

## TOPICS OF THE TIME.

## Central Park in Danger.

WE have a comely city, we of New York,—a city of extraordinary natural advantages, some of which remain neglected, but many of which we have skillfully availed ourselves of for purposes of beauty and recreation. The trouble with us is that we do not fully know, appreciate, and cherish what we have. New Yorkers, as a class, seem to be more bent upon getting on in the world,—reaching out for something beyond,—than upon enjoying, providing for, and jealously guarding what they already possess. The city, collectively considered, is supposed to be proud, for instance, of its Central Park, and yet for years it has permitted the affairs of this same much-vaunted and really much-enjoyed pleasure-ground to be grossly mismanaged—until, to-day, notwithstanding the existence of a Board of Commissioners charged with the custody of its affairs, the only trustworthy and vigilant guardians of the Park are the newspapers of the city, which keep a sharp look-out, and now and again sound a note of alarm when some new act of vandalism is threatened.

At the moment of writing, the press is once again in full cry. The Board of Commissioners has succeeded in getting rid, one after another, of the two eminent experts, Messrs. Vaux and Parsons, whose engagement in the service of the Board was, not long ago, hailed as the beginning of a new *régime*; and, meantime, the Commissioners, it seems, propose to go to work and destroy, for the purposes of a menagerie, one of the prettiest and rarest spots in the whole Park. There being now no expert connected with the management of the Park, the proposed desecration is, of course, not recommended by any official whom the public are willing to accept as both competent and responsible; and it is known that the experts who have recently been forced to resign their positions would never have consented to the ruin of the meadow which the newspapers have been trying so hard to save.

We say that the newspapers are looking after the affairs of the Park with commendable zeal. But on the part of the general community there appears, at least, to be an apathy which we suspect would not exist, under the same circumstances, in any other large city of this continent. Park management by newspaper evidently works better in New York than park management by commissioners,—as said commissioners have been managing these many years. (Or shall we call it park butchery, tempered by newspaper criticism?) But if the people of this city had the proper feeling of citizenship, they would long ago have done something more effectual than grumbling by proxy. Yet, that the public are displeased with the present state of affairs there is not the slightest doubt. That the indignation is gathering force and intensity there is some reason to hope.

When the public does become thoroughly aroused, we believe that it will demand a more radical cure for the present evils of park management than has yet

been applied. One trouble with the Board, as at present constituted, is that the number of commissioners established—namely, four—makes it difficult to arrive at a majority vote for any measure. It has been found by experience that the Board is much more likely to be at a dead-lock of two to two than it is to reach a decision by a majority vote of three to one. This is in part the origin of the pitiable wrangling that, for the past half a dozen years (with rare intervals of apparent peace), has made the published proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks a disgrace to the city. Of late, secret executive sessions have been instituted, and newspaper readers have been spared those grotesque accounts of meetings of the Board, which, at times in the past, have seemed more like reports of the inelegant altercations of pot-house politicians than the recorded debates of high public officials having in charge a costly and magnificent work of art.

When the public does act in good earnest—and, judging by analogy, it is sure to do so sooner or later—it will, we say, insist upon a radical cure. It will strike both at the membership and organization of the Board; and it will insist, moreover, upon the retention in the management of the Park of the very best and the very best known experts. Landscape gardening, architecture, and tree-planting are arts and occupations which ordinary business men, or politicians, or engineers, no matter how well trained and competent in their own lines, should not undertake without skilled and responsible advice. It happens that, just at present, one of the ruling four has more knowledge of a kind which should be valuable to a Commissioner than has often been the case with members of the Board. But this gentleman does not, we are sure, claim to be an expert on all the points covered by Messrs. Vaux and Parsons, nor has he the definite authority of an expert with his compeers of the Board, nor has his reputation as an “expert” been increased in the community by his having countenanced the installation of the menagerie in the South Meadow, and the consequent ruin of what we are inclined to believe the most beautiful glade of the whole Park.

In a word, the Department has forfeited the confidence of the public; every man in the Board pulls his own way; the experts are gone; the entire service is demoralized; and the Central Park is daily and hourly in danger.

## The Spiritual Effects of Drunkenness.

THE curse of drunkenness, on the side of its physical devastations, has been abundantly depicted by the advocates of the temperance reform. The amount of grain consumed in the manufacture of intoxicating liquors; the number of men whose labor is worse than wasted in producing and in vending them; the number of lives destroyed by them; the number of paupers and insane persons whose woes are traceable to this source;