

On Which Side Of The Windshield Do You Do Your Cussing?

By H. I. Phillips

ARE automobilists people? Can a man be a motorist, and still be himself? Is it possible for a person to drive an automobile, and remain a human being?

Do gasolene and courtesy mix?

Why is it that Casper M. V. Bluegills, the mildest, gentlest man in the neighborhood when afoot, becomes a Terrible-Tempered Mr. Bang the moment you put a steering wheel into his hands?

How comes it that Chester X. Y. Oohms, the well-poised bank clerk, will ride all day in a stuffy day coach and show only mild irritation if the train is held up by cows on the track ten times during a 55-mile run, yet become a profane and infuriated madman if, when driving his coupé around the block to get a pack of cigarettes, he is delayed forty-five seconds by a traffic cop directing a bewildered old lady to an emergency hospital?

How do you explain that Artemus V. Beedeez, passenger on a twelve-day boat to Europe, will force a smile and say philosophically, "Well, we'll have to make the best of it," when the ship is delayed nine hours by a fog, but become apoplectic with rage, and bellow, "It's a blankety-blank outrage!" whenever he is out in his fireless cooker and is held up two minutes by a hard-working coal-truck driver trying to back up to the curb and unload?

Why is Luther Q. Brighteyes, efficiency expert, psychologist, and author of the stirring pamphlet "The Importance of Patience and Self-Control in Business," one of the first men to fly off the handle when a little boy, hurrying home from the delicatessen store with a pound of potato salad and a dozen eggs, tries to cross the street unaccompanied by the state militia?

Can you tell me why Otis Throckmorton Whooziss, secretary of the Golden Rule Society, will smile graciously, lift his hat, and say sweetly, "I beg your pardon. I'm really awfully sorry. Please excuse me," when he accidentally steps on a strange woman's foot in a theatre lobby, yet will lean out and make faces at his own grandmother if she fails to slow up her flivver and allow him to "cut in" on a congested highway?

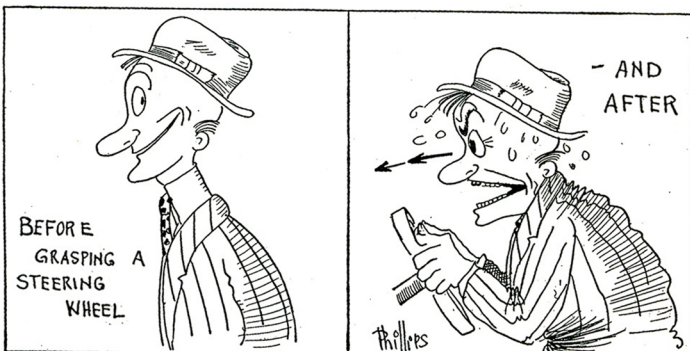
It's all over my head. I haven't got the right answers.

Possibly there's something about a windshield that distorts a man's outlook on life.

Perhaps it is the horn.

I'm not preaching. As a matter of fact, I'm in the same boat with the rest of the Occasionally Human Race. I believe in graciousness. I think courtesy and consideration two great virtues. I have no

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patience with the gruff, ill-mannered person who has no sense of fair play. Ordinarily, I keep my temper and rarely do I wax profane. But I'd hate to be held strictly accountable for all that I do, say, or think when driving an automobile.

Once the smell of gasoline gets into my nostrils, I become a different man. And how!

Few things that the other fellow does seem right to me. I denounce traffic policemen as dumb-bells, brand truck drivers as idiots, classify women drivers as nitwits, bawl out little children as crazy numbskulls, and dismiss pedestrians as a whole with the scornful, "The big louts! Can you beat 'em?"

I become overbearing, disdainful, superior. I become, as it were, an hauteur-mobilist.

NOW, I'm not that way under other conditions. Subway tie-ups I regard as unavoidable. When one occurs, I read my paper for fifteen or twenty minutes, and then, if the train isn't ready to move, I walk out and grab a taxi. If the taxi gets tied up in traffic, it nettles me somewhat, but I don't tear my hair, glare out the window, and use language not permitted in the fourth-best families.

If I go to the theatre and the curtain, scheduled to rise at eight-thirty, does not rise until nine I get somewhat peeved. I shuffle my feet a bit and mutter a little, but I don't blow a horn vociferously at the producer and make grimaces at the usherettes.

Even on the telephone I am under better control than in an automobile. I give "central" an even break, at least. She always gets a minute for rebuttal.

BUT in the gasoline rickshaw—that's something else again! Once aboard the motor lugger and I'm the whole nine reels of D. H. Griffiths's "Intolerance." And I'd be awfully upset about it and conscience-stricken if I didn't know from observation that ninety-nine out of one hundred men are the same the minute they step on a self-starter or let in a clutch.

Is the craze for speed so predominant a characteristic of the people of the United States that, once it is given an opportunity to express itself, it submerges all other traits? That may be it.

One touch of gasoline, possibly, makes the whole world spin.

Give a man a chassis, four tires, a soap box, and a horn, and he immediately wants to become the Vanishing American.

From that time on he believes in the survival of the fleetest.

He has two mottoes. They are:

1. Fright makes right.
2. The other fellow is always wrong.

This speed mania is no respecter of persons. Last summer I was all but side-

wiped by a big rumbling limousine that tore out of a side street with absolutely no warning. My amazement at the performance was eclipsed by the recognition of the driver as a beloved priest, well over sixty and widely known for his gentle ways and inherent kindness. He probably didn't know what a different picture he made with his foot on an accelerator. One of the most careless drivers in my home town was a bishop. Any place but at the wheel of his runabout he was a cautious, slow-moving, extremely considerate gentleman. But once in his petrol-barouche, and he was more of an insurance risk than the fire chief.

For some years, I was secretary of an automobile club in my home town. Its slogan was "Safety First!" and its board of directors, meeting once a week, issued a flood of bulletins emphasizing the need of cautious driving, and urging all motorists to consider the rights of others. One of its officers was arrested one day while carrying some "Go Slow" signs into the suburbs!

After nailing up one "Go Slow" sign, he had violated the speed laws in his rush to put up the others! At another time, the club, aroused by a series of accidents, appealed to the public to report to the club any persons observed driving recklessly. When the complaints were opened at a later meeting, one of the first read was against the president of the club.

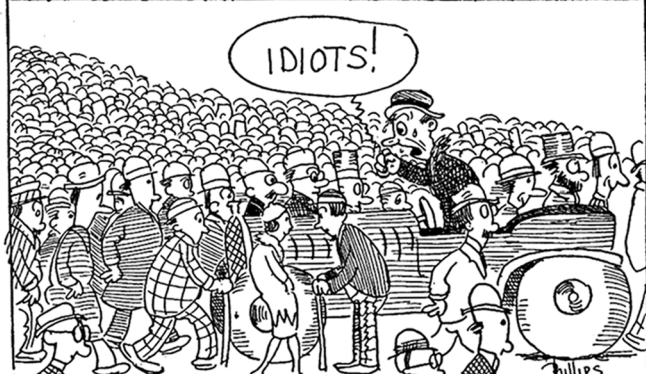
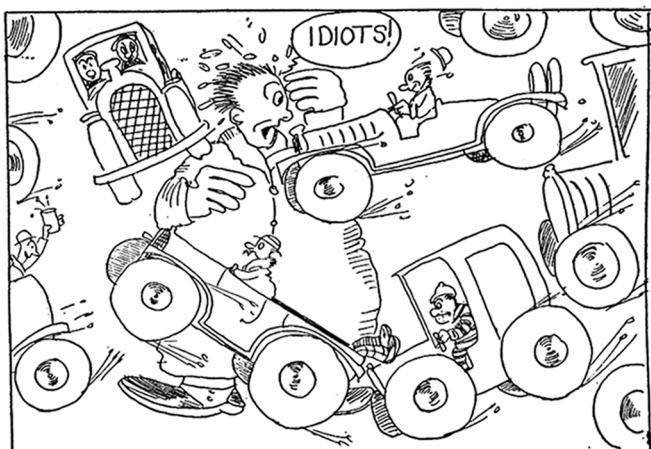
INCONGRUOUS as it may seem, the drivers of ambulances are particularly subject to speed dementia. It is getting so the most hazardous part of a patient's illness is his trip from his home to the hospital in an ambulance. For that matter, the immune motor-cycle policemen are just about, as reckless as most of the drivers they arrest, and, as everybody knows, the fastest driving seen in American communities to-day is being done by fire chiefs on their way from the firehouse to the quick-lunch-room for coffee and crullers.

It's in the blood. The man on the way to a notions store to buy a spool of thread for his wife drives just as heedlessly as the chairman of the reception committee clearing the way for a channel swimmer, a golf champion, or the Prince of Wales.

The motto of both is, "Don't stop until you see the whites of their eyes!"

And that—let's be honest about it—is mine, too.

The change in character that comes over me when I step out of the rôle of a pedestrian and into that of a flivver pilot is very



How traffic seems to the pedestrian and how it seems to the motorist

curious. Whenever I walk about town, crossing streets in heavy traffic, I become an outraged citizen, a downtrodden, brow-beaten, fender-scarred pedestrian, whose spirit flames in revolt against "the stupid, irresponsible, selfish, pig-headed, pygmy-brained automobile drivers who don't give a whoop about the rights of other folks." I deliver a tirade at the taxicab chauffeur who grazes my thigh as he sweeps around the corner; I denounce the truck driver who by a blast of a trick horn causes me to set a new running broad jump record; I stand shaking my fist and purple with rage as the gentleman at the wheel of a private car ignores my attempt to cross the street at a walk and chases me up an alley.

"Has a pedestrian no rights? Do these fellows in automobiles own the earth? What's the matter with the police? There oughta be a law-w-w-w-w-w!" I mutter to myself.

But, a few hours later, when I hop into my own 45-horse-power percolator, and pick a course down Broadway through the milling throngs, I become an outraged motorist, an agitated car owner, an impatient speed demon, whose spirit rises in revolt against "the stupid, irresponsible, selfish, pig-headed, pygmy-brained pedestrians who don't give a whoop about the rights of motorists." I let fly a blast at the struggling man who darts in front of me to avoid death under the wheels of a ten-ton truck. I bawl out the messenger boy who dashes across in such a way as to compel me to cut my speed from 30 to 29½ miles an hour. And I mutter "Fool!" at the elderly gentleman who ducks back to the curb just in time to save his trousers from being carried away by my front right fender.

It all depends upon the point of view!

However, I'm trying to reform and lead a better life. I'm nearer right when, as a pedestrian, I condemn the automobilists than I am when, as an automobilist, I condemn the pedestrians.

The pedestrian, I am satisfied, is the under dog. He has no flexibility, no quick "pick-up," no accelerator and, above all—no horn!

The advantages are all with the automobilist. There is no justice in the motorist's assumption that he should take a mile while a pedestrian takes an inch.

So of late I have been making a serious effort, when driving a car, to be fair to the man who navigates in a pair of shoes. Whenever a pedestrian steps out into the street with what seems poor judgment, I restrain that impulse to skirt him and cry "Whatzamatollah? Are ya sound asleep?" Instead, I often put on my brakes; if necessary, come to full stop, and with a smile wave him on his way. But the results have been disheartening. When I slow up my old boiler and show consideration and courtesy to a pedestrian, almost invariably he thinks there's something wrong with me!

HERE are some exact experiences taken from my diary:

MONDAY: Still trying to play fair with pedestrians, but they don't seem to get the idea. Driving out Merrick Road, when young man and woman stepped abruptly from curb in path of car. I put on brakes quickly and came to full stop. Startled by grinding of brakes, they seemed confused and stood in middle of road. I motioned for them to go ahead and cross the street. They did so. I then started car again, and, as I passed the couple, the young man gave me a bitter look and cried, "You're one of them fresh guys, ain't you?"

TUESDAY: Had another amusing experience to-day in working out my attempts to be gracious toward pedestrians. Was passing through Central Street when a workman stepped out from the curb to signal a trolley car. He did not see me at first, but jumped back onto sidewalk as I came to a stop. I leaned out of car and nodded for him to step out and get his trolley. He looked at me in a dazed manner. "Come ahead," I called to him. He made no move for a few seconds, and then walked around the rear of my machine to board the car. I am sure he thought there was some catch in it.

WEDNESDAY: Was bowling along suburban road at more than a reasonable speed when a mother pushing a baby carriage stepped from the sidewalk about half a block ahead of me. I slowed up, and motioned for her to cross, indicating that I would wait for her to do so. She dashed back to the sidewalk again, quite frightened. As I came to a stop, I smiled and said, "It's all (Continued on page 98)

(to be continued)