Along the Lazy Belt.

DOWN in Southern Ohio, not far from the West Virginia line, is a tract of country inhabited by families who in past time have wandered westward from the "Old Dominion." The country, from certain characteristics of its inhabitants, has been named by its northern neighbors "The Lazy Belt." The region is quite rough—narrow fertile valleys being inclosed between steep ridges rising three hundred to four hundred feet above the level of the alluvial plains. These ridges, or steep hills, run tortuous courses, branching here and there in the most unexpected and bewildering manner. The crests of the ridges, though often very narrow, are approximately flat, and on them have been made with little labor the roads of the country. Thus, though nearly level and easily made, the roads follow all the windings of the summits, and in a most aggravating way twist and turn toward every point of the compass.

To go by road from a house on one hilltop to another house in plain sight across the narrow valley, requires sometimes miles of traveling. But it is said of the true native, that he never cuts across lots, but goes by the road. It is true he takes more time; but what of that? The exertion for any one moment is far less than in descending and climbing the hill-slopes; and time is no object!

The houses, to a stranger viewing them from a distance, seem well built and comfortable,—quite out of keeping with the reputation of the people. Nearer inspection, however, shows many drawbacks. The building in many cases was apparently planned for a commodious farm-house; but the energy or means of the owner fell far short of his wishes, and the house stands, perhaps, partly clapboarded, with portions of weather-beaten staging clinging to the sides and roof. Around the front side of the house, whose unfinished appearance hints that a portico was to have been, or may yet be built, are scattered odds and ends of rotting lumber, stones, farm tools, tin cans, and broken crockery. Close by the door is a redolent pool, supplied with water by the overflow of the drinking-trough, and the libations tossed from door or window by the good housewife at various times during the day. Here the families of ducks and geese love to linger, hunting for rich morsels, and with their competitors, the pigs, watch about meal-times for choice bits to come flying from the open window. Sometimes hens, pigs, and goats may be see going in and out of the front door with the children, apparently as much at home as the rest of the family.

Inside, the house below stairs may be nearly finished; the family, however, seem to prefer to live in one big room, and leave the rest of the house for playground, storage for old furniture and bits of harness, and as clutter-room generally. The father of the family is typically a tall, hollow-chested, and round-shouldered man, whose salient points are a bristling beard, blue overalls, and tall cowhide boots when in the tobacco-fields. He would probably prefer to go barefoot at all times, but confesses to an innate dread of stepping on snakes when away from his door-yard.

The mother is also rather thin and lank. She goes about her work clad in a tattered calico dress, barefooted, and her head concealed by a large, flapping sun-bonnet, from whose depths occasionally issue commands in a high, sharp tone to the various members of the family; she alone seeming not to be wholly given over to inertia.

The very speech of the natives reflects their indolence of mind; they seldom make a precise statement, but rather leave their meaning to be inferred. Oddly enough, their one phrase which does duty to express number, size, and quality is "right smart."

"Wa'al, stranger, it might be five miles to the next tavern, and it meb-be more; I reckon you'll find it a right smart way." "Yes, I got a right smart o' boys and girls; more'n I can look arter."

"I reckon there will be a right smart o' tobacco this year."

The cause of this degeneration of the inhabitants, of their apparent listlessness and poverty, may be traced, if such a contradiction of things