



"This is an art  
Which does mend nature: change it rather: but  
THE ART ITSELF IS NATURE."—Shakespeare.

## PUBLIC GARDENS.

### PARKS AND BUILDING GROUND.

No one can be more desirous than myself that parks, gardens, and open spaces should be multiplied in the vicinity of all our large towns, and that they should be made as extensive as possible; but certain considerations, left entirely out of sight in the article on Victoria Park in your last week's issue, seem to render it advisable, with the view of furthering this very object, that the strips of land in dispute should, as originally proposed, be let for building on. With your permission, I will briefly state what these considerations are.

1. When a sum of public money is voted for a park, and a special provision is made to enable the park to become in time self-supporting, and even to have a surplus revenue which may eventually pay back to the nation its original cost, it seems to me to be bad policy to endeavour to annul these provisions, and thus make it a perpetual charge on the revenue. For, if this is done, it must inevitably render any Government both less willing and less able to entertain the question of establishing new parks. The fact of the great increase of population round the park, which is adduced as an argument for keeping the building land open, is the very circumstance which has rendered the surrounding land so valuable, and which will enable it to produce the required revenue.

2. There is, however, a very important principle involved in this question, which has been strongly advocated by Mr. John Stuart Mill, viz.:—that as much as possible of the *increase* in the value of land which is directly caused by the public, should belong to the public. Now there is no more certain way of increasing the value of the surrounding land than by making a beautiful park in a densely peopled district; and by reserving a strip of land all round that park at the outset, *expressly to be built upon when the demand arises for it*, you do actually secure a large share of the increased value to the public. The strip of building land around Victoria Park, for instance, is certain to increase in value; so that, besides producing a good revenue for the first term of the leases, it will probably, as those leases fall in, be re-let at a much higher rate, and so produce an increasing revenue, which may not only suffice to pay for the present park, but may also supply funds towards the formation of new parks in outlying districts where they will be then more needed.

3. But if the strips of land in question are now permanently attached to the park, we not only lose all this present and prospective benefit ourselves, but we make a free gift of the wealth we have created to men who have no earthly right to it. For there will then be a most valuable building frontage to the park, about three miles in extent, in the hands of private persons, whose property will rise to double or treble its previous value the moment we extend the park up to their boundary, and give them the certainty of a perpetual view over it. Many of these freeholders will have purchased their ground at a low price, because it was believed that they would be entirely shut out from the park by a continuous line of houses on the reserved land.

4. It is of the very first importance to establish the practicability of the principle of always securing, at the time when great improvements are first made at public expense, an additional tract of cheap land, the enhanced value of which, created by the improvement, may at some future time repay its cost; and I cannot but think that it is very short-sighted

policy, under *any* circumstances, to claim this reserved land, and so neutralise this highly desirable result. It is almost as suicidal as the practice of those Governments which, having obtained a loan on the faith of the establishment of a sinking fund, appropriate the revenues set apart for that purpose on the first monetary pressure.

5. On looking at your very clear map of Victoria Park, it is easily seen that the strips in question form a very small part of the whole; and although twenty-nine acres in one lump is a good-sized piece of land, it is of far less importance when in a strip nearly three miles long. For a large portion of this extent, the strips are only one hundred feet wide; and it cannot much affect the park as a place of recreation whether the houses, which will soon inevitably encircle it, are built on the outer or the inner side of the surrounding roads. On the other hand, it is a matter of the highest importance to prove, that in populous districts parks can be made self-supporting, after a few years, by the simple method of surrounding them with a belt of land reserved for building, the constantly increasing rents of which shall benefit the public instead of private landowners. I therefore maintain that it is the true interest of the people at large that the original scheme should be carried into effect, because it is founded on a true and most important principle, which will favour (as surely as the opposite course will check) the multiplication of parks and gardens for the people.

ALFRED R. WALLACE.

[We wholly agree with our correspondent, who puts this case in such a clear light. Apart from the various excellent reasons given by Mr. Wallace, it is desirable that the public should possess the power of determining what kind of buildings shall exist in the immediate neighbourhood of its parks. Again, the gain of a mere riband of ground, such as is shown in our plan, or the gain of the strips of ground around the two most recent London parks, and of which we have heard so much clamour, is as nothing compared with the advantage of securing other parks, however small, in densely populated parts of the City, and which we could secure so easily if the grand principle of allowing the public to benefit by the improvements be adopted. We must secure for the dwellers in our vast cities more than a breath of fresh air on a Sunday afternoon at perhaps a distance of several miles from their houses. With reference to the gain to the public from the construction of parks, we have some evidence from the other side of the Atlantic, which came to hand the same day as Mr. Wallace's letter. It is a report of the splendid new park at Brooklyn, which we had the pleasure of visiting in 1870:—"On reference to the rolls of the city's property, the commissioners find that since the commencement of active operations on the park, there has been added to the tax list the large amount of 77,232,410 dollars, the Board of Assessors having felt themselves justified by its very obvious increase, in adding twenty-five per cent. to the city's taxable property for the year 1869. It should be observed, also, in order to a proper appreciation of these facts, that a large portion of this increase, to wit: the sum of 32,820,059 dollars, has arisen in the wards immediately surrounding the park, including the town of Flatbush, thereby increasing the city's annual income nearly a million of dollars."]

### THE ROYAL GARDENS, KEW.

Your correspondent's remarks (p. 217) on the Pagoda Vista at Kew will surprise nobody; it is a legitimate subject for criticism to all interested in ornamental planting. How anyone could have dreamed of disfiguring such a beautiful vista by planting deciduous trees in front of Deodars, has caused much discussion amongst practical men. That fine promenade was originally a grand conception; but for years it has been evident that the Deodars were not succeeding. On the contrary, they have proved a failure; for, from the time they have been planted, they ought to have been twice the size they are at present. It is now proved that, except in the south of England or in certain favoured localities, Deodars are not sufficiently hardy for our climate. But why should not steps have been taken long ago to remedy the error, by planting trees that would have answered the purpose? Surely, from among conifers, plentiful as they have been for years, choice might have been made of trees that would have given satisfaction. It has been long known that the *Cedrus atlantica* is much hardier than the Deodar; therefore, it