

THE EXTERNALS OF WASHINGTON.

I SUPPOSE that no American, how poor and insignificant soever, can go to the city of Washington without feeling a sense of ownership in, and a desire to be proud of, the political metropolis of his country; and so many hundred thousand Americans do journey thither, that in looking at it a stranger inevitably wonders why such an overwhelming public opinion has not long since been created concerning its management as would have rendered impossible both the congressional recklessness and the private selfishness whose ravages he must now so vainly deplore on every side.

For if ever magnificent possibilities were cruelly marred, mutilated, and mangled, those of the National Capital have been, and every day are being, so treated. It has been in existence eighty years. The greatest intellect and the highest culture of three generations have represented America here. All the wealth of the nation has been at its disposal. Superb cities with their parks and beautiful suburbs have grown up all over the country to serve it as examples. And what have we? "A few things splendidly done, and everything else at sixes and sevens"; here the opulence and progress of America, and there the poverty and shiftlessness of Africa; and *just now* a lavish yearly expenditure of the local and national funds for the perpetration of stiffness instead of grace, of ugliness instead of beauty, of æsthetic failure instead of artistic success, — in fine, the most disappointing, disheartening conglomerate that ever shocked the pride or patriotism of order-loving, beauty-worshipping woman. Nothing, it seems to me, but the genuine masculine insensibility to both beauty and order could possibly have produced such a result; and one may judge here how much the palaces and public places of Europe probably owe to the

taste and aspiration of the royal ladies who inhabit and delight in them; since men are alone responsible for everything in this draggle-tail metropolis.

The city is on the eastern bank of the Potomac, and the site chosen for it has, or rather had, two leading features: one, the ridge or plateau running parallel to the river on which the Capitol stands; the other, the undulating plain between the ridge and the river, on which the city is principally built. The plan adopted by Washington for making the most of this happy combination is imperial, and is said to have been taken by Major l'Enfant, the first engineer of the city, from the stately avenues and vistas of the park at Versailles. By it the whole surface was laid out, first in unusually wide streets running parallel to the four faces of the Capitol, and therefore at right angles to each other; and then in a series of immensely broad avenues cutting the streets diagonally, like a huge diamond pattern superimposed upon a much smaller checkered one. Wherever these avenues intersect each other is a broad space, which in Paris would be called a "*Place*," and wherein, jewel-like, some noble public building or church would be set; and wherever the avenues cross the streets, little triangles are cut off the blocks, which are hardly suitable for building, but are just made for grass planted with flowers or shrubs, or a few trees, and with something beautiful — a fountain or a statue — in the middle; while the larger halves of the blocks left on the other side afford, with their obtuse angles, unparalleled opportunity for architectural effect.

The plain is only a mile or two wide, and looking from one of the western porticos of the Capitol, the city, or at least all the noteworthy part of it, lies below you, stretching northwestward

into union with Georgetown, and lining the Potomac southward until it is stopped by the so-called "Eastern Branch" of that noble stream, at which juncture the two rivers, often poetically flecked with sails, open and gleam broadly. For background to the picture, the heights of Virginia's "sacred soil" lift themselves in answer to the height on which you are standing, the great Doric portico of General Lee's confiscated mansion being visible diagonally opposite, though the hills — stripped, alas! of their forests during the war, and scantily dotted with houses — seem, not in the vigor and hopefulness of youth, but in the exhaustion and resignation of age, to stretch themselves sadly and wearily around the entire curve of the western horizon. It is a scene which nature and the great founder of the city meant to be unrivalled in loveliness, but which succeeding waves of population and of congressmen have so deluged with deformities, from those bare hills in the distance to the shameful Capitol surroundings at your feet, that to a sensitive eye, enjoyment is completely swallowed up in vexation and disgust.

For, first, it is evident that as regards the public buildings and parks of the National Capital, *grouping with a view to general effect* should have been the one thing greatly studied. Instead of which, half of the former have been stuck down, like diamonds in a dish of sand, to suit the clamor of property owners who wanted a rise in the value of their lands; while the parks have been invaded, mutilated, and treated generally with an utter disregard, not only for what is beautiful and fitting in itself, but for the actual property of the nation.

And, secondly, as to the domestic architecture, it would require the Gothic richness of Nuremberg, or the elegance, splendor, height, color, of the Grand Canal of Venice, to do justice to these wide streets and the great avenues that slash into them with such bold angles and unexpected vistas.

But since these ideals are extravagant, why should not a second edition of dignified and respectable Boston, for instance, or of lovely suburban Cambridge, half seen and half screened amid trees and vines, and with grass and flowers all about it, have grown up on the site of the National Capital? * In sad reality, behold a city of flat-roofed houses, — boxes rather, — for the most part low, bald, mean, or squalid, standing in rows, or nearly touching one another, and placed originally right upon the sidewalk, with rarely ever a yard of turf in front of them. The majority are without an ornament to cornice, door, window, or step; and if there is a garden, it is usually at the side, behind a high wall, so that it is utterly lost to every purpose of street ornamentation. So many negro-cabins are but eight feet high, and so many wooden and brick tenements are but double that, that, without exaggeration, if one third of the city of Washington were razed down to the general level of the rest, I think it would all be about twenty feet tall; and this with the streets averaging a hundred, and the avenues a hundred and fifty, feet in width!

The third above-mentioned comprises, of course, the business and fashionable quarters of the town, which, to their mutual disadvantage, very much run into each other. Upper-tendom has naturally fixed its seat in the vicinity of the White House, but it is jostled at every step by the shop and the shanty, and its architectural flights are far more modest than one is accustomed to observe in Northern cities; for as a rule, the houses, still on the box-pattern, are of plain red brick, brown paint or brown stucco making the only variation. One can hardly believe, in looking at most of them, that magnificent New York is within only eight hours' ride; while as for the French-roofed cottages in neat lawns,

* The reader will pardon my specifying these two. It is merely because I am familiar with them: there are many that rival them, and New York, of course, is far beyond.

that, with their gay slatings, bow-windows, and vine-clad porches, are now everywhere in the North, they seem absolutely unknown.

Never, surely, were greater incongruities tolerated in any civilized community! In other places, people of wealth and taste like to get as close together as possible, so as to form solid streets, or at least squares, of respectability and order. But in Washington their instinct seems to be, choosing the Presidential mansion for a centre, to back farther and farther away from it and from each other, Lafayette Square alone, that I know of, presenting an unbroken phalanx of city residences. The consequence is that the interstices have had to be filled up anyhow, and the great houses of millionnaires or of high government officials will, more likely than not, have a tumbledown tenement, a mean grocery, or a negro-shanty not a block off, and not seldom they are next-door neighbors. Even of the White House, the Treasury, and the Patent Office is this true; while the buildings that immediately surround the grounds of the magnificent Capitol itself, and which, if one stands on its terrace, *must* affront the eye, are the most disgraceful jumble of whitewashed sheds, saloons, and old boarding-houses that can be imagined. Palaces should hedge it about with awe, but stables are leering impudently in its very face!

The churches in Washington worthily match the private dwellings. There are forty of them, I believe, and among all these I have seen I have noticed only four in stone, two of which are building now. These latter promise also to be Gothic, and if they fulfil the promise they will mark a new era in Washington; most of the other forty being the brick "meetin'-us" in various combinations of vagrant architectural fancy, utterly free from all trammels of schools and traditions, unities and proprieties, whatsoever. Yet one would think that every leading denomination in the country would take care to be represented in the Na-

tional Capital by one costly and beautiful church at least.

But perhaps the most distressing, because, it is to be feared, the most hopeless, feature of the city is Pennsylvania Avenue, in one grand intersection of which on the hill with three other avenues the Capitol stands, and in a similar one, a mile and a half off, on an undulation not far from the river, the White House; so that it is the great artery of the political metropolis of our country.

Until the spring of 1872 I had never been in Washington, and never shall I forget my first walk up this national avenue of ours between the Congress and the President of that "giant Republic," a trifling fraction of whose vast wealth only would have been required to make it worthy of its high office. Knowing nothing at all about it, I had yet, in a vague way, imagined it as shaded with superb trees dating from the founding of the city, and as lined with grand government buildings, fine churches, brilliant hotels, and, at the White House end, with the aristocratic residences of the Cabinet and foreign ministers. These latter I had fancied standing each apart, amid grass and glowing flowers, and surrounded with vines, evergreens, and shrubs; and I had taken it for granted that the people promenading on this stately avenue were as distinguished or elegant in appearance as the exclusives one meets on Beacon Street or Fifth Avenue.

So much for fancy. Now for fact. Pennsylvania Avenue is a boulevard no less than one hundred and sixty feet wide. The inevitable double horse-car track defaces its centre, but the rest of it is paved with wood, so that it is smooth like a floor, but, unlike a floor, it is swept so seldom that the dust lies thickly upon it. *There is not a single church or public building upon it;* but the closely set houses along its length are of every variety of shabbiness and ugliness, and of all heights, so that their roofs are as uneven as the teeth of an old saw. In their lower stories may be found repre-

sentatives of all the avocations that wait upon the kitchen and back-stairs want of humanity, upon the sordid needs of the poor, or upon the cravings of the dissolute; for alongside the grocer and the meat-man, the plumber and the gas-fitter, the cheap jeweller and milliner, are bar-rooms — bar-rooms! — at nearly every ten steps

The part nearest the Capitol is the worst section of the whole. As you emerge upon the avenue from the little, horseshoe-shaped park at its base, you see on the left the National Botanical Garden, which is a large enclosure surrounded by a tall brick and iron fence, and planted with young trees. Its centre is necessarily filled with conservatories, which considered *as* conservatories are handsome; but Horace Walpole said truly that “it is impossible to make a green-house ornamental,” and these look peculiarly out of place. Opposite the Garden, on the right, is a row of dirty and paltry shops and drinking-places that would befit an Irish alley, the corner one being actually a *laundry* (only at this writing, May, 1873, in course of demolition), which for years flapped the wash on its roof in friendly democratic greeting to the United States flags on the Capitol two stone-throws' off!

From the latter to the White House is a distance of fifteen streets, and at Seventh Street the avenue is intersected by another avenue, the three combining to form a large open space set off by triangles which, next to that of the Capitol itself, is, perhaps, the most effective situation for a magnificent building in all Washington. A year ago, the several hundred feet of this unique site were occupied by an old shed, covered with a roof of tarred shoddy, and as perfectly black and dilapidated with age as any smithy ever imagined. This was the Washington Market, and it had stood thus conspicuously in the very centre of Pennsylvania Avenue for two generations!

Behind it loomed up three immense brick barns, — the centre of their roofs being raised in the ungainly fashion

peculiar to grain-elevators, — which had just been built round three sides of the quadrangle of which the black shed was the fourth side. These are the new market-houses; and now the old deformity of the black shed is pulled down, and the new deformity of the brick barns is fully revealed in its place. In the remote future a fine façade, it is said, will be built on the site of the shed, which will conceal them; but of course, to put the City Market there at all was a glaring impropriety in the first place, bringing, as it does, inevitable market-carts and all unsightliness into the vicinity. That the land was a gift from the owner for the purpose was no excuse for its acceptance by the government. The Treasury or the Patent Office should have been placed there; and with land at five or ten cents a foot, as it was then, it would not have ruined the country to have bought the property, and given to the city a market site also; whereas the present disposition of it *has* ruined “the Avenue.”

A little way past the market, come, within the space of a few blocks, the leading shops of the city, which, excepting the lace shops, are ordinary in the extreme; and after these the avenue pursues its dreary and shabby way until, fronting you at Fifteenth Street, the southern portico of the Treasury Department shoulders itself *into the air, and, contrary to what I trust was the intention of Washington, completely hides the White House from the avenue and from seeing or being seen by the Capitol, — an eternal dig in the ribs of posterity from the obstinate elbow of old President Jackson (who, I am told, would have it there) that posterity must ever resent and his contemporaries should never have permitted; for the awkwardness of the whole corner as then and there fixed to all time cannot be exaggerated.*

Such, dear reader, are the dire realities of that Pennsylvania Avenue whose name, at least, is known all over the country. Half-grown or scrubby, ugly trees, or no trees at all, alter-

nately preside over the broad sidewalks, which, when Congress is in session, are alive with self-complacent negresses, with whiskey-soaked, loaferish-looking men, with loudly or tawdrily dressed women, and with dirty-faced children, whose homes are over their parents' afore-mentioned shops. Several large second-rate hotels interrupt, but, with their flat white façades, do not redeem the depressing succession. There are a few tolerable store fronts, and just *two* handsome Mansard-roofed structures approaching completion, but they are lost in the general don't-care impression. The *soil* upon everything is indescribable; and, in short, as a gentleman remarked in my hearing on first seeing it, "Pennsylvania Avenue is the New York Bowery gone to seed." — And yet there are not wanting enthusiastic sisters of the pen who describe it in their newspaper letters as a "splendid Corso," and reel you off such a set of celebrities whose imaginary habit it is to continuously succeed each other upon its pavements, as will fairly turn your head!

Up to the close of the war, Pennsylvania Avenue might have been regarded as a "specimen brick" of the whole city, so utterly devoid of taste or beauty were most of its houses. But since then a new era has dawned upon it in domestic architecture, for on some of the newer streets — K Street, for instance — the brilliant idea has been put into execution of regarding a whole block as an architectural unit, and building the centre and end houses taller and more projecting, and with somewhat more ornamentation than the others. There are not many of these blocks, but so effective are they, such is the delight in coming upon them, that in a manner they have redeemed the whole city from ugliness; and indeed it is easy to see that if the idea should be extensively carried out, Washington would come to appear externally like a city of palaces.

If we turn to the public buildings of Washington, we find (the Greek architecture being once admitted) achieve-

ments worthy in many respects of the United States, — structures of which Americans have no reason to be ashamed, whether for strength, size, or beauty. Excepting the Capitol, there is not a ray of genius in any of them, however; and owing to the utter absence of unity of plan in the decisions as to their location, they make but a fragmentary impression, and add little to the noble presence of the capital as a whole; while the mistakes and incongruities that have been perpetrated in connection with every one quite take off the edge of the satisfaction with which the educated visitor might otherwise regard them.

Not but what things were finely enough begun. Congress and the President having been placed as they were by Washington, the chance was afforded for two magnificent architectural groups: first, the Capitol, flanked by the Supreme Court, the Patent Office, or what not, might have crowned the ridge in the manner of a Greek Acropolis, while marble steps and terraces swept up to them with their own superb and dazzling effect; and, second, the White House, surrounded by whatever departments naturally cluster about it, might have risen proudly visible to the Capitol from the opposite end of the avenue. Or, better still, each might have stood in solitary state within its grounds, while the avenue between them was lined with all the other buildings, — thus producing indeed a "Corso" unsurpassed in the world.

But, as has before been mentioned, the many-pillared Treasury is half-way across the line of the avenue, and completely conceals the White House from view. Its immense side-length is plump upon the pavement of Fifteenth Street, and the steps of its northern portico are actually in a hollow instead of on the elevation that all Greek architecture requires. If placed in that spot at all, the land should have been filled up to a level with the Presidential grounds; instead of which, a sunken street was graded between them, and the bank

terraced many steps high on the White House side.

On the other hand of the latter are the old War and Navy Departments ; and as I walked by them a year ago I admired the beautiful level lawn which, shaded with fine trees, and looking as peaceful as an old-fashioned college *campus*, lay between them all. It has since been gullied through, however, to form a new street, called Executive Avenue, and along this the new State Department, which is also to include the War and Navy Departments, is going up as a pendant to the Treasury. It is to be one of Mr. Mullett's grandiose granite Mansardian structures,—“only that and nothing more”; and though one must rejoice that the tradition of the classical architecture is at last broken for the national buildings, it is a question whether the low Greek Treasury and White House will not be dreadfully dwarfed by the towering roofs of their new French neighbor. Its cost is to be *eight millions of dollars*; and if it had only been placed on the Avenue where the Market is, it would have been there an immense adornment, and would have shown itself to the most admirable advantage. Now two of its four façades will be lost, from fronting on obscure streets.

The Patent Office is an immense quadrangle built around a whole square. It is respectable from its size and solidity, and its simple but spacious porticos are effectively reached by long flights of steps. But it is on a side street naturally unimportant, and, what is stranger still, the National Post-Office of white marble occupies another square diagonally opposite. If there is anything that can redeem for these two great and important structures their fatal, their inexcusable situations, I confess I cannot see it.

More fortunate than they by far, the City Hall was very well placed at the intersection of an avenue and a street. It is on a public reservation, and might have been in the midst of beautiful grounds. But it, too, is directly on the sidewalk, Ju-

diciary Square being behind and at its sides only, and looking in a very rough and recent state. Like all the other public buildings, it is white and Greek ; and though plain and small in comparison with them, it is pleasing enough to make one regret the grimy pillars and the degraded and demoralized aspect that the colored loafers who haunt there have given it. The generous width of the intersection in front of it—perhaps two hundred feet—would have afforded a centre-piece of verdure with plenty to spare ; but the whole space is filled with the wooden block pavement, and poor Lincoln stands in the middle of it upon his bare white column, looking as ghastly and forlorn as one fancies St. Simeon Stylites himself.

The Armory, the Smithsonian Institution, the Agricultural Bureau, and the Washington Monument stand nearly in line between the Capitol and the river, in different sections of a reservation that was originally intended for the City Park, but which Congress, in the most flagrant and indefensible manner, has trifled away and “appropriated” to this, that, and the other, until now there is no semblance of a park left,—only a separately fenced-off series of “grounds,” for the most part half laid out and half kempt.

In the midst of the only one of them that has been at all improved into beauty, is the Smithsonian, built, I should say, in imitation of a feudal castle. The material is a rich red-brown stone, and it has seven or eight towers and towerlings, every one of them different, and which on a lofty height of the Rhine would look very picturesque and be suggestive of the growth and additions of different ages. In a flat park and for a scientific institution, the application seems a little forced ; but as one approaches it through the winding walks laid out, and under the trees planted, by the “lamented Downing,” it looks beautiful and gracious enough to be “its own excuse for being,” and to make one only give thanks for an escape from the everlasting Greek. From

Capitol Hill, however, the effect of its many irregular turrets is very much injured by contrast with the great white unfinished obelisk to Washington that even now looms much above them, and which, as yet neither one thing nor the other, but, with its melancholy crane on top, makes one think of a gigantic gibbet erected from which to swing off to universal scoff the dead body of that gratitude, admiration, and reverence once felt by Americans for the Father of their Country. Its completion on the bald monstrosity of its original design would be simply a national misfortune, but its size and its situation are so remarkable, since it towers up over everything even now, and forms the termination of innumerable vistas all over the city, that before pulling it down a jury of our most eminent architects and sculptors ought to sit upon it to decide whether something cannot be done with it as it stands; for a man of imagination and power might be able to strike out from it some bold and grand conception.

A Monument was a highly appropriate thing to place in the city park; but were each of the other buildings now upon it as fine in their way as the Smithsonian itself, — they are both perfectly insignificant, — this would not repay the citizens for the loss of what was intended to be their chief breathing-place and pleasure-ground, and its treatment is a rich but characteristic specimen of congressional recklessness, incapacity, and want of fixed principle. It was originally a reservation that began with the Capitol grounds, and ran straight down to the Potomac River between the two streets that front the north and south faces of the Capitol. It was a rectangle, therefore, a mile and a half long and three eighths of a mile wide, and, too stiff and cramped, perhaps, for much "park" effect, it is greatly to be regretted that, instead of the space between the two parallel *streets* which start from the Capitol, the area between the two diverging *avenues* (Pennsylvania and Maryland), which soon run far outside of the

streets, was not rather reserved for the park, for so it would have included the White House grounds, which touch the present one only at a right angle; and moreover, the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue being thus made a park boundary, the Market could not have been placed there, and the growth of the low quarter now infesting the region between the park and the avenue would have been impossible. Designed in this way, the park would have been a great isosceles triangle, a mile and three quarters long, with a base a mile wide on the Potomac, and an apex expanding round the Capitol into grounds three eighths of a mile square; and were I my Uncle Sam, I would yet beg, borrow, or buy for national purposes this area between the avenues, cost what it would; for so a fusing of the principal grounds and buildings of the National Capital into some consistent plan of beauty and fitness might yet be possible.

Such even as it was, however, if the park had simply been planted thick with trees, and left to grow up this last eighty years into a wood like the Berlin Thier-Garten, by this time it would have been a wide belt of shade and grass crossing the city and extending into the river, such as would have utterly charmed the heart of the visitor, and satisfied the needs of the population. But the most malicious ingenuity could not have devised to deface and render it more hopeless for all purposes of a park than has really been the case. First, streets were carried across it, and the divisions thus made fenced in, in forty-acre lots. Then, at an immense expense, a *canal* was cut through the city and carried some distance up the centre of the park, in order to connect Georgetown on the Potomac with the Navy Yard on the Eastern Branch, — with what wild idea of a gigantic commerce to be transported at any sacrifice by a short cut, who can now conceive? Of course it proved utterly useless; and after remaining a noxious sewer in the nostrils of a long-suffering neighborhood,

it has just been filled up (*after first being dredged out*) by the present Board of Public Works. Right of way having been given to a canal, of course a railroad could not be refused the same privilege; other interests were also allowed to encroach; and finally, in May, 1872, Congress actually gave away to rich railroad corporation Number Two a section of it worth half a million of dollars for a railroad *station*, with all its accompaniments! About two fifths of the very centre of the park have thus been stolen from the nation; and while one severed extremity was appropriated to the Botanic Garden at the head of Pennsylvania Avenue, the other was divided between the three or four institutions just described.

Ex uno disce omnes. Washington City is full—and it might be its peculiar charm that it is so—of open squares, circles, and triangles; but, excepting Lafayette Square and the Smithsonian and East Capitol grounds, there is hardly a creditable one among them. The two former are exquisite, and were laid out by Mr. Downing, that is, by a man who had made a life-study of what he undertook to do, which is why they are so beautiful. The latter is a stroke of luck or genius which is too much for the congressional Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds to stand, so they mean to clear the trees away, if they can, in order that the east view of the Capitol may be unobstructed.

What is it that Horace Walpole says? “The public taste is the taste of the public, and it is a prodigious quantity of no tastes, generally governed by some very bad taste.” The dire angularity of the laying out of all the open places upon which the public functionaries are now busy in Washington bears out the above fully. Nay, they contrive to make even the very water itself angular; for all the fountains but two which they have put in—and they are legion—are on the principle of the squirt, instead of the jet or the cascade; so their stiffness and insignificance may be conceived!

Yet with the great Potomac rolling by, Washington might well afford to have as many and as superb fountains as old Rome herself.

And so now we come at last to the Capitol, which, with all its defects, is the greatest architectural triumph this country has produced, and which can lack a world-wide reputation only because Americans themselves have not known enough to give such to it. Like all the most famous structures, it was not built in a day, but has grown gradually into its present development; and even unfinished as it is, hugely defective as it is, and with unlimited capacity for additions and improvements, it crowns the city and the landscape with a glory unsurpassed by any secular building in existence. It is not all of white marble, dear reader, but at first you *take* it to be; and its extent, its strength, its evident costliness, together with its singular external beauty, quite inflate one with joyous patriotism and pride, and in looking at it one feels that our money-loving and money-getting Brother Jonathan has the divine spark of genius hidden somewhere within him, after all.

The first surprise and exultation over, however, a succession of mortifying discoveries dawns upon the visitor, of which the most crushing to me was, that, though splendidly situated upon the ridge commanding the city, the Capitol *faces the wrong way!* The front is to the EAST, and those magnificent porticos, with their crowds of Corinthian pillars, their sculptured pediments, bronze doors, and countless sweeping marble steps, the bronze Goddess of Liberty herself,—everything,—turns its back upon the city, the river, and the West, and the whole façade exists for the benefit of the trees that were idiotically planted in the East Capitol grounds just across the street from it, and which have now grown so great that they make a full or three-quarter view of the building impossible, and so beautiful that the threatened cutting of them down is “enough to kill one.”

Washington expected and intended that his namesake city should grow up in state and splendor on the hill, instead of down in the marshy, malarial plain. But unfortunately he placed the President's house down there, and of course all society inevitably clustered about it; beside which, the original property owners held the land about the Capitol at such exorbitant rates that for years people were actually forced to purchase elsewhere.

So for a long time the hill was comparatively abandoned, while the plain was peopled. But the marvel of marvels is, why, when the Capitol Extension was planned twenty-five years ago, and men had seen plainly where, contrary to the original expectation, the city had built itself, *that* occasion was not seized for making the grand façade on the west instead of on the east front, and of placing the statue on the dome facing in the same direction; for now the Goddess of Liberty looks as if, shrugging her shoulders at the hap-hazard city behind her, — nay, at the “great sloven continent” itself, — she were gazing regretfully toward the ocean across which she had floated hither, and were vainly wishing herself safe back in the “tight little island” of respectabilities and proprieties that gave her birth.

But the truth is, that Crawford's statue, though in itself a most noble conception, is not at all the thing for that snow-white dome, which, more graceful and enchanting (if it *is* only iron) than any dome in Europe, lightly lifts itself, a bold, pure, perfect conception, into the blue dome above, and which, therefore, instead of being weighted by the very august and pensive maiden in dark brown who now presides there “in all her ponderosity,” should have been crowned by a white or gilded flying figure just poising there for a moment on one toe, and expressive, say, of “Westward the star of empire takes its way”; and *then* the strange exhilaration and satisfaction with which even now the visitor be-

holds this exquisite dome would mount into ecstasy.

In order to complete, i. e. extend, the eastern centre of the Capitol to correspond with the two newer wings, the present Capitol architect, Mr. Clark, proposes to spend two millions of dollars. But, as the reader can see from every greenback, for this generation the east front is well enough as it is. The grand façade of the Capitol, especially since the Presidential inaugurations take place from its central porch, ought to be on the west; and until that is accomplished, every other interest of the building should be put aside, excepting only such as relate to the convenience of the Congress itself. More room is even now imperatively demanded, but there is no reason why it should not be gained as well on the west as on the east, while every argument of beauty and fitness — since our whole continent lies to the westward, as well as the city itself — is in favor of spending our millions on the former.

But if the heart sinks with dismay over the mistaken frontage of the Capitol, it swells in indignation over the shabbiness, the neglect, the disgrace of its surroundings. Imagine an immense and magnificent white marble building, which cost no less than twelve millions of dollars, standing in a desert of red earth, with a small, horseshoe-shaped park hugging its western, and a small square one standing off from its eastern façade, and you have the immediate *entourage* of the Capitol of the United States: while just outside of this area, as I have before said, is a but too appropriate fringe of old boarding-houses, oyster-saloons, drinking-shops, shanties, sheds, and tenements. Not a blade of grass, not a shrub, not a fountain covers this red desert, but only two or three vagabond trees which are quite lost in the abounding desolation. Horse-cars, carriages, and carts are driving over it *ad libitum* all day long, and for years all the refuse of the Capitol restaurants was thrown upon it.

The two little parks, on the contrary,

are so thickly planted with trees as very much to hide the building. They are surrounded with the huge iron fence required by the period when elephants and megatheriums roamed at large through the streets; but Uncle Sam's money gave out before the fences were done, for that on the grand front of the east side is a common wooden picket one, and black with age at that, while those at the foot of the side-terraces are made of three rough boards nailed upon intervening posts. In the centre of the western terraces, two flights of stone steps lead down into the horse-shoe park; but at their ends, unpainted wooden stairways with hand-rails answer the same purpose, similar conveniences for the use of senators being provided also on the north side. The street or carriage-way between the eastern front and the East Capitol grounds is very badly paved and has no sidewalk, so that to look at the finest façade in the country you have to walk or stand in the middle of the horse-car track which runs through it! And so it goes. All over the national city one may read in giant characters the words, "Selfishness, Politicians, Rings, *Rings*, RINGS!" but the climax of the refrain is precisely here. Had this area of about forty acres been improved and planted as, eighty years ago, it should have been, it would now be an exquisite and historically venerable park, in which our every great statesman had perhaps left his own memento in tree or shrub, and in the midst of which the Capitol would have shone like a dream-land vision.

On the southwest side of the grounds there are no houses, but the red desert ends abruptly, and fifteen feet below it a marshy plain stretches in abject dreariness to the junction of the Eastern Branch and the Potomac. It is crossed by a railroad and seamed with a muddy creek and ditches. Negro-cabins are scattered sparsely over it, but as yet there are hardly any regular roads or streets through it; and though it is a square mile or more in extent, there is hardly a tree or a shrub to be seen,

except at the extreme point, where, at the foot of Delaware Avenue, the beautiful lawns of the Arsenal extend into the two rivers.

Dismal and discreditable as it is, however, it affords an almost providential opportunity for one of the loveliest parks imaginable. For along the top of the ridge which overlooks the city and this now wasted spot, New Jersey Avenue runs southeast from the Capitol grounds to the Eastern Branch, and Delaware Avenue, when laid out, will run southwest from the grounds across the plain to the river junction; the two thus inclosing an isosceles triangle on the south of the Capitol, with a water-base on the Eastern Branch, similar to that on the west between Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues with a base on the Potomac, which I mentioned before as the one Congress should have appropriated in the first place. Only, the park I propose would be far more beautiful than that, because in that the lay of the land completely hides the Potomac from the spectator on the Capitol terraces, whereas by pulling down the houses on the western side of New Jersey Avenue (excepting the building rented by the Coast Survey, they are very old, of little value, and there are not many of them) one could drive along it from the Capitol down to the water, and have this exquisite prospect of the two rivers and the hills beyond and the intervening park all the way, while, returning, one would enjoy an equally unique view of the eastern and southern façades of the Capitol at the most striking angle possible, of the hill-cradled city which stretches southwestward below it, and, at the evening hour, of the gorgeous sunsets which display themselves over it. On the other side of New Jersey Avenue, on still higher ground, is yet left the old Carroll place, uplifted now like a green island above the horrible cutting of red earth which has been made all about it, and full of fine old trees. This would serve as the Belvedere of the park, and a lower ridge, which runs along the Eastern Branch at

right angles to Capitol ridge, agreeably diversifies the plain; so that in truth, rocks excepted, there seems to be every feature here, in a small compass, that could render a park beautiful and even remarkable.

Such a pleasure-ground as the above might be made, with its walks and drives and river prospects, is needed to indemnify the Washington residents, and particularly the poorer of them, for the one in the central section of the city of which Congress has so wantonly deprived them. It is needed, moreover, to rescue one of the beautiful creations of the Almighty from being everlastingly lost to the enjoyment of His children; for New Jersey Avenue and the fast-filling plain once built up, it is gone! Yet no other park in or near Washington could duplicate this exquisite river view, or give the drive along the river bank that this could do between the Navy Yard and the Arsenal, or have the glorious Capitol as the crown and apex of the whole. Can the English afford the Thames embankment for a pleasure drive, and cannot Washington, without commerce, and with a double river frontage, afford one of them for the same purpose? Surely yes.

The city of Washington is at present in the hands of a "Board of Public Works" appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate; the public grounds near the White House are in charge of General Babcock, one of the President's secretaries; the Capitol grounds are superintended by the Capitol architect, Mr. Clark; the Botanical Garden is under somebody else; and I presume that the Smithsonian, Agricultural, and City Hall grounds have each a guardian spirit in the employ of the government, whose training, like that of most of those above mentioned, has been in anything rather than in landscape architecture. Of all these functionaries, the most active and influential is believed by the Washington public to be a certain enterprising plumber whose sign is visible on Pennsylvania Avenue from far and

near,—Mr. A. R. Shepherd, vice-president of the Board of Public Works. This Board, appointed late in 1870, borrowed four millions of dollars; they taxed the people two millions, and they ran in debt two millions more; in all, eight millions. They themselves allow that up to December, 1872, they had spent thus much. Their opponents say that they had spent over double that sum; that they dare not exhibit their books; that they have so much influence in Congress that the committee which was granted at the petition of one thousand tax-payers to investigate their affairs during the session of 1871–72 either could not or would not compel them to produce them; and, in short, that in proportion to the property valuation of Washington (only about \$62,000,000), the peculations and corruptions of Tammany in New York are moderate when compared with those of this "ring." Their friends, on the contrary, declare that never was there an incorruptible and beneficent public body on earth subjected to such "fiendish" persecutions as this Board has been; that it has had "diabolical" difficulties, trials, and stumbling-blocks to encounter, worthy only of the invention of the "imps of darkness"; and that their especial accuser, Mr. Roosevelt, is quite as much "out" in his figures as he pretends the Board are in theirs.*

Of course, in the face of such flat contradictions on both sides, one must only use one's own eyes and ears to judge for one's self as to whether the Board of Public Works appointed by the President were indeed fit persons to take charge of a national work of such magnitude and importance.

Five years ago the National Capital was a magnificent mud-hole, among whose streets and avenues cows, pigs, and chickens wandered as freely as the inhabitants. That these nuisances have been wholly suppressed, and that the city has been thoroughly drained

* See the speeches of Mr. Chipman, the congressional delegate from the District of Columbia, in Congress last spring, in defence of the Board.

and is now smooth and dry in all its length and breadth, with the latest inventions in pavements, is due to the immense energy of the Board of Public Works. Moreover, the streets of the city were, in fact, too wide for anything but very magnificent edifices, or else dwellings relieved with grass and trees in front. But everybody, as I have said before, rich and poor alike, had built their pikestaff-plain houses directly on the sidewalk, so that the effect was lamentable in the extreme. This painful baldness has been in many instances most happily remedied by the Board, for they have advanced the sidewalks from ten to fifteen feet toward the middle of many streets, and turfed the ground next to the houses to that extent; and it is truly wonderful to see how deformity has been almost turned into beauty by this simple process. Where the houses are at all handsome, as in K Street, the effect is positively enchanting, and gives brilliant assurance of what the city as a whole may some day become, *provided* the hideous cast-iron fences with which too many house-owners have already heavily loaded this redeemed turf are positively forbidden for the future.

Thus much admitted, however, commendation — at least in my poor judgment — should end. The streets are so immensely wide that any pavement better than cobble-stone must necessarily be immensely expensive; and if anything better was decided upon, evidently it should have been the most durable thing that could be procured. Some of the streets are laid with the concrete, and a few, I believe, with the Belgian stone pavement, but as a general rule the wooden block pavement has been used all over the city. Now, the concrete pavement that the Board has put down did not in many places last one year; and as for the wooden pavement, business men say that it only pays to use it where there is travel enough to *wear* it out as fast as in the course of nature it must rot out. But there is no business in Washington;

nothing much heavier to be drawn over these miles and miles of wooden streets and avenues than the softly driven carriages of the fashionable women who spend the afternoons of the “season” in calling upon each other. Ten years from now, therefore, when in the course of nature these pavements shall have decayed, who is going to pay for new ones, after it has nearly ruined the property-owners to pay for these?

Still, the appearance of the city is so greatly improved by the smooth pavements, and it is such a comfort to bowl along in a cushioned carriage over a floor instead of jolting in it over cobblestones, that within three years Washington property has greatly risen in value, and many more persons are attracted here as winter residents than formerly. Granting, therefore, that the present paving is all for the best from every point of view, what shall we say of the *grading* of the city as carried out by this Board of Public Works? The narrow plain in which Washington lies was not wholly flat, but gently undulating. The plateau on which the Capitol stands, and which stretches back on the level two miles or more, was also gently undulating. As the streets were first laid out, they followed the lay of the land, and houses were built on them accordingly. But Congress, forty years ago, it is said, undertook to “determine the grades” of the city. The whole plateau was to be shaved off until the Capitol stood alone in its glory on its highest part; and for the plain, no mortal, sure, can guess what their idea was. At any rate, from that time to this successive “Boards” have been trying their “prentice hands” in improvement of nature’s work. If the heavy loads of an immense commerce had had to be dragged up steep natural inclines, one could have pardoned the “ideal” of Congress and its agents in this matter. But with nothing heavier than a grocery cart or a carriageful of ladies to roll over it, to cut down every swell and hillock where it could be done to a perfectly flat surface is a piece of vandal-

ism possible only, as I believe, to self-taught men.

If a little learning is a dangerous thing, surely a little taste is a fatal one! For at what cost and sacrifice has not this flatness been achieved! To say nothing of natural beauty destroyed, and natural drainage unbalanced, *positive deformity* has been created. For along these gently rising streets houses, of course, had been built, whose owners were suddenly told that the sidewalk was to be torn up, and the street graded two, five, ten feet below the previous level! What then becomes of the houses? Left up in the air, people have been obliged to terrace their few yards of turf to the pavement, and to provide a long flight of stone steps to get up and down to it. Of all things in the dry American climate, dear reader, and in the Washington latitude, *terraces!* In "misty-moisty" England, terraces are appropriate and very beautiful, because they are green all the year round; the winter does not kill them, and the summer does not scorch them. But over here, even as far north as Boston, people whose houses are unhappily on a bank have to water the latter with hose nearly every evening after June to keep it from drying up. Fancy, then, what it must be to keep a terrace green in Washington! Why, even the Capitol terraces are a misfortune, for they are an eyesore seven months at least of the year. Moreover, as everybody knows, the boast of Washington is the royal breadth of its streets. But with the centre of the street turned into a canal or gully, and the houses perched on the sides clear up above the pedestrian, the effect of the space is greatly diminished, and the street looks cramped and narrow. If, then, the reader will imagine the beauty of a vista of high banks that are brown all winter and withered all summer, and which are crossed at every house by long flights of stone steps all exactly alike; if also he will figure up the added expense to every trunk, every barrel of flour, every ton of coal that is carried up these

steps, and the tax on the callers and the residents who have to climb them to reach these stilt-mounted mansions, I do not think he will sigh to live in Washington. DEVASTATION, indeed, is the only word that can express much of the work of the present *régime*; and no matter who may have the charge of the externals of Washington hereafter, it will never be the city it might have been, any more than a man who has had the bridge of his nose broken can be as handsome as nature intended.

The assessments on property-owners for these "improvements" are absolutely terrifying, and many persons of small means have been obliged to sell their little homes from inability to meet them. Nor will the authorities wait for an advantageous sale. The time allowed is peremptory, and at the end of it the property must go for what it will fetch. The consequence is that it often goes very cheap, and is then bought in by the "ring" and their friends. At least such is the common talk in Washington; and it is certain that men whose paper five years ago was not worth fifty cents on the dollar, are now living at the rate of ten or fifteen thousand a year. Nor is this all. Expensive as is their grading and paving, the Board have been by no means careful to get it right at first in every instance, so that curbstones and pavements have been taken up in many places, not once, but *three times* in succession, and the property-owner made to bear his share of the expense of the mistake. As for the wails of the women over the trees that have been destroyed in this process, every woman can imagine them! And true enough, you walk and drive over this Southern city, eighty years old, blazing hot in summer, and ask yourself, "Where are the trees?" For one sees few worth mentioning, and the Board of Public Works, it is said, is responsible for the absence of a great many.

The grading, or rather degrading, process carried out by the authorities has not been confined to streets already

in existence. Drive out into the country a mile or two and you find the prolongation of the Washington streets and avenues *cut through* all the natural swells of the ground, so that the eye cannot glance anywhere without being affronted by these unsightly red gullies, which are all the more distressing because there are so few trees in the landscape to conceal their desperate deformity. Yet—will it be believed?—so well contented was Congress with the work and with the integrity of this purely local Board of ordinary business men that, at the last session, it actually voted them four millions of dollars with which to continue their cutting and slashing. But, by the end of spring, it was said all over the city that this was used up in paying debts, and that the Board intends next year to ask boldly for ten millions more!

Now compare their rate of expenditure and its result with those of Mr. Olmstead and his associates in the Central Park of New York City. From 1856 to the Tweed epoch in 1870, as we learn from the last Central Park report, there was spent in converting that barren waste into exquisite beauty but six millions of dollars,—those elaborate bridges and everything inclusive! *—while in two years these men have squandered ten (their enemies say twenty) millions, and all they have to show for it, beside the sewers underground, is miles and miles of wooden pavement,—much of it laid with dreadful carelessness,—several dozens of meagre iron fountains, some thousands of excessively young (and therefore very cheap) saplings, and, save the turfing next to the houses, not a single object of beauty or grace added to the city upon which the eye can dwell with satisfaction,—*not one!* Yet, to show how it would *pay* Congress to give the city into the hands of true artists, the property in New York bordering the Central Park has in-

* Mr. Olmstead states, I believe, that, had he been allowed to hire his men in the open market, in his own way, he could have done the work even twenty per cent cheaper.

creased in value, since its purchase, fifteen hundred per cent, and that in the entire three wards within which it lies has risen six hundred per cent. The last year's *excess* of increased tax in those three wards over the interest on the cost of the land and improvements was \$2,726,595.90; and this is only the beginning, for those wards are as yet but thinly peopled.*

I have seen it stated somewhere that the Indian-extermination policy of the nation costs the government, on an average, half a million of dollars per squaw! What a shriek of horror would go up from congressmen and their constituents were they asked to appropriate as much to make myriads of white men and women happy as they have cheerfully done to murder a few wretched copper-colored ones! The women of this country can blush, if the men cannot, at the spectacle of the National Capital farmed out—under the eyes and doubtless the sneers of the representatives of foreign courts—to art tyros and ignorant jobbers, who do with it what they choose for their own glorification and emolument, and are held responsible by nobody. We may not have among us a Phidias or a Praxiteles, a Michael Angelo or a Raphael, but we certainly have in this country men of genius and lifelong culture, men at the same time of high honor and established reputation,—artists, sculptors, architects, and landscape-architects,—who could take the Capital into their hands, and in twenty-five years present it to the nation to be held in trust for the world as a thing of beauty, worthy of shining in its place in Time's coronet of famous cities.

Our artists are now everywhere pursuing the limited ends of their own fortunes. Yet nothing less than religion or patriotism ever fired the human breast to its highest achievements; and until American Art is called by the general voice to adorn the American Capital on its own re-

* The rise of property in Brooklyn around its magnificent park, also in charge of Mr. Olmstead, is said to be still more extraordinary.

sponsibility, and to make there its home, it will never be worthy of its native country, or rise to the stature of its sisters in other lands. This rich and extravagant Republic of forty millions of prosperous people has not a single national gallery wherein it can see even what its own eminent sons have done! What a comment on the selfish and sordid aims of those millions! Yet in Europe not only the great centres all boast their immense and priceless art-collections, but nearly every little Italian or German city, and of late even the English provincial towns, can point with pride to valuable galleries, and to memorable or beautiful buildings, which are adding richness and dignity and content incalculable to the otherwise barren sum of human life.

I trust I have convinced the reader that, from an artistic point of view, Washington at present is in a bad plight. A year's residence amid, and a year's brooding over the mismanagement that prevails there have "borne in" upon me the following propositions, which, of course, like all amateur attempts, are but a lame and impotent conclusion, and to which I only invite attention until such time as the country shall demand a dictum on the subject from a committee of acknowledged artists whose achievements proclaim them the fitting persons to pronounce it.

1. The city of Washington, having been created by and for the national government alone, private interests and wishes should in no case be allowed to stand in the way of a full regard for the national dignity and honor, and the innate fitness and propriety of things.

2. Congress should therefore buy up peremptorily at its present (not prospective) valuation the property entirely surrounding the Capitol grounds for half a block in depth, the whole of Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and the White House,* and,

* The retail business now transacted there could be gradually transferred to side streets.

in case the new park south of the Capitol should be purchased, as has been above suggested, the whole of New Jersey Avenue from the Capitol grounds to the river.

3. This property should never be sold, but should be used for the government buildings to be erected in the future, or leased to persons or institutions capable of building upon it in a manner worthy of the situation.

4. A National Board of Public Works, consisting only of landscape-architects, landscape-gardeners, and engineers of acknowledged ability and reputation, should be appointed by Congress, and given charge of the entire surface of Washington City, of the District of Columbia, of the National Cemeteries, and of Mount Vernon (for even there the hand of the Vandal has been committing sacrilege of late), and thereafter not a tree should be planted, far less cut down, without their sanction and approval.

5. Whatever funds this National Board requires for the improving, restoring, or beautifying of the above areas should be granted from the national treasury, and the citizens of Washington should only be taxed to keep the improvements in repair.

6. A National Commission of our leading architects, sculptors, and painters should pronounce upon all the buildings and works of art to be henceforth erected or purchased by the nation. And no house — not so much as a negro shanty even — should in future be put up in Washington without their permission, since there may be art even in the design of a shanty.

An attempt is being made by speculators in city lots to get the Presidential Mansion removed a mile to the north of where it now stands, the White House to be retained only as the President's Office. This should be sternly frowned down by public opinion, since from its historic associations, the beauty of its situation, and every other reason, the Executive Mansion should be where it always has been. At present it is too small

and insignificant for its obvious purposes, and the White House, therefore, should be built out towards the Potomac in a quadrangle with high roofs, and when these are done the portion now existing should be altered to correspond. Then the government, having as above recommended, taken possession of Pennsylvania and New Jersey Avenues and of the streets surrounding the Capitol, the lots at the White House end should be granted by it to foreign governments whereon to build the houses of their respective legations. Spacious and suitable dwellings, to be rented by Cabinet officers, should also be built in the same vicinity, and on both Avenues and around the Capitol blocks handsome and stately without, substantial and simple within, should be built and arranged in "apartments," continental fashion, to be leased to senators and members for the longer or shorter periods of their congressional terms. This done, and the interstices filled up with the buildings of the Government Bureaus, of the future National University, of the Congressional Library, the Hall of the Supreme Court, and what not, a sort of "Grand Boulevard of the Republic" — extending from the White House on the Potomac along Pennsylvania Avenue, round the Capitol, and thence at an obtuse angle down New Jersey Avenue to the Eastern Branch — would be created which the world could not excel.

The land and improvements of the Central Park up to the present time have cost New York twelve millions of dollars. But what of that? The New-Yorkers are proud of and devoted to their Park, and are willing to lavish upon it all that it can possibly need for

its adornment, simply because they know that it repays them so bountifully for all; not merely, dear reader, in money, though we have seen that it does even that amply in the rise of the taxable property about it, but in happiness, — happiness that *beauty alone* can bring to the human heart, all unable as we are to explain it.

Out of their poverty the citizens of Washington have spent, in all, ten or fifteen millions of dollars to improve its disproportionate streets and avenues, while the government, though paying no taxes on its numerous and valuable "reservations," has, until last winter, given almost nothing at all to city improvements, but has confined itself to paying for those merely of its own buildings and grounds.

I fancy that the reader will be surprised to learn how little these latter have cost the country, and hereafter will not wonder that Washington is so beggarly as it is. Up to the year 1870 the government had spent in that city, exclusive of salaries, only forty-five millions of dollars, of which twenty millions went "for such general purposes as are not peculiarly a part of the Capital of the nation, such as the Navy Yard, Arsenal, Insane Hospital, bridges, canals, fuel, gas, water, fences, etc., etc., etc."* For the public buildings, grounds, pictures, and statues in Washington the nation has been assessed during four fifths of a century but twenty-five millions of dollars, i. e. just twice the cost of the Central Park. Or (to put it *à la* General Butler), from 1792 to 1870 every individual in it has contributed to the state and dignity of the Federal Government but *one and a half cents* apiece annually.

* See Report 52, 41st Congress, 3d Session.

Zina Fay Peirce.

THE PHANTOM CHAPEL.

I.

THE night-breeze puffed our sail, as through
The shadowy strait we steered ; and soon
Along the flashing lake we flew,
Upon the white wake of the moon.

Betwixt the islands and the shore,
From cape to cape, we still pursued
Her sparkling keel, which sped before,
Like hopes that, laughing, still elude.

The mild night's universal smile
Touched sheltered cove and glistening leaf ;
Each shadow-girt and wooded isle
Shook in the wind its silvered sheaf.

By day a flower, by night a bud,
Her pure soul rocked in dreamy calms,
The lily slept upon the flood
Her nun-like sleep, with folded palms.

From cove to cove, from cape to cape,
We chased the hurrying moon, — when, lo !
In yonder glen, what gleaming shape
Behind the trees uprises slow ?

Between the upland and the wood,
Half hid by elms that fringed the shore,
The semblance of a chapel stood
Where never chapel stood before.

All still and fair, in misty air,
The lovely miracle upsprings,
As if some great white angel there,
Just lighted, stooped with half-shut wings.

Locked in the lonely vale, aloof
From men, the Gothic wonder rose :
On pallid pinnacle and roof
The quiet moonlight shed its snows.

From the dim pile, across the gray,
Uncertain landscape, faintly came,
Through pictured panes, a stained ray,
Red from some martyr's shirt of flame.

And, listening ever, we could trace
The strains of a mysterious hymn,