

TO FILL IN THE EAST RIVER.

Thomas A. Edison Proclaims a Gigantic But Practical World-Wonder.

It is the belief of Thomas A. Edison, the inventor, that within a decade all transit facilities we may construct over and under the East river will be sufficient to relieve the congestion which has hitherto kept pace with the city's growth, says the New York World. In brief, with six tunnels under the river bed and four or more huge bridges in full blast above it, each with a capacity of 50,000,000 passengers a year, the glut and gorge of transit now to be seen at the Manhattan end of the Brooklyn bridge will still exist.

Therefore, says Mr. Edison in effect, the only thing that will remain to be done will be to fill in the East river and to continue the Manhattan streets into Brooklyn.

No student of social conditions who has watched the growth of this city for the past 15 years will call Mr. Edison's dream an idle one.

Year by year the East river is becoming more and more of an obstruction to the free movement of two huge populations. Neither ferries nor bridges have availed to do away with the ever-increasing congestion.

The huge Williamsburg bridge was completed, and let an apparently new army of bridge travelers sprang up, and added it almost to its capacity, while the old ravening army continued to clamor around the Manhattan end of the old bridge.

For years before the subway was built the elevated railroad carried 500,000 passengers daily. The subway was

looked forward to for quick and permanent relief. The subway has been completed and carries 475,000 passengers a day, yet the elevated roads have not a jot in the pressure of their enormous traffic.

What, then, is to be the ultimate end of this ever increasing and never ending crush? When all the tunnels are filled with trolleys and the human tide continues to roll in unabated torrents through and over them all—when New York sits up and takes breath and looks around, what will remain to be done? What, indeed, but to follow Mr. Edison's idea and fill in the East river.

This will mean an engineering feat greater than the digging of the Panama canal, and far more costly. It will be a gigantic problem, practically involving the reconstruction of a great portion of the city, a doing away with great shipping piers, business establishments, docks and warehouses, the laying out of innumerable parks and breathing places for the people.

It would involve the condemnation and purchase of great properties along the river front, the issue of hundreds of millions of dollars in bonds and the bitter antagonism of thousands of citizens who, although financially interested, know nothing and care nothing for the daily congestion between Manhattan and Brooklyn.

The gigantic undertaking would necessitate the pumping out and filling in of nearly eight square miles of river bed to an average depth from the water surface of 20 feet, as well as the transportation of millions of cubic yards of earth and stone.

Could Greater New York undertake and carry through such a proposition? Most assuredly. Several civil engineers dur-

ing the past few years have said that such an undertaking is mainly a question of money and men.

It is feasible, very feasible, they say. Men who at present may regard such an enterprise as chimerical within 20 years will consider it within the ordinary scope of financial and engineering possibility.

New York is rapidly developing into a city greater than the world has ever known. It is like a slowly awakening giant who does not fully realize his strength and power. Even now we dispose of a yearly budget of nearly \$110,000,000, a feat that no other city in the world equals. Within 20 years, when we may begin to figure upon the enormous task of filling in the East river, this budget, increasing in ratio to the increase of population, should amount to fully \$150,000,000 a year.

This tremendous revenue will enable the city to carry out correspondingly tremendous undertakings. As has been pointed out by one writer, "It has gone past the village aversion to spending money—all it needs now is to learn how to spend it rightly. It is spending more for East river bridges alone than Pericles laid out on the monuments of the Acropolis. There is growing up, no longer slowly as in the past, but with daily accelerating speed, a popular determination that these millions shall bring us as full a return to the community as they would to a private individual."

According to the estimate made by Calvin Tompkins of the Municipal Art society, the increase in the city's population during the next 15 years will be not less than 50 per cent.

Thus even with a 50 per cent increase in traffic facilities across the East river the congestion will remain just as it is at present. Where the increase of population may continue uninterrupted for 100 years, the increase in traffic facilities between Manhattan and Brooklyn is bound to come to a halt long before that time.

The city will then stand face to face with the problem outlined by Mr. Ed-

ison—the filling in of the East river. In such an undertaking the government would undoubtedly insist upon a canal being left for the passage of warships to and from the navyyard, which would then become a sort of secluded lake. Such a canal would be as necessary from a strategic point of view as the canal across the Isthmus of Panama. It could be spanned with draw bridges at the intersection of every street if necessary, as its use by the navy would not interfere materially with traffic.

The natural boundaries of the filled-in portion of the river would be from the battery to Governor's island, and thence across Buttermilk channel to Brooklyn on the south; on the north from Brooklyn across Hell Gate to Ward's island, and from Ward's island to Manhattan.

The filled-in portion would consist of between six and eight square miles and would cost, according to some estimates, between \$400,000,000 and \$500,000,000. When once completed, however, the great undertaking would practically pay for itself in the acquisition of four or five square miles of made land in the heart of the greatest city in the world. It would add millions of dollars to the assessed valuation of property.

The great business properties now scattered along the shore front would be forced to find quarters further up along the sound or on the shores of Jamaica bay.

The filled-in portion of the river would become one of the most attractive portions of the city, covered, as it would be with parks and boulevards and splendid edifices.

A plan has already been recommended for beginning this work by filling in the water between Manhattan shore and Blackwell's island, thus establishing unrestricted communication between the two.

There would not necessarily be any halt in the continued building of underground roads, even during the filling in of the river.

With the work in progress, sewers, conduits for electric power, subways for freight, express and passengers

could be built and covered without entailing any delay. The beauty of the new stretch of city land would not necessarily be impaired by the presence of the four great overhanging bridges above the filled-in river. Even if not used as arteries of traffic as at present, they could be transformed into beautiful and enduring aerial gardens for the people.

The gigantic undertaking would enable lower Manhattan to expand. Instead of building skyward business enterprises would spread out over that portion of the river that is now bounded on the north by Blackwell's island and on the south by Governor's island.

Very few of New York's citizens realize the stupendous changes that have already taken place in the topography of the city in the way of cutting out and filling in the elevations and depressions that formerly existed.

Over the swamps and hills and streams that were once features of the landscape, great buildings have been erected. Eighteenth street, from First avenue to the river, is practically made land. The tide once rippled along the east side of Cherry street, where huge double-decked tenements now stand. These changes which have taken place gradually and almost imperceptibly would have been regarded as impossible of achievement had the work been undertaken as a lump job.

In the opinion of many competent contractors and engineers, if the city authorities should call a halt on the water wastage and install a salt water system for fires, thus saving the \$100,000,000 expenditure contemplated for a new water supply, the preliminary work of filling in the East river could even now be commenced.

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