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Observations from the Left Seat of an Automobile of An American Landscape Undergoing a Transformation

AN INCIDENT OF TRAVEL

*A Record of the People and Places Encountered on a
Two Thousand Mile Motorcar Odyssey Through
New York, New England and Canada, circa 1900*

by Arthur Jerome Eddy

What must it have been like to make a tour along unpaved back roads, through several states and Canada, in a cantankerous motorcar circa 1900? Writing under the self-deprecating pseudonym “Chauffeur”, Arthur Jerome Eddy gives us in **AN INCIDENT OF TRAVEL** (Rollright Books) a remarkable account of precisely that experience. Traveling no less than 2000 miles in a very early type of “horseless carriage”, he explores towns and villages, as well as philosophy, religion, politics and anything else that stimulates his thinking on the arduous journey through the American landscape of the early 20th century.

AN INCIDENT OF TRAVEL brings back, in much pleasing tones, a nearly forgotten age, when American society was slow, but its people not slow-witted. This is America in transition, a culture only beginning to grasp the great changes that would erupt onto society’s stage. We feel a sense of sweeping, swirling shades of variety, the melding of different cultures, customs and traditions. The “Chauffeur”, on his long voyage, ties together disparate elements with remarkable ease, and shows what has been gained and what has been lost in American society.

Part travelogue, part mechanic’s guide, part history lesson, part social commentary, this story works on many levels, but makes for surprisingly easy reading. However, Eddy’s book is more than a snapshot of old days, because the motorcar was a revolutionary innovation. The automobile became a type of catalyst for conversation: people reacted to it as a provocative symbol of progress and industrialism. Their comments about “the machine” often revealed their true feelings about the modern age.

One of the most interesting aspects of the journey, was the constant attention his car required. Unlike the vehicles of our day, which are supposed to run for tens of thousands of miles without needing major repair, the cars of the early automotive period were still experimental, and every jaunt was something of a test drive of components, as well as a learning experience. In Eddy’s case, nearly every day he had to submit his “machine” to a careful tuning, fitting, or replacement of parts. Yet despite all the work and frustration, one feels Eddy possessed a real affection for the strange new contraption.

AN INCIDENT OF TRAVEL (original title: “Two thousand miles on an automobile; being a desultory narrative of a trip through New England, New York, Canada and the west”) should appeal to readers with an interest in 1900 America, Northeastern culture and heritage, early automobiles, rural life, and the effects of technology on society. It is a uniquely informative and entertaining appraisal of American life.

Arthur Jerome Eddy (1859-1920) was a well-known public figure in Chicago, whose likeness was captured in a portrait by James McNeill Whistler, in 1894. This painting is an appropriate tribute to a man who was known for his support of Modern art through lectures and articles, especially Post-Impressionism and the Cubists. He also collected art that spanned early 20th-century avant-garde painting and printmaking. Although as a lawyer he did not have all the money he needed to indulge his tastes, he is still often grouped with other much wealthier collectors, such as John Quinn, Alfred Stieglitz, Walter Arensberg, and Albert C. Barnes. Eddy also corresponded with many notable artists of his day.

Paul Dennis Sporer (editor) is the author of *The Dimensions of Companionship; Liberating Love; The Concept of Family; and Equal but Different*. He has also served as editor on more than 30 culturally and historically significant books, including *Painting Explained*, by Thomas Gullick; *Is Secession Treason?*, by Albert Bledsoe; *The Heart of Aryavarta*, by Lawrence Dundas; *Beauty and Art*; by Aldam Heaton; *The French at Home*, by Albert Rhodes; *From Slave Cabin to Pulpit*, by Peter Randolph; *Newer Ideals of Peace*, by Jane Addams; *Views of Old Europe*, by Bayard Taylor; *Gentle Measures*, by Jacob Abbott; *Parental Influences*, William Bacon; *Finding a Way Out*, by Robert Moton; *The New Birth*, by Austin Phelps; *Tupelo*, by John Hill Aughey; *An Incident of Travel*, Arthur Jerome Eddy; *End of an Era*, by John Sergeant Wise; *The Missionary*, by Samuel Mazzuchelli; *Half a Century*, by Jane Swisshelm; *Born Three Times*, by Thomas L. Johnson; *Dark Hollow*, by Anna Katharine Green; and *1492: Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, by Mary Johnston.

For further information about **AN INCIDENT OF TRAVEL**, or to arrange an interview with the editor, please contact Cassandra Foxton, [inform at anzapublishing.com](mailto:inform@anzapublishing.com). The publisher’s website address is AnzaPublishing.com.

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