

Intended for *Dr. Cahill II*

"O wad some power the giftie gi'e us
 To see oursel's as ithers see us."

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A Puzzle for the Board of Estimate.

The New York Cahill Telharmonic Company, which is incorporated "to generate and distribute music electrically," has made application to the Board of Estimate and Apportionment for a franchise allowing it to lay or string wires in the streets to connect its plant at Broadway and Thirty-ninth street, where it maintains 145 dynamos and one keyboard, with the homes and places of business of its subscribers. At present the company supplies ten or twelve persons with electric music over wires leased from the New York Telephone Company, but in a report on its business HARRY P. NICHOLS, the Board of Estimate's engineer in charge, says:

"The company states there are a number of inconveniences involved in this arrangement. It is proposed by the company, should it get the franchise, to lay its own wires in the streets, which may be connected to subscribers' houses or places of business. Each subscriber will be provided with one or more outlets which may be governed by him as to the kind of music and volume of the same. He will be furnished with a switch by which he can regulate the music either soft or loud. Another switch will govern the class of music, that is, he may, by turning the switch in one direction, get the effect produced by the piano, or by turning the switch in another direction he may get the effect produced by an orchestra, &c."

Naturally, the application raises many new points for the board to consider. The telephone is a necessity, but telharmonic music has not yet become essential to comfort and happiness. Mr. NICHOLS declares that it is hard now to imagine that it will ever be of commercial value to its subscribers, and he asks: "How far should the city go in imposing conditions which will govern rates to be charged, the rapidity of construction and efficiency of service, &c., of a company operating a purely amusement enterprise and requiring the use of the streets under a franchise for such operation?" For the present at least he advises that the city refrain from telharmonic rate regulation:

"It is the aim of the company to employ the greatest masters of music. The cost of such services are undetermined, and for that reason it is difficult to state in advance what charge should be made to the subscribers to compensate the company for such service. I believe there is good foundation for the claims of the company in regard to rates, and I would suggest, therefore, that no rates be fixed in the franchise, but that

a clause be inserted giving the Board of Estimate and Apportionment control of the rates. Under such a clause the board may exercise its authority to reduce the rates charged should they at any time appear to be excessive."

At a future day some champion of a music loving constituency may be swept into office on a platform declaring against extortionate charges for harmonious sounds. Mr. NICHOLS would have a clause in the franchise forfeiting it if within three years 4,000 music outlets are not established. Another clause he recommends thus:

"The service furnished by this company is not of such a character that money value to the city may be derived therefrom. However, music in free wards of hospitals would no doubt be of benefit to convalescent patients under the city's care. I would suggest that the franchise provide for the free installation of the apparatus and free service in such wards in Bellevue and Allied Hospitals in the city as may be required by the board.

"Should the Board of Education deem that such service as is to be furnished by the company would be of advantage in the assembly halls of the public schools, for entertainment or instruction, I believe the city should be furnished with service at one-third the rates charged to the general consumer, and a clause has been inserted that the Board of Estimate and Apportionment may require the company, upon the application of the Board of Education, to install and supply service at such rates."

Mr. NICHOLS and Mr. CROSBY, the president of the company, have had little difficulty in reaching an agreement as to the terms of the proposed franchise. Already a draft has been prepared, which is being considered by a committee of the board consisting of President MCGOWAN, President AHEARN and President COLER. Music furnished by masters at a great central concert chamber and distributed throughout the community by mechanical means has been a feature of books written by many dreaming idealists. It is somewhat startling to find the subject removed from speculative fiction to the serious province of speculative finance, engineers' reports and government regulation.

1884