THE PLAN OF THE COLUMBIAN FAIR GROUNDS.

MORE than twenty years ago a design was prepared by Messrs. Olmsted, Vaux & Co. for laying out three tracts of land which were known together as South Park, Chicago. One of these tracts is now Jackson Park, the site of the Columbian Exposition. Among the striking features of this plot of land, as pointed out in the report accompanying the plan alluded to, was its long frontage on the lake, which, in the opinion of the designers, added an element of such grandeur and sublimity that it compensated for the absence of picturesque elevations of surface, while at the same time it provided means of transportation by water from the city, whose business centre was some seven miles away ... Visitors who come by rail would pass through the arches of this stately structure [the Administration Building, the loftiest and most strictly monumental building on the grounds] into the quadrangle, where their first impressions of the Exhibition will be received. A glance at the map will explain to some extent this arrangement and the magnitude of the scale upon which the whole idea is worked out will be understood when it is remembered that the basin contains nearly nine acres of water.

This plan of ushering visitors into the grounds through a porch of such dignity and into a court surrounded by architectural splendors, instead of letting them in through some side-entrance, so to speak, seems to us one of the finest inspirations of the design. No group of buildings approaching these in magnitude or of equal ambition in design, and related to each other so intimately, has ever been constructed in the entire history of architecture, and while the designers of the separate buildings have been allowed certain liberties as to details of expression they have worked together in perfect sympathy to secure a single consistent and harmonious effect . . .

[Editorial. Garden and Forest 5(1892): 289]

In the throng who witnessed on Monday the Columbian Exposition few probably realized that the harmony of the scene and the perfection and convenience of the whole scheme of arrangement were due to the genius of one man, Frederick Law Olmsted. Many others have brought to this great enterprise their gifts of labor, devotion, artistic training and the enthusiasm born of a great opportunity, but the spark of genius which has produced a single and consistent work of art, changing the sandy and uninviting waste of Jackson Park into a marvel of stately beauty, sprung from his brain. Of this the world may still be ignorant, but his associates realize and proclaim it; and the architects, sculptors and painters who have been inspired to their sincerest efforts feel that their work serves a nobler purpose, because the labor of each contributed to the harmonious development and expression of his comprehensive idea . . .

The foremost artist which the New World has yet produced, Mr. Olmsted, has been singularly fortunate in impressing himself during his own life upon his time and people, and in living to see with his own eyes the development and perfection of his greatest conceptions. The memory of his name and personality may be dimmed in the passage of years, for it is the fate of architects to be lost in their work, but millions of people now unborn will find rest and refreshment in the contemplation of smiling landscapes which he has made, and will enjoy the shade of trees which he has planted. No American has been more useful in his time or has made a more valuable and lasting contribution to civilization in this country.

[Editorial. Garden and Forest 6 (1893): 192]