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East of the Mississippi

Well, we have had our vacation or, more properly speaking, variation. We had a change. That was all. The time we were off duty went more like work than play. Time well spent, though, and we are pleased---pleased to again be back in old Missouri, the greatest State of them all.

The writer and his partner in the waltz of life have in the past made many journeys into near and far countries during their more than thirty years travel of the road of life, but we do not recall that we have ever before attempted to inflict our experiences upon the patient but suffering public through the medium of print, or otherwise. There is no particular reason why we should do so now, and that leaves us without an excuse.

We are just home from a short visit---short in miles and in days. On Saturday, August 12, we left for our old home country, Crockett county, Tennessee, and on the next Saturday, August 19, we returned to our home here. We made the trip in our Chevrolet---"Chivie," they call them over the river. From our home here to our destination in Tennessee, speedometer register, was but 63 miles. This, of course, does not take into account the width of

the Mississippi, which we crossed at Cottonwood. That, we say, is a very short journey. Ordinarily, it should be no more than two hours' drive. On Missouri roads it would require less time than that to cover, according to the speed we made on this side of the river on our return journey. With good roads all the way, one could easily leave Hayti, Missouri, Sunday mornings and attend Sunday school at Lebanon church in Crockett county, Tennessee, and return for noon lunch. To cover such a trip would seem too insignificant to make mention of, and as the writer is not in the habit of recounting personal experiences, perhaps we could save our reputation as a narrator by adhering to our rule of reticence. However, this is a day and time of shattered precedents all along the line, from women's apparel to the spinning of literary yarns, so homely habits in some respects might as well be tossed to the four winds. In this age of flying machines, thoughts might as well also fly, and he who would write his fill, for at most his readers will be few. And hence, as but few will be interested in these random thoughts, we shall make no pretense of following a connected theme, for there is nothing of that sort to follow in making a short auto trip in August. The fact is, we followed nothing but the road ahead, and at times found that hard enough job. At least, it was a plenty in places to keep a novice busy, for this trip meant for him the driving of a new car over the worst of bad roads. We mean that. In our time we have seen some roads, but not worse than the first three miles out from the Cottonwood ferry on the Tennessee side. Here, from the water's edge, deep, crawly sand is encountered. To make matters worse, there are sand pits, or washes, several feet deep, that to be negotiated must be plunged into with gearing in low and with engines racing at the speed of thirty-five miles an hour in order that the opposite bank may be climbed. Here is where we would have turned back, but were now across the Mississippi and headed for the hills, and thinking each mile would bring us better going, we kept our "Chivie" headed toward the east. Soon this part of the road was left behind without a single mishap, and we felt our courage as a chauffeur rising several points, in our own estimation, though not to the extent that we felt absolutely safe. Three miles from the river, after passing the farms and entering the forest, from there to Finley no fault can be found with the highway. That ten or twelve miles of level bottom embraces the best roads we found in Tennessee.

There is a splendid ferry at Cottonwood---in fact, two of them. Arriving there about 10:00 a. m. on our journey to Tennessee we found

four other cars ahead of us, waiting to cross. The ferry boat was on the other side, but we had not long to wait, and received the most courteous attention and felt as safe as we did on land, and much safer than on some so-called land after reaching the Tennessee shore. This ferry has an immense trade, requiring the employment of five or six men, and we, with the four other auto travelers, were soon on our way across the two miles of Mississippi water. We gave no notice to the make of the other cars, but the captain of the ferry ordered his crew to follow them up the bank, while he, himself, drove ours with the remark: "Boys, follow those Lizzies up that bank---this damned 'Chivie' will take care of itself." And it did. It climbed from the water's edge to the top of the bank without a pause. That gave us our first confidence, which was needed later, as has been told. After that climb, wherever we saw automobile tracks, we were sure we could go, though had we known before starting the condition of the highway, we would not have started on this trip in any automobile made.

The road from Finley to Dyersburg was a disappointment. Expecting to find this in good condition we found it, instead, a series of holes, bumps, deep dust and bad bridges. No time could be made. Going out of Dyersburg, south, it was practically the same. We don't know why it is so, but it is so. Judging, however, from the way they drive, the people over there pay little attention to their highways. Perhaps they do not know what good roads mean. Surely they could not be so seemingly well satisfied with what they have if they do know.

West Tennessee ought to have and could have good roads. The topography of the country is favorable to road construction, and their taxable wealth, in comparison with surrounding States is far from being over-burdened. Added to this, good roads would greatly enhance the value of every acre of their lands and add equally to town property. We believe we suspect where the fault lies. We arrive at our conclusions by the process of elimination. As we say, we can find but one excuse, and that is the fact that the residents of Tennessee have not learned to properly appreciate the value of good roads. We find people over there doing things precisely the same as their grandfathers did them fifty years ago. Tennessee is populated with a citizenry of pioneer settlers. We know old people living over there who never saw the Mississippi river. Some never saw the sun rise nor set save over the same ridge. Tennessee has been sending out her most progressively inclined sons and daughters to the four corners of the earth for the last fifty years, but has received little or no emigration from the outside world. Consequently they have fallen into the rut of pessimism. Some of them take and read the daily papers. They read with wonder of huge enterprises being developed elsewhere, not realizing that they, themselves, are surrounded by possibilities for development almost beyond the dreams of the most advanced theorist.

Personally, we like West Tennessee. If for no other reason, we like it because our earliest recollections are associated with its scenery. It was the State of our childhood home. The happiest and the saddest hours of our life have there touched the tenderest chords of our heart. On a sunny hilltop beneath grass-grown

and sunken graves sleep father and mother. As a whole, we like the people who have remained around the old homesteads and know no other lands. They are intelligent, honest and, in their way, enterprising. And the way they have learned to run their little "Henrys" up and down the red hills is to be admired. They can climb a hill with a 40 per cent grade---that is, if they have a 40 per cent hill to go down before going up. They go down with all four cylinders hitting high, and go over the top of the next rise like a bat out of perdition. The fact is, "going over the top" is the first name of Tennesseans. The main thing is to get them started right. Alvin York is a Tennessean. He was hard to get started, but when finally jarred loose from the hills of his nativity, he came near mopping up with the whole German army before he could be stopped. Tennesseans have made good abroad. They can do the same at home---if they will. Some day these friends of ours are going to wake up from their Rip Van Winkle sleep on the road question, and when they do, they are going over the top. At present they have a long way to go and show but little sign of starting.

But back to the subject. That reminds us. What is the subject? This was not to be a good roads article, so there is little else to go back to. We hope we may be excused for our dilution upon roads, for this is the feature of the trip that got most upon our nerves. In connection with this trip it matters not what else we might attempt to say, it would be difficult for us not to run into the road subject.

At the outset we said the trip was short. So it was---in miles and in time. The latter all too short, for we failed to see all we intended to see. There is a saying, "So near and yet so far." As near as our old home in Tennessee is, fourteen long years had intervened since we last looked upon the places and faces of our early life. What a gulf of time that is! What changes it has brought! Only the absentees or their return can properly appreciate this vastness. Even the old hills, themselves, have changed. Some, mere babies when we last saw them, are now married and have babies of their own. Others have moved away---gone westward to find more progressive lands. Black locks of many were penciled with silver threads. And, alas, there is a great void and silence. The enlargement of the neighborhood cemeteries that border the roadside tell the sad story of life's final tragedy---the tragedy of death that awaits us all just around the curve in the road, or just over the hill, out of sight.

Mrs. York saw her four sisters and her only two living aunts, and how many nieces and nephews and grand-nieces and grand-nephews we hazard no guess. The hills and valleys seemed full of them. Looking another fourteen years henceward---when it comes, may those who gather then recall the happy days of this short visit and keep green the memory of those who have reached the end of the road.

The writer is sorry to say that circumstances forbade him seeing any of his blood relatives, there being none of his name in the community visited. The fact is, we were unable to make our visit nearly so complete as we would have liked, and we desire all those whom we did not see to appreciate our deepest regret. Our return was made over a different route to Dyersburg. We came

by Halls, Double Bridges and Unionville, crossing the river (Forked Deer) at Yellow Bluff. This road, while further, was better, save for its hills and the snake-like winding and wiggling of its way. Leaving Halls and traveling northward, the road traverses the Mississippi river bluffs, up one and down the other, with an almost continuous curve and many abrupt turns. This road, or at least, part of it, we believe, is to be converted into what is called the Jeff Davis Highway and part of it, near Unionville, is already fairly well graded and has good width. And, right here, is another thought, lending further weight to our idea of the neglect of road building in Tennessee. Somebody lives at Unionville---somebody who has seen some other part of the world. While Unionville is but a country hamlet, far removed from the railroad, with but three or four stores, a church and school and blacksmith shop, it is the prettiest place, excepting none, that we saw on our trip. We had never heard of the place before and ran into it unsuspectingly, hidden away among the hills overlooking the river valleys, and it at once attracted our attention and we thought we would like to stop and stay there a while. There was a modernity about the setting of everything that spelled enterprise to the passer-by. Many of the residences were constructed after the bungalow fashion, with lawns and flowers, showing that somebody had seen beyond the confines of the local rises and settings of dawns and sunsets. Perhaps, after seeing California, someone has returned and found, after all, that "Dear Old Tennessee" was as capable of development as the far west and at much less expense. We do not know that it is true. We made no inquiries. But the facts as we state are there to be seen, be the cause what they may. And at and near Unionville we found the best highways. We link these enterprises together as the outgrowth of the same causes.

If we ever write another article on this subject, if we may use that word in this connection, we may offer some suggestions for the betterment of the roads and other conditions in Tennessee, but for the present our allotted space is over filled.

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A careful examination of the new map showing the proposed location for the 1500 miles of State Primary Roads reveals the fact that 60 per cent of these roads will lie south of the river. Another, and perhaps the best reason, is that the counties south of the river have outdone the northern counties in voting bonds for good roads and have thus shown their need for better roads and their determination to have them.---Sikeston Herald.

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Thank you for reading this far. We hope you have survived the ordeal.

C. S. YORK.

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