

## MY COUNTRY.

My country! I had hoped to see thee great;  
 And growing greater with the march of time;  
 With honor the bright path of glory climb;  
 And a new epoch for mankind create!  
 I longed to see thee a well-ordered state;  
 Promoting virtue, and repressing crime;  
 In peace, surpassing thy heroic prime;  
 Free, strong and wise, and master of thy fate!  
 But, if this favored land condemn the past;  
 If vulgar greed supplant the nobler aim;  
 If power be used the weaker to enthral—  
 Let withered hopes to the wild winds be cast;  
 Let history weep to write the page of shame;  
 And patriot hearts deplore the nation's fall.

PROF. EDWIN EMERSON, SR.

## A PLEA FOR TREES AND PARKS IN CITIES.

The sudden changes of temperature for which the city of New York is noted, though taxing the strength of all, naturally weigh most heavily upon the poor. This is particularly true of the summer months, when the mortality rises 30 per cent over and above the average death-rate for the year. When the heat is greatest, and especially when the periods of high temperature extend over many consecutive days, the mortality is simply appalling among the destitute living in the packed tenement districts where every square inch of available space is utilized, and where as many as 100 persons are sometimes crowded into a five-story dwelling built upon an area of only 2,500 square feet. On the streets the conditions are not much better; for here the heat is greatly intensified by reflection from brick walls and asphalt pavements, and, in some quarters, the air is vitiated by decaying garbage and other foci of infection.

In view of all these unfavorable circumstances the question arises, cannot something be done to mitigate them? In other words, is it not possible to provide more breathing places for the multitude?

It is hardly necessary to say that Central Park has doubtless proved the greatest boon ever bestowed upon our city. In 1856 the territory embraced within our present park limits was a rude, uncultivated tract distinguished by swamps, creeks and rocky gulches, and inhabited by squatters; the only landmarks at that time being the Block House, the home at Mt. St. Vincent, the Arsenal, and here and there a private dwelling. Yet this land, purchased by the city at a cost of about \$16,000,000, has, by reason of the improvements made upon it, so enhanced the desirability of the property in adjoining districts that the assessed valuation of the latter has gradually advanced to over \$500,000,000.

This fact expresses more eloquently than words the material benefit which the park has brought us. Statistics show that it has improved our health; but its real charm must be seen to be appreciated. There are taller trees in old Hyde Park, broader driveways in the Bois de Boulogne; but a happy com-

bination of art and nature has made these 800 acres of ground one of the loveliest of urban resorts. With all its advantages, however, except on holidays it is hardly used by the poor, who live at too great a distance to go there for the fresh air they need.

In 1867 St. John's Park, shaded by graceful elms, was covered by a freight-depot and wholly obliterated. Battery Park, formerly our public garden, has been disfigured by the unsightly structure of an elevated railroad. The greater part of City Hall Park, at one time one of the most beautiful spots in the city, is now occupied by Mail Street, the Federal Post Office and the Court House. The removal of the Post Office to a more central location would again give the city control of the site upon which that building is located; and this area could be further enlarged by the building of a new court house elsewhere, the present structure having frequently been condemned by the Board of Health. Such measures would facilitate the restoration of the old park to its former size and beauty, and would prove a blessing to the numerous occupants of the neighboring sky-scrapers as well as to the crowds who in future will emerge from or go to the Park Row depot of the cars of the Rapid Transit Tunnel.

To compensate for the spoliation of this once beautiful spot, a few small parks have been created in the lower part of the city. Among these, Mulberry Bend alone is deserving of special commendation. The adjoining "Paradise Square," where five thoroughfares meet—hence appropriately called the "Five Points"—was fifty years ago the centre of crime and misery. One alley of this neighborhood bore the significant name, "Murderers' Row." This was the haunt of the notorious gang, "The Dead Rabbits," who terrorized the district between Broadway and the Bowery. This locality has now been completely transformed; three acres of open ground occupy the site of the former squalid dens; trees, which have scarcely had time to grow, have cleared the vitiated atmosphere; and terrorizing criminals have been compelled to make room for frugal Italian laborers.

Another plot of three acres, bounded by East Broadway, Norfolk, Hester and Essex Streets, has been acquired for the formation of "Seward Park." This pleasure-ground is situated within the borders of the Tenth Ward, where 70,000 persons, principally Hebrews, live on 109 acres of ground, *i. e.*, 643 to an acre. The dilapidated structures which covered the spot proposed for the park have been demolished, and the encircling houses, with all their misery, have become painfully visible. Here the Recreation League has temporarily arranged a playground, where swarms of children congregate, and their merry-making is in singular contrast to the

careworn faces of their parents, which show but too plainly that their hopes of finding an asylum in this country have been by no means realized. If some of their more fortunate brethren could witness the misery prevailing in this portion of the city, I am sure they would not permit another summer to pass without providing "Seward Park" with vegetation. The evening concerts which the city furnishes here must sound like mockery to persons suffering from insufficient food and water.

As to water, better provision has been made in other districts. A spacious building containing public baths is now being erected in the prospective "Hamilton Fish Park," comprising the square bounded by Houston, Pitt, Willet and Sheriff Streets. Yet this building, estimated to cost \$80,000, will encroach on space required for fresh air and for light. Far more successfully have the advantages of our river front been utilized at Corlears Hook Park, a resort which is constantly growing in favor with East Siders.

Several suggestions regarding our opportunities for improvement occur to me. In the first place and above all, I desire to call attention to the shore-line running parallel to Blackwell's Island. Owing to the strong currents at Hell Gate, the entire stretch between the Long Island and the Astoria ferries—that is, from Thirty-fourth Street to Ninety-second street—is unadapted to the landing of cargoes, and consequently is almost entirely devoid of piers; only a few being used for the landing of coal and lumber. If the entire river front were converted into a shore park, instead of the twelve acres north of Eighty-fourth Street, and the square bounded by Thirty-fifth and Thirty-sixth Streets, between First and Second Avenues, the change would materially benefit the greatly congested German and Irish districts of the East Side, and at the same time increase the taxable value of the adjacent property. Unless heroic measures are taken this section will eventually become the Whitechapel of New York. In the streets between First and Second Avenues many vile resorts are found, while the space between First Avenue and the river has been appropriated for gasworks, malt-houses, and abattoirs.

It has been proposed to convert the section extending from Fifty-second to Fifty-fourth Streets, and as far back as Eleventh Avenue, into a pleasure ground—the "De Witt Clinton Park." On this spot, surrounded by sturdy oaks, stood the century-old homesteads of the Mott and Striker families; but it has been recently hired for a dumping-ground, so that the fair old landmark has been despoiled of the trees remaining upon it. As it is, the few dilapidated cottages remaining still bear the name of Striker's Alley, which leads to an