



OPEN LETTERS

A City's Small Pleasure-grounds.

IN a scheme of public pleasure-grounds the minor open spaces of a city are indispensable. They provide agreeable contrast with their urban surroundings, refreshing the eye with the verdure of grass and trees, and delighting it with the beauty of flowering plants. They afford breathing-space for dense populations, refuge from the heat and vexation of crowded tenements, places for social intercourse in the open air, and playgrounds for the young.

The aspect of social intercourse is one of the most important. Whoever has spent any time in a Mexican city must have appreciated the notable factor in the life of the people played by the public plaza, the *zócolo*, the paseo, the alameda. The plaza, with its central garden and its band playing through the warm evenings, is a sort of great free public club-room. It is this function of a public outdoor club-room which should be particularly borne in mind in the designing of the minor open spaces of a city. To this end, just as a club, in the planning of its house, administers to the pleasure and comfort of its members to the greatest possible extent, so the public pleasure-grounds of a city should be made to meet the greatest possible variety of recreative uses in the outdoor life of the population, bringing all these uses into harmony with one another, that the pleasure of no one class shall conflict with that of another. One of the most essential of these uses is that of a playground for children: an element that needs to be most carefully considered, that it may not degenerate into an abuse.

In designing a small city park the character and needs of the neighborhood should be thoughtfully studied. The requirements are quite different, for instance, for an environment of fine residences or of the homes of a well-to-do class, and for a crowded tenement section or a population of the industrial classes. In the former case a certain elegance and richness of design is demanded. By giving the place a character of this sort, the desirability of the surrounding property is made more permanent, and the taxable values thus assured contribute to the prosperity of the entire community. The beauty of such a pleasure-ground is enjoyed by the public at large. The facilities for recreation in a place of this character need be little more than abundant strolling and promenade room, with good provision for babies and young children out for an airing.

In designs for the open spaces surrounded by the homes of the poor and the lowly quite another class of needs must be taken into account. The aspect of beauty should be considered no less than in the former case. Indeed, it is really more important, on account of its educational influence and its service in bringing joy into care-burdened lives. Then, too, in a democratic com-

munity nothing should be held too good for the common people. But in this class of grounds provisions for more positive forms of recreation are needed; the considerations of beauty should not limit these, nor should they be permitted to mar or debar the needed beauty.

The amplest playground room consistent with the entire space at command, and with the comfort and convenience of the neighborhood, should be provided; but it is essential that orderly conduct and orderly maintenance should be strictly observed. Play is educational no less than study, and unruly behavior in a public place breeds lawlessness. Then in a small pleasure-ground certain forms of sport cannot be permitted which would be quite in keeping with more ample room. Games like base-ball, for instance, would endanger passers on a small ground, while their boisterousness would make them a nuisance in a thickly populated neighborhood. With surroundings of a decent character, such sport on a small ground would be likely to depreciate property. Where ball-grounds and the like are permitted in an urban neighborhood, the total space should be of considerable extent, and the games should be kept in the middle, with ample space between them and the border. Playgrounds should also be graveled and neatly kept. If turfed, they quickly become shabby and ragged, and their influence upon habits of public order correspondingly bad.

The city of Boston, which, besides a magnificent system of large parks, is remarkably well provided with numerous minor open spaces, possesses a number of model grounds of this character, as well as many of the worst examples of the class. The former are of recent design, and are in charge of the Department of Public Parks. The riverside pleasure-ground—the Charlesbank—is a fine example of the class. It serves a large tenement neighborhood, and is the most popular small park in the city. It has a frontage of about half a mile on the Charles River, and an area of fourteen acres. It was designed by Mr. Frederick Law Olmsted. Along the river-wall there is a broad promenade, bordered on one side by an abundance of seats, placed with reference to rest and enjoyment of the river view and the air from the water. Some of these seats have awnings, and are reserved for women with infants. Back of the promenade the ground is irregularly sloped, with grass, trees and shrubbery, and winding paths. The aim here is to screen out the street and its buildings from intrusion on the park. At each end of the grounds there is an open-air gymnasium, with very complete apparatus for practice. One of these is for men and boys, and the other for women and girls. Their use is absolutely free, and both are extremely popular. The best of athletic instruction is given by the professionally trained persons in charge. The gymnasium for men has turned out some of the best athletes in the country. There is a fine house, with

rooms for dressing and bathing, and hundreds of lockers for clothing. The attractions for exercise here have kept thousands of young men out of mischief, away from the bar-rooms so numerous in the neighborhood, and given them healthy inclinations. The oval space is surrounded by a high, open iron fence, and the animated spectacle within is exceedingly interesting to spectators. Perfect order is maintained, and it is very seldom that a policeman has to be called in. Between the fence and the fine five-lap cinder-track for running and bicycling that surrounds the gymnasium ground there is a ribbon of velvety grass with shrubbery, and this is never disturbed. In the winter the ground is flooded for skating. Young men of all classes, from college students and those most favored by fortune to those most humbly circumstanced, resort here for the fine opportunities for outdoor training, and associate in democratic equality in their sports.

The women's gymnasium has a similar house, but the grounds are carefully screened from publicity by thick masses of shrubbery. The requirements for apparatus are simpler, and so the ground occupied for this purpose is much smaller; the space inclosed by the running-track is covered by a velvety lawn where little children can tumble about on the grass to their hearts' content, while their mothers sit and watch them under a pleasant shelter. There are also sand-courts where children can play and dig. A charitable organization—the Women's Emergency and Hygiene Association—volunteers to take charge of this women's gymnasium and crèche, and poor mothers who go out to work for the day can leave their children here to be taken care of.

Another feature of the place are landings where row-boats, canoes, etc., are let on moderate terms. The multitudes that throng here on pleasant summer evenings make one of the sights of the city, and in the daytime there are hundreds of babies out with their mothers and sisters. The fresh summer air from the river has, since this park was established, saved the lives of many hundreds of little ones who otherwise would have perished from cholera infantum.

Another typical small park is that under construction at the North End. Adjoining the ancient Copp's Hill burying-ground—until now the only open space in this crowded section, and therefore for a number of years past open for playground purposes, with children permitted to romp among the quaint old gravestones—the steep northern slope has been laid out in terraces, with hundreds of seats for enjoyment of the air and the fine view over a portion of the upper harbor. A foot-bridge over Commercial street is designed to connect these terraces with a charming water-park into which some old wharf properties are being transformed. Two pleasure-piers for promenading, with landings for boats, inclose a little cove. Facing the water, a pretty lawn space is bordered by a curving beach where children may wade in the water and dig in the sand.

A different type of minor open space, and equally a model, is the Charlestown Playground. This is a rectangular area of ten acres, now under construction, and designed with a surrounding promenade, with trees and grass borders. With the exception of two outdoor gymnasiums and their buildings, designed for the two sexes, as at the Charlesbank, the entire space is occupied

by a great playground, with a surface of rolled gravel, for ball-playing and other games. The place has a frontage on the Mystic River, with a boat-landing and floating baths. Near by is the small park of Charlestown Heights, where four acres of a steep, unpromising hillside have been converted into a strikingly picturesque spot, designed especially for a neighborhood breathing-place for rest and promenading in the enjoyment of an extensive and varied prospect over the river and the suburban landscape beyond.

It will be noted that all of these are waterside pleasure-grounds. In locating small parks in a city, it seems desirable to take advantage, so far as possible, of sites with a water-frontage, on account of the superior advantages for air and recreation thus offered. An ideal would be to have no part of a city's population more than ten minutes' walk from a public pleasure-ground of some description. A law recently passed in Massachusetts provides for the encouragement of playground and garden spaces adjacent to tenement dwellings by leasing the land to the city at a nominal rental, equivalent to the taxes on the same, the areas to remain in charge of the proprietors. By thus making such lands free from taxation, it would seem that much might be done toward providing model tenements with much-needed open space about them.

Sylvester Baxter.

Conscious False Vision.

[THE following deals with a variety of double personality that is as unexplainable as the cases heretofore mentioned in THE CENTURY. It is a true experience of a patient, given in his own language, and now, fortunately, only a memory: will conquered nerves.—H. C. WOOD, M. D.]

It is about eighteen years since I had my first experience of voluntary and involuntary false sight. For months, by an effort of will and imagination combined, I could see, with an externalness and sharpness of outline which things never assume in the ordinary mental perception of them, an object which I wished to project on space. The image thus placed before my bodily eyes seemed as actual and touchable as the chair that stood beside it. Yet I was too young to have tampered with drugs or stimulants, or even to know the effect which such articles produce. The will could banish at its pleasure specters that it had itself evoked. But there were others that came uncalled, which would not avault, however emphatically the command was uttered, till they were ready to vanish.

I remember how, during those wakeful nights so long ago, I felt constrained to rise again and again and peer into the darkness at the tiny goblins capering in the narrow space at the side of the bed, though I knew them to be spectral illusions. They forever vanished as soon as it occurred to me to try the effect of pushing the bedstead close against the wall.

For several years, whenever I looked up from my bed at a certain part of the ceiling, I saw my mother gazing down upon me, compassionately, but serenely and hopefully. What I saw was an etherealized or transfigured face softly glimmering from a sort of halo or glory. The large gray eyes, with their long lashes, were most distinct of all the features. Indeed, it was rather the expression of the face as familiar to me in life—rather