D. H. BURNHAM'S SPEECH
ON
THE BEAUTIFICATION OF CHICAGO, BEFORE
THE
COMMERCIAL CLUB.
Chicago, January 30, 1904.

Until a few days ago your Committee intended to report tonight. But it became evident that such a report as the Club should adopt will be the work of at least a year and not of a few weeks or even months. While it seemed possible at first that the Committee might be prepared to suggest a course of action for the Club, further investigation opened up a field too wide to be dealt with hastily or in any but a thorough manner. Before making a report, therefore, the Committee asks that you grant plenty of time.

But, while we cannot now lay before you any carefully prepared maps, diagrams and estimates, and while we do not deem it wise to attempt a final analysis, we can say that we are able to clear the problem of some of its uncertainties and to suggest what general course should be pursued.

We believe that beauty is a quality that everyone desires; that while many if not most of us pretend to be uninfluenced by this desire, we are, away down deep in our hearts, altogether under the influence of it. A child is taught to do good in order that he may go to Heaven. What is the real motive in the promise? Is it not because the picture promises beautiful surroundings and perfectly harmonious conditions, which are in themselves beauty? And, as we grow older, we work eagerly in order
to surround ourselves with conditions harmonious in themselves, wherein we may dwell in peace, every sense being gratified? And we never lose this hope. Did we do so we would despair, and cease to work. We keep on because we either look for a heaven for ourselves or for those we love; a heaven hereafter perhaps, but more often we work in the hope of a comparative heaven here. We long for the mountains of Switzerland, for the blue waters of the Mediterranean, for the lovely streets of Paris, for California, for Japan. Few of us go but all of us dream of going, ay! even to the last man of us. We are born with the longing for beauty and we shall die with it, and, I hope that every good fellow will realize it, for the Lord knows we live in little harmony with our conditions here in Chicago.

Well! we cannot go away and leave the unhappy conditions about us; few of us can at any rate. The greater part of us must remain, chained to the car, the greater part of us of this Club, of our dear ones, and of the entire people we live among. What are we to do, then? We have this life to live, are we going to give up the hope of living it pleasantly? Yes, if we must, but must we? This is the whole question before the Commercial Club. Must we give up the thought of pleasant surroundings, and confess ourselves unable to better them?
If every man were willing to instantly give himself to the work a change would be made that would compare with the instant birth of Athena. "Yes", if every human being were absolutely unselfish we should at once have a commune, free-trade, a millennium, in short. All these things would be easy were man not what he is, but, being what we are we will not deal with the problems on sentimental grounds. We long for beauty, for peace and comfort, and we feel we ought to have them, while confessing that, as individuals we are too selfish to put up anything unless we can see a dead sure return in cold cash. Well, let us consider the subject in the light of money values.

We want beauty. What is the first pre-requisite? Surely no one doubts that Cleanliness is the thing. Cleanliness then? How can we get it? By realizing what dirt is costing us. And what is that cost? A few items will give us a partial glimpse of it.

In the consumption of coal we lose 50% of the actual heat making power and thus we make smoke. How much does each man in the room directly lose by imperfect consumption of coal in the City of Chicago, figuring the cost of his coal per ton and deducting 50%?

The smoke once made forms a black pall over the city. You breath it. How much does that cost in loss of vigor, and depression of spirits? What per cent of happy working force does each one lose because of the
dark, gloomy atmosphere? How many employees have you? What is your loss in services, because each one of them is less efficient under a cloud than he would be in pure air? You can answer with certainty that you do lose heavily on account of your own depression and that of your men, when you recall the exhilaration you have felt on those rare days when the sky was clear and the wind came from the lake. On such days the air was pure and you did double duty.

Then there is the actual cost of cleaning windows, walls and furniture; the actual loss in goods begrimed, of excessive laundry bills, and, finally the immense added cost of cleaning streets because of the constant rain of soot upon them. Give us clean air and the street cleaning problem will be more than half solved, because the loose material from the air is more than half of that which is scraped from our avenues and alleys.

Well, suppose it be so. Suppose that the direct loss and cost to us in Chicago is $5,000,000.00 per annum, a sum more than necessary to provide all the money we want to pave and keep clean the streets of the city, even then, what are we going to do about it? We are throwing away in smoke immense amounts of money every year, besides our health, our comfort, and our chances for lovely surroundings. Then what do you recommend that shall end this condition of things?

The direct loss is an enormous sum every year;
you and your employees are lowered in effectiveness and 
happiness. Your direct loss of actual money is very large, 
and yet there does not seem to be a sure remedy in sight, 
unless you can depend on creating a sentiment sufficiently 
strong to compel the authorities to do their duty. The 
ordinances of the city are sufficient to cover the smoke 
nuisance, but they are not enforced. There have been 
trials made to enforce them but they have fallen down, 
and, the Committee fears that this will be the case always 
because there is no one to hold the authorities up to 
their duties. Is there then, no hope? Must we live as we 
are and give up all thought of taking the first step toward 
beautifying the city? Not if we are in dead earnest, but 
are we? There is a way to accomplish this and there is but 
one way. The public authorities do not do their duty and 
they must be made to. A little temporary flutter among 
us may be enough to induce the proper authorities to act, 
but their action will be as temporary as ours in following 
them, and when we stop they will stop. How then, can we 
arrange matters so that we will not stop? Does anyone 
think that we as individuals are going to give constant 
attention to this matter for years; that we will make 
the fight and keep it up? Not much! "We wouldn't keep 
it up if we made the attempt. We know that, and it is 
useless to suggest that old farce again." We know we lose 
actual money every year by the smoke, and that we are de-
pressed and unhappy because of it, and that we would like to
live somewhere else; that we run away from Chicago every chance we get and always hate to return, but we are not foolish enough to try on the old public agitation dodge which never, as Mark Twain said about the Arab's gun, "carries farther than a brick-bat and is not half as dangerous."

Well gentlemen! this frankness discloses the facts as they are. You are anxious to do something. You know the city will not do the work. You know you cannot depend on yourselves for any length of time to make the city do the work. What then, is left? You must abandon all hope or else must hire some one to make the authorities do their duty. Not one man is needed, but an organization; one that will make a certainty of cleaning this Augian stable, and the committee recommends to the Club that the work of forming such an organization be undertaken. The first cost will be large. It may be hundreds of thousands of dollars. A sum at any rate which when put at interest will produce income enough to enable the Club to employ first class talent, and enough of it to effect a radical cure of the nuisance. To stop the smoke nuisance and keep it stopped.

Other clubs are now taking up the same question of purification of the air. We believe that hope lies in this method and in this method only. A sacrifice must be made and a heavy one, in order to retrieve our own long
neglect of our public duties. The crime of the Anglo Saxon is ours. He growls and grums under the abuses of government, but will not personally sacrifice his own time or comfort in order to make public service what it should be. Either public service or money, gentlemen. We want the change, shall we pay for it?

It was decided to place emphasis on the Smoke Nuisance because this is the root of evil with us, and because, so long as it exists, it will be well nigh impossible to do anything of any value in furtherance of a scheme of beauty.

But almost as important is the question of paving and maintaining the streets and of keeping them clean. No strong sentiment can be expected to exist in favor of beautifying the town as long as the smoke exists and the streets are rutty and foul.

The report of our expert on street pavement deals exhaustively with the subject, and he says, what indeed we know to be true, that there are many good pavements in use in the world, any one of which would be satisfactory, but that the vital question is not one of sort or sorts of pavement, but of the maintenance; that there is nothing known that will not wear out, and which does not require constant expenditure of time and money in order to keep it in good condition.

The best pavement seems to be Asphaultum, and this is the judgment of Paris, of New York and of Washington; of
many other cities too. By their practice they confess that it is on the whole the one satisfactory material, and it is easily repaired and kept in order, if daily attention be paid to it, and more than any other pavement it is easily cleaned. This much may be said in a general way about the kind of pavements. The Committee does not feel called upon to make any recommendations at this time respecting this matter. It is too soon to do so, and it may not be in their province anyway, they merely state what seems to be popular opinion regarding road surfaces.

The question of maintenance and cleaning is the important one, as we have said. It does not seem to your Committee to be a hopeless job to bring about the good pavement of the old town of Chicago, and of many other parts of the city. This can probably be done by agitation and some plan of contribution on the part of abutting property; the direct value to the real estate itself would seem to indicate that this position is not unreasonable. One might almost say that proper pavement of the streets and alleys could be brought about at an early date, could any certainty be established in the minds of property owners, that once the work were done it would be maintained and kept clean.

What then is the outlook for maintenance and proper street cleaning? Here again the committee is met by the constant failure of the authorities to do their full duty in this regard. Of course it is argued that the state of the public finances does not afford money enough to do the
work. This may be so, but the people have come to think that it is not altogether lack of funds that is to blame in the matter; that there is something more than mere lack of money; that contractors are not held to keep their work good under their guarantees, and that efficiency of the public employees, as well as money, is wanting. They have come to believe that much more could be done to maintain and keep clean street pavements than IS. This works against any change of the state law to allow an increase in taxation for the purposes we are considering, for the people have had much cause to ask themselves the question whether or not there would be any great improvement, even if taxes were increased.

The same organization suggested for abating the smoke nuisance might be used to compel the authorities to do their duty as regards the streets perhaps, but it is undoubtedly true that the city has not enough funds available to maintain all the streets and alleys of the entire city and keep them clean. It is idle to ask if there would not be money enough to do so were all parts of the city service administered with strict economy and without the shadow of "graft". We must take conditions as they are and not as we think they should ideally be. No doubt an improvement could be brought about through proper censorship, but your Committee does not see much hope from the public service as we have known it. Casting about for other means to bring about the desirable end your Committee has considered the possibility of property owners paving, maintaining
and keeping clean the streets and alleys abutting their holdings, but the realization on the part of property owners, which we have hinted at already, had discouraged us in this direction, the realization that acting as individuals we cannot rely upon ourselves for any sustained efforts in public work unless a force outside of ourselves penalizes us in case of failure to do our part. True, we might make laws compelling every owner to pave, maintain and clean the streets and alleys in front of and behind his real estate, but such laws will require long years to pass and bring into effect, and our concern is with the present. Your Committee confesses that they do not see how you can place much reliance upon public authorities for this work and while they do believe that abatement of the smoke is possible and that this will make a great difference in the cleanliness of the streets, they are puzzled by the maintenance problem. There has been but one suggestion made which seems to hold out a chance for maintenance and cleanliness. It came through a street railway man of large experience, a man who looks on the side of the traction properties and not of the people. He says, that the street railways should have long franchises, and be allowed to charge the usual fares now in vogue, and, that in return they should pave, maintain and clean the streets over which they pass. In the case of Chicago they should in addition do this for all the streets and alleys from 22nd street to the main branch of the river. He thinks in our case, the return thus made would more than equal the
sums asked by this city of the surface companies, and that it would very much increase the traffic on the cars themselves; because the cleanliness and good order of the pavements would tend to increase traffic to a degree more than equal to the cost of caring for the streets. That, as things now are, dirty streets mean dirty cars, and dirty cars are shunned, while clean streets would mean clean cars, and this means carrying many more people. He thinks the city could in a large measure solve its street paving and cleaning problem by this means, and that the surface lines could make more money. Mr. Yorkes once made this offer to our city of Chicago, but the Mayor thought that he was not in earnest, although if my informant is correct Mr. Yorkes was probably making the suggestion in good faith. Here is a plan which might carry us a long way toward consummation. Your Committee does no more than mention the suggestion, but it is evidently one that should have careful consideration, as should any that holds a possibility for the future.

The annual appropriations for cleaning and garbage removal are about $1,000,000.00, which we do not understand to cover maintenance of pavements. If the pavements were in perfect condition this sum might give us comparative cleanliness, but not such as that of New York under Colonel Waring.

Your Committee is informed that other Clubs are taking up this problem of the streets and that there seems to be a strong awakening of the public mind in this
direction, out of which should finally come a solution of the difficulties we now are laboring under. Let us hope that the united purpose of so many earnest people may find a practicable method of cleaning the city and of keeping it clean.

And what can be done in Chicago to increase her beauty when she is clean? We cannot have the sort of beauty depending on variation in grades. We cannot, like the cities around the Mediterranean, build terrace above terrace, ornamenting them with ballustrades and stair ways, with sub-tropical trees and shrubs, nor can we replan our city so that the streets shall radiate from plazas ornamented with statues, fountains and other monuments. We cannot have that peculiar charm that pertains to Paris, too Vienna, old Rome or our own Capitol City of Washington. It is too late for that. Our plan is a rectangular one, and rectangular it must remain. To open great vistas and change the direction of our streets would require almost total destruction of the buildings we have, buildings too costly to be torn away. It is not to be thought of. Nor can we have that beauty belonging to even skylines, the beauty that comes from harmony of building with building. We have sinned away this sort of salvation. We have made our bed in this regard, and we must lie upon it. But we need not depend on the charms peculiar to other cities. Let us turn our thoughts away from them, both because they are out of our reach and because we have possibilities of our own which, duly improved, will give us individuality and produce about us
conditions befitting ourselves, resulting in more happiness
than would arise from schemes which though appropriate to
the people of other places are foreign to us.

Mr. Perkins has spoken of the parks. What a
pleasing picture the projects he has unfolded presents.
Where else on earth is such a system assured for the delight
of the inhabitants of a great city? The extent of so
much finished work given up to the people, makes us realize
what is coming and in a measure what may be the life of our
children's children? No more formal parks like Kings'
domains, made for pomp and ceremony! but everywhere the
far stretching lawn and the quiet water, the shadowing
trees, the gleaming leaves and smiling flowers, things that
conduce to contemplation, to quiet thought, playing upon the
minds of millions of our people, and tending to beguile
them into the peace of simple nature. If Holland produced
a sturdy, peace loving and orderly people, why should not
the aspect of nature here do the same for our children?
Your Committee does not think you need to give a thought
to your sylvan parks, the work is well afoot. Should
we not back and applaud it in the confident belief that
this part of your wishes is already assured.

The Chicago River does not present an interesting
picture, far otherwise. In old Rome and in nearly every
Capitol of Europe the river is a feature of great
beauty, its high masonry walls up holding wide boulevards
whereon stately trees overshadow the walks and drives,
and the stone quays at the water’s edge, the stone stair cases, parapets, statues and bridges, all lend a special charm to us unknown. Perhaps these things may come to us here, but not while large ships go up and down the stream making fixed bridges impossible and requiring low docks running back to the ware houses. And yet there is something we might do here now. The old docks are rotting away. The piles of them might be sawed off below the water and on them concrete walks might be built. These might be of good architectural forms and they might be made uniform in appearance, thus doing away with the neglected and untidy appearance we now have along the banks of the stream. This simple change can be made at small expense, perhaps no more than that of the present methods, and it would go far to redeem an otherwise unpleasant feature. Moreover, it would be economical in the long run. And vines might be planted to run over the walls of the buildings now facing the river, clinging vines which will take care of themselves, and which would tend to soften and bring together the conflicting details of the hard old structures.

The time may come when masted ships will cease to ply on the Chicago River. This, so far as from seeming visionary, is not improbable and should it come, then there is a chance to build avenues over all the branches and create thoroughfares surpassing any yet made by the hands of man. This scheme would be well worth the best thought of the most eminent designers. Think of a plaza where the branches now meet, think of a treatment in the center of the
avenue like the best you see on Drexel Boulevard; think
of the many sorts of details that could be used to give
charm to such a composition, and incidentally think of the
everous value of real estate bordering upon it. Properly
controlled and designed as a whole the space over Chicago
River might become the most beautiful highway in the world,
a highway on top at the level of the present streets, a sub-
way beneath for traffic and passengers, and the clear
water of the lake flowing under all down to the drainage
caanal.

But our chief charm is the lake, and this we have
neglected—not quite, indeed, but does not the plantation
of Lincoln Park, and will not the Plantation of Jackson park
in part redeem our errors? When the outer world came to us
in 93, the water front was the theme on every tongue. The
bordering of the Fair upon it was the real success of that
memorable time. To build a city, not near, but actually
against the water, not a shipping city but a pleasure city,
this was the mission of the Fair, and we have not forgotten
its teachings. We have been reaping on our oars, waiting
for the moment of gathered strength to make our dreams of
yesterday a reality of today.

Many times has the plan of a great park-way, built
cut in the lake, stretching from the heart of the city down
along the city's entire front, enclosing wide lagoons, been
spoken of. The vision was feint some eight years ago, but
it has grown stronger year by year, until now it does not
seem to be a vision at all, but something quite feasible, and almost within our grasp. A part of it at least is all but realized. And who would have thought ten years ago that, the sad, disorderly down-town lake shore, unnamed and altogether repulsive, would soon be a delightful green from Michigan Avenue to the Railway, and that in a few years more a broad park will stretch a quarter of a mile farther into the lake from Twelfth street to Randolph? As we said of the sylvan parks, we need no longer to use our strength to hasten this part of the beautification of the city. Grant Park is designed, the contract for filling has been let and the actual work of building is well afoot under the auspices of a board against which there has never been a breath of suspicion. Michigan Avenue is to be widened and appropriate bridges over the railway are to be built, and to crown all, there is to be in the front door-yard of the city a beautiful classic building, resting on the center of the new Grant Park, its approach beginning at Michigan Avenue, the whole stretch of Grant Park being a setting for it. One's mind naturally turns to the Court of Honor in Jackson Park when thinking of this vestibule of the city. And as the people were filled with just pride when they realized the results of 93, so your Committee believes, they will again congratulate themselves when Grant Park is made a reality. The possibility is a noble one, let us hope the result will equal it, and that we shall soon be breathing
the pure air of an unobstructed lake front, extending the entire length of the city and given up wholly to the pleasure of the people.