NEW YORK IN THE MAKING—FIVE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS TO BE SPENT IN RECONSTRUCTING THE CITY: BY WILLIAM GRIFFITH

After a momentary silence spake
One city of a more ungainly make,
"They sneer at me for my disfigurement:
"What! did the hand then of the builder shake?"

ANTICIPATING, by a generation or more, such a critical possibility as the foregoing, New York, crass, crude and obviously colossal, is now drawing the teeth of impending criticism by paving the way to become a beautiful city: and it will be an extraordinary place when it is finished—when it is!

Since its Knickerbocker age, the city at the mouth of the Hudson, which boasts of itself as being not only Great but Greater New York, has been in process of construction. Born one story tall, it has added line upon boundary-line, story upon story, until to-day, from its Matterhorns of masonry it fairly looks down upon the architectural world, and has nearly attained the limits of construction. Now the hour of reconstruction is at hand.

Reconstruction! The word has a wealth of meaning, of mighty travail. Elsewhere are places on earth where the maxim of tearing down being easier than upbuilding is honored in the observance. In our original metropolis, judging by the celerity with which thirty-storied buildings are tossed skyward and two-storied subways or tunnels are driven underground, by the magic growth of whole areas almost in a night, the obverse rule would seem to apply: it is harder and perhaps costlier to erase than it is to rear—in New York.

This is one reason why the reconstruction of the city has been postponed from time to time, or, to be exact, until this year of architectural quasi grace 1906. Beetling structures have multiplied with the ant-like rapidity of crowds. For a decade the annual increase in high-roofed and higher-renting hotels and department stores alone has been numbered by the hundred. Already the entire core and center of Manhattan Island is punctuated with them—buildings that have been springing up here, there and everywhere, with complete disregard of
sites and sightliness, at an average outlay of a hundred and fifty millions a year; and this is not to house or even office a population steadily increasing at the rate of a quarter of a million per annum, but because the available area has been so limited that owners have found themselves compelled to improve their rent-rearing properties to the topmost notch.

However, and fortunately, there is a special providence which governs the rise of a city, and Greater New York, according to Architects Whitney Warren and Richard Walker, who originated the plans which are practically certain of mayoral and aldermanic approval, is not badly based either from an artistic or an architectural view-point. It might be worse, in that it possesses the essential elements which, if properly treated and adequately developed, will make it the most beautiful as well as the greatest city of architectural record within the next twenty-five years. All that is necessary, say they, is to adopt and execute a broader policy in providing new connections and in making alterations here and there to remedy defects which have come about through the haphazard manner in which the metropolis has until recently expanded.

This is an executive no less than a golden age, and the present municipal government of our chief city is the executor of a dazzling inheritance. New York is crude ore, thickly veined with gold possibilities. To mine, crush, mint and mold the given product is the great mission which Mayor McClellan and his adjutants have undertaken. Plans have been made for many important improvements already: some of the projects have gone far enough to warrant final success, and others are on the eve of adoption and immediate execution, or the beginning thereof. Vast schemes, architectural and sculptural, are now being pondered by the municipal authorities, artists and others, which, when fully ripened, will transform an already majestic metropolis into one of rare beauty. The really greater city that is growing from the plans, as adopted or now being considered, looms faintly out of the mists of the future. That it will be a massive thing, structurally, goes without saying. That it will be a city of broader avenues, greener and greater parks, better and bigger bridges, taller towers and cooler catacombs is the boon promise or prophesy of those who have the work in hand. Plans accepted and plans that are now cer-
tain of acceptance provide for an expenditure of quite five hundred million dollars within the next few years, and the result of these projects will be twenty beauty-spots where there is now one. They will embrace monuments, sculptural and arboreal, intended, not for a decade or a century, but for a civic lifetime.

By far the greatest improvements will be brought about by the completion of spacious avenues of egress and ingress under and above ground and water. In the mighty heart-throbs of the metropolis millions of human beings will be drawn from the suburban regions each morning, to be sent pulsing back again in the evening through the greatly improved and increased arteries that shall radiate from Manhattan within the next twenty years. And decorative beauty will, it is promised, keep pace at every corner with grosser utility.

Primarily, the first point of attack in the work of demolition, en route to reconstruction, will be Fifty-ninth Street between Fifth Avenue and the East River. It is in this vicinity that the New York City Improvement Commission, created three years ago to prepare a comprehensive plan for raising New York from a comparative to a superlative architectural degree, has been more extravagant than anywhere else. According to the programme, the city purposes to acquire all of the reality between Fifty-ninth and Sixtieth Streets and between Fifth and Second Avenues, the territory thus acquired to be transformed into a spacious plaza or approach to the new Blackwell's Island Bridge. As an earnest of what is to be, the city has already acquired the square block between Second and Third Avenues, both of which are now blurred with elevated railroads, and Fifty-ninth and Sixtieth Streets. The commission is a unit in contending that the proper method of developing outlying boroughs is to provide attractive entrances to and from Manhattan and the various suburbs. At present east Fifty-ninth Street is not only an eyesore but a menace to life and property, as it is, surface-cars at the junction with Madison Avenue (which also applies to Forty-second Street at the same longitude), follow each other so continuously that it takes an acrobat to cross the street. Such, indeed, is the uproar of trains, cars, honking motors, clanging ambulances and demon draymen, combined with the semi-occasional storm of fire-engines, that it is quite futile to be merely acro-
PROPOSED CHELSEA IMPROVEMENT, SHOWING ELEVATED ROADWAY AND DIGNIFIED STEAMSHIP TERMINAL
COMMON PLAZA FOR THE APPROACHES TO THE EAST RIVER AND MANHATTAN BRIDGES IN THE BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

Drawn by Birch B. Lanz
WIDENING OF 181ST STREET LOOKING WEST FROM WASHINGTON BRIDGE
CONTINUATION OF MADISON AVENUE
FROM 23D STREET TO BROADWAY
batic—one must have courage, intrepidity, strategy and a deal of enthusiasm to negotiate a passage. In short, Fifty-ninth Street has been condemned by the commission as a very unholy place, full of structural vices and architectural sins. Its days are numbered.

Using the Sherman Monument, which cleaves Fifth Avenue, as an axis, a plaza three hundred and twenty feet wide will sweep majestically from the southeast corner of Central Park to the new bridge. This plaza will boast three drives—two outer ones for carriages and the middle one for heavier traffic; and a quartette of sidewalks, two on a side. The corners will be suitably upholstered in stone copings and balustrades and the plaza will be fringed generously with trees. Monumental columns will be erected at effective intervals. Plans are also drawn by the terms of which diagonal streets will radiate from Second Avenue and the plaza to Fifty-seventh and Sixty-second Streets respectively, for the greater accommodation of heavier traffic. Of course, the creation of this plaza will involve the demolition or removal of the Netherland Hotel and one or two other imposing structures, besides scores of lesser ones. To offset the exceeding expense thus entailed, it is strongly recommended that the city also condemn the properties immediately overlooking and benefited by the plaza. Their increased valuation, it is believed, will go far toward recompensing the city for its primary outlay. This scheme of excess condemnation has been successfully inaugurated by several European cities, and, in more than one instance, has fully reimbursed the city for the cost of a new square or thoroughfare.

Fifty-ninth Street, however, is only one item on the programme which comprehends a system of parks and drives as yet only threading a needle of dream. Beginning on the north at the new Hendrick Hudson Bridge spanning the Harlem River, there will ere long be a chain of parks and parkways extending not only down to Fifty-ninth Street, but across the Blackwell’s Island Bridge and far toward the heart of Long Island. Thus it will be possible for one to drive nearly fifty miles straight ahead through a practically continuous boulevard bordered with foliage and relieved further by miles and miles of park.

Thus, Dyckman Street, from Nagle Avenue to Broadway, will be a monumental avenue linking Highbridge Park with the Speedway Extension. Skirting Fort Washington Park and traversing the
new Boulevard Lafayette one may pass through the Hundred and Eighty-first Street Parkway, connecting the North River waterfront with new parks in the Bronx via Washington Bridge and the Grand Boulevard and Concourse. Washington Bridge, one of the finest structures in the city, will thus be included in the park system, extending from Fort Washington Park on the north to Pelham Bay Park near Long Island Sound.

In addition, Riverside Park will be stretched far to the north of its present northern terminus and will afford the finest and longest strictly river-side driveway in existence.

It also is now virtually assured that the civic authorities will uphold the ambitious architects in their plan to construct a stadium between Macomb’s Road, Boscobel and Aqueduct Avenues, to be approached by a wide, tree-lined driveway over Washington Bridge. Still another fringe of park, now in definite prospect, will extend from One Hundred and Thirtieth to One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Streets, between St. Nicholas and Bradhurst Avenues.

New York now has a waterfrontage of nearly five hundred miles, forty-four miles of which represent Manhattan Island. Of this forty-four miles, three-fourths are available for commercial purposes, the remainder for park purposes. The two principal problems to be mastered are the unsightly appearance from the water and the traffic congestion on the land side. On the North River side, where congestion is becoming more and more noticeable, and where the tides of traffic are abnormally swollen, an overhead elevated street is planned along the waterfront. This will accommodate the north and south travel, leaving the side streets, piercing the city from river to river, for the east and west travel. Approaches from this elevated street to the recreation-piers are projected, with stairs for pedestrians and inclined planes for horses and vehicles at convenient junctions. This is shown, by way of illustration, in the accompanying drawing of the Chelsea improvements on the North River between Twelfth and Twenty-third Streets. The aerial promenade will readily lend itself to decoration. Cases of shrubbery, palms and potted plants will star the promenade at regular distances, and the northern water-fronts, instead of being a center of congestion, din and confusion, will have both artistic and utilitarian merit, as has the transformed waterfront at Antwerp.
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Another improvement which combines beauty and greater utility is foreshadowed in the plan to remove the east wall of Central Park between Fifty-ninth and One Hundred and Tenth Streets, thereby adding a driveway through the park and relieving much of the now-existing traffic congestion. North of One Hundred and Tenth Street to the Harlem River the avenue will ere long be arched with trees leading to the Grand Boulevard and forming a direct connection between Central Park and the new parks of the Bronx. Subsequently it is proposed to widen the avenue north of One Hundred and Tenth Street to boulevard dimensions.

Of equal importance with the foregoing innovations is the resolve to erase the stoop-line on Fifth Avenue between Twenty-third and Forty-seventh Street. For years it has been growing more and more apparent that the first street of America is entirely too narrow-shouldered to bear the burden of travel imposed upon it. By abolishing the stoop-line the sidewalks will be extended to the building-line and seven and one-half feet lifted from the present sidewalks on each side and thrown into the roadway, thereby adding some fifteen feet to the space available for vehicle-traffic and affording immediate relief.

Legal assurances have been given the city that it is privileged to rescind any rights to vaults under the sidewalks, so that the last leg of opposition to this improvement has been knocked from under.

Of VARIOUS suggestions advanced for the amelioration of traffic conditions around Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street junction, the one most likely of adoption by the Board of Aldermen this year is to sink the center of Forty-second Street so as to allow the surface-cars and heavy road-vehicles to pass under the street proper. This passage will, of course, extend between the Subway and the street surface, but the Subway tunnel is quite deep enough to afford the necessary space, and the plan will undoubtedly be ratified. At the same time, it will be necessary to abolish the stoop-line on Forty-second Street between Madison and Sixth Avenues by way of according space for carriages and a widening of the sidewalks.

Civic surgery will be practised with telling effect, it is promised, in either slicing off a block of buildings directly south of Madison Square or in driving a new street diagonally from Madison Avenue and Twenty-third Street to Seventeenth Street and Fourth Avenue.
This street should run parallel with Broadway. Should the alternative be decided upon, as now seems assured, Madison Avenue will be run through so as to join Broadway at Twenty-first Street. The triangular area thus created will be made into a sort of green, befounded pendant of Madison Square.

Nor is this all. The commission is nothing if not thoroughgoing. It purports extending Sixth Avenue southward to dovetail with West Street at Duane. Seventh Avenue may also expect to find its foot resting on West Street at the corner of Spring, and both termini will be gladdened by squares of green and shade. A new park is badly needed, says the commission, between Division and Canal Streets and Forsyth Street and the Bowery. This park will be a junction of new streets leading directly to the Manhattan and East River Bridges.

Crossing to Long Island, the visitor twenty years hence will find improvements scarcely less noteworthy than those in Manhattan. Spacious plazas will be hollowed out, not only in Long Island City as an addition to the Blackwell’s Island Bridge improvement, but between Concord, Tillary, Gold and Lawrence Streets as a common junction of the approaches to the East River and Manhattan Bridges on the south. Flatbush Avenue, extended, will run diagonally through this plaza and will be flung far eastward from Fulton Street to Fourth Avenue. Heywood Street will be extended and widened from Kent Avenue to Fort Greene Place and Lafayette Avenue, where still another, though demurer, plaza awaits creation. As a fact, Brooklyn has plunged its hand deep into the magic jar, drawing forth the plan of yet another park between Canton and Navy Streets, facing the United States Navy Yard, together with a new street, by way of abundant measure, to run from the Navy Yard through the greater plaza to Court Street. Dissatisfied even with this spacious allotment the City of Churches has yearnings to transform Jamaica Bay, studded with islets, into a recreation-ground that shall not only rival but replace Coney Island once and for all time.

For these Manhattan improvements are not chimeras. Many of the projects are under way. Others have been approved and are ripening toward substantial expression. Plans have already been drawn for a greater areaway at the Brooklyn Bridge approach, and it is more than fancy, if not a fact, that before the block whereon
VIEW OF THE PROPOSED TREATMENT OF DELANCEY STREET AS SEEN FROM THE WILLIAMSBURG BRIDGE
PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT OF BATTERY PARK—UNION FERRY-HOUSE FOR LINES RUNNING TO STATEN ISLAND, BROOKLYN AND JERSEY CITY

Drawn by Birch R. Long
GREATER NEW YORK, LOOKING SOUTH, SHOWING THE PROPOSED NORTH RIVER FRONT AND GENERAL SYSTEM OF PARKS AND PARKWAYS
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the Staats-Zeitung building now stands is razed, all that slice of land from Centre Street to Broadway on the northern side of Chambers Street will be condemned to enlarge City Hall Park and provide greater girths of green for the municipal buildings.

Of course, the scope of this forecast has not included acres of grosser improvements, such as railway termini to cost millions, seven great twin tunnels to cost other millions, additional subways under ground and masses of masonry above ground. Many millions will be sown in private ways that will yield a tall and abundant harvest. Above the skyscrapers of to-day will tower the forty-storied structures of the future now declared practical and awaiting only the pressure of increased realty values to send them pushing upward in the commercial heart of New York. By 1926 the city will have a new skyline.

Meanwhile, how shall it fare with the homeless and increasing millions? Annually, and for that matter diurnally, the supply of private dwellings diminishes. Those of recent construction are designed only for the wealthy, who each year are retreating more and more to their country seats, and who occupy their town houses, from the fifties to the nineties, for but brief periods. Yet somewhere there is always light, and for the flat-dwellers, too, there are flashes. They radiate from rapid transit. But the light is in the outlying regions, which improved communication will reflect. There, in place of impossible mansions in town, will rise myriads of inexpensive dwellings—squares and crescents such as characterize suburban London, mile after mile of houses, leagues of villas, all of them unpretentious, of a depressing sameness, but accessible, airy, secure from the crowding complexities of metropolitan existence, and each of them to some human being a shelter from the colossal city. Then as now, no doubt New York will reflect the United States, but with this difference—where it now is a commercial and financial center it may then be an architectural oasis. Shall it be only a great mart, the greatest on earth, from the Battery to the Bronx, bent only on waxing wealthier, crowded by day, vacant at night, a Cyclopean inferno with a tender canopy of blue, into which each morning from New Jersey and Long Island and Westchester the masses shall focus? Or, shall it be, as the prophets are planning and promising, a city of beauty in fact as well as fancy?