

"DARK CONTINENT" TURNED ITS DARKEST SIDE TO ARMEN

(Boston Herald)

For Leigh Hunt the "dark continent" was symbolized by the Nile as it flowed through Egypt "like some grave, mighty thought threading a dream." For Henry Drummond, to have lived in Africa was "to have lived before Menes" and "to have watched the dawn of evolution." Famous explorers of the mysterious country, from Livingstone to Stanley, a round dozen of them, one after another grappled with it, but had to leave the biggest of its puzzles unriddled. Those were days in which traveling had to be done with feet to the ground through a shut-in land which defied all save local investigation. These are airplane times that permit of larger prospects, and the "bird's eye view" of Africa just taken by Dr. Chalmers Mitchell, the scientific aviator of the London Times, is the beginning of a new method of charting out the continents of the world. It shows a region all untamed and far yet from having qualified itself as safe for civilization.

The attempted trip from Cairo to the cape, a good part of it accomplished in a single machine, was well calculated to try out African conditions. Dr. Mitchell and his party found it by no means easy either to stay up or to look down. Heavy rains, thunderstorms and whirlwinds prevented clear vision; good seeing was also interfered with by flying sandstorms, even by bush fires which sent up trailing columns of smoke for scores of miles. At one stage of the journey there were "columns of dust thousands of feet high all round the horizon."

Terrific heat sometimes lessened the lifting power of the plane, and "forced descents" occurred with disagreeable frequency. Once ground was reached, there was danger from both human and animal enemies; armed natives threatened the aviators from the bush, lions roared near by, or elephants charged on the resting party. Occasionally there were "pestilential landing places abounding with mosquitoes, centipedes, crocodiles and large howling animals. Many a time the hippopotamus 'stabbed like a lance' and the minute lake-fly 'raised instantaneous blisters.'"

Dr. Mitchell found the mountainous regions of Africa "extraordinarily wild, desolate and picturesque." But outside the populated areas there were many "desolate wastes," swamps wet and dry, and such natural processes at work as tended to "make the whole country arid, and lift men, animals and plants to the river banks, water holes, hills and lakes." The general impression made upon him was that of "slow accumulating decay through countless centuries" of "generations of men, beasts and plants festering in the steamy uplands and in the dry lowlands, giving dust and a faint odor of death." Happier lands are recalled by him which "have risen and fallen under the cleansing sea, been scraped and scoured by glacial epochs, while Africa has only cracked and festered." He calls it "the most interesting, fascinating and deplorable country imaginable," and his only hope is that some colossal upheaval may come in to redeem and remake it. Yet in spite of all he would be glad to repeat his airplane trip over the dark continent.

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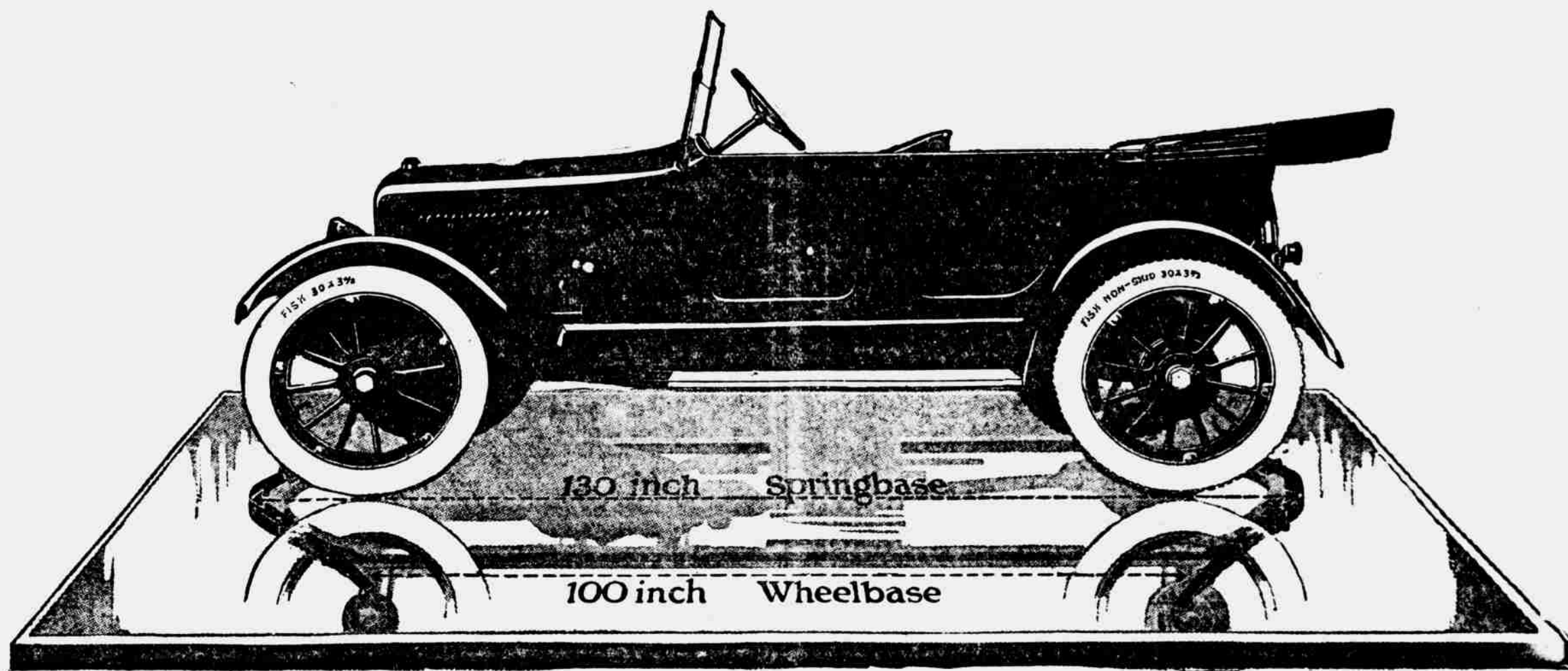
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