

An Automobile Ride

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breaths of the air that fluttered the Union Jack.

Stranleigh, confident that he had shaken off pursuit, enjoyed himself in a thoroughly democratic manner, sailing and motoring, the second week venturing on a tour of the automobile manufacturing district. He had come to believe Parkes so untruthful that he discounted everything he had said, and was unprepared to find the reality far in advance of the description. However, he saw no sign of the Sterling Motor Company, so asked the chauffeur to convey him thither. The chauffeur, pondering a moment, was forced to admit he had never heard of the company.

"Then will you go to one of these offices and enquire?" requested Stranleigh. "Some one is sure to know the name."

The chauffeur drew up at a huge factory and went inside. Returning very promptly, he informed his fare that they knew of no Sterling Motor Company, but there was in Woodbridge Street a young engineer named J. E. Sterling, who, they believed, made motor cars.

"J. E. Sterling! That's the man I want. Where is Woodbridge Street?"

"Right away. Next door, as you might say, to the river front."

"We'll go there. Drive past Mr. Sterling's place."

Woodbridge Street proved to be crowded with lumbering trucks, loaded with vegetables for the most part, and among these vehicles the chauffeur threaded his way with caution. They passed a small, insignificant shop, above whose window was printed:

J. E. STERLING,
MOTOR ENGINEER.
REPAIRS
PROMPTLY EXECUTED.

When the chauffeur halted a little further on Stranleigh descended, and dismissed the car.

THE door of J. E. Sterling's modest works being open, Stranleigh walked in unannounced. A five-passenger car stood by the window, where it could be viewed by passers-by. Further down the room rested a chassis, over which two men, one middle-aged, the other probably twenty-five, were bending, with tools in their hands. Both looked up as Stranleigh entered.

"I wish to see Mr. J. E. Sterling," he said.

"My name is Sterling," replied the younger man, putting down his tools, and coming forward.

"I understood," went on Stranleigh, "that there was a Sterling Motor Car Company."

"There will be," answered the young man, confidently, "but that's in the sweet by-and-by. It has n't materialized so far. What can I do for you?"

"Can you give me some information regarding J. E. Sterling? I want to learn if it tallies with what I have heard."

The young man laughed. "Well, that depends on who has been talking about me."

"I heard nothing but praise." Sterling laughed even more heartily.

"I am afraid they were getting at you. A man may be a creditable inventor and a good all-round engineer without expecting praise from his friends. Are you looking for an automobile?"

"No; as I told you at first, I am looking for J. E. Sterling."

"I was going to say that I'm not yet prepared to supply cars. I do repairing and that sort of thing, merely to keep the wolf from the door, and leave a small surplus to expend in my business. My real work, however, is experimenting, and when I can turn out a machine that satisfies me, my next business will be to form a company.

A man can't do anything in this line without capital."

"The competition must be keen." "It is, but there's always room for a tip-top article, and the production of it is my ambition."

"Is that your work in the window?"

"Yes."

"Does it satisfy you—come up to your expectations?"

The young man's face grew serious; his brow wrinkled almost into a frown. "I can't exactly say it does that," he answered at last. "Still, I think the faults can be corrected with a little patience. On the other hand, the improvement I have put in this car may not be as great as I thought when I was working at it."

Lord Stranleigh looked at him with evident approval. He liked the young man's frankness and honesty.

"Do you mind showing me your improvement and explaining its function?"

"Not at all. Come over to the window, and I'll show you how the wheels go round."

AS the two men approached the car in the window, a man on the pavement outside stopped suddenly, and regarded them with obvious astonishment. Neither of those inside saw him, but if one or the other had looked through the glass, he would have recognized the sinister face of Wentworth Parkes who, having satisfied himself as to the visitor's identity, turned away and retraced his steps.

Sterling lifted a leather curtain which hung down in front from the passenger's seat, and disclosed a line of three upright pegs, rising two or three inches from the floor of the car. They were concealed when the curtain was lowered.

"If you give the matter a thought," said Sterling, "you will discover that the passenger in an automobile is in a helpless position. His chauffeur may faint, or even die at his wheel from heart failure, as has often been the case, or he may be drunk and unreasonable, driving the car with danger to all concerned, yet if his passenger attempts to displace him while the car is traveling at high speed, disaster is certain. The center peg here will stop the engine and put on the brakes. A pressure of the foot on the peg to the right turns the car to the right, and on the left, to the left. In an ordinary motor the passenger can do nothing to save himself, but here he may stop dead, or, if he prefers it, may disconnect the steering wheel, and guide the car at his will."

"It seems an excellent device," said Stranleigh.

"I think it is, but after all, the crises in which it could be brought to play are rare. As a general rule, a chauffeur is more to be trusted than the owner, and if the owner happened to be a nervous man, he might interfere, with deplorable results. That's its disadvantage."

"Yes," said Stranleigh, "but it's like the pistol. You may not need it, but if you do, you need it very badly. Could you let me try this car tomorrow?"

"Yes," said Sterling, slowly, glancing at Stranleigh. Then he added, with more enthusiasm, "I should be very glad for you to try the car."

"Then place it in the charge of a competent chauffeur, who knows nothing of your safety device, and send it to my hotel at eleven o'clock. Tell him to ask for Henry Johnson. I'll make a little journey into the country, where I can test the device."

"Better cross the river to Canada," said Sterling.

"Very good. Canada will do," agreed Stranleigh. "You're a busy man, Mr. Sterling, and I've taken up a good deal of your time. You must allow me to pay for it."

The young man's face grew red be-



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