

1873.

VICTORIA.



DEPARTMENT OF LANDS AND AGRICULTURE.

PARKS AND GARDENS.

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY'S COMMAND.

TO THE HONORABLE JAMES JOSEPH CASEY, M.P., MINISTER OF LANDS AND AGRICULTURE.

Melbourne, 31st May 1873.

SIR,

Having been informed of your wish that I should undertake the duties of Inspector-General of Metropolitan Gardens, Parks, and Reserves, in addition to my ordinary duties as Permanent Head of the Administrative Branch of the Lands department, and having received instructions from you to prepare new estimates for the Botanical Garden and Government House Domain, based on the intention to limit the improvement of the outer domain to such as would render it a well-arranged public park, and not to make provision for the metalling of carriage drives in the Domain, or for a new steam-engine therein, I have the honor to lay before you estimates, the adoption of which would involve a saving of about £13,000 on the estimates of the Botanical Garden and Domain, as previously prepared by the Secretary for Agriculture. I beg also to submit to you the following remarks relative to some of the reserves which would be under my general supervision as Inspector-General of such reserves.

The decision relative to the Domain will obviously involve the omission from the improvements of the outer portion of such reserve of the extensive conservatory, large fountain, and nearly all the symmetrical flower beds, terraces, vases, raised paths, and other accessories of a garden of high class, as indicated on Mr. Sayce's design for laying out the Domain. Although I much admire the taste, knowledge of landscape gardening, and forethought displayed by him in all the details of such design, I am of opinion that the Government has acted wisely in deciding on not carrying out such a costly design, which, even when completed, would require a very great annual expenditure to keep in proper order such very extensive gardens of high class.

The conversion of the outer portion of the Domain into a picturesque public park should be effected in a different manner to that followed in creating such floral parks as Fitzroy Gardens, and the Treasury Garden, which being situated in the central part of the city, and surrounded by a dense population having unrestricted access thereto, required special arrangement, because in such reserves the chief desiderata were shade along the numerous paths therein forming important lines of traffic, and such dense and continuous masses of foliage as would tend to check the inroad of dust from the adjacent streets.

Consequently, in such reserves, strict adherence to the rules of landscape gardening, with regard to the grouping of trees, &c., had to be abandoned in favor of the formal lining of the paths with rows of umbrageous trees, and the planting in the back ground of dense masses of conifers, evergreen shrubs, fern trees, &c.; small flowering shrubs and bedding flowers being merely introduced to mask the unsightly aspect of the grass in such reserves during summer, as the amount of labor and water available was insufficient to enable a close-cut verdant sward being maintained during such periods of the year.

In the intended Domain Park, which is far away from the crowded blocks of buildings and dusty streets of the city, the trees might be grouped in a less formal manner in clumps, separated by carefully selected glades or vistas; and the shrubs and flowers might be kept quite apart from the trees.

The formation of beds of choice flowering plants near the residence of His Excellency the Governor, would necessarily have to remain in abeyance until such residence be nearly completed, as the contractor for its erection requires so much ground for the traffic to it, and for the deposit of materials required in its construction. The curator of the garden could, in the mean time, place in his nurseries a large amount of choice plants in such positions as to be easily raised with large balls of earth at their roots, and placed in the ground near the residence, when such ground is ready for their reception.

Any money voted for a conservatory should, in my humble opinion, be expended on the erection of a very lofty one, to take the place of the existing one in the Botanical Garden, containing fine palms, tropical ferns, bananas, &c., now being damaged, owing to the inadequate dimensions of the present conservatory. The new one could be built so as to completely envelop the old one, which need not therefore be taken down until after the completion of the new one.

With a view to my supervision, after the 1st July, of the gardens and parks heretofore under the sole control of the City Council of Melbourne, I inspected Carlton Garden yesterday, in company with the Right Worshipful the Mayor and the Town Clerk. It was apparent, after such inspection, that although the City Council had, many years ago, incurred a great outlay for a very large number of araucaria excelsa, and other valuable trees, for planting in Carlton Garden, the liberality of the council had been rendered nugatory in consequence of such trees having been planted by the gardeners in undrained holes; many of such trees have consequently perished, and the remainder of them are so stunted, unsightly, or unhealthy, as to be now worthless for the arboreal ornamentation of the garden. Some of the paths have been formed, but so badly as regards their cross sections as to all require reforming. Some trenching has recently been effected in the central portion of the garden, and will constitute a valuable aid to the improvement of the garden when the present imperfect drainage of such trenched ground has been rectified. The fencing and gates are much decayed. Under such circumstances it is obvious that a large portion of the sum of £6000 proposed by the Board of Land and Works, and by the City Council, to be expended during the year, commencing on 1st July next, on the gardens and parks, to be jointly vested in those corporate bodies, ought to be allotted to Carlton Garden. Such sum ought, during the year in question, to be devoted exclusively to Carlton Garden, Yarra Park, Fitzroy Garden, and Flagstaff Garden, in the following proportions, viz.:—£2200 to Fitzroy Garden and Flagstaff Garden, and £3800 to Carlton Garden and Yarra Park. Of the latter sum £2550 would be expended on Carlton Garden and £1250 on Yarra Park.

I now beg to suggest that, after the 1st July, the following improvements in Carlton Garden be energetically carried out:—

1. The erection of handsome entrance gates for pedestrians, facing Queensberry street, Carlton, and Gertrude street, Fitzroy; the construction, between such entrances, of a well gravelled walk, on a line much more direct than that shown on Mr. Bateman's design for laying out Carlton Garden; the placing of a large and fine statue at a central point on such walk, where it is intersected by diagonal walks; and the trenching and draining of strips of land along such walk for the reception of rows of Huntingdon elms.

2. The making of an excavation on the western side of the garden for a large sheet of water, wherein aquatic plants can be displayed; and the arrangement of the soil derived from such excavation in a mound of irregular and natural shape (which soil can be enriched by the admixture of street sweepings, and a top-dressing of black earth, with a view to the establishment on the mound of a good sward of grass and groups of flowering shrubs).

3. The lessening of the present artificial appearance of the existing fountain in the centre of the garden; the removal of the young cedars, and other large kinds of forest trees, which have been injudiciously planted close to the margin of the basin containing such fountain; and the planting, in lieu of such trees, of such kind of palms as like proximity to water—ferns, variegated phormium tenax, pampas grass, variegated bamboo-reed; and for undergrowth, various flowering creepers.

4. The drainage of the trenched ground in central part of the garden, and the planting therein of groups of choice deciduous trees, so selected as to form pleasing contrasts by the vernal and autumnal tints of their foliage, such as corstorphine planes, scarlet oaks, silver poplars, &c.

5. The effectual carrying out of the attempt, previously unsuccessfully made, to establish an avenue of deodar cedars along the straight walk at the north side of the garden. The cedars, which were originally planted in undrained holes, are now, with few exceptions, either dead, or in such a wretched state as to necessitate the cutting of them out and their replacement by fresh trees.

6. The introduction in suitable positions of masses of bedding flowers, backed by evergreen shrubs, and the formation of some ribbons of flowers, carefully selected with regard to the colors to be placed in juxtaposition.

7. The introduction of a few statues.

The improvement of Yarra Park will comprise the construction of roads and footways in such park; the plantation of various kinds of trees in such position as not to interfere with the unrestricted use of the greater portion of the park for athletic sports of all kinds; and the introduction of a good supply of seats.

With reference to the gardens, parks, and reserves heretofore inspected by officers of the City Council, and which are to come under my supervision on 1st July next, it is obvious that all persons employed in such of these reserves as are in course of improvement, should be under my sole command. I beg therefore to suggest that the City Council be informed that after the 1st July the services of Mr. Felstead, the City Bailiff of Parks, will be no longer required in Carlton Garden, and that his services will be of value in regulating the depasturing of stock in Fawkner Park, Prince's Park, and the reserve abutting on the Sydney road. The owners of such stock should be required to erect in such reserves an extent of fencing for plantation fences and tree-guards, that would be equivalent in value to the grass consumed by their stock.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

CLEMENT HODGKINSON,  
Assistant-Commissioner of Lands and Survey.

