



OPEN LETTERS

How Boston has Systematized its Parks.

A LESSON FOR ALL AMERICAN CITIES.

IN answer to the editorial request to describe the Boston park system, I would say that it deserves careful consideration, on the part of all friends of municipal progress, as an exceptionally felicitous example of wise and artistic planning with reference to all the various recreative and sanitary needs that open spaces of a public character can be made to serve. It is notable that Boston was the last of the older great cities of the United States to become alive to the necessity of public parks, in the modern sense of the term, in the equipment of a progressive municipality. The reason for this lay in the park-like beauty of its suburbs, with woods and fields easily accessible to the population, and in the existence of the large, old-fashioned Common, and the more recent Public Garden, in the very heart of the town. But with the expansion of the city, and the consequent gradual disappearance of rural charms, the necessity for the preservation of areas of open space within convenient reach became apparent. It was twenty-two years ago that a special park act was accepted by the citizens, and it is about eighteen years since the work of construction was begun. Up to the present time something over twelve million dollars have been expended upon land and construction.

The regret has frequently been expressed in many quarters that the work could not have been undertaken years before, in view of the many lost charms of the surrounding landscape that might thus have been preserved. But, on the other hand, it is felt that it is better, after all, that the delay should have occurred, on account of the more artistic methods that have been developed, the growth in public appreciation of such methods, and the consequent disposition and ability to do things in a larger, more intelligent, and consistent way.

If a large city were to be planned for location upon a beautiful and virgin site, with our present knowledge it would be a comparatively easy task to adapt it to the conditions of the place with regard to all the requirements of use and beauty, and there would be an unspeakable advantage in the utilization of the natural landscape opportunities of the region. A city of ideal beauty might thus be created, and the work would be possible of accomplishment with remarkable economy of resource. While such an opportunity would be a piece of rare good fortune, it is worth remembering that in the assured expansion of many small towns of to-day into large and important centers there exist, in large measure, opportunities not dissimilar in character, and that the problem of the growth of our great cities also includes similar conditions. Intelligent growth, instead of the haphazard expansion of former periods, should be the aim in the municipal activities of the present age. Modern science has placed in our hands the means essential to such growth, together with a knowledge of what the circumstances demand. Of cardinal impor-

tance are the adaptation of every scheme for municipal development to topographical requirements, and a wisely considered use of the natural features of a site in determining the permanent character of landscape surroundings.

This principle has to an unprecedented degree governed the designing of the Boston park system. While that system has by no means been planned as a whole, these ideas have been followed as its development has gradually progressed from comparatively small beginnings. It would be instructive to trace the various steps in this development; but present limitations forbid, and it can now only be said that the system comprises a series of public open spaces, each related to and complementing the others, each possessing a marked individuality in landscape character and in the part which it plays in the general scheme of public recreation in the open air.

Boston is fortunately situated in regard to these ends: a maritime city lying upon an island-studded bay, with estuaries penetrating a strikingly diversified landscape; a region not modeled upon a grand scale, such as distinguishes the country about New York, but with a broad and liberal graciousness in the charmingly picturesque commingling of hills and valleys, woodlands and marsh levels, with many ponds and various clear streams, and margined by the sea in an irregular coast-line of bluffs and rocky headlands alternating with shining beaches—the whole country toned and softened by nearly three centuries of human occupancy. Much of this has been ruthlessly mutilated, and conspicuous areas are hopeless wrecks of former beauty. But much yet remains unspoiled, and the city, with such landscapes lying upon nearly every side, has been enabled to take good advantage of its natural endowment.

Boston had the good fortune to obtain the services of Mr. Frederick Law Olmsted at the outset, and the entire park system has been designed by that great artist and the firm of landscape architects at whose head he stands, and has been carried out under their immediate supervision. The Park Department is governed by a commission of three members, prominent citizens appointed by the mayor, who consider it an honor to serve the community without pay. They have had the good sense to follow the advice of the experts in charge of their work in practically all matters of design, construction, and administration. The department has been singularly free from political interference. The attitude of the commission in this respect has not infrequently aroused most vindictive resentment on the part of the mercenary element in city politics, but the civil-service law has been a strong bulwark against such aggressions. These conditions have given the Boston parks a noble artistic unity, which underlies and assures the widest popular utility in providing the various forms of recreation which public open spaces of different kinds can be made to serve.

The central feature of the Boston system is the great park of the city, Franklin Park, which corresponds in its general character to Central Park in New York and Prospect Park in Brooklyn, but more nearly resembles the latter in the simple breadth and unity of its scenery. Vistas of a noble range of hills bring several miles of country-side within the park so far as landscape effect is considered. A line of parkway, unique in character, connects Franklin Park and a chain of other pleasure-grounds with the heart of the city by an irregular route of something like seven miles, with drives, rides, walks, and a long reach of waterways. First in order comes the Arnold Arboretum,—the beautiful great «tree museum» so well described by Mrs. Robbins in *THE CENTURY* for April, 1893,—a tract of hill and dale where every variety of tree and shrub which can be made to grow in the Boston climate flourishes under the most favorable conditions in a way that combines delightfully the highest demands of botanical science with popular instruction and recreation. This has been done under the cooperation of Harvard University with the city of Boston.

A half-mile farther on is Jamaica Park—a fresh-water pleasure-ground, with most of its area occupied by the beautiful Jamaica Pond. The land acreage is just sufficient to assure an attractive margin of pleasant shores. At this park aquatic recreation is the main feature, with excellent opportunities for skating in winter.

Leverett Park is a continuation of Jamaica Park, with a striking diversity of scenery in groves and tree-clumps, grassy slopes, small ponds, brooks, and cascades, and provision for the establishment of a zoölogical collection of fresh-water aquatic life in and about a series of shallow pools.

Leverett Park continues the parkway along the valley of a charming stream, one of whose sources is Jamaica Pond, and which forms the boundary between Boston and the town of Brookline,—this and the succeeding division of the improvement having been carried out jointly by the city and the town. The next division is a long and comparatively narrow section called the Riverway, which in landscape character recalls some of the loveliest aspects of rural England. Then, just as the neighborhood of a streamlet on the New England coast changes as it approaches the sea, so as this clear little river joins the creek that now safely carries the waters of a once very troublesome stream—Stony Brook—to the estuary of the Charles, the scene gradually assumes a littoral aspect, and brackish waters meander through marshy levels with bosky banks. This remarkable reproduction of the tranquil landscape of salt-marshes is a novel feature in park design, and is notable as an absolute creation of scenery upon a foundation of nothing but repulsive mud-flats and a shallow bay, just as the Riverway is an instance of the restoration of a formerly beautiful landscape. «The Fens,» as the marsh scenery section is called, form the artistic guise of a necessary and very important engineering and sanitary improvement. A short and narrow section, the Charlesgate, brings the parkway to its terminus at the Charles River. A chain of picturesque and ever-varying scenery is thus presented all the way from Franklin Park. Under formal urban conditions the system is

carried through the handsome residential Back Bay section to the threshold of the business districts at the Public Garden by way of Commonwealth Avenue, now in charge of the Park Department.

Another very important element in the system is Marine Park at City Point and Castle Island. This is the seat of the greatest yachting headquarters in the United States, and the maritime movement forms a brilliant and animated spectacle through the summer. The use of Castle Island for park purposes has been given by the National Government. The island has been connected with the main, and between it and a long iron pier at the Point a «Pleasure Bay» with a horseshoe curve gives opportunity for safe boating. Facilities for beach-bathing on a large scale are provided, sites for club-houses are allotted to the various yacht-clubs, and a great aquarium is contemplated. For two miles along the shore of the peninsula of South Boston the Strandway, now under construction, makes a beautiful bayside drive, and, continued as Dorchesterway to the end of Massachusetts Avenue, the chief cross-town thoroughfare, gives Marine Park a pleasant and convenient connection with the rest of the system. Another parkway line, just determined upon, will connect Franklin Park directly with the Strandway, and make a continuous line of park roads, about thirteen miles long, from the Public Garden to Castle Island.

There are several minor public grounds in various sections of the city, recently established by the Park Department, not connected with the main system, but models of their kind as local and neighborhood open spaces, in contrast to the sixty-five open spaces of various kinds which, for the most part, are shabbily and yet expensively maintained by the Public Grounds Department, apart from the regular park administration.

The municipal park system of the city forms but a minor portion of the area of public open spaces included in the Metropolitan Parks District of Boston, which in 1892 was created for this purpose, comprising a cluster of thirty-six municipalities. The metropolitan system already includes more than sixty-five hundred acres, with other large areas publicly held in various ways under the administration of that department by a board of five commissioners appointed by the governor. There are two noble public forest reservations,—the Blue Hills, with over four thousand acres, and the Middlesex Fells, with about thirty-two hundred acres,—besides the Stony Brook Woods, of about four hundred acres: the latter an expansion in a picturesque grand parkway which is to connect the Blue Hills with the Boston system at the Arnold Arboretum. Within the district is also the important public forest of the city of Lynn—the Lynn Woods, comprising two thousand acres. All these are wilderness tracts of remarkable sylvan charm, requiring only the simplest forms of judicious improvement to let Nature do her best and to adapt them to public use. This improvement need be little more than the planting, thinning, and care of trees, with expert disposition of appropriate varieties according to landscape conditions, together with a well-devised system of good roads to make the scenery in all parts conveniently accessible for the public.

A small tract of great importance is the Beaver Brook Reservation, to the westward of Cambridge in Waltham

and Belmont, embracing a famous group of grand and primeval oaks, and the cascade celebrated by Lowell in his exquisite poem. Of inestimable value in the metropolitan park scheme are the dedication to public use of several miles of ocean front at Revere Beach, and of the shores of the Charles River for a large portion of its course through the metropolitan district. Also included are the similar improvement of the shores of the two other rivers, the Mystic and the Neponset, so far as practicable, and the connection of the various reservations with the city and with each other by lines of boulevards and parkways, the latter to comprise in their chain the most important large ponds of the district, several of which are very beautiful.

Several of the metropolitan municipalities outside of Boston have recently engaged in the work of park improvement, most important being Cambridge, which has taken for the purpose nearly all the shores of the Charles River within its limits. Notable park works of picturesque character have also been undertaken by Newton, Waltham, Malden, and Winchester. Including the local grounds, there are already within the metropolitan district available for recreative purposes a grand total of between thirteen and fourteen thousand acres of public open space.

The metropolitan system as projected is a work which demands years for its consummation; but it is felt that the lines cannot too soon be laid down and adopted. Altogether the Boston scheme of park development, including with the metropolitan the several separate municipal undertakings, is undoubtedly the broadest and most comprehensive yet planned for any city; and by its thoughtful adaptation of the most essential elements of the regional landscape to the needs of a great urban population, it has justly aroused the enthusiasm of the foremost authorities on the subject.

Sylvester Baxter.

A New Parliament of Religions.

AN OPEN LETTER FROM A EUROPEAN ADVOCATE OF A
NEW PARLIAMENT IN 1900.

WHEN, in 1893, the news came that a Parliament of Religions was in session at Chicago in one of the palaces of the Columbian Exposition, it gave old Europe a great and almost anxious feeling of surprise. We were told that before an assemblage of thousands, surrounded by one hundred and seventy representatives of the most diverse religions, Cardinal Gibbons had risen, his fine and gentle face set off and illumined by the scarlet of his cardinal's robe, his eyes beaming with celestial joy, and had recited the Paternoster, in the silence, as it were, of a sanctuary. The whole assembly had accepted that prayer as «the universal prayer.»

The Parliament of Religions, however, did not limit itself merely to this solemn and ideal manifestation. Following a very practical and precise program, the representatives of religious humanity, in their various sessions occupying seventeen days, studied the gravest problems of the present time. They spoke only of agreement, conciliation, souls, union, and fraternity. It was the first council where there were neither disputes nor anathemas.

Now, although Mr. Charles Bonney, a religious-minded thinker, was the first to propose the idea of a Parliament

of Religions, and the Rev. Dr. Barrows, a Protestant minister, was its practical and effective organizer, yet it is but just to recognize that the coöperation of the Catholic Church in the United States made it a possibility, and assured its success.

As for the advantages which may have resulted from the Parliament of Religions, Mgr. Keane, who was obliged to attend the International Scientific Congress of Catholics at Brussels (September, 1894), in order to defend the great work of the American bishops against the attacks of the Jesuits and the non-compromising spirits (*intransigents*) of the Church, set them forth thus in an eloquent discourse: «Mankind begins to detest hatred and hostility ever more and more. Humanity is making an undeniable effort toward milder forms and a more prolific blossoming of charity. And is it not the aim of religion to unite man with God and with his brethren? Religion is charity. Even though we may not be able to agree on questions of faith, may it not be possible to come to terms on charity? It would be much to give even *this* lesson to Christians: that in order to love God it is not necessary to hate one's brother who does not love him in just the way we do; that so as to be faithful to our belief, it is not necessary to be at war with a hundred who understand faith differently. But there was another very desirable utility—that of uniting the protest of every form of religious belief against materialism and agnosticism, against all forms of irreligion and unbelief, and thereby showing how contrary these things are to the fundamental ideas of mankind and its happiness.»

Might not old Europe, renouncing her past contentions, renew so great an act of generosity, liberality, and progress, and convoke a new Parliament or Universal Congress of Religions? That is the question which some French Catholics, Protestants, and Israelites asked one another. The year 1900 is to be glorified by the Universal Exposition at Paris, and it will rest on the apex of two centuries. Why should it not be chosen to mark the date of an immense religious rendezvous, where all believers might make a sole and same declaration of faith, «I believe in God»; and unite in a sole and same prayer, «Our Father, who art in heaven»?

Above all, at the present time, while problems of social transformation are engrossing and carrying away all minds, it is the duty of those representing the moral and religious ideal in this world to recall the fact that religion, whatever may be said to the contrary notwithstanding, has molded the soul of humanity in the past, has stamped its deep impression in the flesh and blood of all the generations whose heirs we are; and hence no dreams for reorganizing the world can afford to neglect the indestructible element of mystic aspirations.

The social benefit of these aspirations is incontestable. They alone are able to preserve a trace of idealism for us in the terrible struggle for life which, without them, would be merely material, brutal, and ferocious. «For the immense majority of men,» said Renan, «established religion constitutes the only share in their lives given to the worship of the ideal. To suppress or weaken this sole and great remembrance of nobility, in the classes deprived of other means of education, would be to debase human nature and take away the sign that distinguishes it essentially from animals.»