

A VERY PECULIAR AVENUE

A WEST SIDE THOROUGHFARE OF LITTLE ACCOUNT.

BEGINNING HUMBLY IN DIRT AND LUMBER
PILES AND SUDDENLY CHECKED WHEN
BEGINNING TO GET RESPECTABLE.

Thirteenth-avenue is one of the most peculiar of the many unique thoroughfares which lie within the limits of this City. It begins in a very humble and unpretentious way, but during its brief course of about a dozen blocks it gradually improves in width and general appearance. Unfortunately, however, at the very point where it begins to promise great things, and the casual pedestrian feels inclined to take a fancy to it, the avenue ends abruptly in a high board fence, which proves an impassable barrier to all except the most accomplished acrobats. Thirteenth-avenue is described in the Street Directory as running northward from the foot of West Eleventh-street to the foot of West Twenty-fifth-street. During the first four blocks of its course this thoroughfare and Eleventh-avenue are so completely united that it is impossible to distinguish one from the other. At the upper end, however, an extra block and a half are thrown in, and the abrupt termination of the avenue takes place about half-way between Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh streets.

After branching off from Eleventh-avenue, the thoroughfare assumes the form of a dreary waste. The foundation is probably the ordinary City pavement, but this is completely hidden under an accumulation of dirt and cinders. At the foot of Eighteenth-street the highway takes the shape of a narrow defile. Huge piles of lumber tower up on either side of the dirty roadway, obscuring the bulkheads of the North River on the western side and completely covering the sidewalks and curbstones on the eastern side. This defile, in which two wagons might pass each other if skillfully managed, continues for about two blocks. Occasional glimpses of the surrounding country are obtainable in the next block. Before this picturesque scenery, which suggests the mountain ravine, has had a chance to render itself monotonous to the eye, the street again assumes the desert aspect. At Twenty-third-street, the avenue suddenly awakes into life. The Pavonia ferry-house, the numerous street-cars, and the comparative throngs of people which are seen at that point, remind the promenader in Thirteenth-avenue of the fact that he is still within the limits of a great City. The buildings fronting on the avenue now for the first time begin to average more than one to the block, and the thoroughfare assumes the appearance of the boulevard. The way has gradually widened, and the pavement has by degrees come up to the surface. During the short remainder of its course the avenue is paved as smoothly as a floor, and suggests the finest of the up-town drives. Its broadness, however, attracts few vehicles. No better place for bicycles could be found. The thoroughfare above Twenty-third-street would answer for a parade ground, so broad and smooth is it. Unfortunately, even at this end of the avenue, buildings are scarce and lumber-yards are plentiful. The pavement is perfect up to the high fence which at present marks the northern limit of the avenue. Through the spaces between the boards of this barrier a striking contrast is to be observed. Decaying docks with ships full of slimy, floating logs, stagnant water which has no appearance of having been changed by the incoming tides, unsightly rocks, neglected lands, squatter settlements, and shabby-looking factories, all border on the noble Hudson, which, dotted by white sails and steam craft, stretches out to the lofty Palisades in one broad, magnificent sheet.

The buildings fronting on Thirteenth-avenue are not numbered. Signs at the entrances of the lumber-yards announce that their respective offices are situated in more civilized portions of the town. The corner drinking saloons, without which no place in this City is complete, are made to effect a compromise by fronting both on the side street and on the avenue. The gin merchant invariably gives his address as on the street, and ignores the avenue. The lumber-yards are very large as a rule. Piles of timber mount as high as the loftiest buildings on any of the neighboring streets. Men are constantly at work taking from some of the piles or adding to others. The piles are never perfectly upright. The Leaning Tower of Pisa has been copied as nearly as possible in the architecture of these lumber piles. If there is anything that the lumber merchant despises more than another it is uniformity. Consequently his piles of timber mount upward at different angles. In one of the avenues into which his yard is divided the piles will for a short distance all lean inward, then for a few rods they will all lean outward. The avenues are constructed in as irregular lines as possible, and the piles, rising on all sides, at many different angles, suggest persons staggering home under the influence of strong drink. The lumberman delights in making piles of boards which are not uniform in length. One end of such a pile is kept perfectly even. This renders the other end strikingly uneven, and the longer boards which stick out at intervals suggest the quills upon the fretful porcupine. The lumber merchants in their crusade against uniformity seem to arrange it so that the large and the small yards shall be side by side. In the former the lumber piles are of huge proportions, while those in the latter are made as small and insignificant as possible. The lumbermen in the lower part of the avenue reserve much of the ground in the interior of their yards and pile their lumber on the space which was originally intended for the sidewalk. They even make large encroachments on the roadway itself. It is immaterial to the lumber merchant whether he rears his lofty pile on his own or the opposite side of the way. As the thoroughfare is little used he is allowed to cultivate this happy audacity to absolute perfection. If it were not that a small patch of roadway was required for his own use he would appropriate it entirely. He makes, however, an exception to the rule in the case of a lamp-post. He does not entirely hide the post from sight by his lumber. On the other hand, he leaves a little lane by which the lamp-lighter may gain access to the post. In one of the lumber-yards is a huge chimney, which is perfectly round. This also partakes of the surrounding style of architecture, and leans over to one side in the true Pisa fashion. Some of the buildings in the neighborhood have acquired the same peculiarity.

Two of the City dumps ornament the western side of Thirteenth-avenue. Around one of these a number of Italian women gain a livelihood. When an ash-cart from the gas-works at the foot of Sixteenth-street appears they swoop down on it like a flock of vultures upon a dead carcass. They climb on to the cart and search among the ashes for coals, which they store in their aprons. Hot coals they fling on to the ground and afterward return for them. The women work together peaceably and chatter to each other in the melodious language of sunny Italy. The docks and bulkheads along the lower portion of Thirteenth-avenue are used principally by schooners and other small craft which land lumber, bricks, ice, coal, &c. Small schooners with loads of charcoal reaching fully 10 feet above the decks land their cargoes there. That portion of the roadway which is not taken up with lumber is regarded as free storage ground for any one who wishes to make use of it. Unused ice carts in scores stand along the side of the way, while heaps of bricks, coal, sand, &c., abound in profusion. Old odds and ends are stored under many of the empty carts. Along the bulkhead above Twenty-third-street are the docks of the White Cross, Atlas, and Arrow Steamship Lines. A few stray yards lie between the docks and the avenue. The landing for the men-of-war at anchor in the river is just above the Pavonia ferry-house. There is a large vacant space bounded by Twenty-second and Twenty-third streets and Eleventh and Thirteenth avenues which appears to be used as common storage ground by the lumbermen and others.

At night Thirteenth-avenue is a very desolate neighborhood. It has then few inhabitants except private watchmen and rats. The police avoid it scrupulously. The lights are few and far between, and on a calm night there are no sounds heard there which are loud enough to drown the quiet ripple of the river's tide.