

RIVERSIDE PARK.

IN the current discussion of questions relating to public pleasure grounds "the city's breathing places" has come to be the phrase used oftenest to designate urban parks as a class. From this it would seem that the primary purpose of a city park, according to the popular conception, is to furnish a free bath of fresh air for lungs doomed to inhale some fluid which is not always fresh nor over cleanly. Analysis proves that the air in densely peopled quarters of a great city is heavy with noxious exhalations and impoverished in the elements which promote the processes of life; while that which is sifted through masses of foliage and quickened by sunlight is at once disinfected by the subtle chemistry of nature and enriched with elements of tonic vigor. Among the people crowded together in every compactly built city, no doubt there are too many to whom a breath of pure and fragrant air, wafted across broad stretches of cool herbage or flowing water, and screened through the leaves of lusty trees, would prove a novel and surprising refreshment; and therefore in this one particular it would be difficult to overstate the sanitary importance of accessible and spacious city or suburban parks.

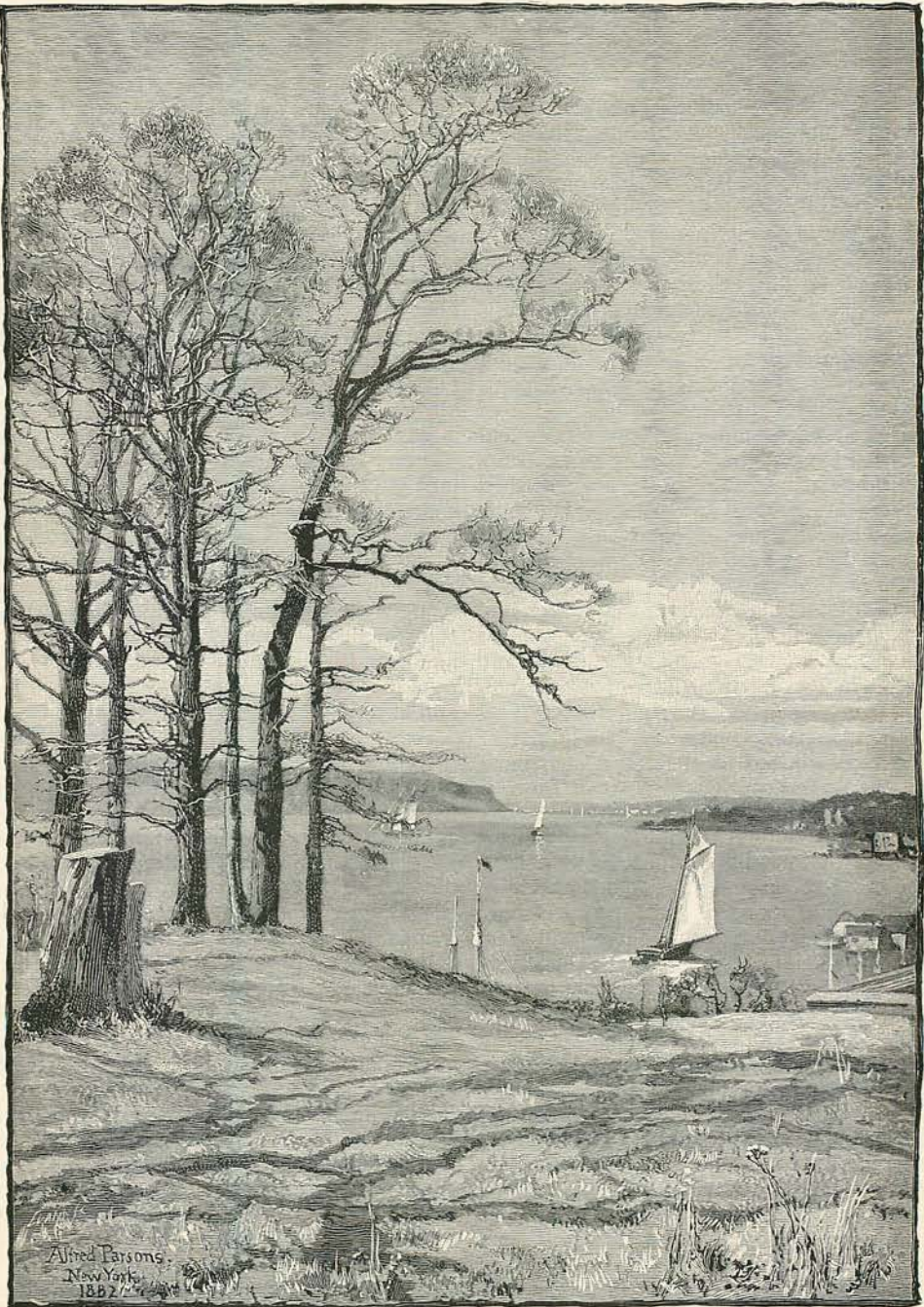
But after all, the ideal park is something more than a fresh-air preserve or a fresh-air factory. Its influence must reach the nobler part of man's nature. It must make a direct appeal to the imagination through the senses, and all its elements and accompaniments must helpfully unite to make that appeal distinct and impressive. Fortunately there is no select class whose minds alone respond sensitively to the sights and sounds and odors of the outdoor world, for what we vaguely term the love of nature is a deep-seated and universal instinct which is never stifled outright even under the most depressing conditions. One who has given a handful of flowers to a street child, and watched the sudden sunshine overspread the little face and chase away the prematurely hard and wary expression, will feel that it is a genuine heart-hunger which has been for the moment allayed. It is the same hunger which the driving man of business feels and promises himself that he will satisfy with a country home, where in the evening of life he can enjoy the brief leisure he has toiled so many years to earn. In fact the mind of man was never haunted by a day-dream of possible earthly felicity unclouded and secure without its vision of fair fields and shining skies. And this instinct is no less persistent than it is spontaneous and universal. It is constantly benumbed by the stupefying discipline of schools,

but it survives even the paralysis of a liberal education. It is one original impulse which is not quite choked to death by the cultured formalisms and insincerities of an artificial world. It is a profounder feeling than the mere relish for natural beauty. It means more than a sensuous delight in color or form or melody or fragrance; and this not only because in nature always, as in the noblest art, sensuous beauty is substantiated, transfigured, and vitalized by some indwelling truth, but because it includes an element of affection, a strange feeling of kinship with material things as if they were informed with conscious life. In the poetry of every language, and wherever else the elemental passions of the soul find spontaneous expression, this affection never lacks recognition. Any instinct which sends its roots so deeply into the constitution of the mind cannot safely be denied all gratification. In so far, then, as the conditions of a city life forbid its enjoyment, they deprive the mind of its natural food; and a city park serves no unworthy purpose if it does no more than offer to intellect and affections the nourishment they crave.

A discriminating interest in various kinds of natural scenery is the specific development of this general inclination to commune with nature which first demands recognition. Whether it is owing to association of ideas, or to some deeper reason in the constitution of things, like the law in accordance with which every phase of the mystery and passion of human life is visibly symbolized somewhere and at some time in the appearances and processes of nature, certain it is that particular kinds of scenery excite definite trains of thought and feeling, as, for example, in the direction of wistfulness, aspiration, or hope, just as the minor music of the autumn wind produces the sentiment of melancholy. Green pastures and still waters are to-day and to every one the essential elements of the typical picture of peace, just as they were in the sacred poetry of Palestine. A reach of gently rolling meadow,

"Whereon the nibbling flocks do stray,"

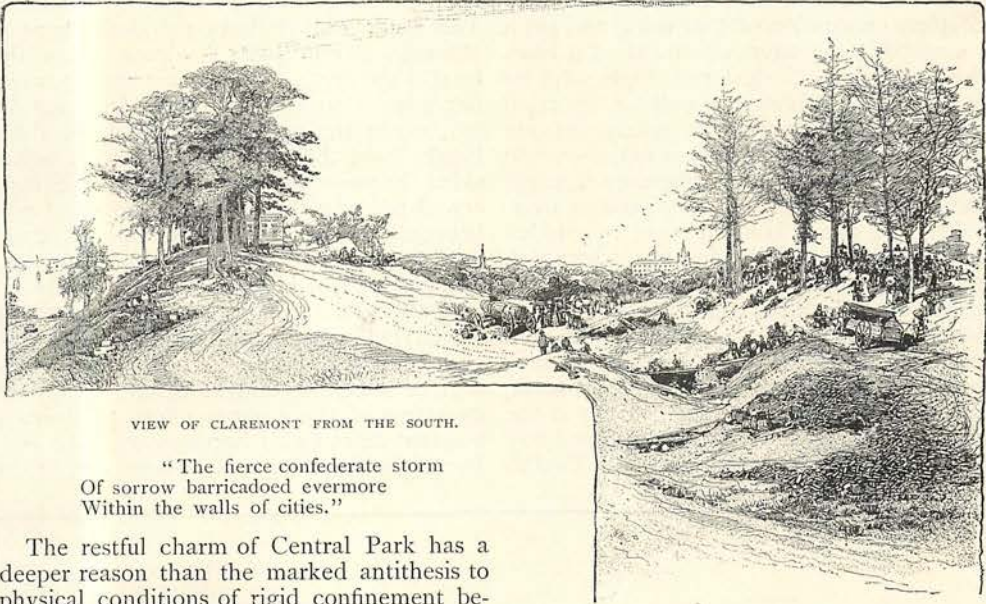
sloping to the cool border of a brook which lingers here and there to catch the sunlight as it falls through openings in the overhanging foliage, its mantle of closely cropped verdure fitting it so smoothly as to reveal every undulation, and offering a surface texture upon which the very shadows of the trees delight to rest, is always a revelation of innocent contentment. It always brings a sense of restfulness and peace. It is a picture which not only excludes



LOOKING UP THE HUDSON FROM CLAREMONT.

every suggestion of the want and wretchedness, the cruelty, oppression, and strife which society acknowledges as its shame, but its motive is in refreshing contrast to the devouring ambition, the strenuous energy, the eagerness, the adventure, the spirit of progress which the same civilization boasts of as its distinguish-

ing glory. To the imagination it suggests the simplicity, the dignity, the innocence, the conservatism, the freedom, the quietness, the contemplative leisure of the ideal pastoral life; and while it possesses the mind it is a signal relief from the wear and weariness, the strain and pressure, the turbulence and discontent,



VIEW OF CLAREMONT FROM THE SOUTH.

"The fierce confederate storm
Of sorrow barricaded evermore
Within the walls of cities."

The restful charm of Central Park has a deeper reason than the marked antithesis to physical conditions of rigid confinement between walls of stone and upon streets of stone, which is offered by its broad rural views, its openness and airiness and spacious skies. In spite of the salient scenery about it, its narrow limits and originally rugged surface, it embodies with rare success the tranquilizing pastoral idea. Its scant meadow-land is not fenced off by well-defined boundaries to advertise its meagerness, but is allowed to flow around wooded knolls and lose itself in grassy alcoves which wind among the trees and lead the fancy onward with fair promise of broader fields beyond. Even the bolder features of the park and its passages of sylvan picturesqueness are all subordinate to its central purpose, which they emphasize by shading and contrast. The rising tide of population will soon sweep quite around it, but there will remain one spot in the heart of the city which may not be bounded by a sky-line of roofs and chimneys, for the city is forever walled out of sight by woodside banks of foliage. The time is coming when Central Park will be as unfashionable as the Battery is to-day; but so long as men delight in seclusion and sigh for repose, its tranquil graces will not cease to allure, for its fair prospects, tuneful woods, and scented air, which soothe every sense, bring with them an inward rest and peace which are no less real because their presence is not consciously recognized by those who enjoy them. Indeed, the rest will be more refreshing and the peace more profound because they flow in upon the spirit so quietly and never challenge observation.

But all the possibilities in the way of recreation grounds on Manhattan Island were

not exhausted by a single success in one direction. Besides the placid prospects whose interest lies wholly in the foreground or in the range immediately beyond, there are grand and inspiring landscapes which embrace the blue distance in their sweep. New York, too, from her peerless position as the maritime capital of a continent, looks out upon bright waters on every hand, and from all her breezy shores the sparkling surface of river, bay, or sound can be seen stretching away in endless diversity of cheerful prospect. And questions of scenery apart, there are certain wants which Central Park was never designed to meet and to which it never can be adapted. It is a difficult matter to reconcile the ideas of seclusion and festivity. Pastoral simplicity vanishes as the equipage and bravery of fashion become obtrusive. Even now, with the city half grown, there are times when the roadways of the park are thronged with carriages to the limit of their capacity. The ratio between the grass and gravel of the park is such that any sacrifice of its verdurous elements to the extent which a widening of its wheelways would necessitate is not to be thought of, even if such a change would not be a flagrant violation of the spirit of the work. The roads were laid to command the same quieting scenery which is enjoyed from the walks, and they will suffice for all who drive to find these reposeful landscapes. The carriages driven in gay procession for social pleasure must soon go somewhere else.

To think of Riverside Park simply as a relief from the thronged wheelways of Central

Park is to form a most inadequate and incomplete conception of that work, and yet it is essentially the aggrandizement of a road. The road itself—a cluster of ample ways for pleasure riding, driving, and walking, separated by strips of turf from which stately trees are to rise, and extending for three miles—would have a dignity of its own wherever it might lead through the city. But its position overlooking the broad Hudson gives it an added importance and an individual character which are not repeated nor paralleled in any of the famous avenues of the world. From Seventy-second street to the hollow known in the old maps as “Marritje David’s Vly,” at what is now One Hundred and Twenty-seventh street, the river banks are bold, rising steeply at one point to the height of one hundred and fifty feet. Down at the river level lies Twelfth

ing and completing the dignified structure. The outer walk follows this bold terrace, although at one point it drops below the level of the drive, allowing carriages to wheel out upon a spacious balcony. Occasionally too, where the grade demands it, the drive breaks from the walk and side road which skirts the property line on the eastern boundary of the park, leaving wide slopes of turf between the ways. Notwithstanding these devices to give variety to the plan of the road proper, one can hardly comprehend how so long a terrace can escape being unpleasantly formal; but in this instance the constant change of level and direction excludes any impression of sameness, and at times the upward sweeping of the parapet curve produces a pleasant effect by its harmony with the skyline of tree-tops beyond. Even now, before

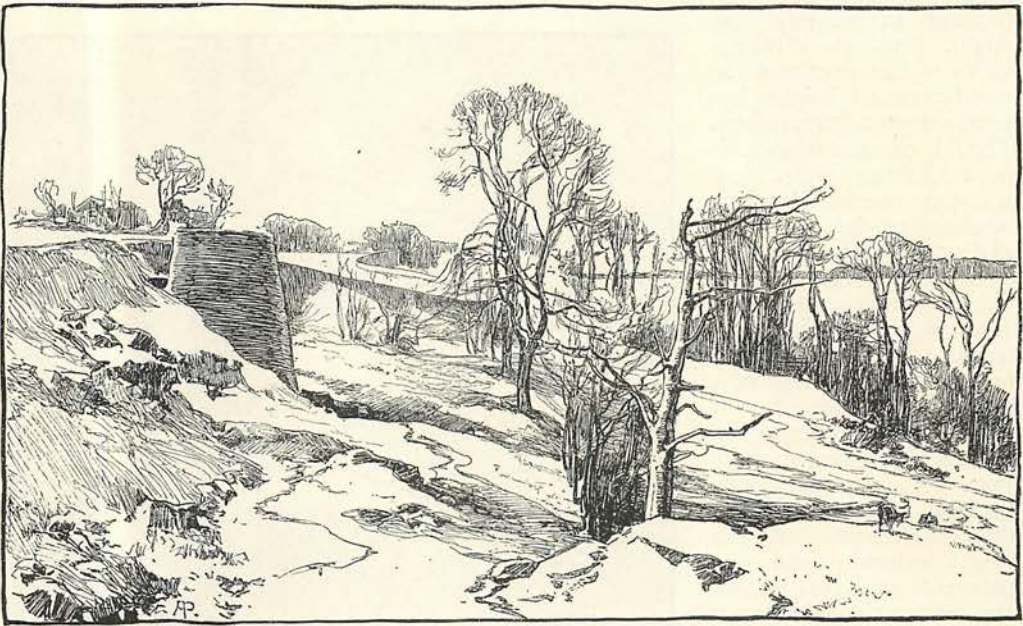


RIVERSIDE DRIVE AT NINETY-SIXTH STREET, LOOKING NORTH.

Avenue, while upon the high ground, eight hundred feet inland and parallel with the pier-line, Eleventh Avenue cuts its way square across the long series of side streets in accordance with the orthodox rectangular block system. Between these two avenues, now approaching one and now the other, winds Riverside Drive, following mainly the brow of the bluff, but rising and falling at easy grades, curving about the bolder projections, and everywhere adapting its course so graciously to the contour of the land, that it does not look to have been laboriously “laid out,” but to have developed rather as a part of the natural order of things. The broad shelf against the sloping bank formed by the associated ways is supported on the lower side by a massive retaining wall, at some points nearly forty feet in height, and this rises above the drive in a low, heavy parapet which extends throughout its entire length, fitly crown-

ing its trees are grown or its retaining wall mantled with vines, the road itself, as its gray stretches disappear behind some hill and beckon the visitor onward, delights the eye and kindles the imagination.

West of the wall is a strip of land varying in width as the avenue approaches or recedes from the river. It is generally lower than the drive, and falls away to the water with a rapid inclination. In one of its wider portions, however, near Eighty-second street, the granite basement of the island rises in a pair of abrupt hillocks above the road level, bursting through its thin covering of turf here and there, and nursing in its crevices two or three stunted and picturesque honey-locusts. Glimpses of the river and the Jersey shore beyond, caught between these hills, furnish pictures worth remembering even among the many glorious prospects from the drive. This strip of land is too narrow to afford any park-



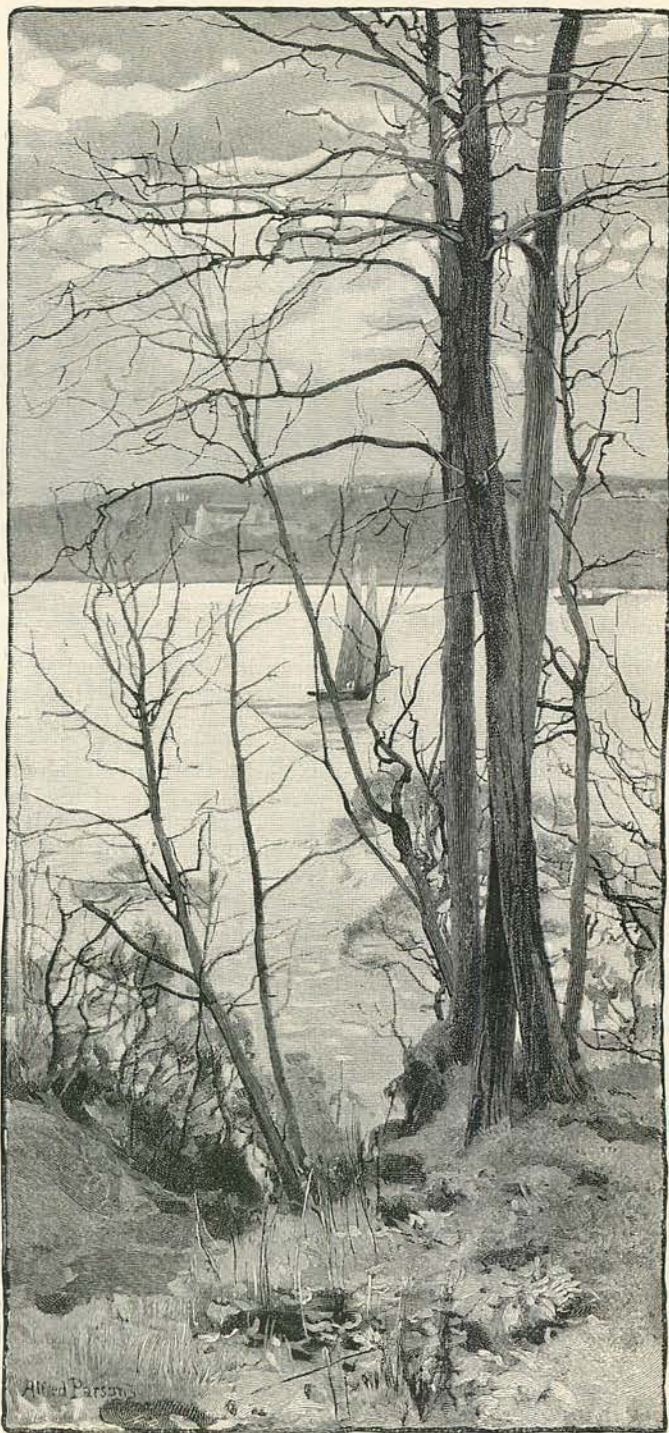
RIVERSIDE DRIVE NEAR CLAREMONT, LOOKING SOUTH.

like range; and while nothing has been done to adapt it to the purposes of a pleasure-ground, it has unfortunately been hideously scarified to furnish "filling" for the railroad and other improvements. Descending from the drive by stone steps to some points where it is accessible, as at One Hundred and Sixth street, we find an open wood of fine trees with grassy intervals extending for a long distance as a sort of intermediate terrace, which drops suddenly to the river level in a steep bank covered with a wild tangle of trees, shrubs, and vines. Some of the trees have a size and dignity of expression which invest them with an individual interest. The white pines at the northern end of the park, the chestnut oaks in some of the upper groves, the tulip-trees and sycamores at Ninety-sixth street, all wear that venerable look which trees rarely attain in the first century of their history. It is a matter of record, however, that General Robertson stripped the island of all its trees in the cold winter of 1779-80, to furnish fuel for his freezing redcoats. This was the winter when New York was reported by the British officer to be no longer on an island, so solid was the ice which bound it to the land beyond both rivers. Across the bay even, from the Battery to Staten Island, heavy pieces of artillery were driven. The trees were not cut, however, until old houses and the hulks of unseaworthy vessels had been broken up for firewood. No doubt the British axes found trees in plenty remaining, although one hun-

dred and fifty years of felling had gone on since Hendrik Hudson, looking on the island from the deck of his galiot, pronounced it "a pleasant land as one need to tread upon, and abundant in all kinds of timber." It was one of his landing parties who reported here "an abundance of magnificent oaks of a height and thickness one seldom beholds, together with poplars and linden-trees and various other kinds of wood." A remarkable variety of arborescent growth is yet seen wherever the land is left to cover its nakedness. There is hardly a half-mile on the bank at Riverside where one cannot look over from the walk and count forty tree-species. The record of General Robertson's exploit may be put in evidence against any claim for reverence as primeval settlers which our oaks and pines may set up; but they are trees of stately stature, none the less.

The real value of this belt of land below the drive is not, however, to be estimated by any attractions of its own, but is derived from the fact that it secures the water-view and furnishes it with a foreground. It is the impressive presence of the strong and silent river which invests this parkway with its unique interest. No treatment of its shores, however insolent or feeble, can make the Hudson tame or trivial or commonplace. So long as the broad current bears its burden of stately ships so lightly between mountain barriers worthy to contain it and direct its flow, the river and its banks will never fail to

fill the mind and eye with pictures of majesty and might. From the drive the views of the river and the wood-crowned heights beyond are most characteristic. The full expanse of water is not at all times visible. Now it is quite obscured by some headland or cluster of trees, and again barely enough of it is revealed through leafy vistas to provoke the fancy. Here again its full light gleams over the flattened top of some pepperidge, or is softened and sobered as it filters through the spray of birches and willows; while from occasional high levels the eye has free range to the north or south along the bright waterway, and over prospects of great extent and the most varied interest. The crowning view of the whole series is that from Claremont looking up the river. This is at the northern end of the park, where the grounds are widest and where they reach their greatest elevation. As the high ground here abruptly falls away, the road naturally ends, sweeping around in a loop on the brow of the bluff where the interest in the scenery culminates in this commanding prospect. Here, half hidden in a grove, stood the historic mansion once occupied by Lord Churchill, but the oaks and tulip-trees which surrounded it are dead or dying one by one, as destructive "improvements" have gashed the hill-side with deep cuts and drained away the water which fed their roots. But a few months ago a giant pine which had survived the cruelties of the city engineer and at least one lightning stroke was chopped down when the old house which it sheltered was "restored" for victualing purposes beyond all hope of recognition. Other trees were swept away



ACROSS THE HUDSON FROM CLAREMONT, FORT LEE IN THE DISTANCE.

at the same period, when there was much digging out and heaping up of earth hereabout in accordance with some unrevealed plan. But in spite of the desolation of the foreground, the distant prospect remains. Below the bluff the Hudson still broadens out to hold the light of all the sky. The Palisades frown along the left, and seem to end in a bold promontory, around which the river flows from the mysterious distances beyond, while on the island side a rocky arm is thrust out from Washington Heights, to protect the deep and quiet bay.

Of course it is to be understood that the Riverside Park of to-day is little better than a promise, or rather, it is but the foundation and frame of what it is to be. The road-bed is laid, and this establishes the plan beyond any possible abandonment. Of the hundred miles of frontage upon navigable water, possessed by the cities which cluster about this harbor, three miles are thus rescued from commerce and dedicated to recreation. At only two points, and these near its southern extremity, do cross streets extend through the park to the river, so that traffic is forbidden here, and the character of the territory which fronts the drive as a residence quarter is fixed. This land as yet is largely vacant, but its advantages will be plainly squandered if it is not occupied by a line of villas whose deep lawns, while giving them more perfect domestic seclusion, will add to the amplitude and dignity of the parkway. A short space in the life of a city can work this transformation, for a city grows, alas! more swiftly than a tree, and the villas could be built and rebuilt before the lindens, elms, and maples will cover the drive with cooling shadows.

Not until the expanding city has brought a large population within easy reach of the work can it completely fulfil its purpose as a grand promenade, where people in great numbers come together for that stimulating recreation which forms so important a feature in the social life of Old World cities. It is a heart-hardening and mind-depressing process to come into daily contact with throngs of people with whom we have no sympathy. This is an irritating influence to which the city business man is constantly subjected, and it is one cause of wear and exhaustion from which he needs relief. If the same persons, with the hardening struggles of the business day behind them, can meet for the common purpose of recreation, the pervading holiday sympathy contrasts as refreshingly with the jostle and scramble of the exchange and market-place as does the quieting charm which lingers about the secluded borders of a tree-flecked meadow. No one who has ob-

served a multitude of happy people on the Champs Élysées in pleasant weather, or similar gatherings which on occasions assemble in our own parks, can doubt that this inclination to associated recreation is a natural and healthful one, which deserves to be provided for. At such times the joyous light which beams from every face helps to illumine all the rest. There is a manifest contagion of light-heartedness. The source of this peculiar pleasure is plainly in the social instinct. It is abounding human life in its most cheerful aspect which gives so keen a relish to the general enjoyment.

It is plain that the charm of scenery, and especially of quieting scenery, is not essential to a stimulating recreation, whose controlling element is congregated human life. The freedom and exhilaration of fresh open air; rows of full-foliaged trees, greensward and birds; wheelways ample, smooth, clean, a springy bridle-track adjoining the road, so that occupants of carriages can readily turn to converse with friends on horseback; shaded footpaths and cozy resting-places,—these are the essential physical features of a grand promenade. To them can be added the most elaborate decoration, for it will not be out of harmony with the formal colonnades of trees, and the artificial character of the whole structure. Monuments, statues, fountains, tropical plants, and floral embroidery so barbarously misplaced amid quiet rural surroundings, will here help to heighten the brilliant effect, where

"With stately progress to and fro
The double tides of chariots flow,"

and numbers of spirited horses and well-dressed people meet and mingle in a spirit of animated gaiety. As a field for such festal assemblages the Riverside Terrace offers a unique opportunity; for besides all the best features of an extended and spacious Spanish Alameda the river flows by to cool and freshen every breeze, even if we count for naught its glorious scenery among the exhilarating sights and sounds of the promenade. But festivity will be at flood-tide for only a fraction of each day, while the river never fails. And even when the scene upon the terrace is in full glitter, there may be one who will turn for refreshment to the sun-glints on the water or to a bit of hazy distance as his friend grows tiresome. A noble horizon may not be essential to social enjoyment, but a more delightful incident to such enjoyment can hardly be imagined, and at times it might prove a wholesome corrective of the inanities of fashionable walk and conversation. Fortunately an elaborately decorative treatment of the terrace will not dissipate attention from the spacious prospect beyond, for the

parapet furnishes such a marked and decisive line of foreground limitation that well-chosen, decorative objects held within it will rather emphasize by contrast the grand effect of the distant scenery. We may lament that the planting of the trees was so long delayed and that such inadequate preparation was made in the original construction for giving them deep root-hold and rich feeding-ground, especially since so much depends upon their vigor and amplitude of shade; but if the place which the work is designed to fill in the social economy of the city comes to be appreciated civic pride will hardly tolerate any further mistakes. No single park centrally situated in a great city can be large enough to furnish space at once for stimulating social recreation and the quieting charm of secluded scenery. Indeed any attempt to mingle the two forms of recreation will be to the disadvantage of both. If New York had prepared twenty-five years ago for a grand promenade from Madison Square to Central Park the trees would now have attained some maturity of stature and expression, and this parkway would already be famous as one of the striking features of the city and the object of its noblest pride. Twenty-five years hence as dense a population will have sprung up on the heights which overlook the river as that now found along the line of Fifth Avenue. One opportunity lost should be a warning. Riverside, as the true complement of Central Park, should be made ready to welcome the expanding city as it sweeps by to the north.

SINCE the foregoing description of Riverside and its possibilities was written an element of the most serious significance has been introduced by the selection of Claremont Heights for the Grant mausoleum. A structure fitly commemorative of the high achievement and patriotic devotion of the nation's foremost soldier might well consist with the spirit and purpose of the park; but the actual sepulture of the hero at this key-point necessitates some

compromise with the prevalent idea of festal assemblage. A certain isolation must be granted to the tomb in deference to the sentiment of reverence, and yet in view of the limitations of the ground at this point of focal and culminating interest it is not desirable that the surrounding space should be considerably encroached upon. The adjustment of conflicting claims of this sort is one phase of the complex problem presented, and obviously a satisfactory result can only be reached after the closest study and the most judicious treatment. On the other hand it should be remembered that Riverside would possess no monument to Grant if his dust were not laid to rest beneath it, and that this presence will add an impressiveness to the monument which belongs to none of the memorial works reared elsewhere. The spot will henceforth be invested with a national and historic interest which will lend new consequence and dignity to the park. [This increased importance will encourage such maintenance as the work merits and help to preserve it from being turned over to traffic or perverted to alien use.] Riverside, until yesterday unheard of, is already a familiar word the world over. It was the solemnities at Claremont that first introduced thousands of people who live within the city limits to a public ground of whose existence they had been hardly aware. But a few months ago one might traverse the drive from end to end without encountering more people than would be met in the same distance on a lonely country road. The memorial grounds have even now proved helpful to the park, and the interest kindled will not fail. The Heights of Claremont offer many artistic advantages as the site of an imposing structure, and these advantages will remain. The idea of mortality suggested by the tomb is not congenial with the motive of the recreation ground, but this idea will gradually fade out as years roll on, and the man of heroic stature assumes his rightful place in history among the world's leaders who live for evermore.

William A. Stiles.

