

THE QUIET HOUR

MOTOR-MANIA

The other day by actual count twenty-nine hundred autos went east on Euclid Avenue, in Cleveland, Ohio, in twelve hours.

Probably \$3,000,000, would be a moderate estimate of the money which they represented. About 10,000 are owned by residents here. What is true of this one city, is proportionately true thruout the land. The estimated average is a car for every one hundred and sixty families in the United States. The mushroomlike growth of the automobile manufacturing plants and agencies with the inevitable overproduction and keen competition; the fad for discarding the last years machine for this years "model"; the enormous capital tied up—over \$1,000,000,000, are bound to lower prices, placing motor cars within the reach most of those beyond that circle wish they had one. Let us definitely face the facts.

Commercialism with its attendant prosperity and luxury is the characteristic symptom of the age and its most patent and potent symptom is the automobile.

Now inasmuch as our life as a whole is necessarily affected and influenced by our lives in every part, this growing motormaniam cannot long fail to produce an effect, beneficial or detrimental upon our social, intellectual and spiritual life as a nation.

In fact it is not difficult to find evidence of this even at this comparatively early stage of the game.

Admitting that the auto has arrived; and that it has come to stay; and that its grip upon the nation is so firm that it has become a mighty factor in moulding national character and thus determining the trend of future events, what meaning may we read in all this for the future?

If prosperity is the God of our times, and the motorcar is his prophet, let us listen to some of its prognostications, if happily we may be able to avert the evil and ensure the good.

A few concrete cases will serve to set out in bold relief some of the more important phases of this mania for motion.

Motormaniam diminishes church attendance.

I have an acquaintance, a professional man, who, a year ago was a good Methodist, today he is merely a good automobilist. During six or seven months of the year, on pleasant Sundays, instead of going with his family to their church, he devotes the early part of the day to overhauling his big touring car, and the rest of it to speeding thru the countryside his wife and three children with him.

I refrain from moralizing upon the influence of this course, not only upon the parents' spiritual lives, but upon the whole spiritual point of view and prospects of the little "coming people," deprived at a critical time, of the influences so essential to development along higher lines. The simple fact—and it is but typical of a nation-wide condition—is irresistibly eloquent in its prophetic suggestion. Say what you will, this typical instance proves that the motorcar is doing more to overthrow and Europeanize the day o Rest and to undermine the Church than any other agency. I this it is not merely a symptom of a condition already existing, it is contributing heavily to the spread of that condition. Almost every business man who is held down by close business hours during the week, who invests in a motorcar has already surrendered by anticipation, all that a quiet Sunday is intended to bring him—and must bring him unless his

soul is to be permitted to shrivel, and the other world to be crowded out.

Motormaniam breeds reckless extravagance.

Everybody knows that traditional "somebody who has mortgaged his house to buy a touring car." His name is legion, and these fool-ranks are swelled by the other people who do not have a house to mortgage and yet have a car. One estimate asserts that nearly half of the automobiles sold today are purchased with borrowed money, or on credit, by people who cannot afford the luxury.

Desiring to deal only in cold facts, I stopped writing, at this point, long enough to consult one of the leading dealers in Cleveland, Ohio as to the life of the average auto. He gave it as three years. He cited one instance in which the cost was \$3250 and the owner thought him self extremely fortunate in being able to sell it for \$800 in the third year. One of the machines which he sells is priced at \$900, and he stated that its annual upkeep and depreciation are \$500, giving it a three year life.

No doubt for those in affluence, expenditure on that scale does not figure. But it is no less true that a great multitude, which it would at least keep a man busy to number, is yielding to the temptation to divert funds from right-ful business and household channels under the spell of the auto. And national thrift comes next to national righteousness as a guaranty of national stability.

Motormaniam spreads intellectual blight. A New York Evening Post states this phase of the evil succinctly.

Speaking of the speed mania epidemic among a large class of what ought to be a cheerful and bracing pleasure into an unwholesome excitement. It transforms what ought to be one of the most delightful modes of traveling into what cannot be properly dignified by the name of travel at all instead of seeing a country, getting its flavor, enjoying its peculiarities and partaking of its attractions, the speeding automobilist chains himself down to his program of getting over the ground, and becomes absorbed in the monotonous physical satisfaction of his swift motion by day and the inane contemplation of his record when he rests at night. There is something about the whole matter which reminds one of the stupefying fascination of the drug habit."

It is not the church only that suffers because of the spread of motormaniam. Every form of rational enjoyment and intellectual pursuit feels the competition Literature, art, music, all suffer. An art-lover recently said to a friend; "By the way, I have just bought a Rembrandt." "Really" was the eager answer, "how many cylinders has it?"

"Ah, now, hold on. You'd take one quick enough if it was offer you, and risk all of these dismal consequences you are conjuring up"—I think I hear some one say.

Most assuredly, my good friend. And in the same way I would consent to a several-thousand dollar increase in my salary in spite of the dangers of that covetousness which is idolatry.

But that does not alter the fact. A motor-car like a fire is a good servant but a bad master, and there are multitudes who buy them as servants and then sell themselves to them as slaves. And as a result the omnipresent auto is working a radical change in American character—and it is not for the better.

J. H. Bomberger.



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