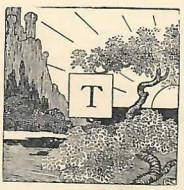
ON THE ROAD TO THE CUP RACE

BY RALPH D. PAINE

PAINTINGS BY CHARLES SARKA



THE October moon is invisible behind low-hanging clouds, but it makes the night a kind of pearly gray in which the amazing number of motor cars become black blobs moving with spectral swiftness. The windows of the farm houses by the Long Island roadside spatter this semi-darkness with shafts of yellow light, for the country folk have not gone to bed at all. Far across the fields beyond Mineola, where the fodder stands in serried shocks, there twinkles a mile of moving lights which stream along another highway that leads to the Jericho Turnpike. A delicate mist blurs this rural landscape. In the foreground are rows of slim young trees, vague and undefined as a monochromatic study by a painter of some foreign school. Beyond these trees stretches this faraway, hazy ribbon of light so vivid and continuous that is is impossible to believe that the lamps of motor cars can be so many as thus to illumine the gray horizon belt.

Where the roads meet, the Jericho Turnpike climbs straight away for half a mile so that the motor cars are visible down the length of this long slope, over which they pour in a splendid torrent. So close together they come from midnight on that it is as if they are linked together in one glittering chain. They whirr past two and three seconds apart, twenty and thirty machines every minute, not for one hour, but for six hours in as close formation as this. It had not seemed as if there could be so many automobiles in the world. It would be less uncanny if there were the rattle of wheels and thunder of hoofs to mark the passage of this vast migration. They slide past, however, with no more noise than the soft purring of their tires on the hard roadway, the steady drone and mutter of their engines, and the melodious chant of their horns which blend in a deep and vibrant chorus as if the voice of the automobile had found itself.

The acetylene lamps, some of them in the form of movable searchlights, fling shadowy patches of light against the banking mist or pencil the overhead gloom with swift, uneasy brightness. At the distant crest of the slope this radiance diminishes until the cars farthest in view are lifting over the hill like so many shooting stars, to dip down and join the surging river of brightness which is made more softly beautiful by the halo of mist that encircles every lamp.

This meeting of the roads is two miles distant from the starting point of the Vanderbilt Cup Race. By three o'clock in the morning the roadside is thickly sown with the lights of motor cars which have been parked in such places of vantage as their owners were able to choose by being thus early afield. Although there are thousands upon thousands of cars in flight past, yet these other thousands are so profusely planted under the trees and at the edge of cornfield and pasture that it looks almost as if one could make the two mile journey by the skittish method of jumping from one to another.

Yet this is but one stretch of the circuit of nearly thirty miles of the racing course, and along its whole extent the automobiles of the owlish sight-seers are already standing in troops and squadrons. It is a singular panorama of luxury, rampant,

flaunting, overwhelming in its significance, for by daybreak there will be forty million dollars worth of automobiles assembled in this bit of Long Island country, and they have been drawn thither from only one corner of the United States.

It is really in the middle of the night when the edge of the road has become black with pedestrians who eddy over fences and ditches or hover, with the most hazardous indifference, within a hair's breadth of this incessant flow of traffic. Hordes of men and women are camping on blankets or outspread newspapers, while many have pitched small tents and are brewing coffee by tiny fires that dot the field with cheery sparks. The exodus from New York and the nearer towns began late in the afternoon of the day before, in the face of a frosty night and skies that sullenly threatened rain. Trolley and railroad train, ferry and footpath have been filling this region as wheat pours out of a hopper. This picturesque army is bivouacked in the open like another Coxey host, and making very cheerful business of it. The most frenzied sport yet devised has lured them to endure such hardships as would have stirred up a lively riot had they been under compulsion to live through such a night's experience as this.

This region is dotted with ostentatious estates of the very rich whose rural life is much bespangled with luxurious living, but in the main it still belongs to farmers and their old villages which have preserved a simple and frugal habit of living. They are fairly inundated by the roaring tide that has swept down from Manhattan, awheel and afoot, but they are valiantly struggling to separate these foolish folk from their money. Attic, hall and "spare room" have been rented to the invaders from the city at prices that promise to lift the mortgage from the old homestead in a single night, and the barns are so many garages in which the uneasy cattle stare wide-eyed at the uncouth figures of chauffeurs cleaning their cars by lantern light.

At the cross-roads are low-roofed taverns unseasonably alight, their landlords serving two o'clock in the morning breakfasts and handling money in such profusion that they looked dazed as with unwonted emotion. Quaint old dining-rooms through whose doors once swept the hoop skirts of our grandmothers echo the laughter of befurred and begoggled parties from Broadway. Millionaires have left their mansions to be tucked away in tiny rooms under the tavern eaves where they thresh around on husk mattresses or drift downstairs to swap yarns with the village worthies in the barroom while they wait for the first gray shadow of daylight. And past these ancient and homely doors flees the endless procession of motor cars all through the night.

Farm wagons by the score have been equipped as impromptu restaurants in which "mother and the girls" sell cake, pies, doughnuts and coffee, and mingle their blushing exhortations with the husky bellow of the frankfurter specialists who have flocked from Coney Island and the Bowery.

"Pa" plays well his fiscal part by yelling to the passing motorists:

"Parkin' place. Parkin' place. Best place to see the race. Back in your machine and hitch it on my meadow lot. Only three dollars for the slickest stall on the hull road."

One lone horse and wagon is sighted making its parlous way along this swarming highway in the very early morning. The horse is of the "Whoa, Dobbin" family breed, and the wagon is loaded to the guards with a farmer and his family whose courage in embarking on this course is admirable in the extreme. Automobiles whirl to left and right of this sorely tried steed, their horns clamor in his ears and the all-pervading stench of gasoline offends his nostrils. He has not even the moral support of a comrade in distress, for he is as lonely a derelict as the dodo bird, or as Selkirk on his desert island. But he plods along with twitching ear and rolling eye, and shows himself a hero in as nerve-racking stress as ever a horse had to endure.

The people huddled in the waiting motor cars become subdued and drowsy as the chill night drags on toward daylight. They left the cafés of Manhattan at midnight with much laughter and jollity, but a reaction overtakes them in the dull gray waiting hours, and they try to sleep and wonder why Vanderbilt Cup races have to be started at the idiotic hour of six o'clock in the morning. There is diversion, how

ever, in watching the marvelous jumble of cars and people stream past. Every known species of fakir is bawling his wares, crap games flourish under the trees, and the country constable is too busy saving wayfarers from getting messed up with the machinery of automobiles to pay heed to the busy gentlemen with the husky voices who ply the dice and the three shells by candle light.

For several hours the cars move past in single file, but long before the starting time they are jostling each other two and three abreast, escaping collision by miracles of deft handling. The reckless chauffeur is tamed for once. To drive at headlong speed is not the trifling matter of obliterating a pedestrian or two, but of making a wholesale wreck of one's machine and his more precious anatomy, wherefore the behavior of these gasoline-pilots is flawless. Every known style and vintage of car has been mobilized, from the haughty imported touring car with as many trappings as a Pullman, to the runabout of an archaic age which rattles and groans like a mowing-machine run amuck. The little fellows display the biggest lamps and sound the noisiest horns, and get in the way of their big brothers for all the world like those third-rate mortals who make a vast deal of bluster, fuss and pretense.

In the view-point of the great American populace the automobile flings an insolent and plutocratic challenge to the humble wayfarer as if to say: "Get out of my way and be damned to you." The man aboard the red chariot may be as mild-mannered an altruist as ever endowed a college settlement, but he is viewed with suspicion by farmers, constables and chickens as a proud and stiff-necked Juggernaut. But here are the inconsistent masses who clamor against "speed madness" as menacing their lives and peace of mind, flocking in such numbers as were never before seen at an American sporting episode, to cheer the very thing they have raised such a row about.

Indeed, there has never been anything anywhere to compare with this all-night pageant of the open road. The grandfathers of this curious multitude would have hailed the spectacle as a descent of vast hordes of fire-breathing dragons and other supernal visitors. Twenty years ago, even, such a sight unfolding without warning would have driven the observers into the tallest trees and overflowed the padded cells for a hundred miles around.

This blasé multitude, however, is thinking only of the racing machines and the dangers that will lay athwart their mad progress. The misty morning darkness has not lifted when there is a huge noise of staccato, coughing explosions somewhere up the road, as if a giant were choking to death with a bone in his throat. Then something long and low and gray somehow threads a path among the thronging touring cars. Infernal streams of blue flame are shooting from its sides, and all other sounds are drowned by its startling reports. Among the high-topped pleasure cars, this speed machine seems of inconsiderable bulk, yet there is something impressive and even menacing in the clean-stripped, gaunt look of this ugly fabric of steel and rubber. It catches hold of one's imagination even more strongly than if it were careering along a cleared course in company with other monsters of its own kind. All around it are the gay groups of onlookers in their upholstered tonneaus, their cars aglitter with brass and paint and varnish. Past them speeds this squat, unlovely thing of furious power and energy, its driver and mechanician crouched low behind their raving engine like gladiators amid a holiday press of Roman patricians and their dames.

As this, the first of the racing cars to appear, moves toward the starting point it passes enclosures by the roadside where crews of grimy men in overalls are making ready their repair shops and tire stations. In the final issue, the skill and daring of the drivers and the power of their hard-driven cars must hang upon these heaps of sausage-like, inflated rings of rubber. These squads of helpers have been drilled like a football team to change tires without wasting precious seconds of time. And while these roadside camps are as prosaic to look at as so many corners of a factory, they are where the race may be won or lost, and not on the course at all.

When daylight breaks, misty and wan, the ruck of cars, men, women and children is so amazingly jammed together near the starting point that it seems as if the course cannot be cleared by anything less violent than a dynamite charge. There is room

for the throngs on foot to overflow into the fields, but the panting cars are hemmed in such a narrow strip of road that they can move only at a snail's pace, if at all, or must charge into the reckless wayfarers who are struggling to be as near the start as possible.

At length this stretch of turnpike is cleared by stress of tact, force and good management, and the dark ribbon of oiled roadbed runs between dense walls of people as far away as one can see. Beyond this stretch they are gathered at the curves of the road where there is the most imminent danger of the racing cars leaping their orbits. Frantic constables are trying to drive them back, but they want to see the chariots of the dare-devil drivers rear and skid, and they are deaf and blind to all warnings. More people than there are in the state of Montana are waiting along this thirty miles of turnpike, and nine persons in ten know that they are to place their lives in the most deadly jeopardy through five hours on end. They have read that most of these international road-races have been made tragic by the quick death of drivers or onlookers, and that the chances are rather in favor of a machine or two hurtling from the path and ripping through the ranks of observers like a roaring projectile.

Yet wherever stout wire fences had been built for protection along the most dangerous stretches of the course, these presumably rational Americans try to tear them down, or to press in front of them in order that they may crowd so close to the flying cars that the wind of their going shall brush their faces. Beyond them are fences, fields and hills whereon they could have viewed the road in safety. But they prefer to beat against the barriers, even to attack them with wire cutters, these long lines of humanity that stir like restless surf in order to coquet with death and show that all previous standards of sanity had been turned topsy-turvy by the spell of the racing automobile.

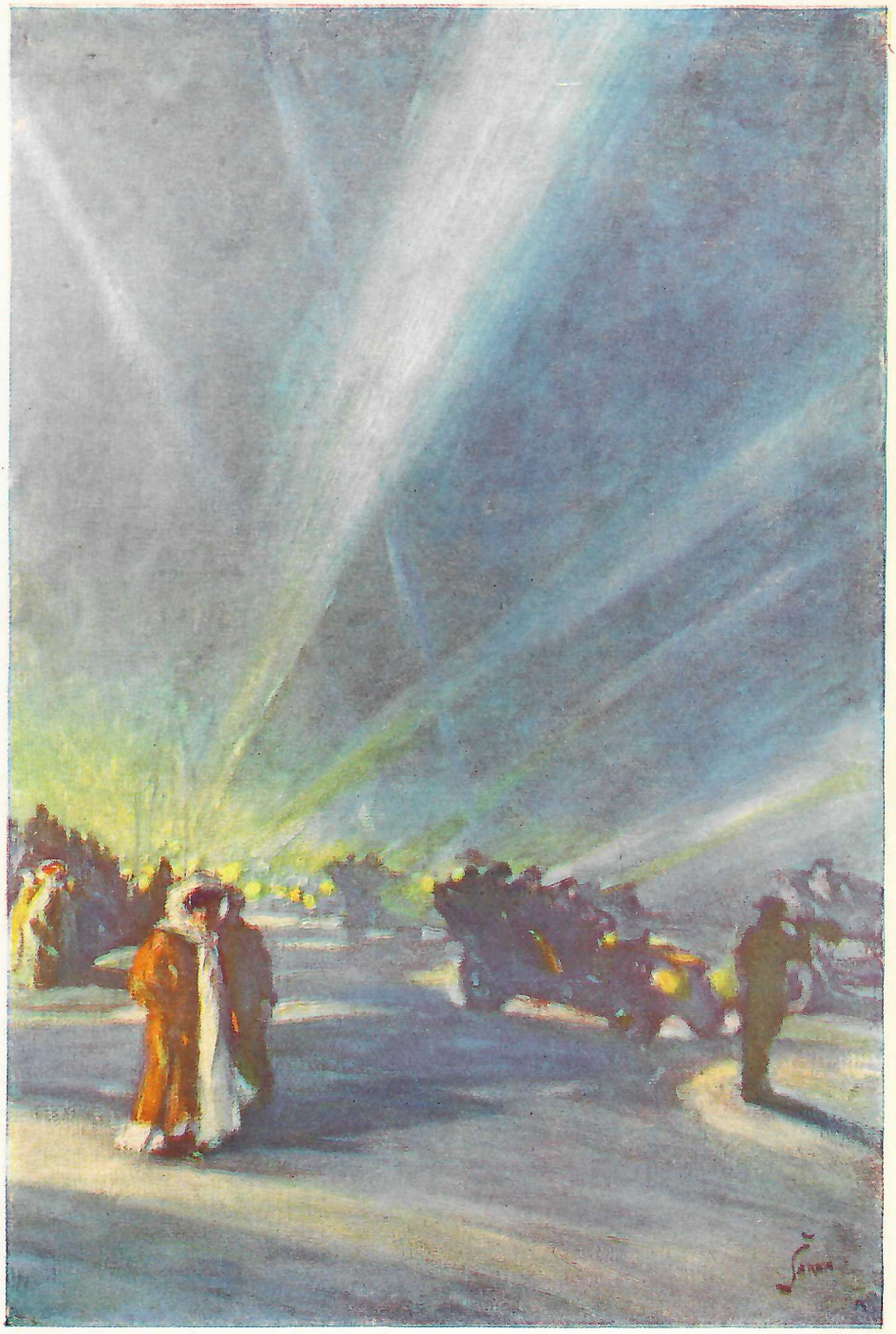
One by one the contestants drive into the shute between the tall grand stands to wait behind the starting line for the signal which shall send them along thirty miles of country road faster than a mile a minute speed. Soon there are seventeen cars in this thrilling parade, while their racking engines are exploding as if ten thousand angry devils were trying to tear their steel prisons in pieces. But the crowds are more eager to see the drivers than the cars. The personal equation eclipses the mechanical. If it were advertised that a man would fight a lion in Madison Square Garden, the police graciously permitting, that amphitheater would be packed to the doors with a multitude animated by much the same spirit that has led a quarter of a million people to flock to this Long Island turnpike.

The most popular among the drivers are those reputed to be the most reckless of their own lives, the fellows of the most diabolical nerve, bravery and coolness. Standing beside his grunting car is Lancia, the rosy-cheeked, strapping young Italian, hero of the most hair-raising contests at home and abroad, who had made a habit of taking curves on two wheels at a speed of seventy miles an hour. Beyond him is Jenatzy, gaunt and worn like an athlete overtrained, but smiling as he chats with "Dare-devil" Tracy, the alert-looking young American, around whom the somewhat forlorn hopes of the stars and stripes are clustered. Wagner, overhauling his compactly built car which looks like a park cob in a string of lanky thoroughbreds, is being talked about as likely to win for France, but there is no over-confidence in the significant care with which he tests the steering gear of his machine. These and other heroes of the hour, French, German, American and Italian, are viewed as men about to shake dice with death. On the surface of things this is an event in the world of outdoor sports. But the friends and employers of the drivers shake hands with them and pat their shoulders oftener than is at all necessary, as soldiers say farewell to comrades in the ranks who have volunteered to charge in a forlorn hope.

Fame and money are the incentives which have led these men to bring their racing cars to the start in this foggy October morning. Every machine stands for the labor of scores of expert workmen through vigilant and anxious weeks and months. A small army of mechanics and helpers have groomed them, and their drivers have hurled them over the course at break-neck speed in all weathers. From twenty to fifty thousand dollars have been invested in every one of these entries in the attempt to prepare a machine which may

Many motorists made camps along the road, where they sat around a fire until time to move on to the starting place.

The cold dawn broke borealis-like, and objects loomed up in weird proportions.



High up above the spectators at the grand stand the bugle sounded its warning cry of "Car coming."

The curves of the roadway presented pleasing spectacles of the enthusiasts.

Painting for "On the Road to the Cup Race," by Charles Sarka

There they were, racing along in the fog of early morn, with the rising sun ahead showing through like a blotch of yellow.

THE LATE EDWYN WILLIAM SANDYS

Naturalist, sportsman, author, one-time editor of this magazine, Ed Sandys was the embodiment of sportsmanly spirit. Few had such thorough knowledge as he of shooting and fishing, and in the telling of it none could compare with the sparkle of his style.

Outdoor literature suffers a severe loss in the untimely death at forty-six of this whole-souled, nature lover.

hold together for five hours under a strain which would seem to defy the limits of human ingenuity. Most of these drivers have been in hideous smash-ups which tore the cars to bits and hurled the occupants far over the landscape. These men are the picked survivors of the fittest and most audacious. As they putter around their cars for finishing touches here and there, they look more like goblins than heroes. Muffled in sweaters, dingy khaki and oil-smeared leggings, their heads bound with dusty handkerchiefs and mask-like goggles, they are as grotesque as the devilish machines which they have learned to master.

One feels that they are playing for big stakes and are welcome to run risk in proportion. But what of the mechanician who is to ride at the driver's elbow? His neck is to be as sorely imperilled over every foot of the way, but he is a hero unsung while he lives, and he is doomed to be unhonored if he should happen to be instantaneously wrapped around a telegraph pole. His only stimulus is in the possible chance that if he survives long enough he may become a driver of renown.

As long as mankind loves a soldier and cheers while the band plays the regiment off to the front, deeds of sheer pluck and daring will be popular, regardless of the ends they serve. After all, the Tommies who have won the Victoria Cross and the blue-shirted troopers who have earned the Medal of Honor were made of much the same stuff as these drivers of racing cars. And this is why the multitude has waited all night to see them.

It is the moment of all the long night and morning hours that makes the journey worth while when Le Blon, the tall and bearded Frenchman, moves his American car to the tape and waits for the word which shall send him lunging away into the mist where hazards lie in ambush on every curve and hill and billowing stretch of country road. Pounding and banging like a battery of rapid-fire guns in furious action, the engine-hood spitting flame from every crevice, a hundred horse power wildly tugging to be free, the trembling car is held in leash while the starter counts off the seconds. So clamorous is the uproar of the engine that the crouching driver cannot hear the words that are shouted in his ear, but from the tail of his anxious eye he watches the arm of the official tick off the time with frantic gesture. Then a hand smites him on the back, a voice yells "Go!" a lever is thrown over, the two straining figures in the car lean farther forward, and—the race is on.

The machine gains speed with incredible haste, and before the onlookers can more than blink it is booming along the course like a gray blur. Heavy rain on the day before has killed the dust and the rising sun is scattering the mist so that it is only a matter of seconds before the fleeing car can be seen diminishing to a pin-point and vanishing on its cyclonic journey to the Hairpin Turn, the perilous ascent of Manhanset Hill and the careering twist of Krug's Corner.

One minute later the second car is started, and already the leader is a full mile on his way. Thus the sev teen racers boom away a minute apart, and the spectacle is so absorbing that it is almost beyond realization that by the time the last car has hurled itself out of the shute, the vanguard is half around the circuit, having covered fifteen miles almost before they can be missed.

The climax of it all has come and gone. There is nothing more to see except the swift passage of the cars with brief intervals between, and for a time the waiting crowds in the grand stands are as far removed from seeing a contest as if they were in a New York theater listening to bulletins telegraphed from Long Island. Now and then a young man with a megaphone shouts the tidings received by telephone from the stations along the course:

"Number nine has lost a tire at Willet's Corner."

"Number seven passed Krug's Corner working badly."

"Tracy stops to put on non-skidding tires."

Another young man toils at a huge blackboard upon which is painted a map of the course. As the bulletins come to hand, he pins the placarded numbers of the cars at the points of the road where they were last reported. This is tame diversion, indeed, to come on the heels of the tension and tumult of the frenzied night, yet there is a certain excitement in watching these placards creep along the zig-zag lines, draw

nearer to each other, or be chartered safely past the Hairpin Turn. One begins to wonder, however, why from Broadway in New York to Broad Street in Newark, the flamboyant touring cars were hurrying to crowd the Long Island roads all night for a distance of twenty miles.

During this waiting time the grand stands are a babel of talk that smacks more of the factory and the foundry than of sport. Almost every one has a smattering of the dialect of the motorist and the air is burdened with references to carburreters, ignition plugs, compensation gears and other Greek to the layman. By virtue of owning automobiles these pilgrims have acquired the privilege of wearing the peculiar clothes that belong with their pastime, of setting themselves apart from the common herd who must live and struggle on toward the grave without goggles, puttees, rubber jackets, gauntlets and streaming veils. This is a fairly overpowering gathering of the new aristocracy of the automobile which may be compared with that distinction achieved in a much earlier, simpler age of our country by "keeping a hired girl." There is really nothing better to do than to moralize about this unprecedented display of American prosperity on parade and——

A fig for your moralizing! Away with it! There is something better to do! Up the road the black crowds under the trees begin to press toward each other, wholly reckless of danger, then a bugle sounds shrill and insistent, and there is an exultant roar from fences, trees and telegraph poles. Confused at first it soon brings a message chanted in unison by thousands of throats:

"CAR COMING!"

It seems as if those black masses now clustered in the distant road can never ebb to right and left in time to make a pathway through. Then into the open there speeds a gray smudge. Instantly it grows larger, and its onset is heralded by a drumming, humming sound that grows in volume while one draws a quick breath. A moment later something flashes between the grand stands. There is no more than time to glimpse two figures bending over the engine-hood, blurred wheels, and the streaking shadow of the car, and Jenatzy had come and gone like a tempest-driven fragment of cloud. In half an hour he had dipped and swerved and skidded over thirty miles of country road, without a track to guide his wheels, his life hanging upon the steely grip of his hands at the edge of the sensitive steering wheel, disaster certain if this grip should vary by so much as a hair's breadth.

This is the high-water mark of the morning's excitement, for almost before Jenatzy has whizzed out of view, his pursuers are sweeping by, now singly, again two and three, seemingly no more than a few seconds apart. Yet what there is of the racing picture to come will be no more than a repetition of these earliest glimpses which suggest the snapping of a swift camera shutter. After the second or third lap the grand stands become a bit drowsy and listless, as if wondering what all the fuss was about. Interest revives in waves when rumors come of a tragedy at some distant place in the course, that a machine has leaped from the road or a spectator has been killed.

The storm-center of thrills and fears has been shifted to the twists in the road where accidents seem most liable to happen. Just as at the circus the crowd finds all other hazards tame and waits impatient for that sinister entertainment called the "Dip of Death," so the ill-omened fame of the Hairpin Turn becomes the focal attraction of the Cup Race. This kink in the turnpike is shaped like the letter "U," and of course the most dangerous stretch for the spectator is along the outer edge where a car, shooting from its path, will infallibly clear a swath like a mowing machine in a clover field. Five thousand people have been massed along this outer roadside since daylight, however, and they are not at all concerned that their situation is as ticklish as if they were playing with matches in a powder mill.

They decide that the risk is well worth while when the first car bears down to take the turn. Jenatzy is driving a full seventy miles an hour, and a locomotive attempting such a feat would fly from the rails like a scared rabbit. But the rocking motor car does not slacken speed until it has bounded clear beyond a soft spot in the roadbed, with all four wheels in air. Actually hurdling like a giant grasshopper,

the car swoops down upon the turn, skids appallingly, and seems to whirl on a pivot while the mechanician hangs by his eyelids far out to windward. In a cloud of dust the tortured car flees away in its new direction and the crowd eagerly awaits another high-keyed sensation.

These people cross the road with a casual indifference that maddens the helpless constables. They fairly snatch themselves and each other from under the wheels of cars that charge down upon them without warning. They are positively anxious to be butchered to make a motor holiday. Once two cars come tearing along abreast. Weillschott, who later comes to grief, drives far out on the embankment and manages to pass Clement. The people break and run for life, but this warning cannot hold them from pressing into the road again.

When a car stops for more gasoline near the turn, these cheerful imbeciles crowd around as if it were stalled in the middle of a quiet country lane. Another racing car looms among them and is gone before they have time to thank God for their mysterious survival. The driver's tanned face turns several shades paler and his nerves are atwitter. No peril of the open road can shake him, but these hundreds of madmen who insist upon getting square across his course make him swear that never again will he race on a public highway in America, no, not for a shipload of Vanderbilt Cups.

Only one man is killed in this riotous morning and his life is a most grievous toll for sport to pay. Yet he had stood and watched these huge missiles shoot past him, and he knew that to get athwart their path was a more dangerous thing to do than to saunter blindfolded in front of a limited express. No guardian angel, working overtime, could protect a mortal against such inconceivable folly.

It has cost the sensation-loving populace at least a million dollars and a total of much more than a million hours of sleep to enjoy this ultra-modern pastime. And most of the spectators are obliged to wait for the newspaper "extras" during the homeward journey to discover who has won the Cup Race. In fact, they don't much care after the American hopes were curled up and wilted. But they can boast that they have seen the most perilous and spectacular sport ever contrived, compared with which Ben Hur's chariot race was a mere kindergarten diversion. A frowsy and drowsy young man who perhaps represents the view-point of the roadside observer remarks as he homeward plods his weary way:

"B-r-r-r-r! Bang! Whizz—! and a bad smell—and then some more of the same. That's all I saw of the Cup Race. I hope Mr. Vanderbilt got a better run for his money than I did. But what gets me is that there was one gilt-edged lunatic among those drivers that didn't have to break his neck for a living. He did it for the fun of it. Oh my, oh my, but it's a dippy world we live in!"