The Destiny Of The American City

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A design for a refined business center in a restricted residential area.
The Destiny of the American City

By

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Municipal Problems, Mother of Mine, Etc.

Published by
Municipal Problems Publishing Co.
Champaign, Illinois
1922
PREFACE

A portion of this manuscript was written several years ago, during a period of inflamed public opinion and social unrest, fraught with many misgivings and uncertainties.

The period in question, was one most prolific in various and numerous remedies offered for the purpose of stimulating the building industry, each one a guaranteed specific for every economic ill.

The object in offering it, at this time, is more for the purpose of giving some idea of the psychology of a period, filled with many economic problems, that had to be solved under conditions, new, varied and untried.

The position taken at that time was far from being the most popular one, for the reason it offered very little encouragement for the builder to build, until some of the abuses with which the building industry was surrounded, were corrected.

Artificially stimulating building under existing conditions, it was contended, would in the end, entail another period of stagnation to correct abuses, resulting in further delay in stabilizing cost of material and labor, the primary cause of stagnation in the building industry—a
period for corrective measures, rather than one for artificial stimulation.

Emerging as we are into the opening and light of a better day, freed from many of the fallacies of the past, with its revelry of wild money-making, its lurid and lavish expenditure, the artificial extravagance and inflations of the war, it is hoped that the return to the fundamental principles and essential things of life, the only true basis of prosperity, will be sure and lasting.

J. F. Hessel.
FOREWORD

I

“The index to the wealth, character and growth of a city are its buildings;
The great structures, imposing edifices and artistic dwellings,
That attract the eye of the stranger, as he steps within its portals.
These reflect not only upon the character of the city,
But the character of its citizens as well.
They are manifestations of the old pioneer spirit
That converted our wet black prairies
Into the best farms in the world.

II

The pioneer of today, in building the superstructure,
The modern American city, upon the foundation laid by the pioneer of yesterday,
Is merely the next step forward in the evolution of time.
We are wont to believe the work of the pioneer has been completed.
We associate in our minds with him, the hardships, the disappointments and the sacrifices
Of the days gone by, and sometimes we fail to realize
Foreword

That each decade, or at least each epoch
Must have the pioneer, just as truly as did in the
early days of our prairies.

III

The sturdy men and women of that day per-
formed their work well.
They transformed the wet black prairies into
the best farms in the world;
They built our villages and our towns;
They erected school houses and places of wor-
ship according to their means.
We, today, enjoy the fruits of their labors.
On their foundation we must continue to build.
The work is no longer that of building a village
or a town;
Our work is to build a city.

IV

We visit cities older than ours by a century,
And marvel at their richness and their beauty.
We compare them with our own and wish that
ours were the same.
We forget to take into consideration the ele-
ment of time.
With the proper vision to guide us on, and the
determination to do,
What can not be accomplished as the years
go by?
Truly, the work of the city pioneer is before us.
—Municipal Problems, 1919.
DEDICATED

to

The Destiny of the American City

I

Have cities, like individuals, a destiny?
Or are they merely victims of chance, opportunism and environment?
Does the Hand of Destiny guide a city along a certain arbitrary path of progress?
Or is it like a shooting star,
A nomad in the sky?

II

Napoleon, at the Battle of Friedland,
When a cannon ball came over their heads,
Just over the bayonets of the troops,
Smilingly made the remark when a soldier instinctively dodged:
“My friend, if this ball was destined for you,
though you were to burrow a hundred feet under the ground, it would be sure to find you there.”

III

Is it true as Napoleon intimated,
That all incidents of life are controlled by Destiny,
Surrounded by its immutable laws beyond individual control,
Leaving individual effort forward or back, fruitless for good or for evil?

IV

Or is not every individual endowed with the latent power
Of carving out a positive rather than a negative destiny,
If he should so decree?
The little things of life, trivial and unimportant as they appear
At the time, may, in the end, prove to be
The all important factors of failure or success.