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# Timeless Gardens

TEXT BY KATE EASTON  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK COLUMBUS

Arts & Crafts gardens incorporated seamless between indoors and out — that ephemeral quality of unity and reverence for nature supported by a cast of balance, simplicity and practicality. Just as the Arts & Crafts house provided access to the outdoors through strategically placed windows and doors, the garden incorporated elements of the home by reflecting the architectural style of the house, using the same local or regional materials, and provided views at key vantage points.

The garden was just an extension of the home and created a holistic outdoor living space that surrounded and extended the home. In keeping with the philosophy of the Arts & Crafts Movement, the gardens of homes built with the craftsman ethic reflected the values of the movement itself. Some of the most well-known American Arts & Crafts gardens include: Greene & Greene's Blacker house and Green Gables, Stickley's Craftsman Farms, Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Waters and Ellsworth Storey's homes in Seattle.

William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll were the prominent communicators of Arts & Crafts garden design concepts like borrowed views, garden rooms, multiple seasons of colorful and lush perennial beds through their writings and work in England. Robinson, a gardener and botanist, influenced gardening with his recommendations to use low maintenance perennials and native plants over the twice-planted-in-a-season tropical annuals of



Victorian gardens. Through his writings and friendship, Robinson had a major influence on Jekyll. Edwin Lutyens (an architect and designer of the Lutyens bench) and Jekyll worked together for much of their professional life and collaborated on many English gardens representative of the Arts & Craft style. Jekyll used drought tolerant plants promoted by Kate Sessions in her designs for English gardens.

Many gardeners know of Jekyll's use of color, especially in herbaceous borders; however, she also strongly influenced Beatrix Farrand. Dumbarton Oaks (Washington, D.C.), designed by Farrand, is noted as one of the best examples of Arts & Crafts gardens. Farrand was known for incorporating impressionistic views in gardens and innovative use of native plant material. Charles Sprague Sargent, head of Bussey Institute of Harvard and the

Arnold Arboretum, taught and mentored Farrand in horticulture and design. Sargent believed that ground should never be changed to create the garden, but that "the garden should fit the ground."

In addition to Jekyll, Farrand and Sargent, Gustav Stickley popularized Arts & Crafts style through his weekly periodical *The Craftsman*. Stickley promoted the use of native plant material and wrote in a 1911 issue of *The Craftsman*, "...the more we know of local conditions and particularly of the flora, the better able we are to achieve satisfactory results. It is only when a detailed study of these is made and applied... that the restful feeling of absolute harmony can be gained." Kate Sessions, a horticulturist and landscape designer, introduced many new drought tolerant plants and terracing into residential and public gardens in San Diego, Calif., which was emulated by others.



In addition to books by Robinson, Jekyll and Lutyens, *House & Garden*, *Garden Magazine* & *Home Builder*, and *Punch* periodicals covered gardening, home building and philosophical thought of the day and were read by many on both sides of the Atlantic. Some homeowners purchased planting plans from seed sellers (e.g., J. M. Thorburn's Seeds, NY) or nurseries or magazines (e.g., *The Garden Magazine*). Many homeowners read Robinson's and Jekyll's work and/or the periodicals and created their own designs. These publications and the surviving mail order Arts & Crafts house plans that included garden layouts can be the starting point for renovating the Arts & Crafts garden.

The cottage garden was the beginning model for the Arts & Crafts garden. Its informality was a departure from staid Victorian rigidity and reflected the values of simplicity, local materials, and handmade crafts of the Arts & Crafts Movement. The organizing ideas of the cottage garden focused on the relationship of house to landscape and used the landscape to enhance the house. A gradual transition from garden to home is the hallmark of Arts & Crafts gardens.

The garden design worked with the natural site conditions or was axially oriented relative to the house or major feature (door, window, patio, etc.) creating a unique sense of place. Intentional placement of garden rooms oriented to observe the path of the sun or moon made



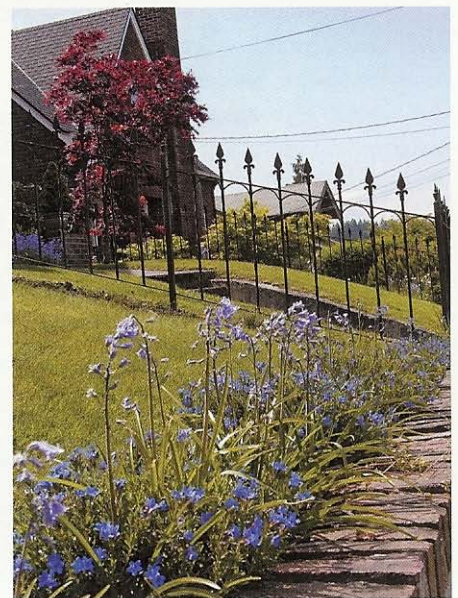
the connection between heaven and earth. Patterns of shadow and light as well as light reflections were created by strategic placement of garden rooms, vertical structures and plants, ponds, and the use of translucent plant material.

Formal (symmetrical and linear) or informal (asymmetrical and curvilinear) layouts accented the natural landscape. Views were borrowed from the distant landscape or framed by a window. The whole of the garden engaged in every dimension – horizontal, vertical, and overhead: Vines clambered over fences, trees and shrubs as well as pergolas, arbors and walls; trees created ceilings; mass

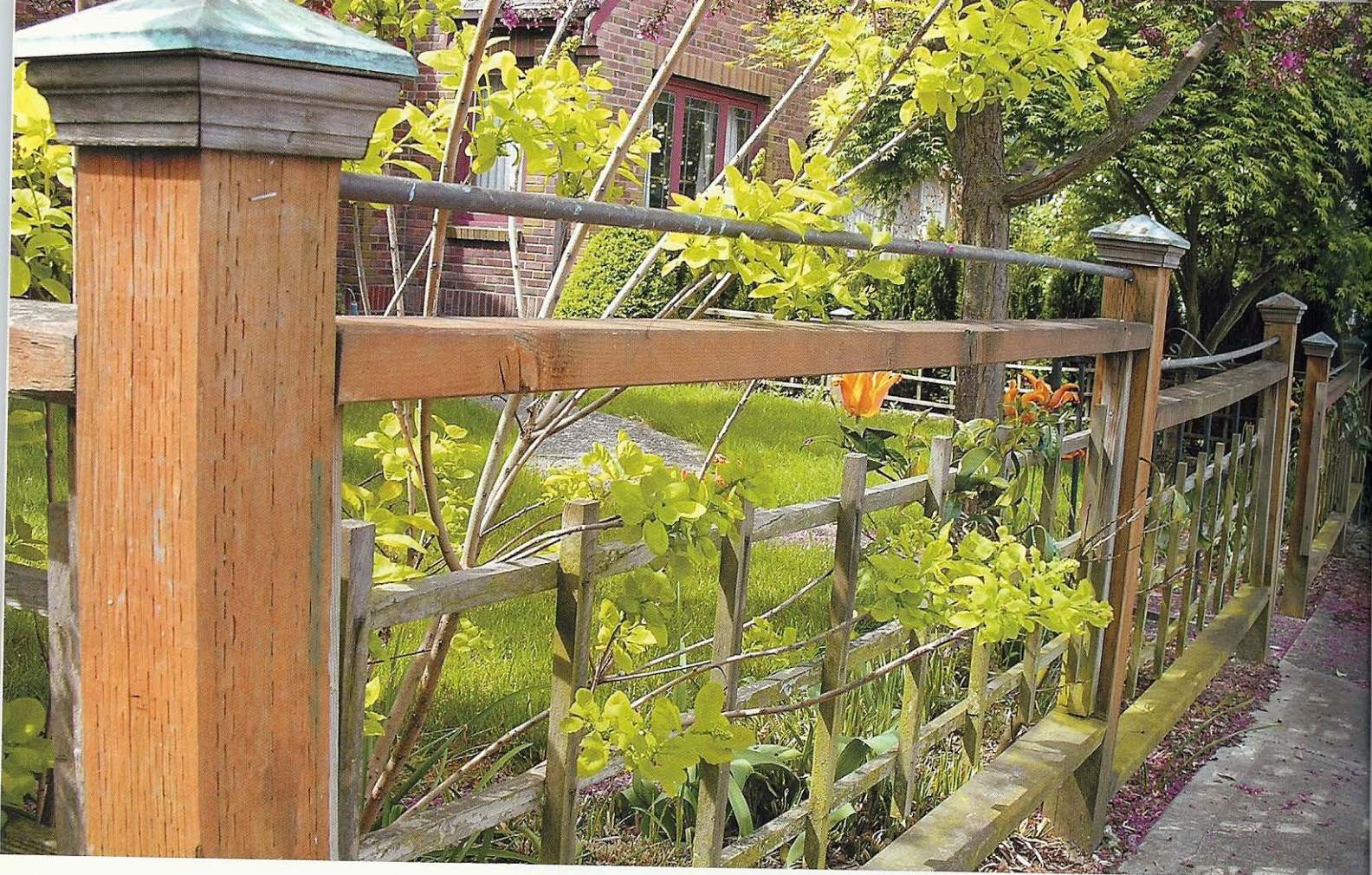
plantings carpeted the ground. The garden celebrated the constantly and subtly changing environment from season to season.

The juxtaposition of informal and formal forms in the garden taunted conventional design ideas. Planting beds and borders were designed so that plants may intertwine and grow over the edges of paths and other architectural elements in sharp contrast to the Victorian rigid rows and patterns of annual color. Overflowing perennial beds lined paths and bordered the home. An entire area would be devoted to flowers and flowering plants instead of lawn. The element of surprise (e.g., a sunny ►

*"A garden must be spontaneous — allowed to spring from the ground in a natural way — otherwise it is devoid of that irresistible something called style, for style is born out of the shaping of use and beauty to environment."* — Gustav Stickley, *The Craftsman*, 1911.







lawn after passing through a shady wood) was also a key feature in the design, as was seating strategically placed to see a special plant or ornament. Fruit trees were common in the cottage garden and sometimes were espaliered along a wall or fence.

The enclosed garden was entered through a gate or archway or courtyard marking the transition between public and private space. A living arbor or pergola with vines growing on it often marked the entrance to the garden. If there was a gate, it was welcoming and was made of wood or wrought iron. A glimpse of the garden beyond the gate beckoned one to come closer and created the first favorable impression of the home. Walkways from the gate or entrance traveled an indirect path to the home entrance, allowing the visitor to enjoy nature along the way.

Fences or hedges served as the garden enclosure. Unpainted lattice and picket fences were the most common and served as supports and backdrops for climbing plants. Sometimes wire fences overplanted with shrubs and vines were used to

*"The sun's early morning rays filling the room with sparkling light, the late afternoon sun hitting the canvas and illuminating the interior with luscious golden light."*

— Frank Lloyd Wright, describing the Garden Room of Taliesin West

create the garden boundaries. If hedges enclosed the garden, they were likely to contain yew, holly, green tree box, Lawson cypress, privet, common laurel, beech, hornbeam, lime (pollarded/clipped), Lombardy poplars, upright cypresses, or junipers (Chinese, Virginia (red cedar)). In

the Northwest, English Laurel was often the hedge plant of choice.

The courtyard and front porch were used for greeting visitors. For most homes, the primary outdoor living room was the front porch and the transition point between inside and outside. Occasionally, the outdoor living





and outside. Occasionally, the outdoor living room was placed on the side of the house under a pergola or loggia, or at the back of the house as a "sleeping porch." In warmer areas of the country, the outdoor living room was a central courtyard area. All outdoor rooms were furnished with swings, benches or other seating that never competed with nature.

Heavy steel wire chairs and benches are the oldest type of outdoor seating, though most often wood (e.g., Adirondack chairs of redwood or cedar), wicker, woven willow, rattan, bamboo, and stone slabs were the materials of choice. The mass produced, heavy cast iron furniture of the Victorian era was shunned as being too unnatural for the Arts & Crafts garden. In mild climates, furnishings included faux bois (false wood) constructed of concrete and wire to look like trees, stumps, and branches.

Areas in the landscape were divided into garden rooms with a specific theme or use. The patio, loggia, viewing platform or terrace attached to the house or free-standing gazebos, summer houses, pergolas or tea houses provided shaded respite and place from which to view the garden or entertain. Sometimes pergolas and arbors were "constructed" of Italian Cypress, Larch, Pear or Apple saplings bent and tied to temporary arching frames. Shrubs commonly trained for pergolas, arbors or allés included: Guelder Roses, Snowy Mespilus, Laurustinus, Common Laurel, Solanum crispum, Robinia hispida, and Laburnum.

Retaining walls of river rock, boulders and brick defined some or all of the rooms, depending on site topography. Serpentine or repeating squared breaks or variations in wall height could be used to break up long stretches of retaining wall. Steps would have risers faced with glazed or patterned ceramic tile. The lower areas were called sunken gardens.

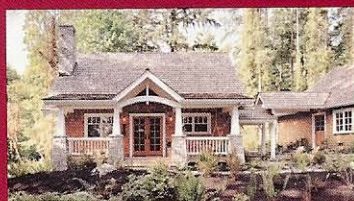
Sunken gardens, such as rose, water, or herb gardens, displayed plant collections designed to show off the beauty of nature. A sundial or birdbath was often found in the center of herb or rose gardens. Jekyll believed "that water is the soul of the garden." Water played a central part in the garden, following Roman and Islamic traditions, and served as a focal point, a place to gather, or provided the restful music of running water. Water features were placed ➤



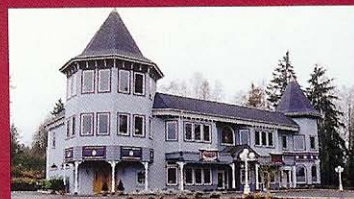
*Water is the "indispensable nurturing force of life." — Outside the Bungalow*

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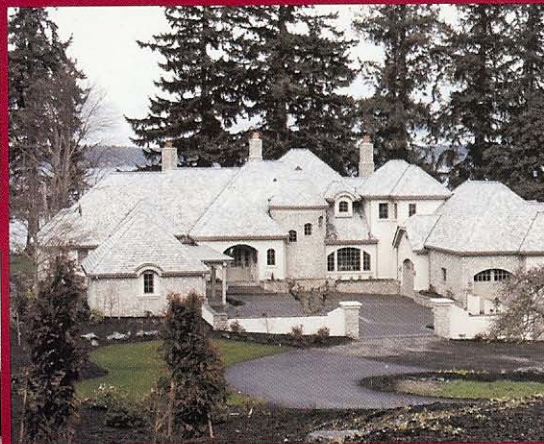
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in the lower areas or sited on the higher levels and allowed to cascade or meander to the lower levels. The form of the water feature was influenced by Spanish Colonial and Japanese styles on the West Coast and more by the Colonial Revival elsewhere in the United States, even if it was just a birdbath.

Paths between the garden rooms were often pounded bare dirt, though gravel, brick, flagstone, slate, rough granite, and grass were also used. If paving was used, the material may be laid in rectangular joining, random jointing, basket-weave, herringbone, circular or concentric rings patterns. Circulation from room to room was a progression through nature, highlighting different aspects and the natural beauty of texture, color and views. Vistas were accentuated with rows of plantings such as herbaceous borders, hedges or allés of trees.

Other furnishings served as focal points in the garden: statuary, containers and objects d'art. Popular subjects for statuary included: boy/girl figures, gods (Pan, Cupid, Narcissus, Venus), dolphins, birds, ducks, swans, quail. Containers marked entrances, graced stairs, or were focal points. Container shapes varied from pedestals to bowls to squares.

Plant selections considered form, scale, color and texture to create combinations pleasing as a group and in harmony with the house. Drifts of mounded plants for mass plantings, upright and vertical forms as accents, or irregular and flowing forms provided contrast and emphasis while anchoring the constructed elements to the ground. Contrasting leaf forms — the graceful narrow arch of *Miscanthus* with broad rounded leaves of *Saxifrage*s — served to show-off the beauty of nature.

Arts & Crafts gardens played with nature's subtle hues and the color cycles of the seasons. Planting schemes tended towards the monochromatic shades in green, white, and pink or harmonious combinations of grey, pink, light purple, pale blue and mauve to create a relaxing and restful view. Bright yellows and reds and oranges were considered too harsh and garish for the natural, peaceful garden. Regardless of the color scheme, plants were chosen for the soil condition, hardiness, size and proportion, and four season color or interest. Favored choices were hardy perennials and sturdy woodies (shrubs and trees) known for their foliage as well as their flowers.

Although styles have changed in the hundred years since Arts & Crafts came on the scene, the principles of design and techniques employed in garden design remain valid.

Unity, simplicity, repetition, line, form, color, texture, contrast are constants of good design, regardless of the style. Today's continued popularity of plants used in Arts & Crafts gardens is a testament to timelessness of the choices. The lessons of "right plant, right place" are today's standard though current generations are learning the distinction between "wild," "native," and "exotic" and the ecological consequences of introduced plant species that adapt and naturalize only too well. Going forward, perhaps the garden will enable humans to understand ecological systems and the interconnectedness of all things by observing nature at close hand, through the seasons and thereby achieving true harmony with nature.

*"Nature is a good colorist, and if we trust her guidance we never find wrong color in wood, meadow or on mountain."*

— William Robinson,  
"The English Flower Garden"



## ARTS & CRAFTS GARDEN Creators, Influencers, Writers

**Beatrix Farrand (1872-1959)**, garden designer; founding member of the American Society of Landscape Designers (now American Society of Landscape Architects, ASLA).

[http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA99/hall/Dumbarton Oaks/farrand\\_dum.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA99/hall/Dumbarton Oaks/farrand_dum.html)

<http://members.aol.com/savegarlandfarm>  
[www.doaks.org/](http://www.doaks.org/)

[www.gardenvisit.com/b/farrand.htm](http://www.gardenvisit.com/b/farrand.htm)

**Edward Hudson:** publisher Country Life magazine, commissioned Jekyll to design the garden for The Deanery, his home.

**Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932)**, author of Wood & Garden (1899), Home & Garden (1900), Wall, Water and Woodland Gardens (1901), Some English Gardens (1904), Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden (1908), Gardens for Small Country Houses (1912) with Sir Lawrence Weaver, Arts & Crafts Gardens (1921), (1981, a modern edition); wrote for Country Life, wrote articles for and edited The Garden magazine; work published (along with Lutyens) in Houses and Gardens (1913) published by Country Life.

[www.gertrudejekyll.co.uk/](http://www.gertrudejekyll.co.uk/)

[www.ced.berkeley.edu/cedarchives/profiles/jekyll.htm](http://www.ced.berkeley.edu/cedarchives/profiles/jekyll.htm)

**Charles Keeler (1871-1937)**, author of The Simple Home (1904), which discusses the ideals of Arts & Crafts architecture and landscape planning. Commissioned Bernard Maybeck to build his home.

[www.oregoncoast.net/simplehome.html](http://www.oregoncoast.net/simplehome.html)

[www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Orchard/8642/cakeeler.html](http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Orchard/8642/cakeeler.html)

[www.berkeleyheritage.com/berkeley\\_landmarks/keeler\\_house.html](http://www.berkeleyheritage.com/berkeley_landmarks/keeler_house.html)

**Emerson Knight (1882-1960)**, San Francisco Bay Area garden designer, creator of J.C. Ainsley house garden in Campbell, CA

**Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944)**, architect of many country homes, for which his friend, Gertrude Jekyll, designed gardens

[www.lutyenstrust.org.uk](http://www.lutyenstrust.org.uk)

**Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903)**, landscape designer and implementer of hundreds of public and private gardens

through several firms he owned, including Central Park (NY), Golden Gate Park (San Francisco).

[www.answers.com/Frederick%20Law%20Olmsted%20](http://www.answers.com/Frederick%20Law%20Olmsted%20)

**William Robinson (1838-1925)**, author of The Wild Garden (1870); The Garden, a weekly periodical, later compiled into The English Flower Garden (1883)

[www.gardenvisit.com/b/robinson.htm](http://www.gardenvisit.com/b/robinson.htm)

*"...The most essential lesson is that...the garden is the ideal meeting place for a balance of art and science, of handcraft and machine technology."*

— Richard Darke, In Harmony with Nature: Lessons from the Arts & Crafts Garden

**Katherine (Kate) Olivia Sessions (1857-1940)**, horticulturist, florist and landscape designer, nursery owner. "Mother" of Balboa Park, San Diego. Published articles in San Diego newspapers and in California Garden. Designed the B. F. Chase garden.

[www.hillquest.com/community/katesessions.htm](http://www.hillquest.com/community/katesessions.htm)

[www.sandiegohistory.org/bio/sessions/sessions.htm](http://www.sandiegohistory.org/bio/sessions/sessions.htm) ➤

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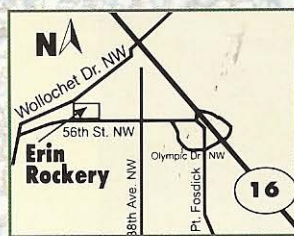
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Charles Sprague Sargent (1841-1927), a botanist, dean of American horticulture at Bussey Institute of Harvard, the founder and first director of the Arnold Arboretum. Sargent often consulted on garden designs and planting plans for Frederick Law Olmsted. Author of *Silva of North America*, *Trees of North America*, and *Forest Flora of Japan*. He also served as editor for the journal *Garden and Forest*.  
[www.huh.harvard.edu/libraries/arnold.htm](http://www.huh.harvard.edu/libraries/arnold.htm)  
[www.answers.com/topic/charles-sprague-sargent](http://www.answers.com/topic/charles-sprague-sargent)

Gustav Stickley (1858-1942), author of *Craftsman Homes- Architecture and Furnishings of the American Arts and Crafts Movement* (1909), *Craftsman Bungalows: 59 Homes from The Craftsman* (reprints from *The Craftsman*, 1906-1913), publisher, *More Craftsman Homes* (1912). Publisher of *The Craftsman* between 1901 and 1916; furniture manufacturer — introduced woven willow furniture.  
[http://anc.gray-cells.com/p\\_gs.html](http://anc.gray-cells.com/p_gs.html)  
[www.bartleby.com/65/st/StickleyG.html](http://www.bartleby.com/65/st/StickleyG.html)  
[www.answers.com/stickley](http://www.answers.com/stickley)



*"...I hold good gardening takes rank within the bounds of the fine arts, so I hold that to plant well needs an artist of no mean capacity."*

— Gertrude Jekyll, *Gardenmakers*, inspiration from nature

Emily Noyes Vanderpoel (1842-1939), *Color Problems: A Practical Manual for the Lay Student of Color*, 1903, explores all the hues of a season and is another source of period plant combination information.

Edith Wharton (1862-1937), wrote *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904), *The Decoration of Houses* (1897, co-authored with Ogden Codman, Jr.) Beatrix Farrand's aunt.  
[www.edithwharton.org](http://www.edithwharton.org) ♦

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