

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

A Trip to Chicago

“Come all ye neighboring people wait,
“While a dreadful tale relate,
“Of a bright use as ere you see
“Was killed nigh Hartford by a tree, –
“Nigh Hartford, by a tree.”

The following narrative will not be as interesting or is graphic is the one which our esteemed friend and ex-member Mr. Cranch has been wont to relate in verse from time to time to the delight of this club. But the lines quoted may serve as a text for an account of a visit recently made to that most wonderful and gigantic of all wonders of the world, the wonderful City of Chicago

It had never been my privilege until very late in life to visit Chicago. I had never been predisposed towards the town; business had never called me there and when on pleasure bent, I always chose some other direction. But I had always had in mind, when some favorable opportunity offered to see the town and make something of a business of it. This opportunity presented itself during the recent summer, the occasion being the annual meeting of the American Bar Association.

The American Bar Association doubtless most of the members of this club are acquainted with. It is the oldest Association of lawyers in this country, whose members are representatives from the different states of the Union. For ten years, or ever since its organization, the Association has held its annual meetings at Saratoga; but by some means or other, for which no doubt Chicago is peculiar, the Bar Association of Chicago prevailed upon the executive committee of the American Bar Association to hold its annual meeting of 1889 in the city of Chicago.

Being a member of this Association when it was announced that the annual meeting was to occur in Chicago, I at once said to myself, here is a chance to see Chicago, and to see Chicago under flattering and advantageous circumstances.

The time of this annual meeting was fixed for the last week in August. The programme for the meeting had been sent out several months prior to the time of the meeting. Among other things, it announced that a reception would be given at the Union League Club; that a banquet would be given to the members of the Association and that a trip to Pullman would be among the attractions held out to the visiting members. Great preparations were being made according to these circulars, and everything pointed to an occasion of Special interest. Accordingly, I myself began to make special preparations, and several weeks prior to the time of the meeting, I opened correspondence with the

proprietors of the Grand Pacific Hotel with the view of securing comfortable accommodations at that inn. Accommodations were secured at this hotel, which was to be the headquarters of the Association.

I left Cincinnati on the morning of the last Tuesday in August. Soon after passing into the State of Illinois, I began to perceive signs of Chicago. We did not disembark at the station, however, until about 7 o'clock in the evening. The lamps were lighted and I was driven at once to the Grand Pacific. I was shown to my room; and a word by the way as to this wonderful room, which I had secured in the first hotel in the city on the 3d floor. The room had a bathroom attached, inside blinds, 2 or 3 not uncomfortable chairs, a small table, a plain dressing case, no curtains, rates \$4.50 a day.

I went down to dinner and immediately realized that I was in the maelstrom of Chicago. The dinner was fair and when I had finished, I descended to the hotel office, where a crowd was presented, reminding one of one of our hotels in Cincinnati, on the occasion of the Presidential convention or some similar assemblage. I had scarcely reached the hotel office, when I struck the Chicago spirit and enthusiasm in the person of our esteemed townsman and member of this club, the Hon. Judge Joseph Cox of Cincinnati. He accosted me in his usual cordial manner and began at once to remark about Chicago, and inquired if I was familiar with Chicago. When I informed him that this was my first appearance in that city he began to expatiate upon the wonders, and as he pronounced them the grandeurs of Chicago.

I found myself gradually approaching the front door to the hotel and Judge Cox said that I must look around [and] some of these magnificent buildings and structures. Nothing would do but that I should at once sally forth and see the immediate neighborhood of Chicago by gaslight. We crossed over to the Post = Office building, Thence to the Rookery and around in that vicinity until we reached the Palmer House. Meanwhile and all along the way, Judge Cox had been speaking very enthusiastically about Chicago and its wonderful buildings and structures, when we pulled up in the hotel office, I had already observed pretty clearly the Grand Pacific Hotel and its office, and since arriving in the rotunda of the Palmer House, I had been observing its points and features, and I must confess I was becoming somewhat restive under the judge's eloquence, I interrupted the Judge in a somewhat emphatic tone, and said; "Judge I have always heard a great deal about the splendid hotels in Chicago, and you have been calling my attention this evening to their wonderful excellence, I have seen the Grand Pacific and am now standing in the Palmer House, and, in my judgment, neither one of these hotels compares in elegance or comfort to the Grand Hotel of Cincinnati."

The judge seemed astonished, was silent for a moment, and said, "Well, I don't know but you are right; that is a magnificent hotel office in the Grand Hotel of Cincinnati; and, by the way, I ate one of the best dinners there the other day that I have eaten anywhere." The Judge did not have anything more to say about the hotels of Chicago; and although I saw him a number of times afterwards during the session of the Association, he had little to say about "the wonders of Chicago," fearing no doubt that I should throw some damper on his enthusiasm. If we were to look all over the city of

Cincinnati, it would be difficult to find a more inconvenient, noisy, illy adapted hall for holding meetings of a deliberative body, than was the hall set apart for the meetings of the American Bar Association in Chicago.

It was a hall in the building known as the Methodist Block. The acoustic properties were simply abominable, and the members and the presiding officers needed speaking and ear trumpets to hear and understand the proceedings. The noise of factories in the neighborhood was as turbulent as if a threshing machine were running in the adjoining room. So much for the place of meeting.

The Association, however, managed to worry through its meetings, and transact considerable business of importance. About the only incidents that occurred out of the ordinary during the progress of the meetings, were two. One was the introduction by a member from Georgia of a resolution in the somewhat florid style of the South, declaring it to be the sense of the American Bar Association that a certain calendar, or almanac, which had been devised by some gentleman in one of the Southern states, should be adopted by all the courts of the several states. This resolution did not meet with much favor; and, after one of the members present suggested that it would be appropriate for the Association to recommend the adoption of Rand & McNally's Geography, the question was put to vote, and the resolution defeated by an overwhelming majority. The Southern gentleman then sought to have the matter laid on the table, but the Association insisted on suppressing the whole matter, and did so in such a way that almanacs and calendars are not likely to be considered again in the American Bar Association.

The other unusual incident was upon the last day of the meeting, and at the closing session, when a member from Chicago, or if not from Chicago, one who was properly inoculated with Chicago, rose to his feet with a somewhat lengthy whereas, praising the splendid hospitality Chicago and the State of Illinois in entertaining the Association, closed with the resolution to the effect that it was the sense of the Association that the Centennial Exhibition of 1892 should be held in Chicago. Instantly a half dozen men were on their feet, demanding recognition from the chair. No doubt, they were from New York, or from sections opposing Chicago as the place for the Fair; but before the Chair recognized anyone of the members, the President, Mr. David Dudley Field, who by this time was standing majestically before the meeting, waved his hand and ruled that the resolution was not germane to the purposes of the Association and was therefore out of order. This ended unusual incident number 2.

As before noted, the programme announced that the association would be given a reception at Union League Club Rooms, by the Illinois and Chicago Bar Associations. On the evening of that day, at the proper hour, Judge Cox and myself repaired together to the rooms of the Union League. We were ushered in, and after looking about for a place to hang our hats and coats, we found our way to the check-room and left these articles. Thence we sauntered out into the reception room of the Club and noticed a number of gentlemen in swallow tails, wearing badges proclaiming them as members of the Reception Committee; but we did not seem to find any one who was looking for us; and so we continued our stroll, meeting no one and speaking to no one, and not being spoken to by any member of the Reception Committee, or any other committee or body.

There was no crowd, at least there was an ample number wearing these badges who had nothing to do; but I suppose that the member of the reception committee who had been assigned to receive the members from Cincinnati not yet arrived. Judge Cox and myself after a little more sauntering among strange faces concluded we would go to the Club room proper, where a lunch was being served and in which room were the library and bric-a-brac of the Club. Here we discovered a sufficient number of the reception committee properly labeled, with nothing to do except to walk about and display their badges; but evidently the member for receiving the Cincinnati delegation had not yet arrived here. The judge and myself were sober and were fairly well-dressed, and the Judge wore quite a distinguished air; and so far as I am able to speak upon the subject, I think there was nothing to repel or frighten any ordinary citizen, especially a citizen of Chicago in our appearance.

We strolled here and there about the club room, and finally took our places on a comfortable sofa. By this time I had become quite indignant at the way of doing so-called hospitality in Chicago. We had been in the Club room among a squad of disengaged reception committee for at least half an hour, and not one of them had approached us and said, How do you do, or can I serve you in any manner. I expressed myself with considerable heat to the Judge and expressed my disgust at Chicago manors. The Judge himself, I think it's safe to say was quite as indignant as myself. About this time, Judge Greene, a member of the Ohio Bar and a resident of Akron, came up and cheered us by his cordial greeting. Judge Cox and myself gave vent to some of our indignation at the way they did things at Chicago receptions. After a few pleasing words from Judge Green, he said that he would see that some of the Chicago committee were sent to look after us, and against our protest and before we could escape, we had a half a dozen Chicago gentlemen brought up to our relief after the committeemen had been told what to do by a member from Ohio.

They succeeded very well, and in a way that would admit of no criticism, in efforts to make it pleasant for us. We did not remain late, however, and returned to our hotel. Judge Cox, no doubt, could add some polish to the account of the reception at the Union League. The trip to Pullman was a very interesting and instructive incident. The Illinois Central Railroad Company furnished the transportation, and Mr. Pullman himself and two or three more of his officials took special pains, and succeeded in making the trip to Pullman very pleasant indeed. It should be remarked, however, that neither the Chicago or Illinois Bar Associations cut any figure in this entertainment I do not know that a member of the Chicago or Illinois Bar associations was present on the excursion. If so, they did not make known their presence. What shall I say of my impressions of Chicago? Desiring to see the city and as many phases as possible, with the time at hand, I sought life outside of the hotel. An incident or two will illustrate. One day I launched at Kinsley's. The waiters were colored, and after waiting a half hour or more, the lunch served was of an excellent order. The table service was very fair, but in no particular does Kinsley's hotel approached the St. Nicholas of Cincinnati in elegance or luxurious comforts. On another day I dropped in for lunch at the "Chicago Restaurant." To my inquiries of the attendant, he answered that there was only one restaurant in the city equal

or superior to this "Chicago-Restaurant." That one was Kinsley's. The fare at the "Chicago Restaurant" was very good, and the cuisine left nothing to be desired. I can dispose of the style and splendor of this restaurant by saying it was pretty well fitted with men at tables, about half of whom were in their shirt sleeves, and smoking at the tables.

One incident that impressed itself upon me occurred on the day of the trip to Pullman. I had been delayed so long in waiting for dinner that I was on the point of losing the train, and rushed frantically along the street looking to the right, to the left and forward, to discover a cab. Chicago seemed to be no exception to the rule that when one especially wants a cab, none is to be had, but finally, I did spy in the distance a Hansom, and thought surely then, that I was safe. I pulled up out of breath at the cab and looked around for the driver, but no John was in sight. An eating house was just below the sidewalk, and thinking perhaps, that the cab man was in taking a drink, or that I could find out there where he was, I descended below the sidewalk. A waiter came to the door, and in answer to my response, said the driver was eating his dinner and would be through in about 15 or 20 minutes! I was so dumbfounded that I scarcely knew which way to turn. Only to think of a Chicago cabman losing a chance of fleecing a stranger under the plea of being at his dinner! As good luck would have it, I did not miss the train, but I have always regretted that I did not have time to get the name of that John.

My four days in Chicago confirmed the impression I have always had, that 99 out of 100 visitors to Chicago, and about the same proportion of the inhabitants of Chicago, are daft on the subject of every thing that pertains to that City. Of course I had in mind to see its public institutions, and between times I endeavored to look up such places. I remembered that Mr. Pool had been the librarian of our public library, and had been called to Chicago to take charge of the Library there. I very naturally concluded that Chicago would have something very grand and magnificent to show in the way of a library.

At the first opportunity I made inquiries as to the location of the public library. To my surprise I was informed that there was no public library building, but that the library was located in the City Buildings. Now the City buildings and County Court House constitute one structure in Chicago, a large structure is true, occupying perhaps a square or more. I went to the City buildings and after feeling my way through a number of corridors and passages, some dark and some light, and after asking a number of questions as to how to find the passage way leading to the public library, I finally reached the elevator and stepping inside was jerked Chicago fashion up into the top story of the said buildings, and a few steps brought me into what answered for the public library. To say that I was disappointed, is putting it very mildly. No doubt the Chicago public Library has more volumes than any other library in the world. I did not stop to inquire what the number of volumes was, but I assumed that the Chicago library is the largest of any public library. The rooms of the library were altogether devoid of any thing attractive or beautiful, unless I except a few fair girls and young ladies who were at the counter applying for books. There was absolutely nothing of architectural or other beauty about

the building or its appointments. It astonished me very much to find that Chicago had no public library building of at least large proportions, to say nothing of architectural or other beauty.

At another spare hour, I visited the Law Library of the Chicago Bar Association. That library was located at the top of the Court House building, and while it presented a more attractive appearance than the public library, it did not begin to compare with the attractive features of the Law library of Cincinnati. The most civil and gentlemanly citizen of Chicago whom I met during my sojourn there, was Dean of the Law school. He showed George Cox and myself over the library and was as polite as one could wish. In leaving the Court House buildings, the Dean, in speaking of the high buildings that were being erected in Chicago said, and in this he voiced the sentiments of the writer at least, that Chicago was making a great mistake in erecting buildings of such enormous height, that they were not occupied in the top stories, and he thought in future years Chicago would discover her mistake. The banquet given by the Chicago Bar Association on Friday evening, I must mention. Perhaps it is not good taste for an invited guest to criticize the viands, but inasmuch as I was in Chicago largely upon a critical, and certainly observing expedition I ought not to omit this.

The banquet was given in the dining hall of the Grande Pacific. About 300 guests were present. Putting it in few words, the banquet would compare very well with such a dinner as we could get for a dollar at one of our first-class hotels. Two or three Chicago gentlemen were at the same table as myself. With one of them, I became quite conversant and had a pleasant chat during the evening. I had already seen considerable of Chicago and had kept my eyes open to see what there was there, and had my own opinion about it. I thought I would ask my Chicago friend a question to test his view of the city, and so towards the close of the banquet I said: Mr.— what are the principal objects of interest in Chicago; what do Chicago people take special pride in pointing out to visitors? Mr.— thought a moment, and in a somewhat smiling voice replied; “Oh, I don’t know that we have anything special that we can show to visitors, unless it is hogs;” So much for the opinion of a Chicagoan on the attractions of that city.

With a Cincinnati friend, we drove over some of the principal boulevards and I must say that I have never seen any Boulevards surpassing those of Chicago. They are certainly marvels of construction. South Park is very expansive as are the parks immediately adjoining South Park, making the park system of that portion of Chicago as extensive as could be wished. The artistic arrangement of flowers, and figures and designs in flowers, was finer than anything that I had before seen. One arm of the park fronting upon the lake promises to be a charming spot, and the parks themselves will be very attractive in a few years.

But of the picturesque, there is nothing to answer this description in the parks of Chicago. They are so level that they are tiresome to the view, and so far as my own inclinations are concerned, I have no desire to see the parts of Chicago or the Boulevards again, unless it should chance to be behind a pair of fast trotters, with the assurance, that I might speed my horses along that very splendid, level Boulevard. We also drove along

some of the avenues on which are located some of the residences of the millionaires, Among them the residences of Mr. Pullman, Mr. Field, and others. I know nothing about the cost of these residences. They were the finest that I saw in Chicago; but I should say that for picturesqueness and beauty of architecture a hundred residences in and about the suburbs of Cincinnati could be found surpassing any of those seen in Chicago.

Lake Michigan which borders upon the principal portion of the City and might be one of its most beautiful features is cut off and barricaded from the view of the persons on land, by crude and offensive buildings and structures, moving trains and standing freight cars. As to public buildings Chicago has none certainly of which it can boast. Its Post Office and Custom House is not to be compared in any respect with the Post Office and Custom House of Cincinnati.

The Chicago Post Office is small, inconvenient, gloomy and forbidding in every way. And although the Board of Trade building has some points of architectural attractiveness, yet it is not to be mentioned in the same paragraph with our own new Chamber of Commerce. I also went into the Leading Drygood Stores of Chicago and availed myself of the privilege of buying a handkerchief, chiefly for the purpose of seeing how it was done in Chicago. I purchased the article at a fair price, and observed that "cash boys" were in use in Chicago, instead of running wires and the more speedy ways of making change which have been in use in other cities for a number of years.

The Dry Goods House of the John Shillato Company of Cincinnati, is superior in every way to the leading retail store in Chicago. Chicago has some very enormous and very high buildings. They are very well furnished. They are not occupied all the way to the top. They have commodious places of ingress and egress, but the most fitting term of description which I can apply to them is they are appalling.

Getting away from the immediate centre of the business part of Chicago, one is impressed with the shabbiness and uncouthness of the City. A great many cheap, flimsy structures are to be seen on every hand. If there are any places of real architectural beauty in Chicago, in my few days stay there, I fail to find them. Chicago was any thing but an attractive city. It's uncouthness and its lack of manners and that ever prevailing manifestation of conceit, give anything but pleasurable sensations. That Chicago is a great City, with huge buildings and an enormous population no one can dispute; but it has many things to learn.

A. A. Ferris

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