

Upton, Marion B. Excerpt from "November Report of Marion B. Upton, Chairman of the Art & Literature Department." 1901. Chicago History Museum. Chicago Woman's Club Records. Box 21, Folder 4.

"...Among the perplexing duties of which I have fallen heir, as Chairman of the Art and Literature Department, is the small park problem. The subterranean Criticism with which we have been assailed on every side would well nigh overwhelm us were we not conscious that our experiences are only the usual ones of reformers along civic improvement lines.

You will all remember that the designs for the Shelter and Fountain were approved by the Municipal Art League, and endorsed by several prominent architects; while the landscape gardening feature was entirely in the hands of Mr. O. C. Simonds, who promised an immediate effect. The effect may have been immediate, but not entirely in the way the Committee hoped.

There seems to have been a conflict of opinion regarding the quality of Vines and Shrubs taken out. The City Superintendant of Small Parks, Mr. Rapp, assuring us, that the stock was not good. He says he has given every care [*sic*] and attention all summer; has had the Park watered faithfully three times each week, and still one third of the shrubs and vines are dead, and the remaining ones have made scarcely any growth. Possibly the extremely dry and hot summer has had something to do with this failure.

The City Superintendant has promised to take charge next spring, and with the liberal appropriation promised by the City, advises doing over the greater part of the landscape gardening.

The beams of the shelter we are assured by prominent architects have artistic possibilities when thoroughly covered with vines. So we must beg our club members to at least withhold their criticism until the vines have time to grow. It may be a year-it may be longer.

In hurrying bustling Chicago we cannot wait for results, we expect in a few years, without waiting for evolutionary and educational methods, a beautiful city like Paris for instance, which has taken centuries of education in public taste; millions of dollars in expenditure, and ages of natural growth.

We freely confess, that this our first effort in civic improvement has been disappointing in a measure, not through any lack of the Committee in charge, for strenuous efforts have been made, but through force of circumstances.

The silver lining to our cloud, however, is that our effort has been the means of stimulating the City authorities to establish a small park and play ground system through the congested districts of our City. These plans are prepared and are in the City Hall waiting City funds to execute them. We trust in the poorer districts more respect will be shown improvements than we have not in the aristocratic neighborhood we chose to illustrate our object lesson. Our architect, Mr. Long, dryly remarked one day, "That in that respect our shelter was not so badly placed after all."

The triangular park, two blocks south of us, benefitted by our example. The residents in the vicinity were stimulated to plant flowers in its much more neglected borders, and through the vigilant guard of one of the neighbors (a woman by the way) this Park was protected from the vandals who committed such depredations upon our park.

I am sorry I have not time to give you in full the report of Mrs. Noyes, who was Chairman of the construction Committee for the erection of the Shelter and Fountain, and whose experiences with the destruction committee, composed of the imps of the neighborhood, are numerous and appalling. She reports, "That although the contractors faithfully carried out every obligation, and in two notable instances gave far more than promised, yet at the present time not one drop of water flows into the basin, or stands in the reservoir of the fountain. All during the hot months of the summer people weary and thirsty would rest in the shelter, and go to the fountain for a cooling drink, and turn away disappointed when they found that the youthful vandals of the neighborhood had pulled out; choked up, or wrenched off the pipes, not one of which was allowed to remain long enough for the mortar to set, which holds the Terra Cotta turtles and coping in place. One of the poor turtles, who would not give up his mouth tube suffered the penalty of leaving his head knocked off." Mrs. Noyes says, "Three times have the terra cotta people set and reset the top part of that fountain, and fixed the small pipes for conveying the water into the basins, and four times has a standpipe been set up in the center of the reservoir to hold the water to the proper level to fill

the fountain. The first time a brass standpipe was screwed into place, as was proper to allow the gardener to cleanse the reservoir, but all the later ones have been of galvanized iron, soldered to place; yet they held no better. The bad boys wrenched them off with apparently as much ease as the first was unscrewed and stolen.” “Sometimes, these standpipes have remained in place over night, but generally only a few hours. The first of the small pipes to carry water through the turtles mouths were of lead, which proved so soft they were easy marks for bending, breaking off, choking up with sticks and stones, and exploding with fire crackers, while the second set, made of polished brass and prettily curved downward, were such shining marks, they were all pulled, as it were, by the roots in no time.”

We have been asked why the policeman on that beat cannot prevent such malicious mischief. It appears, that his beat is so long, that if he keeps moving steadily he cannot possibly pass that place more than once during the twenty-four hours.

Upon inquiry I find, that our experience with the youthful vandals is not an unusual one. I have heard of the most appalling destruction to public play grounds, which one would suppose would be respected on account of the enjoyment obtained from them. Mr. Pond the architect of Northwestern Settlement House has given me permission to tell you of his trying experiences while finishing the House. All the windows were broken out on one side of the building in a single night, and on another occasion the beautiful carved doors on the front of the building were so mutilated, that it was necessary to replace them. While such vandalism is rampant, there is small encouragement for Civic improvement.

Not only are there exhibitions of the spirit of lawlessness in plainest view throughout our City, but throughout our land. The age-tendency is the reckless spirit of individual license. The great and good President was slain by the spirit of our age, and we recognize that this awful crime, thrice repeated within 40 years, is the offspring of the spirit of lawlessness full grown to maturity. Anarchy is born as the legitimate offspring of unbelief in God and of human government.

Perhaps the Pastoral letter of the House of Bishops recently read in San Francisco struck the keynote when it said: “Beyond all controversy, the one supreme need of human nature for its cleansing,

its invigoration, its development to higher, nobler manhood is the indwelling of the Spirit of God.” It also calls upon the people to develop their own spiritual life, and that of their children, by the cultivation of religion in the home as a safe guard to the polluting and destroying influence, which are ever ready to enter therein.

I have asked for a limited time on the Program this afternoon for discussion of this subject, hoping the members of the Chicago Woman’s Club, who have inaugurated so many reforms, may suggest a remedy for this great evil.

The Small Park Committee reported at the Department Meeting this morning, that the Commissioner of Public Works, MR. Blocki, would accept the Park as improved, and the department recommend to the Club, that the Park be turned over to the City, and therefore recommend the adoption of the following resolution.

Resolved: That the Chicago Woman’s Club turn over to the City the Small Park, and that the necessary repairs be made.

Respectfully submitted,

(Signed) Marion B. Upton

*Emphasis original