

COMMISSIONER STRAUS OUT

President of the Board of Health Says His Business Needs Attention.

COL. MURPHY HIS SUCCESSOR

Story that Mayor Van Wyck's Criticism of the Department's Affairs Is Responsible for the Resignation Is Disputed by Mr. Straus.

Nathan Straus sent to Mayor Van Wyck yesterday his resignation as President of the Board of Health, and in less than an hour after it had been received the Mayor had accepted it and Col. Michael C. Murphy, the Tammany Hall leader of the First Assembly District, had been appointed and sworn in to fill the vacancy.

Mr. Straus, who is interested in a number of business enterprises, pleaded in his letter of resignation that his private business required so much of his time that he found it impossible to continue longer in the city's service; but among those who have watched the trend of affairs recently it is the opinion that Mr. Straus's resignation is due to the Mayor's criticism on Monday at a meeting of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment of the affairs of the Health Department.

There has been more or less friction between the Mayor and the Health Board for some time. The Mayor recently sent for a trial balance of the finances of the department and the Commissioners could not furnish one. The Mayor wanted to know the reason for this, and Mr. Straus sent an employe of the department to explain, but Mayor Van Wyck would not discuss the matter with the envoy, and Commissioner Straus paid him a visit. Their interview was said to be a stormy one.

Appropriation Refused.

On Monday, at a meeting of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, the Board of Health asked for an increased appropriation of \$2,279,23, to pay a number of Inspectors of mercantile establishments who had held over under the new administration. The Mayor objected to the granting of the appropriation, and remarked:

"The books of the Health Department are in a very bad condition. I have asked for a monthly trial balance, and have not received it, and this morning I sent an expert accountant to straighten out the muddle."

It is said that this was taken by Mr. Straus as a personal affront, and that his resignation is the result. Mr. Straus, however, declares that his relations with Mayor Van Wyck are of the most friendly nature, and that the Mayor knew some time ago of his intention to resign. When seen last night by a reporter for THE NEW YORK TIMES, Mr. Straus said:

"There is really no sense in this report that my resignation is the result of friction between the Mayor and myself. My brother Isidor is in Europe now, and I have the entire responsibility of our business. I intend, too, to distribute sterilized milk at a nominal fee this Summer, as I did last Summer, and that matter will make some demand on my time. I cannot therefore give the necessary time to the public duties for which I draw \$7,500 a year, so there was nothing left for me to do but resign. In case the United States should go to war with Spain, and at present there are some ominous war clouds in the air, my business matters would require more attention, and I do not want to be caught unawares and with my hands full of public matters."

The New Appointee.

Col. Murphy, who was appointed in Mr. Straus's place, is one of the few Tammany Hall Assembly district leaders who were not provided with places when the new administration came into power. It was said at the time that Mr. Straus was appointed that he would hold the place only for a short time, and that upon his resignation Col. Murphy would be appointed in his stead.

Col. Murphy was born in Limerick, Ireland, in 1841, and landed in this country when he was seven years old. He was educated in the public schools, and upon leaving them worked in the composing room of a daily paper in this city until the breaking out of the civil war. He served through the war, and was mustered out of the service with the rank of Colonel. Soon afterward he joined in the Fenian invasion of Canada, and was arrested by the United States authorities and held prisoner for two months. He was elected to the Legislature in 1866, and for fourteen years represented the lower district of the city in either the Senate or Assembly.

Col. Murphy underwent a remarkable operation in 1880, as a result of which his food was for years taken through a tube. His life was despaired of at the time of the operation, but he is in excellent health now.

He has never lived outside of the First Assembly District, and he has been a member of Tammany Hall since the County Democracy disbanded. He has been an Excise Commissioner, and was, up to yesterday, Clerk of the First District Civil Court. The unexpired term of President of the Board, which he will fill out, is two years.

MAYOR VETOES A CITY BILL.

Exemption of St. Luke's Church from an Improvement Assessment Disapproved.

Mayor Van Wyck on Tuesday sent to the Senate at Albany his veto of a bill to relieve the rector, church warden, and vestrymen of St. Luke's Protestant Episcopal Church from a portion of the assessment for opening Convent Avenue from One Hundred and Fiftieth Street to St. Nicholas Avenue.

In his message of veto the Mayor said:

The assessment from which relief is asked by this bill was imposed in the year 1894, by Commissioners regularly appointed for the purpose by the Supreme Court. Assessments differ from taxes in this, that taxes are imposed upon property for the purpose of raising means for carrying on the Government, and, therefore, the individuals taxed receive only an indirect benefit from taxes paid, while assessments are levied solely because some particular piece of property upon which the charge is made has, by reason of some public work, received a direct benefit.

Exemptions from the payment of assessments are, therefore, special privileges granted to particular persons exempted, permitting them to retain the increased valuation resulting from the public work for which the assessment is laid, and at the same time to escape the reasonable proportion of the burden which other individual property owners are by law compelled to pay. In this particular instance, the property of St. Luke's Church has been increased in value by the opening of an avenue. By this act it is sought to permit the corporation to retain this benefit, this increase in the value of its property, and to relieve it from paying the reasonable proportion

of the cost of opening the avenue imposed according to law. It is not in the interest of the city at large to permit this to be done. The benefit to the corporation is a direct benefit as much as if the increase in value came from the erection or adornment of buildings on its property. Retaining the benefit, it should bear its just proportion of the burden.

MEETING OF THE PARK BOARD.

Bids for Improvements — Brooklyn Commissioner Has Only His Imagination to Draw On.

At the meeting of the Park Board held at the Arsenal in Central Park yesterday morning bids were opened for the following works: For repairs to rustic structures in Central Park, lowest bid East River Mill and Lumber Company, \$1,300; for furnishing 7,500 cubic yards of gravel, lowest, De Witt C. Bouker, \$1.77 per cubic yard; for 5,000 cubic yards of garden mold, lowest, W. H. Masterson, \$1.20 per cubic yard; for filling in 200,000 square feet of garden soil, lowest, W. Young, \$1.44 per hundred feet. The bid of Thomas Dwyer, for improving the new Hamilton Fish Park, which was declared invalid by the Corporation Counsel, was rejected, and the contract let to the next lowest bidders, Kelly & Kelly. The board passed a resolution asking that \$150,000 be appropriated for the removal of the reservoir at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, which will require six months' work, according to plans submitted by Carrere & Hastings, the architects.

The gardeners of the park asked that their salaries be increased from \$40 a month to \$60. Plans were filed for the asphaltting of the plaza at Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue and for strips of asphalt at Fifth Avenue and One Hundred and Tenth Street. The work will cost \$32,000, and Commissioner Brower of Brooklyn asked where the money was coming from, saying that he had been cut down \$200,000, and had nothing to draw on but his imagination. Architect Munckwitz submitted plans and specifications for a new monkey house, just east of the lion house, in Central Park, to cost \$4,500, which were adopted. Mr. Brower again recommended a meeting place nearer the Brooklyn Bridge.

WORK FOR THE LOCAL BOARDS.

President Peters Says They Will Investigate Complaints.

President Peters of the Borough of Manhattan said yesterday that he was satisfied with the opinion of Corporation Counsel Whalen defining the powers of the borough Presidents and the Boards of Local Improvements. Under that opinion there would be plenty for them to do. Complaints of nuisances, saloons, and gambling houses, he said, could be investigated by the boards with greater facility and less publicity than by the Police Department.

Referring to probable complaints against disorderly places, Mr. Peters said that the power of investigation given to the local boards was a wise provision of the charter. "If neighbors have occasion to complain against a place we will send for the tenants and hear their side of the story. If we find that a house is disorderly or that gambling is carried on, we will report our conclusions to the department having authority."

APPOINTMENTS AND REMOVALS.

Peter Milne's Son Out of the Brooklyn Water Department.

Harry T. Edwards of 145 West Fifty-third Street, E. T. Skelly, and Morris Bernstein were yesterday appointed searchers in the Tax Department. Edwards is a negro. He is the first of his race to be appointed to a place by the present administration. David T. Woelper was appointed Journal Clerk in City Clerk Scully's office.

Deputy Commissioner Moffett of Water Supply in Brooklyn has removed from office William Chambers, bookkeeper; Henry W. Valentine, and Reuben E. Caffrey, clerks; Michael Haggerty, teamster, and Frederick Milne, assistant engineer. Milne is a son of Peter Milne, whose retention in the department has caused trouble between the Democratic organizations of New York and Brooklyn. Frederick Milne was mentioned in the exposé of old Brooklyn contracts by the Controller a few days ago. He was removed with the approval of Chief Engineer Birdsall.

STREET LIGHTING CONTRACTS.

Appropriations Made for Only as Much as Was Done Last Year.

Commissioner Kearny of the Department of Public Buildings, Lighting, and Supplies has notified the successful bidders on as much of the street lighting authorized by the late Gas Commission as was done last year to appear at his office and sign contracts for lighting this year. The Gas Commission in December passed favorably upon a large number of applications for new street lights, including the lighting of the streets of City Island and a new system for Central Park. But after the bids had been asked for and opened it was found that the Board of Estimate and Apportionment had not put enough money in the budget to pay for all the new lights. The board had simply reappropriated the amount for 1897, as it did in the case of other estimates, and there was something like \$106,000 lacking. So the contracts were let conditionally.

Controller Fitch told the successful bidders to come before the new Board of Estimate and Apportionment early and get the appropriation increased. The bidders did this, but the board simply passed what the old board had appropriated. So there is just enough money to pay for as much lighting as was done last year, and the new streets will have to go unlighted.

BROOKLYN TEACHERS PAID.

A Bank Keeps Open Until Late in Order to Accommodate Them.

The teachers in the public schools of Brooklyn were made happy yesterday, when they received their checks for their salaries. City Paymaster Timmerman and a corps of clerks were kept busy all Wednesday night filling out the checks. The money to cash the checks was deposited in the People's Trust Company, and it kept open until late in the evening, to give the teachers an opportunity to get their pay.

J. Edward Swanstrom, President of the local School Board, took up the cudgels yesterday in behalf of the central and local educational departments, against Controller Coler's strictures touching responsibility for the delay in paying the teachers' salaries. He said that when his office had been officially notified that the Board of Estimate had made the necessary appropriation for the teachers' salaries, the corrected payrolls and checks were sent in less than an hour. This occurred on Feb. 19 last, and it is only now that the teachers have received their checks.