

Extracts from *The Cathedral Churches of England* by Mrs Schuyler Van Rensselaer, 1887

“When near the spot shown in the picture ... (*view of south east end of Cathedral looking across the main well pool*), we turn our backs on the church and see something far less noble but almost more amazing – a palace which makes the dream of a poet seem prosaic, it is so big yet so pretty, so dignified yet so fantastic, so unnatural to our experience yet so natural-looking here. If ever there has been a romantic house it is this. Not a bishop should live in it, but some festive young seignior with hawks and hounds, going out daily over the draw-bridge on a milk-white horse with the longest possible tail; and on the moat, instead of a stout youth in knickerbockers pushing himself about in a punt with a pole, there ought to have been a boat shaped like a swan with a silken canopy and a troubadour to sing beneath the oriels. I don’t know whether or not we might have gone inside the palace, but who would wish it? No modern family, clerical or lay, could ‘live up’ to such an exterior. But not seeing is believing; not seeing, we could fancy them still clad in brocades and treading on rushes, and shivering when the tapestries wave as the wind blows in winter through patched walls and sagging roofs.”

“the most lovely wide gardens in the world; in these gardens near a natural fountain (hence, *Wells*) which forms a big pool, falls in white cascades, and fills a moat, there rises, with the water around its feet, a palace smothered in vines and trees; and beyond the gardens and the moat run avenues of mighty elms.

As we made this circuit, partly inside, partly outside the close, and at last along the shady avenues, all things grew mysterious and supernal as the afternoon glow deepened in the sky, more and more suffused the air, and softened local colours in a radiance that was neither pink nor gray nor green, but everywhere seemed to have a tinge of all three tones. Everything was quite distinct, yet we rubbed our eyes as though a veil of gauze were hiding realities that could not be so fair. It was romance made tangible. Here was indeed a palace of enchantment, without discordant features, and with no possible feature lacking, even to spellbound princes who swam about as swans among the lilies of the moat. There was not a person to be seen, and often not a glimpse of any world beyond this roseate silent park. Nature and art, blended together, were existing simply for themselves; and the stillness and glamour seemed so ancient, so miraculous and seductive, that at last one thought of escape for safety. An hour of such bewitchment and – who knows? – we too might be swans on the moat, or swallows in the air, or stone figures under a stone canopy forever.”

Mrs Schuyler Van Rensselaer. *The Cathedral Churches of England*; illus. by Joseph Pennell. (New York, 1887). p. 724 740-1