

thereabouts it is known as "Tailholt." This is the town that James Whitcomb Riley immortalized in his poem "The Little Town of Tailholt." Personally, I shall always refer to it as "Joe."

Being a stodgy fellow who seldom does anything spirited, I admire people who do things on the spur of the moment. I knew a girl in Indianapolis who worked at a rather dull job, and it nearly got the best of her. One night, in a frenzy of despair at the monotony of her life, she gathered up all the money she could find, took a taxi to the airport, got on a TWA airliner and flew clear to St. Louis, and then turned around and flew right back again. It was the first time she had ever been on an airplane. She concluded her epic voyage through the starry skies at two o'clock in the morning—cleansed, refreshed, and able to face the world once more. Everybody who heard about it thought she was nuts. I thought she had discovered the secret of sanity.

Cannon Ball Baker was an Indianapolis institution. In that automotive city he had been making a living for thirty-five years by setting automotive records, and at fifty he was still doing it. He held more auto records than any five other men combined. The Baker home was full of silver cups and medals and testimonials. He had driven forty thousand miles on the Indianapolis Speedway in test work, though he drove in the big race only twice. He had driven five thousand miles just up and down Pikes Peak. He had crossed the continent a hundred eighteen times, and had driven hundreds of miles in the western sandy deserts on railroad tracks, before there were any roads. He had ridden across the Isthmus of Panama before the Canal was finished, following railroad tracks and foot trails. He had ridden a motorcycle the entire length of Cuba, around the island of Oahu, all over Australia, and across Tasmania.

There was a time when speed records were being set right and left, but like the hoop skirt and the hair on my head, those things were gone for ever now. Autos had become so perfect that all of them could go too fast. So Cannon Ball Baker's records nowadays were of a different stripe. They were records of mileage per gallon. He had proof that he had motored at the rate of 55.8 miles

to the gallon of gasoline—that was with the wind. But when he drove right back again against the wind and averaged up the two, he came up with 39.2 miles to the gallon. He did it with a manifold-and-carburetor development of his own. He'd been working on it for years. He said it was perfect now, and he expected it to make him a million dollars. He had it installed in his own Graham sedan, and he said that car would go farther and faster on one gallon of gas than any other car in the world.

And he had another thing, a perfection of the old rotary-valve engine, which he had worked out in a one-cylinder motorcycle. With that motorcycle he had got 154 miles on a gallon of gas. Furthermore, the thing was so smooth that he could ride uphill and down at five miles an hour without a buck or a tremble. This thing would make him another million. That makes two.

Cannon Ball Baker was a hearty fellow. He had a big hooked nose, and loved to talk and laugh and show you around. I went out to the house to see him (used a pint and five-eighths of gas getting there) and spent the afternoon with him and Mrs. Baker. His real name was Erwin George Baker. He started motorcycle racing in 1906, then began setting transcontinental records on his motorcycle. As his records grew, he acquired such names as Demon, Warhorse, Daredevil, and The Fox. But it was when he rode into New York in 1914, at the end of a new transcontinental, that he got the name Cannon Ball; a reporter on the *Tribune*, George Sherman, gave it to him. He was in the Indianapolis phone book as Cannon Ball Baker, but Mrs. Baker called him Erwin, and friends called him Bake.

As late as 1934, he was racing across the continent on the public highways at speeds as high as a hundred miles an hour. But not any more. His top limit now was the same as mine—fifty miles an hour. He liked to set records at that speed. Once he shook hands with the engineer of the *Lark* just as it was leaving Los Angeles, and then beat the train into San Francisco by forty minutes, though he never drove over fifty miles an hour. He said it wasn't so much the speed as the gawking around that got you into trouble. You had to sit there one-minded and staring, as though you were shooting a gun—which you really are, only you're riding on the bullet. He said one of the first requisites of safe driving

was to get your stomach right up against the wheel, so you'd have a good purchase on it, and then keep your eyes peeled.

It was fun to listen to Bake. He frequently said "motored" where you and I would say "drove." His grammar, incidentally, would take the booby prize in any university, but I found out long ago that grammar and achievement don't necessarily go together. He was a tremendous eater. He weighed 225 pounds, and he thought that if God had one special piece of work it was a big thick steak. He was the steak-eatingest man I ever heard of. Sometimes ate four a day. And, boy, I mean big ones—the kind that would ordinarily do a whole family. On these devastating coast-to-coast runs, where he drove on and on with no sleep or rest, he existed solely on steaks, hash-brown potatoes, and black coffee. On one fast trip he wired ahead to a restaurant friend in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to have the biggest steak in town ready for him. It was ready, and a yard long. Baker downed her with relish, and then his restaurant friend told him it was horse meat. Baker hadn't known the difference.

On his first transcontinental trip by auto, in 1914, he had only four miles of paved road in the whole distance. And that same four miles was still in existence today, he said, on U.S. 40 between Marshall and Waverly, Illinois.

On the whole, I am ill at ease in the company of artists, for so much of the time I don't know what they are talking about. And yet I invariably like the places they have made into colonies. And so it was with Brown County, Indiana. I fell head over heels for the place, and the people, and the hills, and the whole general air of peacefulness. Good Lord, I even liked the artists there!

All northern and central Indiana is as flat as a board. Neat farms checker it, and the roads are straight as a ruler. Big barns and regular fences and waving fields of grain splash across the endless landscape. But some thirty miles south of Indianapolis the land begins to undulate, the hills are covered thick with forest, the roads wind, and the fields become patches on slopes. It is hill country because this is where the great glacier stopped and melted away and left its giant rubble piled.

Into this hill country of Indiana more than a hundred years

ago came people from Virginia and Tennessee and Kentucky, pushing on into their new frontiers, though never out of the hills, for they were hill people. For a long time they lived their own lives in the woods and the tobacco patches and the little settlements, asking nothing of any man, and eventually they came to be known to the rest of Indiana as "quaint." That is what first attracted the artists to Brown County early in this century—the log cabins, the lounging squirrel hunters, the leaning sheds, the flowers and the autumn leaves and the brooks and hillsides. That, too, is what eventually attracted the sightseers. Brown County in the fall of 1940 was overrun with tourists and sightseers, and a few outsiders who genuinely appreciated not only the wildly colored hills of autumn but also the spirit of the people themselves.

Brown County was not the same as it was when the artists discovered it. The artists no longer considered it picturesque. They said it was "spoiled." They would have gone away, except that they said it was better than anywhere else. Fine roads and hotels had impinged upon the hills and villages. The patch farmer who lived up the holler was nearly pushed off the sidewalk by the gawkers from the city. There was little privacy left. And yet the deep fine attributes of the people endured. The native of Brown County was innately courteous. He would do anything for you, and not think of pay. His honesty was almost old-fashioned. Few people in Brown County locked their houses, and when they did they hung the key on a nail outside the door. They worked in a way that would paralyze an assembly line, yet their work got done, and friends told me there was something fundamental in the Brown County air that compelled an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. The typical Brown County man played a guitar, and sang in harmony, and loved to square-dance, and didn't get lost in the woods, and raised a little tobacco, and went to church, and drank whisky, and was a dead shot with a squirrel gun. Sometimes he was prosperous and sometimes he didn't amount to a damn—but it didn't matter whether he lived twenty miles up the crick in a clapboard cabin or worked in the garage downtown and wore a derby hat, still his code of gaiety and of honesty and his innate sense of dignity remained the same.