

# EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE

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Photograph by F. Ed. Spooner.

TRACY AT THE LETTER S TURN, SWINGING TOWARD THE POST WHERE FOXHALL KEENE MET WITH ACCIDENT.

## “CAR COMING!”

**The Terrific Vanderbilt Cup Race: What It Told of the Past and Future of the Automobile in America**

By **ARTHUR N. JERVIS**



THE hunting of dragons, if only the tales told of it had been true, was a fine sport in its day. Those who followed it, they tell us, went prancing blithely forth in armor to face an almost certain death and a very undecorative funeral; for the knight who had been chewed by a dragon's fangs and broiled by a dragon's flaming breath couldn't possibly have been made to "look natural" enough to be a comfort to his mourning friends.

But, after all, dragon-hunting was a purely ideal sport. It wasn't at all practical and

available. It was all in the mind's eye of the poet and chronicler. It was best described by troubadours who followed the process outlined by the yellow-newspaper editor when he telegraphed to an unenthusiastic correspondent: "Never mind the facts! Send the details!" Nevertheless, in the days when we were getting out of kilts and into our first trousers and were very much braver than we ever to be again, we sighed for dragons, you and I. Even though we hadn't felt quite up to slaying one, we should have enjoyed mightily sitting on the fence and watching our big brother or our daddy do the job.

To-day we need sigh for dragons no more. The death-risking combat between man and

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fiery destroyer is real. We may watch a whole herd of mechanical dragons, snorting, barking, whizzing, leaping, sliding, spitting smoke and flame, for three hours around a thirty-mile circuit. The men who ride them face dangers which are not made out of poetic nightmares, dangers far greater than those imagined by the ancient liar and reprobate who rode out of town for a three days' jamboree, and came back shaky and disheveled and explaining the state of his nerves by a lovely tale of horrid combat with a scaly monster in a cave somewhere off on the other side of the mountain.

Did you see anything of the Vanderbilt Cup race at the western end of Long Island, last October? If you did, you know how far short any one must fall who tries to make one who was not there understand and feel the thing. Take it as it was at the beginning of the eighth lap.

The speed of the cars which have been flashing past the spectators' stand, each one roaring and popping as though every convulsion of it was to end with an annihilating explosion, has been greater than any motor-car speed hitherto recorded anywhere in the world. If his luck holds, Lancia, the Italian,

who is driving like a goggled demon, will win. And, of course, if he holds his speed he will have established a new world's record at the end of the race. Only fourteen of the nineteen cars which started at daybreak are still in the race. The others are scattered around the thirty-mile course desolate and unregarded wrecks. There will be more wrecks before the race is over.

It is a terrific contest. But it has not been sanguinary, as so many had apprehended. There is no prohibition of the rights of the highway to any one. There are no lines of soldiery to hold back the crowd. The free American citizen has enjoyed to the full the right to risk his life foolishly, and he has been making cheerful use of the privilege. Look at the collective mass of him on the course down to the east. The road runs down-hill, and one may look ahead for nearly a mile in the direction taken by Lancia after he has passed the stand, and yet he and his car are quickly lost to sight. They are swallowed by the dense though mobile swarm of humanity. While the racer approaches, they are crowded back along the fences, but once he is by, they make a sortie to the mid-highway in the track of the car, for all the world as



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HEMERY AT THE FINISH OF THE NINTH LAP IN THE VANDERBILT CUP RACE ON LONG ISLAND.



Photograph by F. Ed. Spooner.

TRACY, THE FIRST MAN TO DRIVE AN AMERICAN CAR TO THE FINISH IN ANY BIG ROAD RACE.

though they are drawn in by the suction of its passing. They want to watch it as far as possible, and their lives apparently are of small importance in comparison with half a minute's better view of the flying Italian. It may be that there is another growling, sputtering monster whizzing at them from behind, threatening annihilation. But the shout "Car coming" runs down the road, just as the wind goes before a rain-storm, bending down the grain before the big drops strike it. The mass of humanity parts miraculously and surges back to the roadside.

Ahead of him, down at the very apex of the perspective, Lancia can see the "ain't-I-as-good-as-any-one" farmers standing out in the roadway, watching for him. They fall back as soon as the car comes plainly into their sight; but must it not fray the nerves to handle the throttle and the steering-wheel under such conditions? Apparently the behavior of the crowd does not bother Lancia in the least. The Italians who know the man well, who talk and play with him when he is a man and not a flying demon, say that it is true that he is not bothered. He has no regard for life or death, his own or another's. His complete confidence in his own skill makes him calmly

willing to accept great gasping chances. His eyes, his ears, and his heart are fixed on the broad belt of chocolate color in the center of the road which marks the area where the crude oil has been sprinkled to keep down the dust and which is set off on each side by yellow-gray strips of sand; these in turn are edged by the uneasy black border of the spectators. The belts of brown, yellow-gray, and black are all that Lancia sees; his ears are consecrated to the sound of his engine, for by the noisy tune it plays he can tell how smoothly and how powerfully it is working.

He sweeps the turn at Jericho. The heavy racing-car, with its low center of gravity, swirls around the corner with a speed impossible for a touring-car. There are seven of these turns. Some are worse than others.

The second turn, that at East Norwich, is not the easiest or the wickedest. It is a fair example of them all. Two roads cross at right angles. Lancia comes from the north road and turns west. The crossing is at the foot of a rather steep hill and the rural road-builders have put a water-break diagonally from corner to corner. On the right of the west-bound road are a flagpole and a telegraph-pole. What these poles may mean to



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LANCIA GOING AROUND GUINEA WOODS TURN AT THE RATE OF SEVENTY MILES AN HOUR.

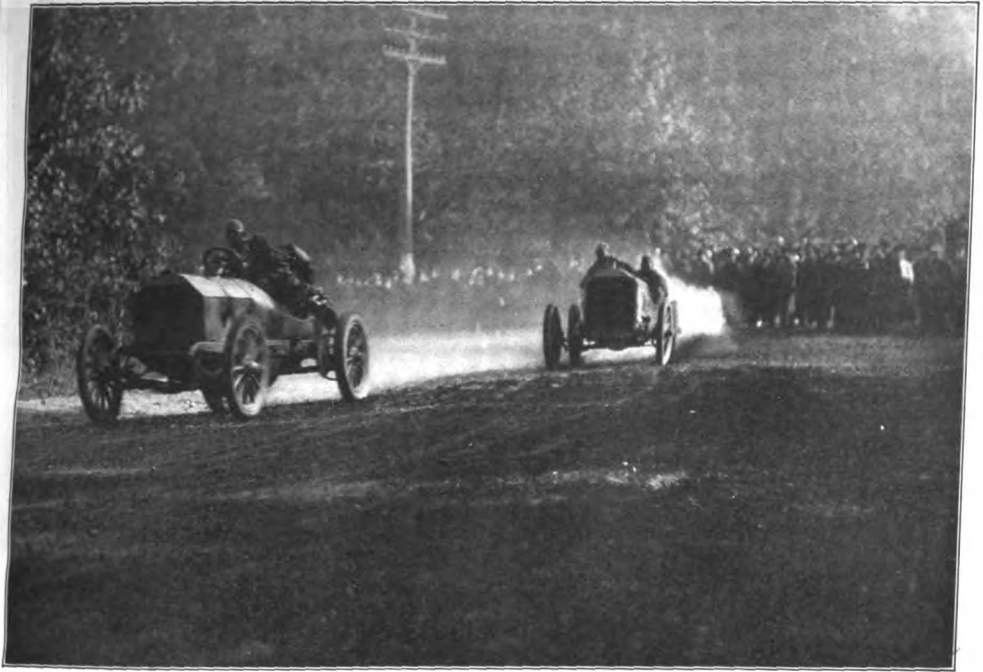
a man who is half-turning, half-sliding across that furrowed angle is told by the crowd which is packed into the porch and yard of the little whitewashed hotel. There is still something in our hearts of the instinct which filled

Rome's arenas with mobs gloating over the shedding of blood. To be sure, there is a difference here—this crowd is hungry to see how near a man may come to being killed and yet escape. But bewhiskered clammers from



Photograph by F. Ed. Spooner.

MRS. W. K. VANDERBILT, JR., AND FOXHALL KEENE VIEWING THE WRECK OF CHEVROLET'S CAR ON HYDE PARK ROAD.



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JOHN B. WORDEN LEADING DURAY IN A HARD RACE AROUND THE GUINEA WOODS TURN.

Oyster Bay eye the two poles at the margin of the road and wag their beards and guess that "one of them poles is a-goin' to be spoiled" before the race is over. And when Lancia clicks his throttle and sets his elbows and the car

is going straight ahead again, the sigh which stirs that crowd, is it all relief, or is there a suggestion of disappointment in it? Surely it is not mere fancy that makes us think we hear two or three voices around us say "Pshaw!"



Photograph by F. Ed. Spooner.

ASCENT OF MT. WASHINGTON BY STANLEY, WHO WAS FIRST TO ATTAIN THE SUMMIT IN AN AUTOMOBILE.



Photograph, by F. L. Spooner.

THE TWO WINNING CARS IN THE SIX-DAY ECONOMY CONTEST OF THE NEW YORK MOTOR CLUB, PASSING THE SHINNECOCK HILLS ON THE ROAD BETWEEN SOUTHAMPTON AND NEW YORK.

The time lost or gained in passing the seven corners of the course safely will win or lose the race. If there be too great recklessness in making the turn, not only is the race certainly lost, but very probably the lives of the men in the car, though Foxhall Keene has taken that risk within half an hour—and has “spoiled one” of them telegraph-poles—ruined his car, but has walked from the spot with bones unbroken.

They call the turn at Albertson’s the worst of the lot. It is shaped like the letter S. It is really the safest, because it is so full of danger-making possibilities that even the craziest driver slows down in passing it.

There are the railroad crossings, too. When the front wheels of Lancia’s car strike the boarded edge, the car rears and leaps. It springs one, two, three, four feet into the air. Perhaps it stays level while it is off the ground. Perhaps it tilts. The fat Italian sits rigid, ready in a flash to start the whirring wheels in the right direction when they come crashing down to the oiled road again.

The crowd knows that he is winning and that he is breaking records. One standing back at the center of the country enclosed by the course might follow Lancia’s movement

by the continuous roar of cheers which salutes him from the roadside. Think of the thrill of it all inside him, and do not be too certain that your imagination accounts altogether for the catlike red glare back of his goggles. He is twenty miles and more ahead of his nearest pursuer. He is writing his name at the head of the world’s roll of automobile daredevils. In a foreign land, a land cold and unresponsive to an Italian, he, Lancia, is compelling roaring cheers for his nerve and his skill and his victory. Why shouldn’t his eyes blaze with the joyous glory of it?

And oh, the bitterness of his Italian soul when the end comes! There are three elements in the race: the man, the car, the road. The man has proved himself; he has mastered the road and the car, too, only the car is not a certain quantity, as is the road. Tires will give way under a strain. Lancia knows by the feel of the road that his tires are leaking—tires weren’t made to stand railroad-track hurdling, anyway. Beyond Albertson’s is a booth with a forge, a complete set of new parts for his car, and a crew of the best of mechanics, drilled for hours in making emergency repairs. It has been placed there by Lancia to meet just such an emergency as

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this. Cautious even in his recklessness, Lancia stops for new tires. They can be put on in a twinkling. The few minutes lost will be made up in no time by the smoother running of the car. When he is ready to start again, Walter Christie, the American, is coming at full speed along the road behind him. The cry “car coming” is ringing in the air. Lancia is too intent upon resuming his mad flight to hear or to look about him. He turns into the road right under the nose of Christie’s car. That the two cars were not smashed to bits and the drivers and their two mechanics killed was due to the quickest of wit and finest of skill. Lancia at the very moment of collision slewed his car about and took the impact obliquely. Christie did not smash into him squarely, but with a glancing blow. A front wheel of Lancia’s car was broken. Christie’s car suffered more. Neither man was hurt. The Italian had a new wheel whisked on and started off, driving with an increased recklessness that caused exclamations of fright and excitement along the course. But the delay made him nearly an hour in completing the eighth round. At the end of the lap he was in sixth place instead of first. He was too far behind to catch up.

And so it was that Hemery won the race and won the cup for France.

Hemery ran his car well. He won fairly enough—it is part of the race to keep a look-out behind when you turn into the road. Hemery covered the 283 miles in four hours thirty-six minutes eight seconds—61.53 miles an hour. It was not the fastest automobile run on the records, though it involved his traveling, over some of the straight stretches of road, at ninety miles and more an hour. Lancia, before his smash-up, once covered the 28.3-mile circuit at the rate of 72.94 miles an hour, and at one stretch his car was hurling itself along the road at the rate of 100 miles an hour, but—he was fourth in the race at the finish.

The grip that the game has on the very individuality of those who play it was demonstrated by the change which came over Lancia when he crossed the finishing line. All the volubility, the florid gestures, the rush and play of the outward signs of tense inward emotions, enveloped him. These superfluous activities of the mind and heart had been absorbed by the machine while he was racing—from the crossing of the line to the end he was but a cold, pale, fat Italian with exalted,

glittering eyes. He took his hands from the wheel and the throttle—and the Latin came out all over him again.

It is worth while knowing what there is in the game so to transform a man. How can such a game find so many willing players? Of what are these drivers thinking as they whirl along, slackening speed as little as possible at each dangerous curve, and bolting on at full tilt of power across every little straight stretch? The trophy at stake is not worth intrinsically one-fourth of what one of the racing-machines costs; its value is not half the amount of the expense to which many of the contestants have been put in order to compete. Most of the men in the race, those who crossed the ocean for it and those who belong here, are mere salaried employees of automobile manufacturers. If one of them wins he will receive a substantial money reward. This explains in part, but in a small part only. What of the other competitors, Foxhall Keene, Walter Christie, Walter White, George Heath, George Warden, men of large means, of habits of luxury; men who have everything which tends to make it worth while to stay alive? Is it simply the sportsman’s love of victory and its glory? This and more. All of them, but the foreigners especially, are fascinated by the holding of immense power and speed within the hollow of the hand. The stake is a trifle. The fascination is overwhelming. Do they think of the danger of death while racing? Assuredly not, or they could not drive. Even the mechanic, who sits beside the driver in the racing-car, may not think of the risk, or he could not ride there and play his part. The risk is so great that if the imagination is allowed to dally with it, the fear will be paralyzing. I know. Partly because I wanted to know and partly from the same feeling which makes one on the edge of a precipice desire to leap off, I tried it.

I played the part of a mechanic in one of the big racing-machines on a rehearsal run around the course a few days before the big race. I rode with Szisz, a driver with a most truthfully suggestive name. The car was the wickedest looking of those entered in the race. It was a brute with a front that tapered like a snout to a jaw-shaped slit at the lower front end; it suggested man-eating.

The course of 28.3 miles was covered in twenty-seven minutes fifty-two seconds, or a little better than a mile a minute. The top speed of the car on the straight stretches was ninety-four miles an hour. As a pleasure trip

it was not great, but as an isolated experience it was worth while.

It is literally true, I found, that the racing-car hits only the high places in the road. Heavy and low built as it was, the machine bounded like a jack-rabbit. We started at break of day. The October air was keen. As we launched through it with speed enough to catch a hurricane, my lips and cheeks stiffened in the cold blast. I had put on a cap with a lining, but the wind blew through it so coldly that soon after starting I was sure I had lost my cap. But I had not. For, while thoroughly believing that I was bareheaded, something flew from the top of my head and the icy gale seemed to be playing upon bared brains and benumbing them. It was not my scalp nor the top of my skull that had blown away, however; it was only the cap. The oiled dirt flew up in pellets and chunks. My eyes were well protected by goggles, but I was breathing like a man downed with the ball in a football scrimmage. I was holding myself on by a hand-strap fixed for the purpose, with a pull that had my arm muscles aching. The other hand gripped the edge of the seat. The speed was increasing and the dirt flying faster. The situation was not so terrifying as I had feared it would be, but it was not fun. Riding in a locomotive cab seemed a luxury, comparatively.

At the first turn we slackened speed. I began to look for the next turn. I was reminded brusksly that I was a substitute mechanic. My duty was to maintain the pressure on the feed of gasoline by means of a long hand-pump. I must keep the indicator at a certain mark on the gage. I had forgotten. I was ordered to my work by a sign. Even that little responsibility was a relief from doing nothing but hold fast. Straight in front of me was the steering-knuckle at which the axle is jointed to the wheel, so that the latter turns the steering mechanism. Watching this, I began to worry. It had two horrible movements, one up and down, caused by the bounce of the car, and the other a wabby side motion, due to the play necessary in such joints. The steering-knuckle and axle and wheel all seemed of recklessly fragile construction, anyhow. Surely they could not stand this ghastly strain of bounding along at from sixty to ninety miles an hour! Besides, one of those tires might puncture or burst at any moment. Ugh! Worse yet, the daredevil Frenchman was not holding the car steady! It was weaving back and forth across

the road. Why didn't he keep in the middle? Then I learned the first lesson. Szisz was intent upon watching the road. He was calmly picking his way, avoiding the bad spots and at every little curve taking the short cut by running along the edge of the road from tip to top of the arc formed by the bend. As if a few feet counted at eighty miles an hour! It was marvelous coolness and calculation. He was all chauffeur, with no thought of the wabby steering-knuckle or the frailty of tires. No mental energy was lost in imaginings; it was all devoted to observing and calculating. I began to understand the game. I was having no experience of fright, I think, but I had learned that I must not watch that steering-knuckle and not think about tires bursting, or I should be somewhat nervous. Around the turns we skidded at about twenty-five miles an hour—and for the moment it seemed a crawling pace, one at which it would not be dangerous to be thrown out. Twice on the lap we passed the car of another racer out for practise, and then there was the thrill of racing and all else was forgotten. Get past! Every worry was engulfed in that thought.

At the end of the lap, when the substitute mechanic stepped from the car with balls of mud in his nostrils and his face so caked in dirt that a smile started landslides, he was convinced of several things. In the first place he would be the driver rather than the passenger. Next, no man has any business to enter a racing-car unless he can leave behind him absolutely every thought of danger. He should adopt the philosophy of the fatalist and then attend exclusively to the game. It is possible to understand that, after a few trips, even as passenger, one would be free from every thought of casualty and yield to the fascination of the scudding flight. Even after a single experience one knows that the fascination is there.

The thrill of the road race was reflected from the men who run the machines to the spectators. It was a strange crowd to watch, when blue dawn came out of the east and gave definiteness and detail to masses of dim shadow, moving restlessly along the roads, settling against the fences. Thousands on thousands saw the race. Thousands went out to the course before midnight and made sure of choice positions along the roadside. Special train after special train rolled in from midnight until dawn and poured out regiment after regiment of eager onlookers. The roads which led to the course were lighted



all through the night by the quivering pencil shafts of hundreds and hundreds of automobile search-lights. From sixty thousand to one hundred thousand people had their breakfast along the fences at dawn. Some breakfasts were served from luxurious hampers by servants in livery; some were served out of pocket packages by the cold-numbered, blue fingers of the consumer.

But when the cry “Car coming!” came roaring up the track, the faces were all alike. Millionaire’s daughter, race-track gambler, absorbed scientist, man-servant, broker, newspaper reporter, staid mother of family, wife of one of the competing drivers—it made no difference who the spectator was, or how near or remote his interest in the race and the racers. They were all made alike. All were alert and a-tingle when that cry of “Car coming!” was bellowed through the megaphone. Those at the roadside, behind the ropes, crushed forward and craned their necks, despite all efforts of bucolic deputy sheriffs to restrain them. Those in the stands leaped to the seats of their chairs, or balanced on the backs of two that stood together. The anxiety and nervous tension of all were manifest to the observer by clenched hands, knit brows, and drawn mouth muscles. One could see along the road to the west for more than half a mile, but no car was in sight. The hiatus was for but a second or two. A tremor and a sigh ran through the crowd as the object of their watch rushed into view. At first it was seen, but not heard, but for a few seconds only; for its oncoming was like the sweep of a meteor. At first, in the distance, the noise of the engine was blurred into a growling whir, not unlike the roll of muffled drums. On came the indefinite, bug-like thing, and in another second the separate reports of the cylinder explosions could be distinguished, like the reports of a piece of rapid-fire artillery. Then, as the car came nearly abreast and swept past, these reports, though booming louder, were overborne, so as to be almost lost to cognizance, by the tremendous swishing noise, caused by the rush with which the air was cleft by the car and by the gritting of its wheels on the ground. So, the sound of the approach was a compound succession of a growling, a popping, and a swishing.

When it passed the grand stand, the car was traveling at a speed of about ninety miles an hour, for, with fine forethought, this structure had been erected on the longest straightaway

stretch of the course; every contestant was able to run at high speed and make a real “grand-stand play” each time around. Only the fact that the stand was on a slight hillock prevented the cars from displaying at the stand the utmost speed of about one hundred miles an hour, attained by some on the slight decline just beyond the starting-tape.

After the big machine had hurtled by, the majority of those at the stands gaspingly inquired of their neighbors, “Who was it?” It was simply a streaking something to them, although the car had a huge number painted in white on its front and sides.

After all, the answer to the question made very little difference to most of those people. It mattered little to most of them that Hemery won the race rather than another—Lancia, for instance—aside from the desire to see the reward of victory go to the most skilful and most daring. It was the spectacle of the racing dragons, the man destroyers, the harnessed projectiles, which drew them and held them thrilled and fascinated. No one who saw and felt the mighty power and the creepy unearthliness of the thing could get it out of his dreams for many a night.

But it was more than a spectacle. It was a landmark in automobiling, in the manufacturing of automobiles, in the attitude of the public mind toward the sport. There was no after-shudder of horror. It furnished no grounds for outcry against such contests in the future. It revived the interest in road-racing on both sides of the Atlantic. It wholly changed the attitude of motorists generally toward the racing question. It was the climax of a progressive series of changes that had been going on throughout the year.

In this event an American car, for the first time, made a splendid showing in a big road race in competition with the best products of the more experienced Europeans. The success of the American car fired the ambition of all manufacturers. The foreigners went home and said that hereafter the United States would have to be reckoned as a factor in the contests for international trophies. Automobiling, as a sport, has just about kicked off its swaddling clothes and become ready for a career. To many, who have listened to the big talk and read the accounts of hundreds of races and other contests during a number of years, it may seem a late day for such a statement. That it is true and has only just now become true, after the motor-car has been for some time recognized as a

permanent factor in our modes of transportation for the present and the future, makes the fact of peculiar interest, and it is for the purpose of bringing it into relief that the subject of the big race is finally important.

For years the principal automobile competitions here have been races on circular tracks, properly laughed at by the motorists of Europe, where every year heroic contests at hundreds of miles have been held over roads running through mountainous countries. It is hardly too much to say that hitherto the automobilists of the United States were only playing at racing, despite the fact that a number of ghastly tragedies have been recorded. On the other side of the ocean, it was early recognized that the automobile was not a track vehicle, that it could not be "extended" on a circular course, and that all track-racing with big machines was essentially farcical. Yet over here, track meet succeeded track meet, and it was the only country in the world where they did. This sort of racing prospered until last summer, and until then, whenever American cars and drivers attempted to compete in the grown-up game, they made a showing so sorry that it is kindest to omit the details. The year of transition was 1905, bringing the great success of the second Vanderbilt race, with its encouragement to American drivers and builders. Now the automobile manufacturers have squarely turned their backs upon the trivial play of track-racing and are ready to engage in road-racing seriously and to develop it.

It may be asked, "Supposing road-racing is developed here to the point it has attained abroad, of what use is it all?" Such racing furnishes an indication of the development of the automobile and tends to hasten the day of perfection attained. Ultimately the general public will be the chief beneficiary—for nothing is more certain than that the automobile is to be used some day by the general public. The bicycle was perfected through the experience and demands of the racing men who rode it. Always the user has been the instructor of the builder. This applies to the automobile with even greater point than to the bicycle, because the motor-car involves more mechanical problems which it is possible to reduce to scientific formulæ. Racing on the highway is of superlative value, while touring contests have but comparative merit. In a race of three hundred miles a car is subjected to a greater strain and a more severe test throughout than it is in five thousand

miles of touring. The strain of running at top speed is acute and supreme. It will tell on the weakest points more disastrously in a few hours than ordinary usage would in as many years. Because of this the big road races have been the school in which the manufacturers learned their greatest lessons. The touring-car should, of course, be built as lightly and simply as is consistent with strength and efficiency. The racing-car must be so built. The weight of the racers is restricted. In building one the maker must combine the greatest power and strength he can within the weight. It is a fixed problem. All the best brains in the factories are brought into requisition for the construction of the racer. The racer breaks down in the race and an important lesson is learned. The experiment is repeated until a winner results. It is but little appreciated that simplicity in construction is one of the vital lessons learned through the building of racers. After the work has been done and a victorious car constructed, what has then been learned becomes a part of the factory's capital. Thus, the racing-school is a very practical one for the manufacturer.

For ten years the automobile makers of France have been attending the school of road-racing and the result is a highly efficient French product. American cars have improved rapidly and in most cases are found better for long tours over American roads than foreign machines, but the need of the practical lessons taught by road-racing has been sorely missed by the domestic manufacturer.

The ultimate goal of it all is the production of a strong, serviceable, cheap vehicle, capable of going without faltering over all sorts of roads, and so simple in construction that any one can handle it. It is the destiny of racing to result in this; it will be well if the cry of "Car coming!" is heard frequently in the land.

Not merely for racing but for every-day uses there is a more economical and better car coming. It will mean that our people go farther and farther from the cities and towns for the holidays, freshening their lungs, their eyes, their souls with the peace and the beauty of things which God made and man may only mar. It means that more and more men of moderate means may bring up their families in the suburbs and convert the uncomfortable journeys between the home and the office into a source of recreation and healthfulness. It means that the world is going to be a better place to live in.