

1933

Bill-Boards

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Recommended Citation

Basset, Elizabeth W.. "Bill-Boards." *The Hornbook* 1, no. 2 (1933).
Available at: <http://scholar.dickinson.edu/hornbook/vol1/iss2/10>

The Hornbook is a literary magazine published by the Belles Lettres Society at Dickinson College between 1932 and 1962. For more information, please contact scholar@dickinson.edu.

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TRAVELING by car is not what it used to be, even as I remember it in the comparatively short span of my life. Where before there were trees, lakes, and mountains in abundance to admire, there now stand gorgeous and flaming bill-boards screeching for the attention of every passing motorist. Some of the oldest known scenes, literal shrines for the people of this country, have been desecrated by such forms of advertisement.

This past summer I spent two months in conservative Vermont, where extensive advertising has been late in arriving. Nevertheless more and more gaudy masterpieces hold the central positions along otherwise picturesque country roads. It was a startling thing when I swung around a curve one afternoon to realize that up in the wilds of a Vermont forest, "even my best friend would not tell me". Life seemed so futile. Later, on the same day, while I stood in mud to my ankles, water running in streams from my hat brim, and soaked to the skin by a downpour of rain, I glanced up, beholding a sign which was mockery in itself. Behold! before me stood a gigantic box of Morton's Salt with the cheering message to me in my labor of changing a tire, "It never rains but it pours."

Not wishing to miss any of the sights of that section of the country, I started one day to pay my respects for the first time to the Old Man of the Mountain. Silhouetted against the clouds with a setting of crags and tall firs below, the old man is an awful spectacle. His profile seems to be the embodiment of all that is stern. Just to the right of where I stood gazing up at this natural sculpture was a bill-board which, together with the old man himself, completed the most incongruous picture I have ever seen. A pert young miss, coquettishly dressed, lifted provocative lips up toward the mountain side, and with a twinkle of the eye

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announced to the old Puritan father that he should "keep kissable" through the use of the finest cigarettes made.

How many stories of domestic tragedy are represented by road side advertisements! Some of the bitterest home relations may be smoothed over, I see, according to the claims made by makers of Burma Shave. Not content with one large landscape of futuristic drawing, the publicity agent of this company must have been hard put to it until he found his inspiration used at present on the majority of roads between the Atlantic and Pacific sea coasts. Not only does the shaving cream advertisement cover more ground, but it also arouses the suspense of the (I was about to say reader) alert motorist. Each announcement is composed of words on several signs, which, if seen in time and read fast enough, may be juggled into a charming ditty. Of the many which I saw a sufficient number of times to commit to mind, one especially rises uppermost in my thoughts. "Does your husband — rant and rave ? — Shoot the brute — some Burma Shave ! " .

I wonder if the owners of a little country store realized how much of their family life they were telling to the world which passed, when they put up the following sign: "MOM'S INN", underneath which was the rather pathetic little announcement, "Pop on Ice". I have felt rather sorry for poor pop.

Instead of being impressed with a place of interest, one carries away merely the memory of its most glaring advertisement. Recently I was talking with a girl who had had her first glimpse of Niagara Falls. When asked how she liked it, she shrugged her shoulders and said, "Oh, it was all right, but have you seen the latest picture by McClelland Barclay? It is of a girl playing polo, one of the series of athletic girls done for Atlantic Gasoline, you know. There was one placed on the rocks jutting out over Niagara, and I simply couldn't take my eyes from it."

I distinctly recall my experiences when visiting Mam-

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moth Cave for the first time several years ago. Mammoth Cave is one of the South's really great places of interest. For miles before we reached it, great likenesses of the cave made me gasp with awe. It was proclaimed the largest, finest, most beautiful cave known to man. I felt as if I could not wait to be there. When I at last approached the cave, I was bitterly disappointed, for it by no means reached my expectations aroused by over-zealous advertisers. It had the appearance of being puny, colorless, and above all less glamorous than I had been led to suppose.

After leaving the cave, we drove over a road of dirt and stones, which seemed as if it must have been in the same condition during the days of the Civil War. When we finally reached the main inter-state highway, we were confronted with an enormous head, the head of a man who had been State Highway commissioner for the past two years and who was again running for the same office. "Vote for Jones," we read. "He has made good every road in the state. Keep them repaired by keeping him in office." We shrugged our bruised shoulders, and limped down the road in our car, which was then lacking only two good springs.

The goal of our motor trip through Kentucky was Lexington where we wished to see the house where Henry Clay lived for so many years. Eager with anticipation, we drove up to the place which had been pointed out to us, and to our astonishment we could see nothing but posters announcing the coming of "The Secret Sin" and "Born to Sin" and "Born to Love". After some difficulty we managed to get a view of the house, but only by leaving the car and making our way between the two bill-boards.

Automobile picnics seem to be quite in vogue during the summer time. Exactly why, I can't think, for any number of worms, spiders, ants and so forth are sure to find their way to your mouth. Nevertheless at one of these parties of which I was a member, we sought refuge from the intense heat by sitting in the shade of the ever-present bill-board.

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When things were started, everything was as it should be on such a function, and we were moving our arms like propellers to dislodge the two inch layer of bugs draped over salad and sandwiches alike. Someone laughed. We all glanced up and for the first time noticed the sign in the shade of which we were resting. An ominous forefinger was pointed at us; the caption read: "Quick, Henry—The Flit!".

What must be the amusement of others when they see how prodigally we Americans have lavished our resources in aid of Mother Nature.

Elizabeth W. Basset.