PARK-MAKING AS A NATIONAL ART.

THE Atlantic Monthly for January contains a noteworthy article under this title by Mrs. M. C. Robbins, who is well known to the readers of this journal. Her thesis is that the desire for the creation of beauty in America will find its fullest expression in the design and construction of public parks rather than in painting, sculpture or architecture. We have already done well in these latter fields, but our craving for liberty, and for enlarged and untrammeled utterance, can only be satisfied by bringing under control the mighty forces of nature and compelling them to develop and make manifest our artistic ideas . . . In our youthful exuberance we long for something that will appeal to all the people—something colossal and distinctly American—and this so-called Art of Public Improvement will find full scope in treating vast areas of mountain and cataract and forest in works of sufficient moment to need the support of sovereign states, or even of the Federal Government, and which need an army to protect them . . . Mrs. Robbins' conclusion is that "there is everything in the United States to nourish a great art—wealth, enthusiasm, generosity, a sense of boundless capacity, the verve and spring of youth and unlimited aspiration. In the Art of Public Improvement, the dreamer and the utilitarian can combine, the nation's beauty and the nation's wealth can in it be united, and our achievements may be such as to satisfy even American ambition" . . .

The rapidity with which the acquisition of park lands by cities has been going on will be understood when it is remembered that in 1869 there were only two well-advanced rural parks in the United States. Fifteen years later there were twenty, and now there is hardly a city of consequence in the country which has not made the beginning of a system of parks and parkways. It is true, as Mrs. Robbins says, that when the schemes now begun have been fully carried out we shall have public reservations reaching, in what is practically an unbroken series, from the eastern seaboard to the shores of California. "The idea of such a continuous reservation, a national parkway from the Atlantic to the Pacific, leading from one beautiful pleasure-ground to another, or passing through great tracts of woodland controlled by Government foresters, is not inconsistent with the genius of our country, which ever seeks a closer union between its parts; while the gradually enlarging park systems of our cities indicate the way it may be brought out in the linking together of suburb to suburb by great boulevards, which tend to bring civilization to distant homes by affording safe and easy communication between them" . . .

We no longer hear objections of this sort against park-building, but there is another danger that ought to be shunned. It is not enough to secure a certain number of acres where they can be had with least cost and trouble. In the first place, the land should be wisely selected and its boundaries intelligently determined. Design for its improvement must be made by competent artists and executed with skill. When completed, pleasure-grounds must be maintained with care, for, if left to uncontrolled nature and unpolicing, they may become repulsive desolations. To secure a good design we need a school of landscape art, for, although such a school will never create a great artist, it can teach him the history of what has been done, point out to him what tools he needs and how to use them, and show him how he can most directly reach his end . . .

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