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## UA37/44 Memories of the Old Chestnut Hunt

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October 1, 1963

October brings many memories of older times, not merely because it also brings my birthday. And that birthday is getting to be a pretty big one now. I always loved the autumn and felt that it had been neglected by the poets or often given a sad tone. When I look back at the three autumns that I taught in Hickman County, the autumn weather and the times I was out in it somewhat tone down my disappointment with those years. The very fertile soil down there assures an abundance of wild flowers, of a heavy understory of shrubs in the forests, such as hazel bushes, or rank growths along the roadsides and fence rows. I have always wished that I could have been a botanist, for I grew up in a world, in the Jackson Purchase, where plants seem more numerous, more important than they do here or elsewhere. Early in my career I studied spring wild flowers and have a fair knowledge of them; but I am afraid that I

would make a poor grade on fall flowers. Anyway, fall brings memories of innumerable walks through the coloring landscapes, of later drives to hills and mountains to see the colors at their best.

What actually started me to thinking about fall was that October used to bring the Chestnut Hunt, originally properly named but, even in my earliest days, not much devoted to chestnut-hunting. The blight that ultimately killed off the chestnut trees was already bad; I doubt whether, on my trips with the school to the old Cherry Farm, I picked up two dozen nuts. But there were other reasons besides the passing of the chestnut as a valuable tree in this part of the world. The big thing, after all, was the chance to get out for a whole day with other young people and a few faculty members and just exult in the fine fall weather. I would have enjoyed going with only boys and men along, but the presence of girls made the fine weather even finer. We enjoyed the drive across the nine miles to Hall's Chapel ; some of the boys walked all the way there and back. We who had dates, and that was a large percentage of us, bought the transportation; the girls furnished the lunches, a custom that also was observed when we had the Boat Excursion. We didn't know the term "Dutch treat" until much later. Before and after lunch time we had spur-of-the-moment track events, a football or baseball game, and on one occasion a beauty contest. Late in the afternoon we turned back, usually singing all the way, tired but rather proud of being where we were. Romance always flowered on the Chestnut Hunts. Some of us used to say that any boy or girl who had gone on both the Chestnut Hunt and the Boat Excursion and had not fallen in love was a sorry spectacle. And, I now recall, ~~that~~ these outdoor romances had a way of sticking, some of them for half a century and more. So, as the October sun shines bright and a cool air gives zest to living this morning, I somehow look back a bit, not to forget the present but to tie up other years with the very vital present.