

THE SOCIAL VALUE OF THE CAR



Lord Montague of Beaulieu, who edits *The Car* (London), says that in becoming an ardent motorist somewhat less than ten years ago he found many of his friends and relations looked upon him "as a nasty, vulgar person who had lost caste beyond all hope," and only eight years ago his car "was stopt by the police on entering the precincts of the House of Commons, altho I was then a member and had the right, by sessional order, to demand free egress and ingress." Since then the public, as well as the private, attitude toward motor-cars has measurably altered. A month ago Lord Montague gave a lecture on cars at the Royal Institution, where among the audience were the Duke of Northumberland, who presided, Lord Rayleigh, Sir William Crookes, the Lord Chief Justice (Lord Alverstone), and Sir James Crichton-Browne. Lord Montague spoke in particular of the influence of the car on modern life, saying:

"The effects are beginning to be important. As to the direct trade of which the motor-car is the cause, I estimate that a sum of over twelve millions sterling is already invested in this country in motor-car plant and machinery, without taking into consideration that in the accessory trades, which are also important financially. Moreover, the output of the motor-car industry in this country will be worth not less than six millions sterling during the present year. In other directions the decrease in the number of horse vehicles, and the way in which the new kind of locomotion is changing the course of existing trades, such as the carriage-building industry, give food for reflection. Coach-builders are now building more bodies for motor-cars than horse vehicles—in itself a sign of the changing current of trade.

"Up to twelve years ago there were many main roads in this country which were almost grass-grown in the summer, while in other places they were often in such a bad condition that it was almost impossible to drive a vehicle at any pace along them. One of the most important questions of the day is the establishment of a central highway board to superintend the maintenance of main roads. Their management to-day is in the hands of thousands of local authorities, who are nearly all working on different systems of road-making—entailing waste and inefficiency. If the motor-car compels the reorganization of our highway system on a national basis, it will on that ground alone be worthy of the gratitude of posterity.

"The social effects of automobilism are becoming more marked every year. It is decentralizing the towns and filling up the suburbs and the country. In Mayfair and Belgravia there have never been so many houses to let, while in the suburbs, situated on high ground to the north or south of London, houses are in great request. Residents at Wimbledon and Hampstead are now only a matter of some twenty minutes away from the central parts of London, and better air and absence of noise are preferred to the rumble, dust, and smells of central London. High rents in the West-end, as in the East-end, depend upon the number of people wanting to live in a certain locality, close to their work or their play. Now that people can live farther

afield and get to their work without undue loss of time, the pressure upon these central localities is not so great, and down therefore have come the rents.

"The great increase in the week-end habit to some extent may be attributed to the increase in the use of motor-cars. Good railway services have existed for some time past in many directions, but the difficulty lay in getting from the station to the country house, possibly some six or eight miles away, and the fact that the best expresses, stopping only at a few important stations, were of no assistance to many dwellers in the intermediate country. The motor-car is now altering these conditions, for at important stations on main lines, every Friday and Saturday, will be seen motor-cars waiting to take their owners and their guests not merely four or six miles to their homes, but often anything between ten and thirty miles, saving sometimes over an hour from door to door which used to be absorbed by changing into a slow train that had to stop at all intermediate stations.

"Up to five or six years ago people only knew the immediate locality in which they lived, and except they were ardent hunting men or keen cyclists nothing above ten or twelve miles away was, as a rule, visited. But now the more distant counties, the landscapes of the west of England, the mountains of Wales, the lakes of Cumberland, the dales of Yorkshire, the beauties of the Western Highlands, which were only dimly visible from a train or occasionally through the medium of cumbersome horse vehicles, are within the reach of thousands.

"Every French motorist who lands here, and every British motorist who goes abroad, learns to know the other nation better, to understand its manners and habits, and to enter, to a certain extent, into its political and social life. There is no doubt that the friendly feeling between English and French motorists has largely helped to foster and assist the *entente cordiale*, which has had so great an effect upon European politics."