something in the nature of a servant?" I asked.

"Oh, no! not at all," was the hasty reply; "at least, not necessarily a salary at present, and never



the problem in that way."

"And the food—what kind of food will you have?"

"As a body, the colonists have not yet crossed that bridge. That will have to be decided by Mrs. William Noyes, one of our members, who has been appointed Manager of the Household. The policy of the house in the deeper aspects of this matter will be shaped by the Board of Directors. Possibly, there may be some compromise of principles in this department also, since half of our members are vegetarians, some believe in a meat diet exclusively, others like breakfast foods, and one or two have the 'fruit and nut' idea. Canned goods, of course, are barred. Then, there are those who insist on early breakfasts, while others want late breakfasts, and still others have the 'no breakfast' theory. You may have observed, by the way, that the advanced thought occasionally begets an extreme diversity of opinion in these fundamental particulars. Mrs. Noyes, however, will undoubtedly have no difficulty in settling these questions amicably. She can compromise, you know."

"And then there is the Board of Directors and the Town Meeting," I suggested.

"Oh, there will be no difficulty!" said Mr. Potter confidently. "By the first of November there will be twelve families in Helicon Hall and everything will be going on splendidly toward solving the great problem that we have before us. There are thirteen children altogether, as a start, and for this Winter I fear their schooling will have to be done in Engle-

wood. When the cottages are built and the colony reaches its full membership, some time in the Spring, we will have our own school."

"And a church?"

"Dear me! I should hardly think so. Of course, if enough members should insist on putting up a church it might be difficult to prevent them. A compromise is always in order. You noticed the possible dilemma facing us in regard to the private kitchen problem. I know of some religious people among our members, however, and the question of a church might come up. But radical thought and socialistic thought, as you know, are usually antagonistic to the church."

"Will the colony be socialistic?"

"Not at all! It is strictly co-operative. There may be some Socialists among the members. Every one knows how Upton Sinclair stands on that question. I, also, am a Socialist. And—yes, there are some others. But they are not all that way. For instance, I could name one member who calls himself a Socialist, but who is really nothing but an opportunist."

"We have professors and journalists, doctors and lawyers among our members, and the question of belief or politics does not come up at all. In fact, there are some strictly business people in the venture, people who have old-fashioned, conservative ideas. There will always be room for compromise, you know, and the whole colony will be run simply as one big happy family—an experiment for which the world has long waited."