U.S. 40

CROSS SECTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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7 Baltimore Rows

In Baltimore, U. S. Alternate 40 runs between characteristic "rows." The view is east, toward the tall buildings in the center of the city. The day is overcast and drizzly; the streets, shiny with wetness.

Traffic is here controlled by lights, and in the immediate foreground the

street is vacant. A double front of cars, however, can be seen charging half way down the block, having just been released by the change of light.

Waterloo Row, built in 1819, shortly after the battle from which the name was derived, introduced this style of architecture in Baltimore. The architect was Robert Mills (1781-1855), who thus left his mark, upon the city and upon the whole eastern seaboard.

The houses in the picture, with their even height of three and a half stories, brick construction, narrow fronts, and marble steps, are typical examples of rows. Baltimoreans take them for granted. Visitors are amused or horrified.

Certainly there are too many of them and they become monotonous. But actually much can be said for the warm reds of their honest brickwork, for their simple doorways—sometimes square-cut and corniced, sometimes arched,—and for the generally fine proportions of their façades. Moreover, they represent a real architectural tradition, developing out of a way of life that endured with much stability and homogeneity over several generations. We may contrast the more recently built districts of many cities where a dozen rootless imported styles of imported architecture clash in the same block.

In addition, for its time the row was highly practical, even functional. The height is suitable for buildings without elevators. Brick cut fire-hazard, and utilized good local clays. Narrow fronts kept distances from being too great in the times before rapid transportation.

Traditionally scrubbed every morning, the marble steps wear rapidly, and are also eaten away by the carbon-dioxide-laden air of the city. Definite sags show in the surface of the first stairway on the right, and the four upper steps of the second stairway have apparently replaced original ones, and contrast with the lowest step.

Beyond the fourth stairway a Gothic churchfront also abuts on the pavement. Even this church seems to adjust itself to the spirit of the row by presenting only a narrow front, and by seeming to reproduce the lines of the steps with its buttresses.

The littered street and the garbage-can at the left show this block to be possibly on the downward path, but the sprucely dressed little boy—obviously posing, but for the moment forgetful of his toy pistol—indicates that prosperity has not yet altogether moved around the corner.

38 Kansas City

This view of Kansas City, taken northward from the tower of the Liberty Memorial, may be permitted to stand for the portrait of the typical American city as traversed by U. S. 40. The highway itself—U. S. Alternate 40, here thoroughly dominated by the city—crosses the railroad tracks via the Oak Street overpass at the extreme right. Closer at hand the Main Street overpass crosses the numerous railroad tracks. Two street-cars appear on Main Street—worthy of note, since streetcars in an American city are already beginning to carry something of an antique or quaint value.

In the foreground stands the Union Railroad Station, completed in 1914, about at the end of the great period in the building of railway terminals. Although architecturally to be described only by that doubtful term "modified Renaissance," and outwardly lacking any trace of modernism, the building is, nevertheless, highly functional. Its obvious T-shape yields good space for lobbies and offices along the head of the T, and easy access

to the many lines of track from the sides of the stem, extending over the tracks. The parking spaces and lines of taxis in front of the station may be taken as symbolic of the present-day dependence of railroads upon motors.

In the right-hand lower corner, the cluster of billboards in the vacant lot is also, unfortunately, typical of the American city, and so commonplace as hardly to be imagined otherwise.

Beyond the station stretches off, for some half-dozen blocks, the secondary business district of an American city. The buildings—regional headquarters, warehouses, and so forth—are architecturally utilitarian. They are generally low, and even the highest ones reach up only eight or ten stories, mere flat-topped, almost cubical, boxes of commerce and industry.

Still farther off, all the more prominent because on higher ground, rise the skyscrapers of the central district—the architectural pride of an American city. Farthest to the left, the Kansas City Power and Light Building, of thirty-four stories, towers to 481 feet, Missouri's tallest structure. Next, the tall shaft of the Fidelity Building breaks the horizon line. Just to its right appears a huddled and undistinguished group of lower buildings, marked by the flat-topped style of the early twentieth century. Then the magnificent Southwestern Bell Telephone Building stands alone. At the right are the City Hall and the Jackson County Courthouse, the latter partially concealing the former.

All that has been said about this picture seems perhaps so commonplace that to an American, as with the billboards, nothing else seems quite imaginable. Perhaps the picture will seem less commonplace if we consider what does not show, in contrast to cities of other times and places. An ancient Greek city was conventionally dominated by its "crown of towers," that is, by its military wall. There is no visible mark of militarism in this view of Kansas City. A medieval city had its walls, but its castle and cathedral stood out most prominently. Perhaps we may take, as successors to the castle, the City Hall and Courthouse, especially since the upper three floors of the latter constitute the county jail. But these buildings are not a part of any scheme of fortification, as the castle was, and the analogy is weak. Moreover, no church seems to show in the picture, and this is characteristic of an age and civilization in which religious institutions have generally been dwarfed by secular ones.