

Rediscovering ILLINOIS

By LESTER COLBY

Why do towns and cities grow? Why do some of them fail to develop? It has been my duty now for more than a year to travel up and down Illinois, visiting towns, cities, industries, men—seeking always the answer to those questions.

My work has been to find out. Theories do not go. If I can learn why some town, some city, some industry or some man has developed, grown, budded out, prospered—then it has been my job to put down on paper that story.

Cause Is Worthy One
The purpose? That Illinois, that Illinois towns and cities and Illinois people may prosper more. The cause is a worthy one. It is not sentimental. Practical business is the thought behind it. I have found "stories" in many towns. Today I shall take you to a place that you have never read about in any of these articles.

The place is called the City-of-Something-Wrong. I have visited the City-of-Something-Wrong many times in the last year. It has some peculiarities. Sometimes I find it in the northern end of the state, sometimes far south. Again I find it out by the Mississippi river and then over by the Indiana line.

Somehow there are a good many people in the City-of-Something-Wrong that do not like each other. I have found it so in winter, summer, spring and fall. And in this city I only meet some of the people. When I am guided about I learn, partly through hearing covert whispers that—

It is better not to meet the banker. He is a crab. Nor the editor. He is a liar and an unprincipled cuss. Nor the judge. A common politician. He cheats at the polls and frames his friends. Nor the hardware man. His goods are junk. I must not meet the grocer. Why? Dirty, cantankerous, ready to go to war with his customers.

Why He Left
One day a man came to the City-of-Something-Wrong. He had thought of building a manufacturing plant there. He went away and didn't do it. I asked him why. He said: "Can you see me living in a place that looks like that?" I go to the City-of-Something-Wrong and look it over. The front yard of the town—that part directly around the railroad station—is a

monument of lack of pride; tumble-down, store-fronts bad, windows worse. A grocer has a "snappy" cartoon poking ironical wit at his customers, pointing out their foibles. It is clipped from a trade magazine and peaches on the cash register.

He insults his customers. Files are thick in the restaurant. Everything is unpainted and rubbish is piled in vacant lots. I rush out of the City-of-Something-Wrong to get a breath of fresh air. And I know why it does not grow.

Lacks Organizers
The City-of-Something-Wrong lacks organizers. Its people do not work as a unit. When any man starts something four or five begin to pull him back, tear him down. And if they, in turn, try to succeed at something else someone plants a heel in their faces. Nobody ever gets anywhere much.

There is some sort of public institution in the City-of-Something-Wrong. With something akin to glee, the citizens of this strange city boast to me that they got it by dint of cheating and crookedness in the day when such things were passed around. One with a nudge said: "The other towns offered the bonus to the state. We offered it to the committee."

Because they succeeded through graft they are happy, have been happy for many years, and so they do not think first of making honest effort to attain better things now. It is their heritage. It seems to me a curse has gone with it.

City finances are in a bad way. We have a man here who would make a very successful mayor—but nobody would vote for him, says a voice. He is admittedly honest and trustworthy. Another voice confides to me that he is a crook.

Puts His Foot On It
There is a plan on foot by some to make an investigation of the native resources around and in the City-of-Something-Wrong. The leading financier of the city puts his foot upon the neck of the idea. "We know what we've got," he says.

He does not look me in the eye as he says it. A man from across the street tells me that this financial man, with the shifty eyes, is in the league with certain manufacturers of the city who have as one of their purposes the stopping of any industry that might want to come to the city.

"Labor is cheap to buy here now," he said. "If more industries come in wages may go higher. They want wages cheap. They call it 'not disturbing the labor situation.'"

It is remarked, under cover of whispering, that all of the best industrial sites are under control. No industry, unless it can get the O. K. of the "inner circle," can hope to break into town except by purchasing a bad-

ly located site or paying a ruinous price.

These men are organized under a sweet-sounding name and pose as city promoters. They hold occasional meetings at which there is talk of doing something for the City-of-Something-Wrong.

Quarrel Over Religion
The City-of-Something-Wrong is a battleground for quarrels over religion. Here a man's religion is not his private business. That is another heritage. It is a black blot out of the darkness of medieval Europe bobbing up in 1926. Some things are possible even in this day when all men read and a good many of them are presumed to think.

Young people move away from the City-of-Something-Wrong. The boys who stay are expert in the arts of the pool room. Ambitious young people, the sort that go away to school or college, as a rule busily find something to do somewhere else in vacation time. Few ever return to stay permanently.

There is considerable moaning among the older ones because the younger generation is going to hell. I have heard a few say that they would not blame them much if they had the chance. That would seem to be to them opportunity. The bootlegger drives a good car.

Politics
A business man of the City-of-Something-Wrong told me that one of the city's most proficient rascals was running for office. He said: "I started to talk in opposition to this man. Straightway \$15,000 was added to my assessment, my business taxes raised."

He went to a clever political lawyer. The lawyer, for a fee, said: "You'd better shut up. That's a way they have of punishing fellows like you."

"So I shut up," even voted for the rascal," the merchant remarked. I asked him why he did not show fight. "How could I?" he replied. "My assessment was too low, and could have been raised again, even after they'd played this dirty trick upon me. You see—I had had it fixed."

Bad Sign
The water in the City-of-Something-Wrong is very bad. Of course, no city can progress far or much with bad water. Industries do not have to come to such towns. There are plenty of places with good water. Any town almost, through co-operation, can finance good water.

Besides, bad water is a bad sign. It indicates factional quarreling. Every time anyone in the City-of-Something-Wrong tries to organize a movement for good, pure water—which necessarily must cost money—a counter action is developed.

I asked one of the citizens of the City-of-Something-Wrong if the peo-

ple living there, when they went away to other places, did not realize how monumental were their faults and follies. He replied:

"That's the trouble. They don't go away. The most of 'em are too tight to spend the money. And besides—business is bad."

That is one of the consistent things that I have noticed about the City-of-Something-Wrong. Business is always bad in it. The people are always complaining. Property values are low. Rents are habitually cheap; wages low.

Many Unemployed
In this city a good many people seem always to be out of work. It is almost impossible to get away from the place once you are rooted in for it is difficult to sell property without grave sacrifice.

Retail merchants, somewhat bitterly, complain that credits are bad. Sales people are not efficient. People living in the city send to other places for goods. Buyers say that they are forced to send away to get service and up-to-date wares.

Oh, it's a long, long story, this story of the City-of-Something-Wrong. I will not tell any more of it just now. I am afraid I might offend someone living there. I seek to maintain a reputation for good will.

Someone might misunderstand me and think me unkind or not generous or complaining. And my aim is to help.

Disorderly and inconsiderate motorists who trespass upon private property from their camping sites and who make no effort to clean up their litter, soon will find available spots in Lake county barred to them. Gradually a wave of resentment is spreading over the county and unless motorists in general show more consideration they will find themselves in a very unenviable position.

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