

III.

Seeing that you lack for this business an element of security against immature judgments, which you have in special professional servants for every thing else of corresponding importance, consider next that what are called the commissioners in your case (the park commissioners of other cities are on a different footing) are simply three members of your elected Council asked, for the time being, to give more particular attention to this branch of its business. There is no other of which, when appointed, they know as little. (My acquaintance with each of the three first commissioners began with his profession that his sole qualification was a good intention.) If they take hold as men do who are bent on mastering a new business, they have no assurance that they will not be superseded before they are grounded in its rudiments. (Two of the three first appointed were displaced while I was still in conference with them.) They address the other members of the Council with no authority of their own in the matter, and with none such as a building committee derives from an architect; a committee on litigations from a barrister; quarantine from a physician; aqueducts from a hydraulic engineer; schools from a teacher; fire telegraphs from an electrician; matters of fine art from an artist; and public gardens, it is to be hoped, from a gardener.

Lastly, to fully understand the riskiness of the arrangement, it must be remembered that the actual directing power of these gentlemen is so limited and uncertain that they cannot feel any strong sense of responsibility in the business. They are constantly checked in any disposition to form cautious judgments upon the question, What would best serve the permanent interests of the city? by the intrusion of the question: What will suit the momentary disposition or fitful