

THE GROUPING OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS

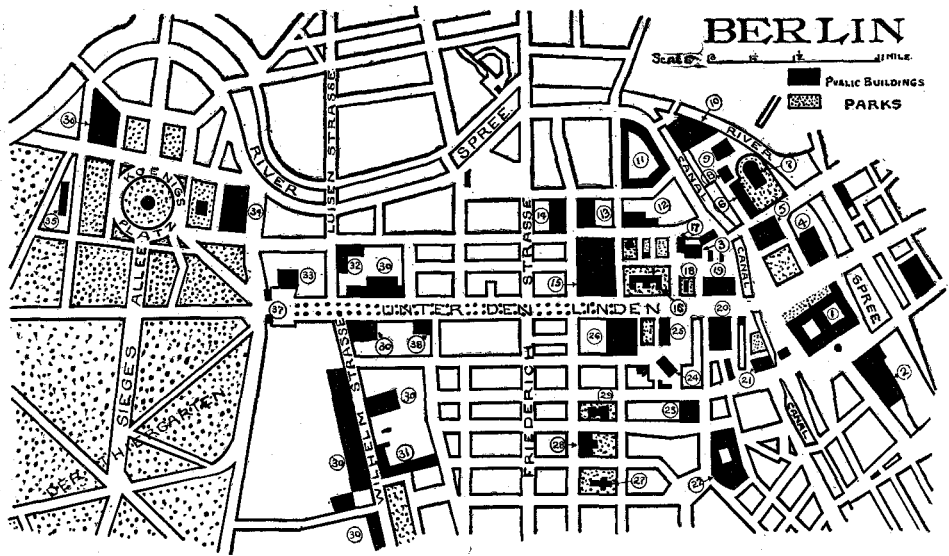
BY MILO ROY MALTBY



THE interest in civic art is spreading at such a rapid rate that the movement promises to assume a National character. Possibly it has already reached that point, for official commissions have been appointed in many cities, private organizations have sprung up from Maine to California, and everywhere citizens and city officials are demanding practical suggestions and information concerning successful experiments in other cities.

Among the matters of fundamental importance is the location and grouping

of public buildings. It is not even subordinate to the artistic character of the building itself, for the proverb of the lighted candle and the bushel has no more pertinent application than to a beautiful building in a mean, cramped, out-of-the-way location. Many a fine structure, with an impressive façade and inspiring sculpture, is buried among commonplace buildings which elbow it vulgarly, destroy its beauty, and practically nullify any ennobling influence it might exert. Too frequently the street upon which it fronts is so narrow that an adequate view is utterly impossible, and the tall sky-scrapers shut out the light. Indeed, if public buildings are



MAP OF BERLIN

Showing Civic Centers with public buildings and parks

to be given such locations, the less spent for architectural embellishment, for sculptural decoration, or other artistic treatment, the better.

In selecting locations for public buildings many factors must be considered. Topography is an important element; no monumental structure should be located in a depression, for example. The laws of proportion must be obeyed; the building should neither be hemmed in too closely nor dwarfed by adjacent open spaces of enormous area; it should have a setting to which its size, beauty, and dignity entitle it. Convenience and utility are fundamental prerequisites; transit facilities often determine the availability of proposed sites. The uses for which the buildings are intended make certain suggestions impracticable. A public market would not with propriety be located in close proximity to a court-house, nor a fire station by the side of a public school. The architecture should be in harmony with the surroundings. Possible future changes in the development of the city should be foreseen and prepared for as far as possible. Indeed, one may almost say that the factors are innumerable, and that no design can even be begun until the location has been selected and all other conditions determined upon.

The principle which I wish to empha-

size here, however, is that any scheme which does not provide for the grouping of the principal public buildings into a civic center is woefully imperfect. The framers of such a defective scheme have utterly failed to comprehend their opportunities and to produce the highest type of public art. This principle goes much further than any enumerated above, for, assuming that each public structure were located with the highest skill as far as that one structure is concerned, there would still be lacking that grandeur, that multiplied efficacy, that ennobling inspiration which comes from the union into one harmonious whole of numerous beautiful and effective units.

The advantages of proper grouping—"civic centers," as they have been called by the Hon. John De Witt Warner—are many. In the first place, the artistic effect is very greatly increased, just as the blossoming rose is incomparably more beautiful than the disconnected petals, no matter how perfect each petal may be. In the natural flower each part, and in the civic center each structure, not only contributes its own beauty but increases the beauty of every other part because of the relation it bears to the whole. Park effects—trees, flowers, shrubs, green grass—constitute the frame of the picture and give a proper setting to the buildings. Open spaces afford

views from the proper distance. When to these are added statuary, fountains, and monuments, all harmoniously combined, the group becomes marvelously beautiful and superbly attractive.

Further, even such modicum of art as exists where buildings and parks are indifferently scattered is less appreciated, and by a smaller number, than when they are molded into civic centers. In the former case, not only is the number small of those who can enjoy the beauties of a building, but the crowds that fill the settees, in the smaller parks particularly, must view the mediocre and often very objectionable buildings that surround the parks. How much greater the pleasure and how much larger the

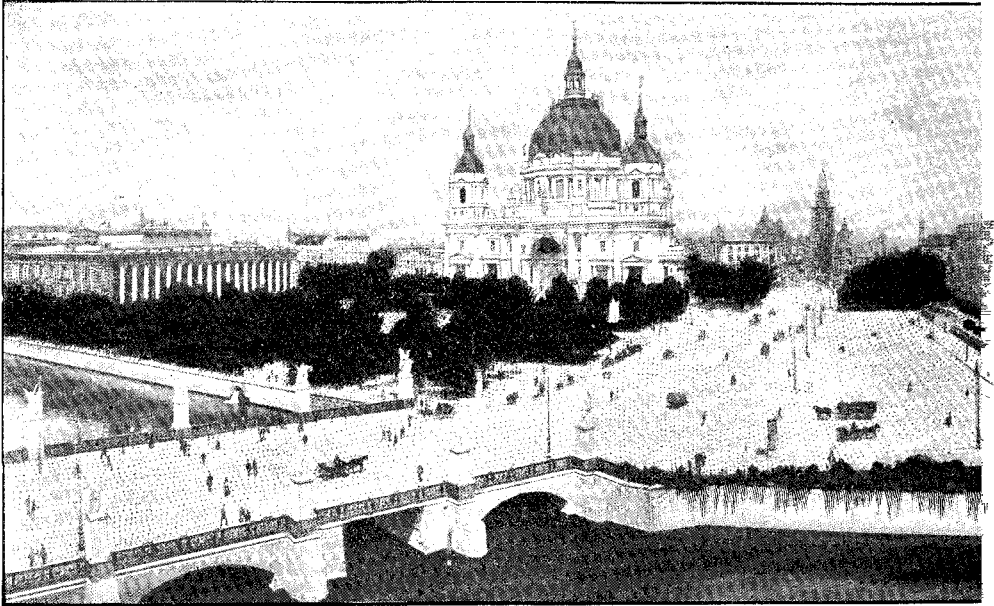
number benefited where the public buildings are in the parks or border them! The use of the parks is not interfered with, and the citizen enjoys the beauty of an artistic façade or well-proportioned structure as well as the refreshing effect of the grass, shrubs, and flowers.

There are utilitarian advantages to civic centers also. When one has public business to transact, it is often necessary to visit various departments of government. If buildings are grouped, this may be done easily and quickly. It often happens also that the citizen may not know at what office to apply for the information desired. If all departments occupy contiguous quarters, he is quickly



MAP OF VIENNA

Showing Ring-Strasse and arrangement of public buildings and parks



Old Museum

Palace Bridge

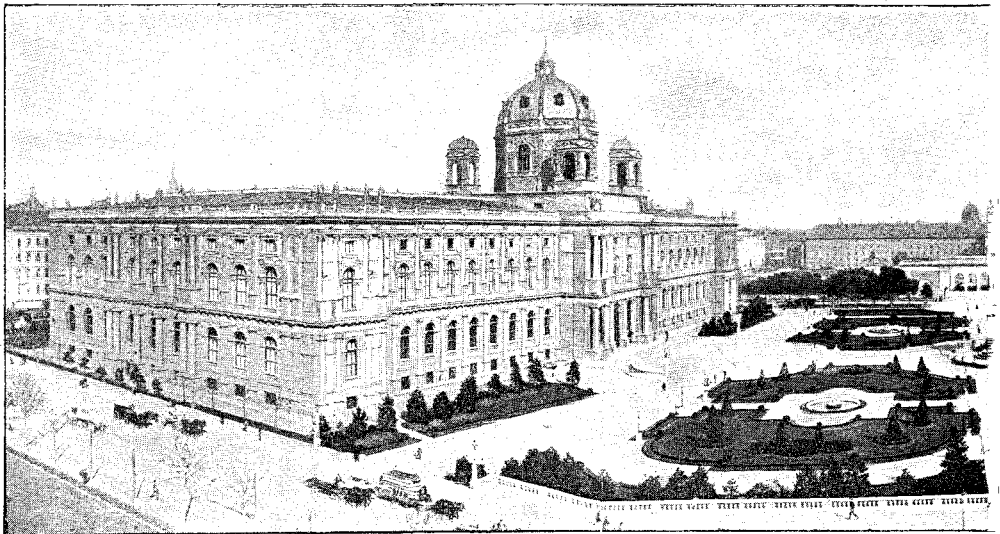
Cathedral

A BERLIN

referred to the proper place. The local offices of the various departments also would be found more readily if each locality had its civic center.

In the fourth place, the creation of civic centers arouses civic pride and patriotism. They give the city character, dignity, and expression. Here is something which the masses can appreciate and enjoy, something which ex-

presses power, greatness, and ideality, and to which they can point with pride. It is not too much to say that one important reason why politics is so perverted is that the city appears to the great masses of the people only through the policemen—as a restrictive power, and not as a constructive and vitalizing force. Being so distant and apparently so unrelated to their interests, they



Imperial Art Museum

Imperial
A VIEW OF THE



Royal Palace
CIVIC CENTER

Wilham I. Monument

oppose any seeming attempt to increase the police power, and indifferently bestow their suffrages upon the politician who sends them turkeys upon Thanksgiving Day, who pays their rent when hard pressed, and attends the funeral when the baby dies. Yet these very masses are most easily influenced by visible improvements of a constructive character, and their patriotism is quickly

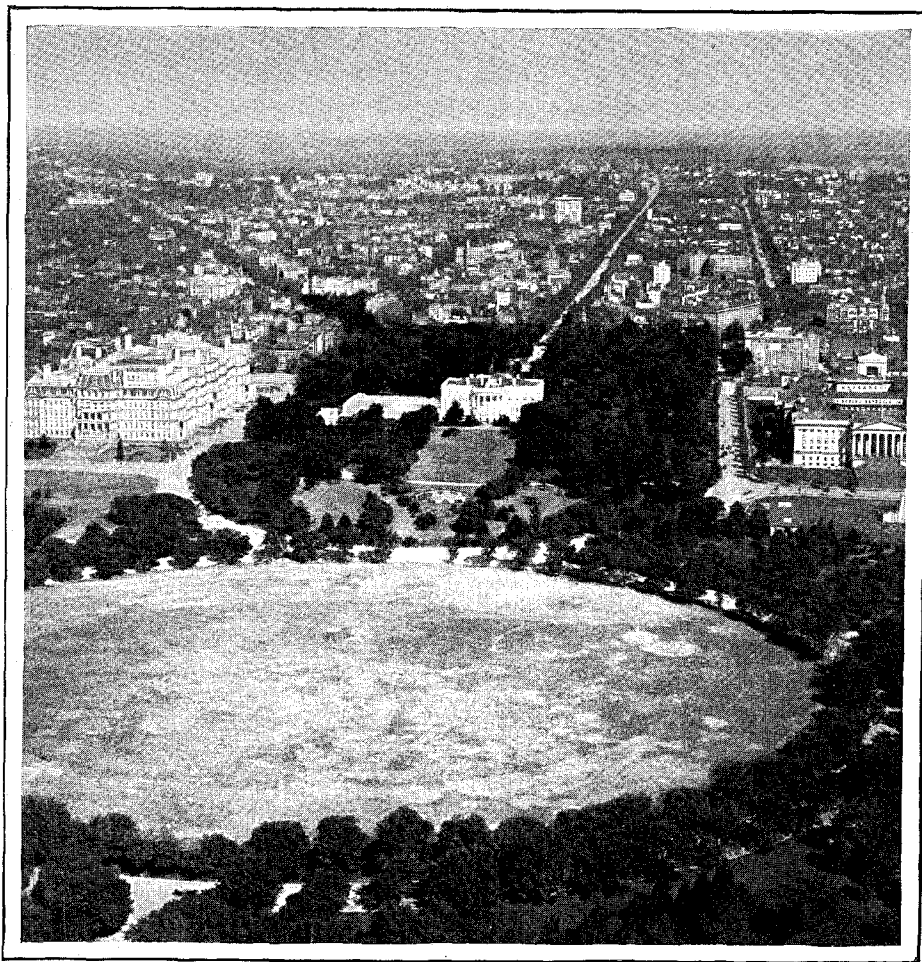
and often permanently aroused by civic progress.

The truth of these statements will, I am sure, be vouched for by those who work in the populous centers of our cities. Even the establishment of a small park or playground has had a wonderful effect. How much greater would be the uplifting influence if the public and semi-public buildings—the court-houses,



Stables
BURG-RING, VIENNA

Natural History Museum



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VIEW FROM THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT

Showing the arrangement of the White House, Army and Navy Building, and Treasury Building

schools, libraries, baths, offices of the administrative departments, fire stations, settlements, theaters, etc.—were grouped in and about these parks, and the city government thus brought close to the citizen and expressed concretely! Would he not be interested in its operations and be led to see that he is a part of the city and that its welfare depends upon his actions?

The cost of carrying out such a programme is slight, especially when compared with its benefits. Every city and every locality must have public buildings. It must have parks; and in every progressive city it is considered imperative that buildings and parks should be beautified by sculpture, painting, and

landscape gardening. Assuming that expenditures for such purposes are necessary, what additional expense would be incurred by a proper grouping and harmonious unifying of the various elements? The fundamental prerequisite is not money, but an appreciation of these facts, the foresight to plan broadly and in advance of present needs, and the condemnation of a larger area than is momentarily needed when park areas are acquired.

For example: When land was condemned for Seward Park, in the lower East Side of New York, it was acquired at a much lower rate than must now be paid for land in that immediate neighborhood. The creation of the park has

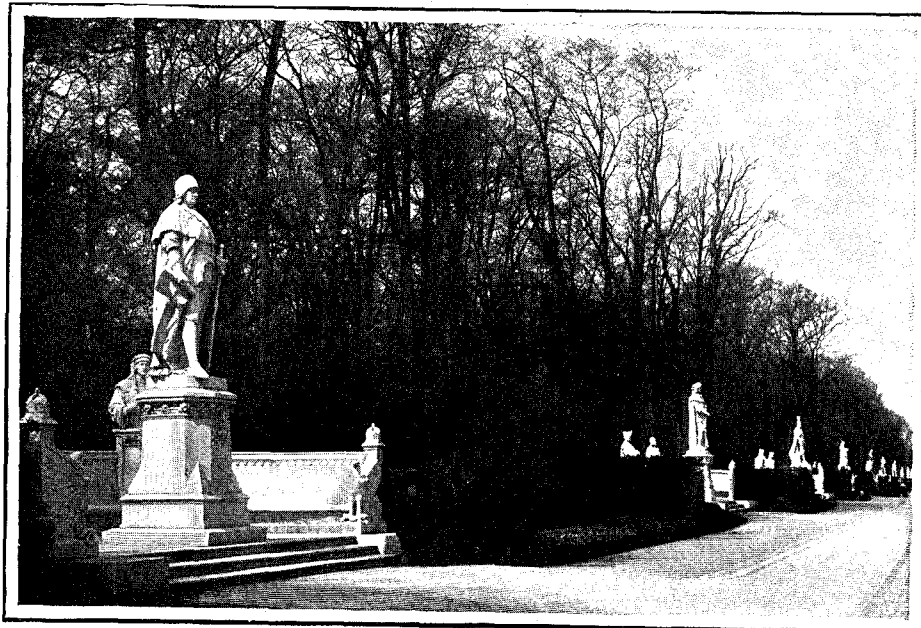
made the locality much more desirable. Recently, the city desired to acquire land in that part of the city for schools, a Carnegie library, and free public baths. Sites bordering on the park were admitted to be the most desirable, but the cost was considered prohibitive, and other locations, widely scattered, were selected in the narrow side streets. Now, it is axiomatic that if a considerable portion of land besides the present Seward Park had been condemned when the park lands were taken, it could have been purchased cheaply. If not immediately needed, it could have been rented to the tenants then occupying it. As occasion required, the old buildings could have been replaced by the schools, baths, library, etc., which have gone elsewhere. The city would be thus both richer and vastly more attractive.

Unfortunately, American cities have been slow to realize the force of these facts. Their streets have been planned largely by chance, or, worse, by persons who considered the T-square the only necessary instrument. Washington, the earliest and most important exception, was wisely plotted by L'Enfant, who provided for the group idea in his scheme. The McMillan Commission, appointed by the United States Senate

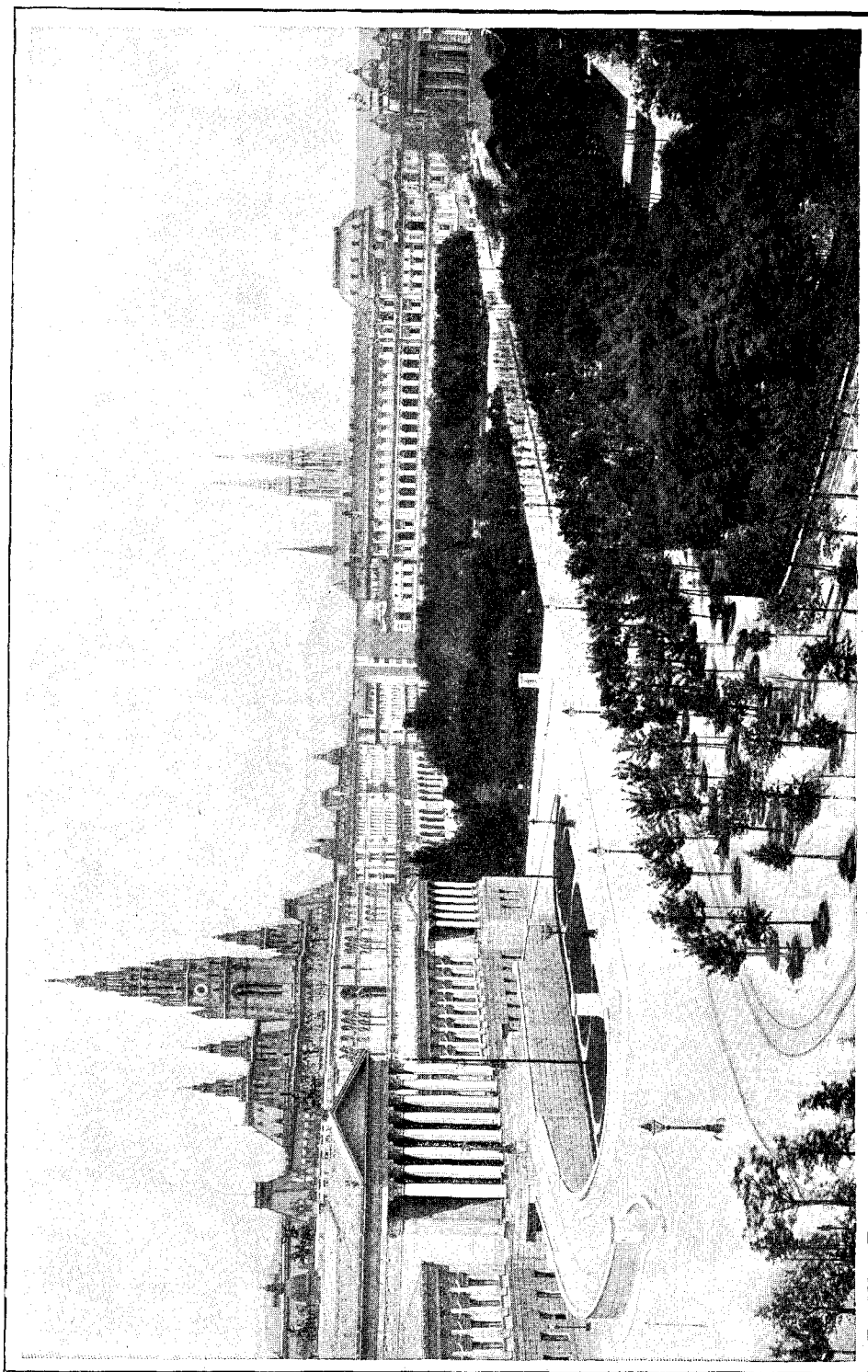
in 1902, has followed in his footsteps, filling in details, until the final result is the most comprehensive plan of grouping that has been worked out for an American city. The Secretary of Agriculture recently proposed to narrow the Mall contemplated in the report by locating the new Agricultural Building nearer the axis, but so much opposition has been aroused that the Senate has opposed this alteration of the plan.

A similar commission has reported a scheme for Cleveland. It provides for a spacious Mall with trees, statuary, and fountains, extending from a monumental railroad station and park on the lake front to the library and post-office at the south, which adjoin small parks. Bordering the Court of Honor are to be the City Hall and Court-House, each terminating a vista when viewed from Bond or Ontario Street. On either side of the Mall are to be placed other public and semi-public buildings, as the needs of the city make them necessary.

Comprehensive schemes have been proposed in other cities, as San Francisco, Chicago, Detroit, Boston, and Hartford, and in many cities there are nuclei which might be extended, as new buildings are erected, into very creditable centers. But the finest examples of



SIEGES-ALLÉE, TIERGARTEN, BERLIN



Houses of Parliament

City Hall

Votive Church

University

Royal Theater

A VIEW ON THE RING-STRASSE, VIENNA

effective grouping are to be found in Europe. Viewed historically, this was the most natural course and well-nigh universal. The Forum and the Acropolis, the civic centers of Rome and Athens, will continue to herald for all time the greatness of a life and civilization which long ago ceased to exist. Indeed, there was hardly a city in the ancient world, and even down to very modern times, that did not have a civic center to which, on all important occasions, the populace flocked. Generally it was the market-place, about which were grouped the castle, the church, the court, and other public or semi-public buildings as they appeared.

In many European cities portions still remain and have been incorporated in the civic centers of modern times. The Grand Place in Brussels, surrounded by the Hôtel de Ville, the Maison du Roi, and the ancient Guild Halls recently restored, is still the center of the civic life of that city, just as it has been for centuries. About the old market-place of Bremen cluster the City Hall, a Gothic building dating from the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Cathedral begun in the eleventh century, and the Exchange, the modern contribution of commerce to civic art. Other well-known instances are the Piazza of St. Mark in Venice, the Dam in Amsterdam, the Grosse Ring in Prague, the Place de la Republique in Lille, Der Ring in Breslau, the Kremlin in Moscow, the Plaza de Armas in Madrid, and the Praça do Commercio in Lisbon.

Berlin deserves special notice. About Unter den Linden, especially at the eastern extremity, have been grouped the finest buildings of the city, State, and Empire. Upon the site of the ancient castle, cathedral, and market-place of Kölln, bounded by the Spree, there now stands that inspiring group of museums, monuments, parks, cathedral, and Royal palace that enthuse every German. Spanning the Spree is the modest Schloss-Brücke with its famous statuary commemorating mythological events. As one proceeds along Unter den Linden he passes the Arsenal, Opera-House, Royal Library, Royal Academy, University buildings, several palaces, and

a number of other important structures in the immediate neighborhood. At the western end of Unter den Linden a new group is now forming, consisting of the new Hall of the Imperial Diet, the new Opera-House, the Brandenburg Gate, the Monument of Victory, the Bismarck Memorial, the Sieges-Allée, several embassies, and offices of various ministries. In other parts of the city there are smaller civic centers. A view of one is shown in the accompanying photograph.

St. Petersburg, thanks to the foresight of Peter the Great and Elizabeth, boasts of an impressive center upon the south bank of the Neva, from which radiate the principal streets and boulevards. The central building, although not the most attractive, is the Admiralty, surrounded by Alexander Park and the garden of the Winter Palace, which stands on the east. Other structures bordering the Place Dvortsovy are the Ermitage, with its magnificent collections of art works, the Imperial Archives, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance, and the Administration Building. To the south and west of the Admiralty are the residence of the Governor of the city, the Ministry of War, the Cathedral of Saint Isaac, the Synode, and the Senat.

In Paris the Louvre is a civic center in itself, for it is nearly half a mile in length and a quarter in breadth. This vast structure contains some ten museums and Ministries of Finance and Colonial Affairs. Immediately to the west, along the banks of the Seine, lie the Tuileries Gardens and the Place de la Concorde and Avenue des Champs-Élysées, containing the monument to Gambetta, the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, the Obélisque de Luxor, the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile, and numerous statues, fountains, floral displays, and other decorative features. North of the Place de la Concorde are the Ministry of the Navy and the Rue Royale leading to the Madeleine. Across the Seine is the Chamber of Deputies, bordering upon the Esplanade des Invalides, which leads one to the Hôtel des Invalides upon the south; and the Alexander III. Bridge, the Petit Palais, and the Grand Palais

upon the north. These three structures of marvelous beauty and symmetry are the permanent contributions of the Exposition of 1900 to the artistic development of the city. Returning to the Louvre, one sees upon the north the French Theater and the Palais Royal. Upon the east stand the Church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois and the Mairie of the First Arrondissement. Across the river, to the south, are the Mint, the Palace of the French Institute, and the École des Beaux-Arts.

Another center is focused upon the Ile de la Cité—the site of the earliest settlement in the Gallic town of Cæsar's day. The Cathedral of Notre Dame and the Sainte-Chapelle are the two finest sacred edifices in Paris. The Palace of Justice occupies the site of the Royal Palace of monarchical days. In close proximity are the Tribune of Commerce, the offices of the Prefect of Police, and the Hôtel Dieu, the oldest and one of the largest hospitals in Paris.

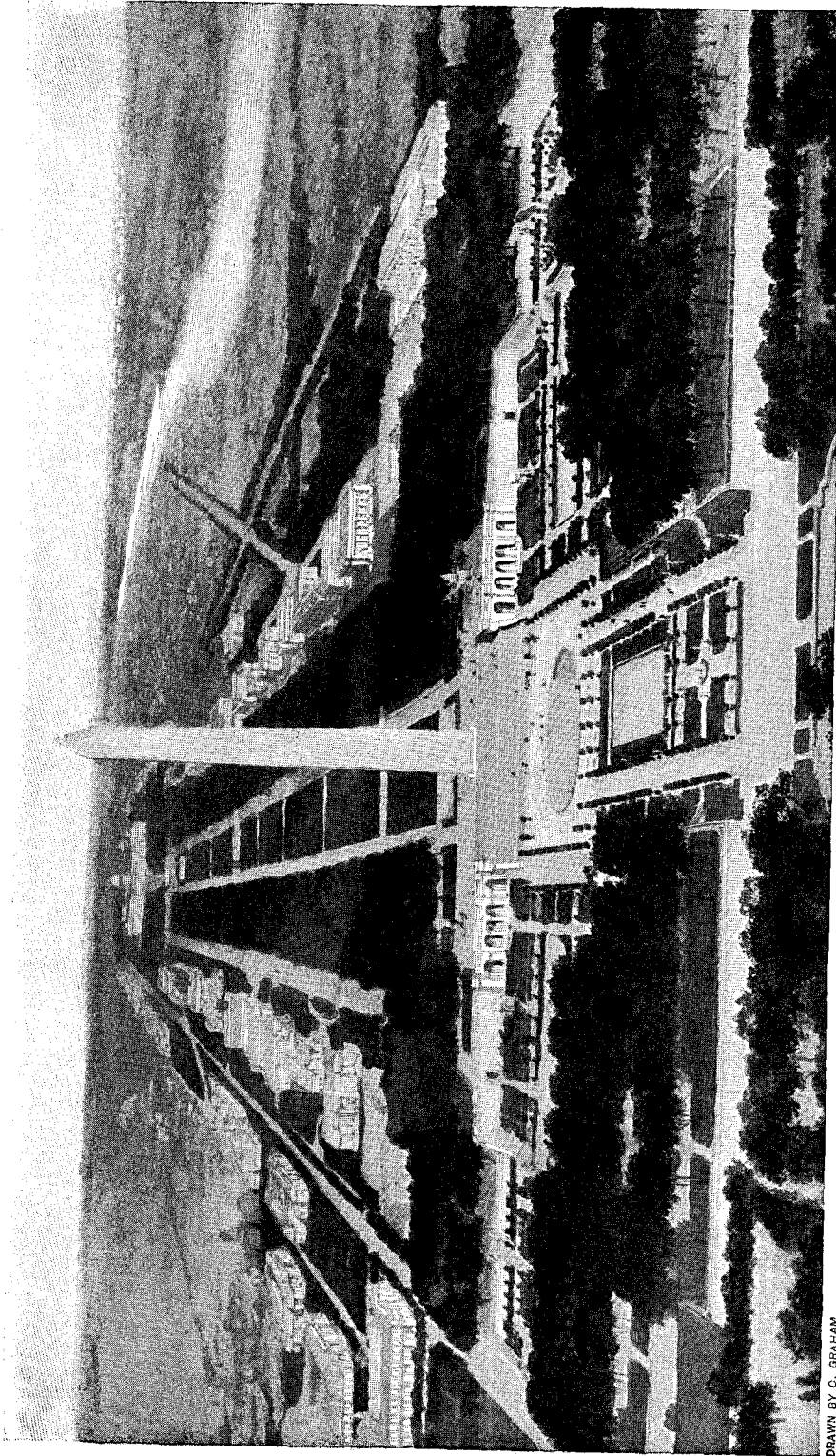
Across the Seine is the City Hall. Smaller groups of buildings in other parts of Paris might also be described, but the evidence already adduced is sufficient to prove the existence of the civic center idea.

The grandest and most comprehensive scheme is in Vienna. Like other cities, it had, in 1857, very elaborate fortifications, beyond which the city was rapidly extending, rendering them of less and less value as a protection against invasion. Soon after the accession of Francis Joseph, he ordered their removal, and out of the three-cornered fight over the disposal of the land, between the city of Vienna, the kingdom of Austria, and the Crown family itself, a very fortunate compromise was arranged. A portion of the immense area formerly given over to the walls, moats, glacis, and drill-ground was to be laid out in broad, tree-lined boulevards girdling the inner city, a portion to be made into parks, a portion used as sites for public buildings, and



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BRANDENBURG GATE, BERLIN
Entrance to the famous Unter den Linden



DRAWN BY G. GRAHAM

THE PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS IN WASHINGTON

The plan includes a great parkway leading from the Capitol to the Washington Monument, with public buildings on either edge of this Mall, and a large sunken garden beyond the Monument

still another portion (so vast was the area) sold to provide funds out of which to construct artistic public buildings, not all at once, but as governmental needs made necessary additional accommodations.

The whole scheme was so intelligently planned and has been so wisely executed, including the treatment of the park areas, the location of the public buildings with adjoining open spaces and parks, the erection of appropriate sculpture and monuments at vantage points, and the branching of other boulevards at proper places, that there is nothing of the kind in all Europe that is more imposing, more harmoniously effective, or more artistic. Improvements and extensions are being made from year to year.

One naturally asks, when charmed by the beauty of these centers, in what does their attractiveness consist? Are the buildings exceedingly fine architecturally? Is the sculpture superior? Have the landscape architects been unusually successful? No doubt the buildings, the sculpture, and the parks are well planned and well executed, but other cities may boast of even finer buildings, statuary, and parks. The excellence is due rather to the fact that by bringing all into their proper relation, by giving them dignity, repose, and the proper perspective by the use of well-designed park layouts, each item in the scheme.

no matter how unimportant it may seem, is made to contribute its share, and every building adds to the beauty and attractiveness of all others.

In one respect foreign cities have been at a disadvantage. Their street plans were inherited from a time when city building was not considered worthy of attention. To correct the street plan, to provide parks and boulevards, to construct civic centers, has, therefore, been an expensive process. Our American cities, upon the other hand, with their future yet unmortgaged, have a free field in large measure. By working out a scheme large enough for future needs, capable of extension with their growth, and by following it out consistently regardless of the herrings dragged across the trail, they may achieve wonderful results at slight expense. But a well-devised plan for symmetrical grouping is absolutely necessary. No matter how small the city, it must have a few public buildings, and their proper arrangement is as necessary to its highest development as in a metropolitan center. Indeed, it is even more important, for a metropolis has other charms by which to retain its prestige, but the small city has few to fall back upon, and these must certainly not be neglected if it is to keep its place and not decline. The most attractive city invariably will and does draw the best class of citizens.

September

By Sara Andrew Shafer

With a Photograph by Wallace Nutting

In fallow fields the goldenrod
 And purple asters beck and nod.
 The milkweed launches fairy boats;
 In tangled silver the cobweb floats.
 Pervasive odors of ripening vine
 Fill the air like a luscious wine.
 The gentian blooms on the browning waste;
 With coral chains is the alder laced.
 The blackbirds gather, and wheel, and fly;
 The swallows twitter a low "Good-by!"