

*The Socialization of the Automobile
in Satire in the Early Motor Age*

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** working draft **

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People should be taught what is, not what should be. All my humor is based on destruction and despair.

- Lenny Bruce, "The Essential Lenny Bruce," 1967 Epigraph¹

Some truth lies at the heart of every joke, even the most absurd, such as this proposed amendment by Rep. John P. Robinson to the Illinois state legislature in 1907 regarding a new automobile law under consideration:

Section 1. In case a farmer's horse will not pass a machine, the autoist will take his car apart and conceal the parts in the grass.

Sec. 2. All autoists will wear disguises, ladies will go veiled, and numbers will be placed upon machines upside down.

Sec 3. In approaching curves, autoists will take the horn and go-ahead on foot, sounding it one minute and listening the next.

Sec 4. In case of being called names, the autoist will pay no attention unless he is called a "mollycoddle," in which case he shall pay his fine for assault.

Sec. 5. Speed on country roads will be limited to ten miles an hour until the tourist sees a bailiff who does not *appear to have had a drink in thirty days*, when the motorist shall be permitted to make all the speed he can.

Sec. 6. In case of a break-down, the autoist will have his machine out of the road and cover it with grass and brush, in order that no horse shall take fright pending repairs.

¹ Bartlett's 16th edition, p. 754 (16)

Sec. 7 In case the autoist hears a farmer returning from town on Saturday night uttering whoops and bouncing his end gate in such a manner that it can be heard a mile distant, the machine shall be turned and sent over the back track at full speed until the driver passes a house where a bare-armed lady carrying a club is hanging on the front gate, looking down the road toward town.

Sec. 8. When a wagon is sighted ahead the autoist will stop his machine a half mile distant, approach with cigars, a bottle, and white flag, and in case the man on the seat remains cold, the autoist will signal the driver, who shall approach with a hand-painted mirror for the wife and toys for the children, and in the event that none of these avail, the autoist shall return to the machine and start ahead at full speed and tilt and kill as many of the contents of the wagon as is consistent with the horse power of the machine.

Sec. 9. The touring machine shall change color with vegetation, according to the season, in order that they may be rendered as inconspicuous as possible. During April and May they shall be green to match the grass; in June they shall be golden, to match the wheat; in July and August they shall be pale gray, to match the dust that covers everything in the country; in September they shall be green again, to match the corn; in October they shall be red, to match the sumac; in November they shall be yellow, to match the pumpkin, and in December, white, to match the snow.²

Two years earlier Illinois Governor Deneen vetoed a bill that attempted, through state-wide regulations, to bring rationality to the state's notorious and notoriously indiscriminate local powers over automobiles.³ The 1907 bill set state-wide standards, a hearty strike at the local bailiff (drunk or sober). The law passed and was signed by the executive. Whether or not Robinson's ridicule had any effect, the automobile-friendly *Los Angeles Times* made the claim in its news article subtitle: "Joke Helps Kill Opposition to Auto Bill."⁴

In early 1909, the United States Congress argued over funding for White House automobiles. Reports followed that the winning argument in the debate was that autos for President-elect Taft would spare the horses his hefty frame. Additional ridicule was leveled at a 90-mile horse ride of President Theodore Roosevelt in the January cold.⁵ Neither in Illinois of 1907 nor in Washington of early 1909 was it the ridicule that

² "Burlesque Wins For Motorists," *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1907

³ See "Auto Speed Bill Sent to Deneen," *Chicago Tribune*, May 11, 1907

⁴ "Burlesque Wins For Motorists"

⁵ See "William Howard Taft and the First Motoring Presidency," by Michael L. Bromley, McFarland & Co., Jefferson, NC and London, 2003, p. 77

prevailed on behalf of the automobile. The jokes did help the cause. Robinson's satire pointedly demonstrated the absurdity of severe restrictions on automobiles and certain anti-automobile attitudes. The quips on Taft, Roosevelt, and horses during the Congressional debate highlighted the idea that automobiles provided more useful transport than horses. That the jokes had any impact at all meant that ongoing opposition to automobiles, whether or not absurd, was, indeed, ongoing. Were the automobile an accepted standard, the jokes would not have been funny. A question becomes, then, what to make of that opposition. Was it relevant? Was it strong? Did it matter?

Reasonable observers by 1907 felt that the automobile "was here to stay."⁶ Still, outside of the motor car business and its enthusiasts, few had any thoughts that it was yet a "Motor Age," as held a magazine by the title. The political establishment was far from accepting any Motor Age. At best it was grudgingly acquiescent, if not exactly tolerant towards the automobile. Robinson had submitted his ridicule to the Illinois debate because he was "disgusted with the tactics of the opposition" that "tried to amend the bill in every possible way." The jokes during the 1909 congressional debate were also made in frustration to an intractable opponent of the automobile who had, until that day, single-handedly guided Congress' attitude towards the technology and its regulation in the District of Columbia.⁷ If we conceive of reactionary forces as doomed, lost-cause holdouts, then we may dismiss as unimportant these opponents to the automobile. But we must be careful not to let subsequent events fully define the historical situation. The wildest dreams of early 1909's automobile proponents fell far short of the technology's later path. Expectations of the technology's diffusion were limited to existing socioeconomic structures, and expectations of technological advance were limited to variations of known design. Think minivan or Ferrari! Also, even the most optimistic short-term expectations were universally shy of the kind of automotive year 1909 would bring. That they were partially right, ultimately, did not mean that they were right at the time, or that their views were accepted as correct in their day. Neither does it mean that they were prescient. They were in some ways, but they were also misguided in other ways. What they were to 1907 and 1909 was an interest: they were fighting for their cause. Similarly, we cannot say that 1909's automobile antagonists were Neanderthals simply because of subsequent events. Indeed, many of their fears were not only contemporaneously legitimate, they were downright prescient. What they were to 1907 and 1909 was an interest: they were fighting for their cause. As of 1909, there was no clear winner. While inevitable, the "Motor Age" was not yet defined.⁸

⁶ A common refrain, here from "The Selfishness of City Speeding," *Harper's Weekly*, March 16, 1907. A less optimistic version from 1908 went, "The automobile is surely a permanent fixture in our national economy ("The Automobile Universal," by A. J. Cook, *Outlook*, August 29, 1908").

⁷ Bromley, pp. 76-77

⁸ For an opposing view that there was little real opposition to automobiles see "America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910," by James J. Flink, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1970, p. 64. For a contemporaneous view of the evils of the automobile see "Romances And Tragedy's [sic] of The Automobile," *Chicago Tribune*, November 29, 1908.

If anti-automobile holdouts were just that, the Motor Age's direct competition was similarly deluded. As late as 1907, the carriage industry remained optimistic:

Representative people in the wagon and carriage trade are not blind to the fact that automobiles are cutting into the wheeled vehicle business in an important way. They declare, however, that it has been most felt in the smaller sales of victorias and other high priced vehicles... The automobile has not interfered with sales much over the great country territory...⁹

The denial was not misplaced. Carriage sales were up. Automobiles were reviled by much of the popular and political establishment, which into 1906 and 1907 was increasingly hostile towards the machines. See here from the *Chicago Tribune*, much upset by reports of automotive mischief by a foreign ambassador in Washington, on "The Wicked Auto":

And since a chauffeur is by his nature the most lawless and presumptuous of creatures an ambassador's chauffeur is doubly dangerous to friendly-relations. Among the many offenses of the automobile this is not the least, that it places international tranquility in the keeping of such hands.¹⁰

Laws, road building, politics, and general attitudes had not taken to the automobile. Through 1909 vast public expenditures were wasted on building roads that were, at best, poor compromises between the needs of horses and automobiles, and, at worst, flat out hostile to automobiles. Political intransigence and anti-automobilism led William Vanderbilt to build the first all-automobile highway in the nation, the Long Island Parkway, a project that national and state politics were incapable of producing.¹¹ In 1907, as Vanderbilt plotted his automobile paradise, New York state funded \$50 million for roads that would within three years become obsolete.¹² In early 1908, former Supreme Court Justice Henry Billings Brown (otherwise remembered for his drafting of *Plessy*)

⁹ "Wagons and Carriages," *Chicago Tribune*, January. 1, 1907

¹⁰ "The Wicked Auto," *Chicago Tribune*, May 22, 1907, editorial. See also *The Tribune's* editorial, "The Danger of Living," lampooning some of the day's hysteria of reform, presently an argument between proponents for chewing "20 to 150 times" and their antagonists, led by the famed Dr. Wiley of the Department of Agriculture who felt that excessive chewing results in "serious indigestion." Automobiles the editors plainly fit into the category of true "peril" (June 23, 1907). Typically for the day, the *Tribune* editors accepted the automobile as a co-habitant to the horse and pedestrian, but under strict advisement that it behave (see "The Automobile Future" editorial, Feb 1, 1907).

¹¹ And one that without the power of eminent domain was most difficult to accomplish. The ultimate path of the road at times followed the checkerboard more than a line.

¹² Bromley, p. 188. See also, "Good Roads in Need of \$40,000,000 More," *New York Times*, February 5, 1911.

published an article in the *Yale Law Journal* describing the “The Status of the Automobile,” that “novel and not altogether welcome guest.”¹³ Typically for his day, Justice Brown spoke of the “masterful influence” of the automobile, that “dangerous and irresistible machine,” with its “speed of an express train... dust and smoke...noisome odor...” Still, Justice Brown asserted, the automobile was here to stay. But it had better behave, or drastic laws curtailing it would result. Perhaps Illinois representative Robinson was not so far off in his satire? If the automobile was “here to stay,” as observers both for and against it asserted again and again, left unsettled was whether or not that was a good thing. In 1908, as Henry Ford redesigned his world’s best-selling automobile, the Model N, and its R and S variants, into the Model T, that question was dominant: are these things worth it? The answer was not clear.

The standard text of the development of the early automobile, James J. Flink's *America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910*, holds that it was the opening of the high-capacity Ford factory at Highland Park on January 1, 1910 that marked the end of the “formative stage” of the automobile and the beginning of the “Ford Age.” Once upon the Model T, the automobile was, for Flink, accepted, or, to use his word, “adopted” by America.¹⁴ Flink built his argument on the inevitability of the automobile due to its inherent utilitarian benefits, the American spirit of democracy, self-reliance, and innovation that leant to acceptance of novelty and the mass production and consumption of it, and to the dedicated, enthusiastic promotion by the automobile industry and enthusiasts. While Flink’s thesis builds the necessary structure for the adoption of the automobile, it all too easily dismisses those social, economic, and, especially, political elements that opposed it.¹⁵ Flink fails to explain why those opposing forces melted away in 1909 rather than, say, 1907, 1915, or whenever.¹⁶ The structures may have been -- arguably -- in place, but there were other important catalysts and deterrents that he ignores.

Anti-automobile attitudes during the “formative stage,” were exemplified by Woodrow Wilson’s now infamous but at the time entirely conventional 1906 comment that the automobile was “a picture of the arrogance of wealth, with all its independence and

¹³ Vol. XVII, No. 4, February, 1908

¹⁴ Flink, p. 4

¹⁵ A quick example: Flink evaluated income and geographic distribution in relation to motor vehicle registrations and concluded, among things, that the slower adoption of the technology in the South was due to fewer cities and lower incomes. However true the correlation, Flink entirely misses that southern politics were distinctly populist and particularly anti-automobile, which represented wealth and republicanism. Democratic hero William Jennings Bryan avoided automobiles. During the 1908 campaign he took motors when they were made available to him, but it was the exception. He was otherwise known to be “partial” to horses (see Bromley, p. 98). When he finally purchased a car in 1909 it was an electric.

¹⁶ Flink notes, “By 1910, the motor vehicle had definitely been accepted as an integral part of American life” (p. 51). Elsewhere, he notes that annual growth in registrations “for the years 1909 through 1912 are particularly impressive” (pp. 58-59).

carelessness,” and that it had “spread socialistic feeling” like nothing else.¹⁷ In a study of Wilson’s comment, historian Tom McCarthy concluded that Wilson was right, that elite motorists of 1906 were in bad need of a leash, lest the automobile be condemned and restricted to use by the elites alone, lest it provoke the masses to socialism.¹⁸ Whatever the veracity of Wilson’s beliefs, the fact remains that the thought was the norm. That doesn’t make it right or accurate. But let’s follow Wilson’s logic: 1) Socialism is not desirable; 2) automobiles cause class envy; 3) that class envy causes “socialistic feeling”; 4) automobiles, as purveyors of that class envy, are to be condemned. Wilson didn’t qualify his remarks to certain types of automobiles or automobilists. He didn’t consider that if automobiles were used by all Americans they would cease to represent an obnoxious few. Today we look critically at Wilson’s comments because we dismiss the view that automobiles are only for the rich. But that position, too, is a problematic. In 1906, automobiles were, mostly, only for the rich.¹⁹ Even Henry Ford knew it, despite his later, revisionist claim that it was his intention all along to build cars for “the multitudes.”²⁰ If we criticize Wilson for believing that automobiles were only for the rich then we necessarily join his argument -- that had nothing to do with automobiles. Wilson’s mistake was to impose qualities of one element upon an unrelated other, in this case, the arrogance of wealth upon automobiles. While autos of 1906 were for the rich, so were telephones, Pullman cars, carriages, and the hotel in which Wilson spoke. There was no condemnation of those things of the kind directed at automobiles. The difference was that the automobile was the latest, the most in-your-face, most flagrant manifestation of wealth, and, thus, arrogant. Wilson’s statement was not anti-automobile, and nor was it anti-rich. What bothered him was its representation of wealth’s “arrogance.”²¹ The automobile would have been just fine were it confined to Newport (which was anti-automobile!), Tuxedo Park, or better yet, to where, in the cartoon, “Where They Belong,”

¹⁷ Fully: “Nothing has spread Socialistic feeling in this country more than the use of automobiles. To the countryman they are a picture of arrogance of wealth with all its independence and carelessness” (from Wilson’s speech, “The Young Man’s Burden,” per “Wilson Blames Speeders,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1906 and “Motorists Don’t Make Socialists, They Say,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1906).

¹⁸ “The Arrogance of Wealth: Woodrow Wilson and Early Mass Automobility in America,” Tom McCarthy, Woodrow Wilson National Symposium, www.woodrowwilson.org, 2000.

¹⁹ Tinkerers, farmers, doctors, and adventurers loved autos, as did the hundreds of thousands of the public that attended races and automobile show. They, however, had no pretense of owning a car. For an interesting view on unusual ownership and use of automobiles in 1907 see “The Gasoline Camel of the American Desert,” on auto use by mineral speculators out West (*Harpers Weekly*, March 16, 1907, pp. 376-378).

²⁰ See the serial publication of “My Life and Work, by Henry Ford [in collaboration with Samuel Crowther],” *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1922. Those of 1906 who had any thought to selling millions of automobiles were stuck making motor cars that looked like buggies; Ford’s automobile of 1906 was all automobile, and its sales were limited to the few; besides, it was not until the 1920s that Ford started selling cars for “the multitudes.”

²¹ Veblen missed the mark by six years. The automobile was by far the worst form of conspicuous consumption.

artist T. S. Sullivant proposed sending it, a “Speedway For Millionaires Only,” where its destruction would fall upon, only, its vile, rich disciples.²² Expose the automobile to the envying masses, and socialistic feelings were surely unleashed. McCarthy agrees:

There was a sense that an immense social transgression was taking place, that the wealthy were suddenly flaunting a marvelous new privilege unbidden in the front yards and faces of the less privileged without showing due deference for the fact that they were on someone else’s turf and were being insensitive to the fact that doing so was publicly devaluing the have-not’s social standing in a giant act of disrespect that violated the prevailing norms not just for the use of shared public space, but that governed relations between the social classes in a notionally democratic, egalitarian society. Indeed, when we consider the intensity of the anger and its deeper meanings, we’re left to wonder whether the introduction of the automobile was not the greatest act of class provocation in American history. Wilson was acutely sensitive to this dimension of the automobile’s introduction.

Wilson punctuated his comments on dangerous automobilists by saying, “I am a Southerner and know how to shoot.” Indeed, it was an adept expression, though not exactly “acutely sensitive,” and more painfully obvious and cheaply tuned, to the overall sentiment of 1906 that unruly wealth was due a national flogging.²³ Nevertheless, when we apply notions of what McCarthy calls “mass automobility” to 1906 we are transposing a modern concept upon the past. McCarthy credits the sudden adoption of “mass automobility” to the Model T and its peculiar appeal to the simplicity expected of an “egalitarian” culture of mass consumption:

It provided a very satisfactory set of practical and symbolic characteristics that allowed people who had not previously been automobile owners to emulate the wealthy without seeming to be hypocritically aping them.

McCarthy admits that “mass automobility” did not arrive until the 1920s, and he recognizes that when Ford introduced the Model T it was neither especially cheap nor much different from more expensive cars. Indeed, its proximity to more expensive cars while at a much lower price was precisely its appeal. However, that appeal had nothing to do with egalitarian sensitivities. Furthermore, automobiles generally were adopted in the American mass consciousness more quickly than was the Model T, and this occurred not

²² “Auto Fun: Pictures and Comments from ‘Life,’” Thomas Y Crowell & Co., New York, 1905. The speed limit for the millionaire’s automobile arena was “Minimum 60 Miles an Hour.”

²³ “Wilson Blames Speeders.” The year 2006 marks the centennial of the release of that marvelous piece of class warfare, “The Jungle” by the socialist Upton Sinclair. Wilson could only be attuned to that sensational work, and it is likely that his speech was in reaction to it.

by providing an alternative to the kind of automobiles or automobiling that so offended Woodrow Wilson, but with dramatic change in the general attitude towards all automobiles.

Today, while the mass of the people use automobiles, “the masses” don’t exist. We call them “the disadvantaged,” or the “underclass,” terms that imply minorities who lack something others normally have, like automobiles. For 1906, we may (*may*²⁴) speak of “the masses,” but it’s nonsensical to speak of “mass automobility.” Unrelated concepts. Any kind of “mass” use of automobiles does not occur until the 1920s.²⁵ What we may speak of, instead, is “mass” or popular attitudes towards them. Right or wrong, Wilson’s view was the dominant attitude towards motor cars in 1906. Wrong, though, is the notion that the Model T somehow made automobiles suddenly palatable for mass consumption.

In 1937, in an era that had truly adopted “mass automobility,” a pastor complained of “auto worship”:

You may see some men too tired to kneel in prayer in church, but on Sunday morning you will see them kneeling by their automobile to get it ready for a trip. That is idolatry.²⁶

Unlike Wilson he was not speaking the popular voice. He was objecting to it. He was, though, on to something that Wilson understood, that automobiles ran on psychology as much as on gasoline. In the mid-1920s, when “mass automobility” was both popularly acceptable and generally operable, the worry had become that there were not too few but too many automobiles. Industry and consumer “saturation” was the latest bogeyman (a reality come 1928/29). Social and economic observers, such as economist Leonard P. Ayres and writer R. L. Duffus, evaluated the meaning of the automobile. Taking from the Veblen school, Ayres viewed the “insatiable demand for more and better automobiles” a result of envy and social competition:

The result of continuous competitive comparison is that everybody who does not own an automobile wants one and everybody who does own one wants a new one. No other manufactured article has ever produced so universal a covetousness.²⁷

²⁴ With about half the nation living in rural areas, it is equally nonsensical to speak of “the masses” for 1906. Still, that there was a large “mass” of an underclass may be accepted.

²⁵ An exact definition of that pinnacle would make for an interesting study. It is not until 1922 that national registrations break ten million -- still fewer than 1 for every 10 Americans.

²⁶ “‘Auto Worship’ Held a New Idolatry,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1937

²⁷ “Growth in Auto Industry Laid to Competitive Irk -- Scrutator,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 21, 1925

Ayres noted that like the horse and bicycle, and with airplanes the next coming manifestation, the desire for automobiles came of the impulse for mobility and speed. Duffus more explicitly attributed the American demand for autos to speed:

Humanity's two primary impulses -- hunger and the mating instinct -- are motion manifestations. We move toward things we desire, away from things we fear...²⁸

...which automobiles made all far, far easier to get. And more dangerous.

The problem of scorching and fatalities has never gone away. At best, in adopting the automobile society set the ongoing compromise between the value of automobiles and their danger. In 1917, Charles M. Hayes, president of the Chicago Motor Club complained that "speed maniacs are making conditions in Chicago intolerable." Motorists, Hayes wrote, must be workers "for public safety... promoters of the general good..."²⁹ In late 1941, as the nation moved to curtail wartime automobile use, humorist Wally Boren noted,

If I tell you now that automobiles is a great blessin' you will probably want to go out and buy a new one. That would make the shortage worse. If I tell you how automobiles has caused so many accidents an' has taken people away from church an' all that, you will get discouraged an' want to see a law passed against 'em. So I will sort of stay in the middle of the road -- an', likely as not, get honked at by traffic goin' both ways.³⁰

While their dangers ever provoked ongoing resistance to autos, distinctly absent from these later observations was the problem of class that so embroiled Woodrow Wilson's view. Only five years after his remarks, we find this statement, one that seems so far away from 1906:

In the annals of history I doubt if any business has developed with rapidity or taken such a firm grip on the masses generally as the automobile industry.³¹

²⁸ "Why We Consume the Most Autos," by R. L. Duffus, *New York Times*, July 24, 1927

²⁹ "The Voice of the Motorist," *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 1917

³⁰ "Wally's Wagon: Get a Horse!" *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1941. In this column Wally had a nice answer to Duffy's claim that the automobile enhanced the mating instinct. Regarding the pre-War (WWI) cars he learned to drive during his "courtin' days," he complained, "An' if you thing you could pet while *steerin'* one of those early models, you are crazy. You could hardly keep it on the road with both hands an' both feet."

³¹ "Steady Progress of Motor Vehicle," by Max H. Grabowsky, *New York Times*, January 8, 1911

How quickly they forgot! And we mustn't forget that in that year of 1911 the "masses" were not out buying automobiles. The "grip" was upon consciousness, not ownership. Or, what had changed was that demagogy's "firm grip" on the automobile had loosened. (It has never given in.) Truly, one cannot exaggerate the significance of Wilson's comments -- given at the Waldorf-Astoria to upper class college boys. He was lecturing them on how to be good citizens, advice that prominently included that they stay away from automobiles. Perhaps not in direct reaction to Wilson's words, but certainly in reaction to the general sentiment, but a few months after the Waldorf-Astoria speech, *The New York Times* ran a spread on "How 'The Other Half' in New York Reaches Its Workshops" -- of various subway, trolley, and elevated train habits of J.P. Morgan, H.O. Havemeyer, Jacob Schiff, J.D. Rockefeller, and a slew of the gilded others. One can freely imagine that Morgan didn't mind the publicity of his taking a seat next to a black man on the Sixth Avenue elevated train.³² While but a slice of classic American hypocrisy and politics, this kind of story was very much in line with the expectations of the day.

Why all this bother? Here's what the automobile was up against:

The President of 1906 stayed away from automobiles. Outside a brief flirtation the year before in a couple motor trips along the Potomac River in a private auto, Theodore Roosevelt was firmly in Wilson's camp on autos, especially their association with "predatory wealth." Roosevelt clamped down on his daughter's attempt to purchase a car in 1902. The gate to his home at Oyster Bay read, "Private Drive: No Automobiles." Hired-coaches freely rode tourists up the drive and past the front of the house. "The President has a strong dislike for motor cars," noted a journalist in 1905.³³

As for the plutocracy, we know Roosevelt's views:

If we did not ourselves attach an exaggerated importance to the rich man who is distinguished only by his riches, this rich man would have a most insignificant influence over us. It is generally our own fault if he does damage to us, for he damages us chiefly by arousing our envy or by rendering us sour and discontented.

³² *New York Times*, June 3, 1906. Morgan normally took a carriage to work and did not like the subway. He was not averse to the elevated train. The article stated that he "never" rode in an automobile to work. Whatever the cause or implication of his choice not to use automobiles, the reader should know that millionaires suffered no condemnation for riding in carriages. The President of the United States of the time made conspicuous use of carriages as opposed to automobiles.

³³ A first mention of the sign that I find in the historical newspaper databases is from 1905, in "Duchess at Sagamore Hill," *Washington Post*, September 21, 1905. He kept the sign there throughout his second term. When it was first put up, I do not know, but my guess would be 1904, an election year and a time when there was a huge flow of visitors to his Summer White House. The ostensible reason for the ban on automobiles there was the noise and smoke, which is true -- in part. For more on TR's attitude towards the automobile, see the author's "Early Automobiles and Airplanes: The Cultural Lag," *Automotive History Review* (SAH), No. 42, Fall 2004, also available at <http://www.stretching-it.com/Autos&Aeros/intro.htm>.

Venomous envy of wealth is simply another form of the spirit, which in one of its manifestations takes the shape of cringing servility toward wealth, and in another the shape of brutal arrogance on the part of certain men of wealth. Each one of these states of mind, whether it be hatred, servility or arrogance, is in reality closely akin to the other two: for each of them springs from a fantastically twisted and exaggerated idea of the importance of wealth as compared to other things.³⁴

The speech, given to 20,000, was on the “nonmaterialistic ideal.” He got there and back by horse-drawn carriage. Roosevelt’s very self-conception as President was built on this conflict and his rescue of the nation from the dual evils of “predatory wealth” and socialist reaction to it.³⁵ In 1908 he explained it to a French visitor:

You know the crusade which I am making and the attacks which it brings down upon me. I fight against plutocracy because I am the enemy of Socialism and Anarchy. Plutocracy is the worst form of government for a people. There is only one other equally detestable: demagoguery. Government by money, government by the mob; one is as bad as the other. And plutocracy is the best ally of Socialism and Anarchy. In my own way I am a conservative. And it is for that reason that I fight plutocratic abuses.”³⁶

See now how this rhetoric plays out more generally in society and automobiles, this from 1907:

The automobile is the great American scandal-breeder of the present day. In St. Louis and other cities of the Union it is now the cause of more domestic troubles and disturbances of happy marital relations than any other one factor. It’s a “devil-wagon” filled with a greater number and variety of ills than was Pandora’s box in its palmyest moments. More marriages have recently come to luckless endings owing to its sinister influences than through all other agencies combined. It’s the prime feeder of divorce courts. The throbbing of its motor and the ‘honk-honk’ of its horn mark time for the beating of innumerable broken hearts.

...there is no denying the fact that the extravagant, the reckless, and even the criminal classes have taken to automobiling with avidity and are

³⁴ “Greater Than Money Maker,” *Boston Globe*, July 8, 1905

³⁵ “Roosevelt Warns Predatory Poverty,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1907. Speaking to young farmers, he also warned against “predatory wealth” and the “abuse of property.” He encouraged the use of bicycles and support of good roads. No autos!

³⁶ “Roosevelt’s Master Virtue Is His Obstinacy,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1908

using the machines for wrong purposes. Although this invention is hardly ten years old, it has already come to be identified in the public mind with reckless extravagance and dissipation. The known swiftness, silence, secretiveness, and privacy of the automobile, together with the fact that it is never used except by people of wealth, have already impressed the public mind with the fact that the apparatus easily lends itself to immoral or criminal purposes.

...There is nothing intrinsically immoral or criminal about the automobile. As it is a new invention, there is as yet no way of knowing what other purposes it may serve to accomplish than those described above. At any rate, it is evident that what President Roosevelt calls “undesirable citizens” are extensively using the machine for their own purposes.³⁷

And what a difference by 1922!:

It is no longer a question of how many persons can afford to own an automobile, but how many can afford not to own one, Alfred Reeves, general manager of the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, told members of the Chicago Rotary Club in an address here today ... “While the recreation value of an automobile is great, it is important to know that 70 per cent. of all the automobiles made last year retailed under \$1,000, and 94 per cent. retailed under \$2,000,” he said. “Of the 10,000,000 vehicles now registered, more than 3,000,000 are owned by farmers, about 100,000 by doctors, and thousands of others by salesmen and contractors.”³⁸

While it is true that politicians and laws reflect the views of the constituents, they also reinforce and build those views. Roosevelt’s rhetoric against wealth provoked as much as hindered “socialistic feelings,” and far more than did automobiles. Automobiles were a destination for that type of rhetoric, not its origin. Whether Roosevelt’s “co-option” scheme succeeded cannot be proven one way or another.³⁹ Socialism’s electoral peak coincided with the peak of Roosevelt’s own social and political radicalism in 1912. By then, automobiles had taken over the national consciousness, and not because of the Model T. Ford’s projection for the car’s 1909 sales was 25,000 units. He had proclaimed

³⁷ “Autos Breed Scandal,” *Washington Post*, June 9, 1907

³⁸ “Autos for the Masses,” *New York Times*, February 1, 1922

³⁹ Co-option, in the modern tongue, is to triangulate, or to adopt part of an opponent’s rhetoric and/or agenda in order to defeat it, supposedly without becoming it oneself.

a similar number in announcing the Model N three years before.⁴⁰ Going into 1909, even in Henry Ford's mind the market had little grown from 1906 and certainly no where near to the ongoing million-plus unit carriage and buggy market. As it turned out, Ford moved just under 13,000 cars in 1909, barely ten percent of industry sales, which, cumulatively, exploded, with or without the T.

My view on this transition is that it took national political endorsement of the automobile to bring about its general "adoption," or, more accurately, its entry to the general consciousness. I do not argue against the inevitability of the all-conquering automobile. I am concerned with its particular form and time. Through to early 1909, the nation's political establishment, local and national, and its laws, hampered and often explicitly rejected the automobile and its mass acceptance. It took a deliberate, dedicated promotion of the automobile by 1909's new president, William Howard Taft, to free political elites and demagogues from the anti-automobilism that had set during the Roosevelt years. At best, Roosevelt did nothing to stop anti-automobile sentiment. At worst, and this is closer to the truth, his rhetoric and his example, combined with his personal antipathy for the machines, spurred the movement and stuffed the national automotive trunk full of class conflict. He might have avoided the delays in automobility and the needless class strife. He chose not to. It was, truly, a dramatic failure, and a destructive absence, of leadership.

Other historians such as Flink have ignored the political component of the automobile's pre-1909 suppression and its post-1909 explosion.⁴¹ Suffice to say that in 1909 industry sales more than doubled, a faster growth than Ford himself experienced that year. 1909 was the pivotal year, and Henry Ford was the beneficiary of it and not its architect. His jump into Highland Park followed and did not create that explosion. If price alone had created "mass automobility," we can put it to later, to 1923 and 1924, when the price for basic Fords dipped below \$300, as the defining moments. If value alone, that is, quality conjoined with price, created "mass automobility," we must look to the mid-1910s, particularly 1914-1916 when the value benefit of the Model T truly outpaced other high-value competition. Or, if we follow McCarthy, the mere 1908 introduction of the Model T suffices the creation of "mass automobility," in that finally, a true automobile appeared that didn't look like a rich man's car. Or, we can follow Flink, who looks to Ford's mass production techniques as the precursor to "mass automobility."

⁴⁰ In January of 1906 (really bad timing from a political point of view...), he claimed that he could sell 20,000 Model N's. He sold less than half that number over two years. See "Early Automobiles and Airplanes: The Cultural Lag."

⁴¹ A short catalog of consequences of the delay by Governments to endorse and adopt the automobile include: 1) huge sums misspent on bad roads; 2) delays in developing new road surface technologies; 3) ongoing deleterious effects of horse manure in city streets; 4) commercial and economic wastage and losses in delaying the fuller introduction of automobiles; 5) delay in industrial developments brought on by the automobile; 6) severe unpreparedness of the U.S. military in motors, tanks, trucks, and airplanes. Also, the particular time and manner of the final adoption of the automobile played to Henry Ford's benefit. If earlier adopted, the industry may have more generally moved towards value over luxury, and the mid-1920s competition that finally brought down the Model T may have occurred far earlier.

I should like to reverse the formula and see all of those elements, price, value, mass production, as effects and not causes. If consumers did not want automobiles they would not pay for them at any price or at any quality. Those fabulous industry-wide sales numbers of 1909-1910 included a good many dogs. And even Henry Ford's was not the perfect car. It had its share of problems. Consumers went for automobiles despite poor quality and low value. And they kept buying them. Even when Ford came to sell half the nation's cars, how do we account for that other half? Those cars were either more expensive or of less value than the Model T, yet consumers bought them anyway. Does "mass automobility" exist without the Model T?⁴² Most wealthy people prior to 1909 and 1910 did not buy automobiles. Many, indeed, made it a distinction *not* to own motors. After 1910, not owning an automobile became the anachronism. Even Theodore Roosevelt bought a car, although not without objection.⁴³ Starting in 1909, the lesser-than-wealthy went head-long into cars, so much so that the condemnation of automobiles went from being that they were too exclusive to that they were not exclusive enough. The complaint became that those who could not afford cars were mortgaging their homes and their lives to own something they ought, for its excessive cost, to avoid.

In the automobile's struggle for definition during its "formative stage" all the benefits and liabilities of the machines set up against one another in the popular mind. The outcome was the socialized automobile. Like the human child, it carried into its adolescence the issues, fears, hopes, and dispositions, good and bad, set upon it in its social development. And like all of us, it would never resolve those conflicts. The socialization process does not fix problems, it merely identifies them, gives them names, or finds ways to hide or ignore them. Society, generally, learns along with the subject. Somewhere along the way, and without losing its worst qualities, the automobile won that social approval it needed to be out in society. Like the wayward child who was blamed for every bad thing because he had previously done bad things, the automobile during its adolescent period was condemned as a class. Automobile was synonymous with its worst qualities, scorcher, terror wagon, "arrogance of wealth." Upon a certain maturity, both in itself and in the eyes of the rest, its reputation had healed to the point that there were -- as there had always been, although without general notice -- good cars and bad cars, good drivers and bad drivers, and hope that things were going to be alright.

Next, and, hopefully, with a laugh, is part of the story of how the automobile and the American nation learned to get along. Let us look now at how the dominant popular views of the early automobile were reflected, defined and even created by satire and jokes, and how it evolved over time.

⁴² Automotive historian John B. Rae believes not. See "The American Automobile," The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1965, pp. 65-68. Rae holds that Ford spurred competitors and consumers both.

⁴³ See Bromley, p. 226

Red: "Is he given to blowing his own horn?"
Blue: "Oh, no; he has a chauffeur."⁴⁴

There's the first problem of the early automobile. Except for the thoroughly dedicated, or the especially adventurous, one needed a chauffeur to use and enjoy a motor car. The chauffeur, of course, was a servant, which meant that only people who had servants had chauffeurs. Dealing with the chauffeur was a constant problem for the motorist. Englishman A. B. Filson Young spoke the frustration for all motorists:

...it is his convenience that must be consulted, it is he who gives the word to stop and go on... he finds it necessary to go fast when you would like to go slowly... You may not make plans without consulting him; he is ruthless in his discouragements; he spends your money with a fine liberality... he smokes the vilest cigarettes - there seems to be a brand especially blended for chauffeurs; he eats and drinks expensively... in a word, he is a bane and a shadow on your life.⁴⁵

On the other hand, when arrested for speed or hauled into court for an overturned wagon, it was the chauffeur's fault, and not the owner's. In images, jokes, and the popular mind "the chauffeur" was an evil class unto himself:

The day was gloriously bright --
A royal, perfect day,
When peace and joy, in golden light,
On crest and valley lay.
Lo, sudden through its midst veered
A whirring, huge machine
Wherein was crouched a goblin weird,
Swatched, visored, goggled green.

Athwart a flow'ry vale he tore --
He scurried up a hill --
And down again like mad he bore,
All reckless of a spill.
That fields, high-arched by tender skies,
Stretched fair on either hand;
Alas, in vain they wooed his eyes --
'Twas but his watched he scanned.

⁴⁴ *The Automobile*, December 7, 1905, pg. 629

⁴⁵ As quoted in "The Motor Book: An Anthology 1895-1914," edited by T. R. Nicholson, Methuen & Co. Ltd, London 1962, pp. 86-90

A trail of dust behind him spread,
And oaths and shouts and groans;
He stayed for living nor for dead,
For ruts nor sticks nor stones.
He grasped his lever with a smile,
Betokening his glee --
“By Jove, I almost did that mile
In Sixty-nine!” said he.⁴⁶

Ah, yes, the speed!

Despite the problems, the chauffeur was all well and good for those who could afford both servant and car. For the rest, the problem began with the price of the car itself. Desiring a motor but short on the money, in 1904 a man discussed the problem with his friend, “Carr”:

We had talked with Uncle Russell Sage, consulted John W. Gates, and interviewed President Roosevelt. And yet we had achieved no practical results. Carr said our method of procedure was wrong. The best way to get an automobile was to open a bank.⁴⁷

Carr, whose ambition was to graduate from being an “off-my-trolley Carr” to a “motor Carr,” suggested to his companion that they might seek the advice of a pretty woman. This led them to Lillian Russell, who upon some thought about her own \$5,000, “full-jeweled, lever-escapement, stem-winding, eight-day automobile,” pronounced how to get one for oneself:

That’s easy. You must be a beautiful woman, have golden hair and a silvery voice. Go on stage. Become famous. Have a cigar named after you, so you will get lots of puffs. Refuse to appear unless you get five hundred dollars a night, and then you can have an automobile like this!

Even if you could afford the car, and even if you could do without the chauffeur, the automobilist lifestyle was not a cheap one:

Parke: how much did your auto cost you?

Lane: A thousand.

“Why, I thought you were going to get a ten-thousand-dollar one.”

⁴⁶ By Edwin L. Sabin, from “Auto Fun”

⁴⁷ “How to Get the Best Auto,” by Roy L. McCardell, *Washington Post*, May 8, 1904

“I was. But that was before my wife handed in a list of the clothes she wanted to wear in it.”⁴⁸

And then there were problems of reliability:

“You told me this automobile was a snap,” said the new purchaser.

“And didn’t you find it to be one?” asked the dealer.

“I should say so. Something snapped every five miles.”⁴⁹

One of the powers of the chauffeur, who was also known as “mechanic,” was his supposed grasp of the mysteries of the “stove” or “combustion” engine down below. Amateurs had to learn the goings and fixings of the automobile for themselves. From the view of popular humor, this was not often a successful venture. Nevertheless, the amateur motorist, also known as the self-driver, knew what he was getting into. A *Life* cartoon entitled, “Where the Fun Comes In,” highlighted his fate. A man speaking to two women about an automobile, seen in the background:

“Yes, I enjoy my automobile immensely.”

“But I never see you out.”

“Oh, I haven’t got that far yet. I am just learning to make my own repairs.”⁵⁰

Not particularly funny, or at least to my view, but a most pointed commentary -- and ridicule. Here also from 1905, from *Country Life* magazine, which was predominantly pro-automobile:

When I first thought of buying an automobile, a glib salesman and my motoring friends talked familiarly of planetary gears, spark plugs, commutators, cut-outs, and other mysterious parts. I was assured I would understand all about them on sight. I trial of five minutes convinced me that the things referred to were tractable and responsive even to my unskilled touch, and so I became my own chauffeur. For two full weeks I was the happiest mortal in town. The machine seemed eager to take me, my friends, and my friends’ friends anywhere at top speed, and it always brought us home without any unnecessary delay. I remarked that a man who could not run an automobile was a fool. I soon changed my mind.

My initiation occurred in front of the post-office when, without warning, the machine had its first fit of depravity. My experienced and considerate friends passed me by without remarks, and a bevy of big boys and small

⁴⁸ “Auto Fun”

⁴⁹ “Streaks of Humor,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1906, quoting from the *Chicago News*

⁵⁰ “Auto Fun”

men gave me useless advice, based on their observations on similar occasions. I turned the crank until my hands were blistered, and then humbly towed the machine to the hospital.⁵¹

There, the mechanic “gave its insides a caress with an old tooth-brush,” cleaned the spark plug, and away he went. Alas, the next day the motor wouldn’t crank for lack of oil. That fixed, our amateur motorist took off with his wife aboard:

Next I became stalled on a hill several miles from town. All that I had learned about automobiles was of no avail. My wife, who did not know a crank-case from a carburetor, solved the mystery by peeking into the gasolene tank, and finding it empty. This experience is one that fate requires of every honest motorist at least once.

And then, if you finally got your machine running, it was dangerous. That was a core reason why people loved the things -- and why people hated them. And they joked about it:

“Father says will you please lend him your automobile?”
“Not today, my son; two enemies of mine are coming to see me, and I’m going to send them for a spin in it!”⁵²

This cartoon put it magnificently:

[Western outlaw greeting a masked, dark chauffeur or motorist next to an auto whose tag reads, “Red Terror”]
Western Badman (genially): “Shake, pardner! We ain’t entirely outgrown guns in this section, an’ we don’t wear our masks every day, but we can appreciate progressive methods. How many notches ye got in yer machine?”⁵³

Automobile humor served to punish the wicked motorist. It could also get a little revenge on behalf of the rest. Another *Life* cartoon depicted a hunched, scorching motorist running down “One woman who did not jump.” He smashed into her, only it was his car and not she that was destroyed. The “she” turned out to have been a large stone disguised as a pedestrian. The angry motorist stumbled from his wreck and encountered the farmer who had prettied up the stone. “You may remember that you frightened my team last week, and smashed me up,” he said, “and so I thought I’d rig a little surprise fer ye.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ “An Amateur and His Motor,” *Country Life in America*, April, 1905, p. 650

⁵² “Just From Georgia,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 30, 1908

⁵³ “Auto Fun”

⁵⁴ “Auto Fun”

From the motorists' point of view, other dangers of the automobile's speed were the sheriff and judge. But no matter, for the rich could always bail out the chauffeur and pay the fine from loose bills in the left-front pocket:

First Millionaire: How is your machine working?

Second Millionaire: Very poorly. Have not paid a fine for over three days.⁵⁵

The joke marked an acute problem from the beginning: what good the fine if it is seen as but a slight cost of doing business?⁵⁶ In 1902 *Puck* decried "The Automobile Laugh":

Nothing is pleasanter than a hearty laugh For all around mirth, the public has only the warmest regard. It is the automobile laugh that stirs its ire; the laugh of the blithesome millionaire, arrested for speeding. The magistrate sits in his seat of authority. The goggled culprit stands before him, jauntily; bored, it is true, but willing to stay for a few minutes, if politely requested The prisoner at the bar is relentlessly fined ten dollars. Then, from out the musty stillness of the court room, arises the automobile laugh; that merry, unctuous peal of good nature... The absurdity of fining a millionaire ten, twenty or fifty dollars is apparent."⁵⁷

A potentially more serious problem for the wealthy motorist than fines and time lost before the magistrate was the lawsuit. Liability for the overturned cart, runaway horse, and maimed child could add up. No matter, for automobilists were rich! At least according to the *Life* cartoon of the man who placed mattresses to the front and back of his auto in order to provide his victims with a soft landing:

This scheme of Cholly Billions admits of a high rate of speed, while reducing to a minimum all risks of damage suits.⁵⁸

For the rich, money was just money. Far worse were all the social problems that arose with the new technology -- so long as we could laugh about it, and at *them*:

⁵⁵ "Streaks of Humor," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1906, quoting from the *Chicago News*

⁵⁶In his 1908 article, "The Status of the Automobile," Judge Brown also discussed the problem of punishing the rich "to whom ordinary fines are of no consequence..." For a modern view, from Australia, on this see, "Hit the rich harder," *The Border Mail*, January 17, 2005, found at http://www.bordermail.com.au/newsflow/pageitem?page_id=880239

⁵⁷ "Cartoons and Comments," *Puck*, September 24, 1902

⁵⁸ "Auto Fun." For an actual attempt at this idea see "Novel Auto Invention to Lessen Street Dangers," *New York Times*, June 25, 1911, of an inventor's idea to land pedestrians in a wide net strung before the automobile.

A severe issue befell the motorist when the automobile as Romeo's best friend failed him. One cartoon entitled, "Trouble with the sparker," showed a woman turning cheek to her lover whose auto has broken down. Another depicted a man explaining away to the disappointed lady his broken wheel:

He: But my dear girl, why complain? Don't you know this sort of thing is all the rage? Do you never read the papers?⁵⁹

That one is not only funny, it is clever, for the author simultaneously lampooned both the absurdity of the automobile fad and the unreliability of the car itself.

Romantic leaps by automobile, called in one cartoon, "Elopement à la Gasoline," was a constant reference and social problem, if exaggerated in the popular press and mind. Marital problems, too, were often blamed on autos and auto infatuation.⁶⁰ Here, from 1906, Elizabeth confronts a family friend, a judge, with her intention to divorce her husband:

"Why, Bess, surely you've no grounds for a divorce..."

"I have a reason!" icily.

"O, ho!" exclaimed the judge. "May I ask her name?"

"It's an automobile!" explained Elizabeth. "I'm an automobile widow."

"A new one to me," commented the judge musingly.

"We've quarreled ever since he bought that big circus chariot of his. I wanted horses instead -- I'm from Kentucky, you know, and I vowed I'd never step foot in that car -- and I haven't! He spends all his time in it -- he says I'm unreasonable -- and --"

Elizabeth broke down.

"Proceed," prompted the judge.

"The last two days he hasn't even gone through the formality of asking me to accompany him -- though of course I wouldn't have gone!

Yesterday he whizzed by with that blond Johnson girl, and today with Mrs. Wheeler. However, I'm not jealous of a mere woman. It's the car!"⁶¹

Finally, there were the horse jokes. Early Motor Age cartoons and jokes constantly harped upon the automobile as against the horse. Against an image of a two-horse team pulling a broken auto:

⁵⁹ "Auto Fun"

⁶⁰ *Elopement à la Gasoline* from "Auto Fun"

⁶¹ "An Automobile Widow," *Boston Globe*, November 19, 1906

Farmer Brown: Wal, now what's the horse power of your machine, if ye don't mind tellin'?

Buzzer (blithely): "Well, the dealer says its sixteen, but that's greatly exaggerated, because it almost never more than two to get it home -- not counting the chauffeur behind, yer know."⁶²

Or this caption to a *Life* cartoon of a broken auto to the side of a running horse and buggy:

*The Passing of the Horse*⁶³

That automobiles were "here to stay" was sublimely ridiculed in another *Life* cartoon depicting a car wrapped around a tree and its driver, from whom we get:

Testimonial of an Enthusiast:

"I feel that the automobile has come to stay."⁶⁴

Flink quotes from Frank A. Munsey from 1906 declaring that "the uncertain period of the automobile is past. It is no longer a theme for jokers, and rarely do we hear the derisive expression, 'Get a horse!'"⁶⁵ Both Munsey and Flink were hardly aware, then, of what the rest of American was laughing about. The horse made its appearance in automobile jokes long after 1906. All the automobile problems and absurdities of reliability, of chauffeurs, of danger, and of speed, the "jokers" never left behind in praising or reminding of the horse. In 1918 this type of joke was still relevant:

Knicker -- What became of Chauffeur?

Bocker -- He absent-mindedly crawled under a mule to see why it didn't go.⁶⁶

Perhaps "Get a horse!" had lost its impact, but the horse itself kept pace with the automobile as sensible, reliable, and safe -- the very antithesis of the automobile:

Tommy -- "Pop, what is horse sense?"

Pop -- "Horse sense, my son, is that quality in a man which prevents him mortgaging his home to buy an automobile."⁶⁷

⁶² "Auto Fun"

⁶³ "Auto Fun"

⁶⁴ "Auto Fun"

⁶⁵ Flink, p. 50, quoting from "The Automobile in America," *Munsey's Magazine*, January, 1906

⁶⁶ "Automobile Jokes, Jests and Joshes," by "James the Chauffeur," I. & M. Ottenheimer, Baltimore, 1918

⁶⁷ "Automobile Jokes and Stories," by James the Chauffeur, I. & M. Ottenheimer, Baltimore, 1913

Humor helps us understand. It brings a thing down to its essence, and bares it for us to see and laugh at and ridicule. Jokes and satire rely on the truth. And both operate through distinction, through generalization, and through exaggeration. A joke becomes satire when it becomes pointed, when it takes on purpose. We might consider the impact of our first joke from above, of the motorist not having to blow his own horn since he has a chauffeur. Appearing in an automobile magazine, the primary audience was motorists and enthusiasts. Coming in 1905, they were mostly wealthy, but not all of them. Chauffeurs read these magazines. Garages subscribed, as did chauffeur organizations and other clubs that were interested in the subject, such as the YMCA. Regardless who read it, anyone of 1905 gets it. Rich motorist. Hired chauffeur. The question for us here is if the joke somehow created or added meaning to 1905. Class conflict would dominate the political landscape during this period. For their novelty, their danger, their expense, and their speed, automobiles would have been subjected to humor and ridicule no matter what the social, economic, and political sensitivities. But this business about the wealthy made it poignant, and, quite often, harsh:

One of the first things required of the genuine automobilist is that he mustn't know anything about it. And the second is like unto the first, which is that a man should disregard his neighbor as much as he loves himself. These things being understood in the beginning, your standing among the fraternity is assured.⁶⁸

Nobody said to eat the rich, but one could well wish upon them all the misfortune an automobile could bring. In its discussion of the advent of motor buses, *The London Chronicle* noted that with automobiles, there were, "One motor, two nervous systems." (A great joke!). Then the class warfare in it: "So," concluded the paper (and shared with American readers by *The New York Times*), "it is a good thing, perhaps, that the motor is so far a pastime of the rich..."⁶⁹ Judge Brown held the same view. Regarding automobilists' self-destruction, he wrote, entirely without humor, "Fortunately, the chauffeur and his guests are the usual sufferers, and in their misfortunes as law-breakers, the general public do not much concern themselves."⁷⁰

In 1910, the humor magazine *Puck* announced a list of banned jokes. (This left the *Chicago Tribune* wondering if it meant that the magazine was "about to suspend publication").⁷¹ Listed there among "the mother-in-law joke," "the actors-walking-home

⁶⁸ "Directions for Running an Automobile," from "Auto Fun"

⁶⁹ "Disease of Automobilia," *New York Times*, November 12, 1905

⁷⁰ "The Status of the Automobile"

⁷¹ "The New Safe And Sane Movement," *Chicago Tribune*, March 30, 1910

joke,” “the cannibals-cooking-missionary joke,” “the wife-waiting-for-husband-with-rolling-pin joke,” and so on, was “the man-under-busted-auto joke.” A broken car was no longer funny. Not that it ended such jokes, for the hood-in-the-air joke persists to this day. What it meant for *Puck* was that the novelty of a broken car was gone. The Model T would bring it back, but to 1910 broken cars no longer offered the joy of *Schadenfreude*. Enjoying someone else’s pain, of course, was much the point to the entire genre of automobile satire and jokes. If you can’t own one, at least you can make fun of someone that does. Now, though, the “man-under-busted-auto” was all too common an experience.

As the socialization of the automobile progressed, chauffeur jokes lost their edge. The 1905 the chauffeur-blowing-horn joke served to explain something divergent. While nothing more than a coachman for an automobile, the idea of a chauffeur carried all the weight of the automobile and its “arrogance,” and danger itself. If there were any coachman jokes, they served no purpose other than humor. People already understood horses, carriages, and coachmen. It wasn’t funny if the coachman ran off with the wife. If the chauffeur did it, then there’s something funny:

DeJinks: I have bad news for you, old man. Your wife has eloped with your chauffeur.

LeBlinks: Great Scott: and he was such a good chauffeur, too. I’ll never be able to replace him.⁷²

There was a truth to it. Wives and daughters did run off with the family chauffeur. And a good chauffeur was hard to find. For the rest that may not have had the privilege of worrying about amorous chauffeurs, there was the “Haughty Chauffeur” (he, having taken over haughtiness from the coachman) who caused all kinds of problems that were self-evident to all.⁷³ Entire sections of laws were written or re-written to accommodate chauffeur “joy riding” (running off with the car without permission), liability, licensing, and other employee-employer relations that were complicated by the chauffeur and automobile. Humor and satire targeted the chauffeur, too. But by 1911 chauffeurs were no longer exotic and no longer such a problem. All the harm they caused was now brought on by the self-driver who was in the process of taking over the roads. Popular fiction turned from the mixed status of the chauffeur as servant, lover, hero, or villain, to the more mundane tasks of just being a chauffeur.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, for motorists, chauffeurs ever presented the same old problems. In 1913 we still find the problem of the amorous-chauffeur:

⁷² “Streaks of Humor,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1906

⁷³ “Haughty Chauffeur” from “Since the Auto Came,” *Washington Post*, February 12, 1905

⁷⁴ See “Fiction for All Fancies,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1910, regarding a fictional chauffeur-hero.

“And after your chauffeur eloped with your daughter, what did you do?”
“Wired them to come back and clean the car and all would be forgiven.”⁷⁵

And the dangerous one:

Gent -- “Can you produce references from your last employer?”
Chauffeur -- “In about a month.”
Gent -- “Why that delay?”
Chauffeur -- “He’s in the hospital.”⁷⁶

In 1911, a man told the story of his friend who, on a tour with his family, asked for his bill at a lunch stop:

“Bring the bill, please. We have had four sandwiches and four pieces of apple pie. Wait a minute, though. What has the chauffeur downstairs?”
“The chauffeur, sir, has had a Parmesan omelet, a grilled brook trout, lamb cutlets and pease, an ice, a cup of black coffee, a 15-cent cigar and a pint of champagne.”⁷⁷

More problems for owners, and delicious irony for the less-than-millionaire. But nothing exotic anymore. In 1912 *The Chicago Tribune* ran a piece called, “From Preacher to Chauffeur,” about a Missouri parson who exchanged the Cloth for the Chauffeur’s Cap and a taxi. “...I can do lots of good where good is most needed,” he said.⁷⁸ It seemed normal, and no one accused him of serving Mammon rather the Lord from the driver’s seat. With the sudden popular consciousness of the automobile starting in 1909, the chauffeured car was one among the larger mix. Into the age of self-driving, the start of which my view marks at 1912, but which was not more fully upon us until the 1920s (and most fully after WWII), the chauffeured “motorist” became, once again, the anomaly, and, thereby, more subject to distinction and ridicule. For this reason chauffeur and limousine jokes have persisted to this day.⁷⁹

While satire serves to ridicule, it also acts as a defense mechanism. In 1904, an advertising trade magazine wondered that automobilists who subscribed to *Life* didn’t take offense at the magazine’s constant lampooning of automobiles:

⁷⁵ “Automobile Jokes and Stories,” p. 14

⁷⁶ “Automobile Jokes and Stories,” p. 20

⁷⁷ “Short Humorous Stories,” *Boston Globe*, September 10, 1911

⁷⁸ “From Preacher to Chauffeur,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 10, 1912

⁷⁹ Modern examples include jokes of Einstein’s and the Pope’s chauffeurs. Write the author for the punch lines.

It is said that *Life's* automobile satire and cartooning have done more to stimulate this industry than has any other publication in the field. This seems a remarkable statement, but the facts bear it out.⁸⁰

The editors of *Life* explained that “a large proportion” of its subscribers owned automobiles. “They are fond of sport, and as a rule they are well-to-do people.”⁸¹ They didn’t take offense at the jokes since they supported *Life's* strong editorial position against “lawless automobilists.” Of course, the editors didn’t want to claim as their own the “worst enemies of the automobile business,” the kind that “stirs up prejudice against automobiles...” Of course not. But did those types of motorists not read *Life*, having taken offense at the cartoons? Doubtful. *Life's* self-proclaimed salvation of the automobile was misplaced. What it did do, however, was to help all readers, motorists, anti-motorists, and scorchers alike, to find a common view of what an automobile was, was not, and was supposed to be.

In the academic study, “The Lore of the Lizzie Label,” a 1930 look at the meaning of Ford jokes at the end of the Tin Lizzie era, B. A. Botkin proposed that the self-directed satire of Model T owners followed the “psychology of the defense mechanism” and served, as against “more distinguished pedigrees and more money in the bank,” as a means of “forestalling or averting criticism.”⁸² Satire and humor may well do just that, and we can see elements of it in self-directed jokes of automobilists. However, that would little explain *Life's* claim that its cartoons, jokes, and parodies halted rather than defended “lawless automobilists” and scorchers. *Life's* self-appointed role was no self-defense mechanism. It was a purposefully antagonistic attempt to distinguish one type of motorist from another. Still, is there not therein an element of apology in all the protests by the motorists, a “don’t blame us” and “not-guilty by-no-association” plea?

“No issue affecting the automobile stirred more controversy at the time or has since been more misunderstood than early attempts to regulate the motor vehicle,” wrote Flink.⁸³ He then cataloged the various forms of regulation and opposition and proponents to it, with motorists lobbying strenuously on one or the other side, but always with a strong eye against “reactionary legislation” to, especially, speeding.⁸⁴ Long before Woodrow Wilson pointed it out, motorists learned the kind of reactions they provoked. In 1902 arose a series of often near-deadly attacks on motorists in the New York area, usually as result of

⁸⁰ “Ads and Autos,” *Life*, March 31, 1904

⁸¹ “Ads and Autos,” *Life*, March 31, 1904

⁸² *American Speech*, December 1930, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 84-85

⁸³ Flink, p. 166

⁸⁴ Flink, p. 185

some killing of a pedestrian by an automobile.⁸⁵ Flink underestimates the role of the motorists in creating automobile regulations. The AAA was formed expressly to promote, in part, “good behavior” by its members. While individual motorists may have loathed and defied speed limits and their enforcement, as a body they were not opposed to the limits, merely to unreasonable limits and unduly severe enforcement. Like any good organization, motorists wanted auto and driver licensing, especially for chauffeurs, in order to maintain hegemony and manage competition. For motorists, self-policing was survival. Cartoons depicting the dangers of automobiles were not funny. They were warnings -- propaganda. Jokes about the dangers of automobiles made light of the danger but never glorified it. The point was easy: cars were dangerous. The humor came of one’s self-affliction by it, a matter of choice, if a bad one. The satire was both humor and education. The dangers of automobiles never went away, and neither did the propaganda and the regulation. They were merely assumed by society as a whole -- the socialization of road death, if you will -- and of the jokes about it:

A man went to an insurance office to have his life insured the other day.
“Do you cycle?” the insurance agent asked.
“No,” said the man.
“Do you motor?”
“No.”
“Do you, then, perhaps fly?”
“No, no,” said the applicant laughing. “I have no dangerous habits.”
But the agent interrupted him curtly.
“Sorry, sir,” he said, “but we no longer insure pedestrians.”⁸⁶

Or here, from 1920:

There is one automobile to every sixteen people in the United States. The population may therefore be roughly proportioned as six riders to ten dodgers.⁸⁷

Parody familiarizes an issue, especially during a time of hysteria. In 1902, a year of great public clamor over automobiles, the *Washington Post* noted,

The automobile is simply going through a stage of development, in connection with public regard, that every new thing goes through if it posses any side more dangerous than a sofa pillow. We have before us a

⁸⁵ See “Scorching Through 1902: ‘The Automobile Terror,’” *Automotive History Review* (SAH), Summer, 2003

⁸⁶ “Automobile Jokes and Stories,” p. 15

⁸⁷ “Amusing Automobile Actualities,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 12, 1920, quoting from the *Syracuse Post Standard*

copy of a Philadelphia newspaper of a date not so very, very ancient, in which the perils of the use of illuminating gas -- then an impeding novelty --are enlarged upon, and the public are warned that they are taking their lives in their hands in encouraging this innovation upon the good old sperm oil, wax, and tallow habit.”⁸⁸

But, warned *The Post*, if chauffeurs don’t slow down and if they don’t stop frightening horses, they’ll never earn the acceptance of other useful novelties that at first so alarmed:

Automobilists will learn wisdom, one of these days, and then they will have neither disease, nor the police, nor popular wrath to fear.⁸⁹

By 1906 that warning had not been heeded, or, it was impossible to heed. Society turned to law and public scolding, such as Woodrow Wilson’s, to keep down the vile motorist. As Judge Brown noted of automobiles in 1908,

Their popularity among those who used them was only exceeded by their unpopularity with those who did not use them. The reason is obvious. To the *insider* they exhibited only their attractive features; to the outsider, only their repulsive ones. To nearly everyone but the occupants they were an inconvenience; to many a nuisance, and to some a veritable terror.⁹⁰

After reviewing the history of road regulations, liability, and law and their applicability to the automobile, Judge Brown remained unconvinced, as late as 1908 this, that the automobile had been sufficiently leashed:

The future of the automobile depends principally upon the chauffeur and his sponsors. If he observes faithfully the speed laws of the various

⁸⁸ “Automobiling in the Future,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 1902. Some more from the editorial:

Some of the oldest inhabitants will recall the fit of shivers which their elders used to feel whenever they boarded a railroad train and started off with a shriek and a ding-dong. Steam-heating had to make its way against fearful odds of prejudice from persons who preferred burning up to scalding or a sudden voyage into upper space. Stairs are still tramped by some timid folk because elevators cannot be trusted; and the telephone, we know, draws the lightning straight into our houses and hastens our deaths from electric shock! Nevertheless, though invention goes on, the world continues to have a good many inhabitants.

When he first got one, my father held a frying pan up to the microwave when using it. The machine still makes him nervous.

⁸⁹ “Automobiling in the Future”

⁹⁰ “The Status of the Automobile”

localities (and herein lies the main obstacle to his popularity) he may expect to be accorded such rights as his superior speed requires for the perfect operation of his machine; but if he persists in defying these laws, he must expect legislation more drastic than any yet attempted; for after all, those who do not use automobiles are still a large majority and control the legislatures.

Note the plain assumption here of class in automobile use. And compare it to this lecture from *The New York Times* but two years later on a very public exhibition of the kind of lawless driving that Judge Brown had warned against, now by the nation's premier citizen, the President of the United States:

President Taft is not to be blamed for liking to go fast when he is out in an automobile. Therein he only shows a trait common to such part of humanity that is privileged to use this most delightful -- barring aeroplanes, perhaps -- of vehicles yet invented by man. When, however, he goes immoderately fast, as he seems to have done in the outskirts of Pittsburgh on Sunday, and, as according to report, he has often done before in other places, he sets a rather bad example for the people who lack his immunity from arrest. Some day he may run over somebody in one of these wild rides, and the somebody will be as dead, and remain dead as long, as if it had not been the Presidential car that killed him.⁹¹

Two years later and the automobile was yet thought of as a privilege -- but not one reserved for the chauffeured or any particular class.⁹² The privilege was now accepted to be available to all, as the nation's chief exemplar wanted to prove as he raced about the nation, everywhere he could, by automobile. *The Times* worried that Taft's scorching would inspire to dangerous speeds those drivers with less competence than the White House chauffeurs, whom the editors praised for their skill. Were *The Times* concern limited to professional chauffeurs -- and their passengers of the privilege -- Taft's example would not have been dangerous. As the editors explained in a later editorial regarding a New York State law that failed to regulate the owner-driver:

Chief among the statute's faults is its failure to subject the owners of automobiles who drive their own machines to an examination which would make their competency something more than an assumption, based on nothing more relevant than ability to pay a few thousand -- or a few hundred -- dollars for one of these vehicles. As an almost invariable rule, the hired chauffeur, against whom all the severities and most of the restrictions provided by the new law are directed, knows enough about

⁹¹ "Setting a Bad Example," *New York Times*, editorial, May 3, 1910

⁹² Note the word "privileged" is a modifier as *The Times* used it here, not a noun.

his car to drive it safely if he will. Only too many owners, however, go out on the road after an hour or two of instruction from an agent who thinks little of anything except getting back to his own work, which is that of selling more automobiles.⁹³

What a remarkable change so short a time from Judge Brown! Now, for “a few hundred” dollars one could join the ranks of the obnoxious automobilist, too!⁹⁴

Of all the charges against the automobile, exclusivity was the most damning. For the rich, automobiles were too damned useful, too much damned fun to give up. And once everyone else got hold of ‘em, they fell to the same disease. The automobile’s new popularity did not change its obnoxious qualities; it shared those qualities with more and more people. This type of talk from *The Times* in 1912 was never heard back in 1906:

While the automobile is no longer the object of anything like the antagonism with which it once had to contend, and one hears now comparatively little about the “scorching” that formerly was the subject of constant discussion and denunciation, still the machine can hardly be said to have the love and admiration of all, and the large part of the public which doesn’t do any riding in motor cars is resigned to, rather than contented with, the dangers and the annoyances created by them. It behooves the automobilists, therefore, to reduce both the dangers and the annoyances as much as possible. By so doing they will in time turn the mild dislike of non-users which has succeeded the old-time hatred into favor, and then will the motor folk escape from not a few restrictions that they have brought upon themselves by lack of consideration for others.⁹⁵

“Mild dislike” was great progress. By the year’s end, *The Times* had declared “The All Conquering Automobile.”⁹⁶ Until that time, both questions and humor of automobiles were confined to the upper classes. Chauffeurs, automobile elopements, breakdowns, and

⁹³ “Owners Unduly Favored,” *New York Times*, editorial, August 4, 1910

⁹⁴ Note that good, cheap used cars were available from the earliest days, but their general circulation was limited to the carriage class.

⁹⁵ “Unnecessary and Obnoxious,” *New York Times*, editorial, March 5, 1912. The editors’ complaint regarded the use of the “muffler cut-out,” which unloosed engine noise. It seems that some drivers used it to “get a clear track ahead” (by scaring pedestrians) and others to pretend that their car was more powerful than it really was. Sound familiar? Along with auto “smoking” -- exhaust, noise was the latest complaint. Please note the absence of class.

⁹⁶ Editorial, October 20, 1912. The title was in reference to military use of autos. The sentiment was for all-round use of the machines: “The vehicle which began as the toy of pleasure-takers, and speedily conquered its way in to the uses of trade, has now won its way into armaments of nations.” *The Times* complained that the U.S. military had not readily enough adopted the technology (a problem originating in the Roosevelt Administration’s anti-automobile bias).

all the joys and absurdities of the automobile were things for those who could afford them, even if they didn't own them. A remarkable change occurs starting 1909. While automobile ownership does not give way to the lower classes, humor about them does. In late 1908, we find this story:

Mr. Fattipose was talking about automobiles and things. "I'll give this to myself," said he, "that before I felt opulent enough to buy an automobile myself I didn't hate the fellows who already possessed 'em. That may sound incredible, but it's a fact. I didn't even feel jealous of them. I envied them a bit, of course, but I was glad to see them enjoying themselves in their cars, and I made up my mind that I was going to have one of those things just as soon as I was able to see the money end of it Now, one of these richly appointed carriages drawn by a fine pair of horses and including the expensive trappings costs just as much as a good automobile. Why, then, should the man on the street who has to scurry like all Harry to escape from the rapidly driven carriage, accept the arrogant driving of the coachman, as a matter of course, and offer no protest or word of resentment when he scowls and growls savage things when he hears the toot of an approaching automobile that beings to slow up about 30 feet away from him, if he doesn't feel like exhibiting the necessary alacrity in getting out of the way? The automobile isn't any new thing any more, and that's why I'm becoming doubtful whether folks who don't own them will ever make up their minds that automobilists are human beings. The grand remedy would be to provide everybody with an automobile. That would fix it all right."⁹⁷

Class yet pervaded the discussion: just give the everyone a car and they'll understand. The tone here was defensive. Progress, yes, but no closure. Into 1909, it became a flat truism that if you actually try a car, you'll be hooked. First from our Japanese ambassador, Hashimura Togo, humorist Irwin Wallace's creation, who was taken on a wild, dangerous automobile ride, during which the chauffeur told him, "To be a Chaffer a person must be accustomed to look Death in the teeth; so what could he fear from mere human mans?" Later, Togo warns his niece, upon the inquiry, "How do it feel to ride in a ottomobile, Uncle Togo?":

Never try it for the first time... because who knows when it might become a habit.

And so it was. If you just gave it a chance, you'd be hooked. The man who convinced more people than any other to give it a try, explained it for himself. To a room of millionaire motorists, President Taft declared that the automobile, "coming in as a toy of

⁹⁷ "Jealous of His Auto," *Washington Post*, October 18, 1908, quoting from *The New York Sun*.

the wealthier classes is going to prove the most useful of them all to all classes, rich and poor.” He learned it, as did Togo, by falling for its charms:

There was a time in the use of the automobile -- I shared it myself when I was plodding along with the tandem that nature gave me, as Holmes called it, when a spirit of intolerance was manifested against the horrible looking machine that the automobile then was to the ordinary eye. There was an intimation of “get-out-of-the-way or we will run you over,” and a resentment against those who were using it until you yourself got into the automobile. Then human nature was shown in the quickness with which the attitude of mind can change, and you regarded as utterly unreasonable the slowness of the pedestrian and the idea that he had any right to any part of the street, either for crossing or anything else. And then the utter outrage of having any dogs at all in any community that should get in the way of that magnificent instrument of travel and comfort!⁹⁸

Whereas the satire in the “formative stage” condemned the automobile class for causing harm to innocent others, the socialized automobile was no longer distinguished, it just was, and it was there for all, good and bad. Outrage at automotive death was poignant if at the hands of a rich man, and his tool was to be condemned. If the same crime was committed by someone not of privilege, the automobile itself was no longer at fault, just the particular act in which it was involved.⁹⁹ By contrast, in 1905, we find this view:

The Charge of the Four Hundred

Half a block, half a block
Half a block onward,
All in their ‘motobiles
Rode the Four Hundred
“*Forward!*” the owners shout,
“*Racing-car!*” “*Runabout!*”
Into Fifth Avenue
Rode the Four Hundred

“*Forward!*” the owners said.
Was there a man dismay’d?
Not though the chauffeurs knew

⁹⁸ Taft speech to the Automobile Club of America, December 20, 1911, Taft Papers, Library of Congress

⁹⁹ Modern gun control debate operates in an opposite manner, either defending the tool with, “guns don’t kill people, people do,” or blaming it instead of its user in the anti-gun position. Class permeates the anti-gun debate insofar as guns are considered more evil in lower rather than upper-class areas.

Some one had blundered.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to kill or die.
Into Fifth Avenue
Rode the Four Hundred.¹⁰⁰

Come 1913 we find:

The motorist (who had run over a stone-breaker's toe -- What! You want \$500 for a crushed foot? Nonsense! I'm not a millionaire. The Pessimistic Stone-Breaker -- No, an' I ain't no bloomin' centipede, either."¹⁰¹

So wealth is our anomaly. Autos were bad if only for the rich, and okay if for everybody else.

Humor, of course, reflects more than it creates. So far as it creates, it takes what already exists and renders it different, perhaps ridiculous, perhaps funny, perhaps more sympathetic, and, above all, more familiar. Browsing through magazines and newspapers of the early Motor Age, I wonder that readers of the age were not sedated by the constant news of automotive mayhem. I see in today's newspaper this morning a quadruple murder-suicide outside of Washington, DC. It's not the first such thing to happen, although it rarely occurs. Still, I'm shocked, I'm outraged, and I'm not at all surprised. These things happen. Just not to me. It's from somebody different, somebody well away. I'm safe. Then I see another item about an awful car crash. That, I can feel, especially as my daughter is learning to drive.¹⁰² There but for the Grace of God go we. So who worried about cars in 1905, or 1912? For most people in 1905, car crashes were like random violence that one just hoped not to fall upon one's place and time. Shocking, but at least not me, and damn those rich people who caused it all. (Think inner city violence and class or racial attitudes towards it.) Come 1912, more and more people are motorists themselves or have gone for a ride in a car. It could be them.

Cars remained dangerous no matter who drove and rode in them. The number of automobile deaths in 1907 was nothing compared to later years, of course. It was not

¹⁰⁰ "Auto Fun"

¹⁰¹ "Automobile Jokes and Stories," p. 20

¹⁰² The other day she drifted into a car in front of her, not realizing that she was moving and that her foot was not fully upon the brake. My father, now 70, did the same thing: as he drifted towards the car to his front -- in which my mother sat at a red light and helplessly watched -- she honked and shouted. He thought she was angry at him for some reason, and couldn't figure out why she was backing into him! Oh, yes, I worry for them all.

until 1912 that in New York City automobile fatalities exceeded those caused by wagons.¹⁰³ For all the anti-automobile hysteria that Illinois state Representative Robinson faced over his automobile law, there were in 1907 a total of 324 automobile deaths nationwide.¹⁰⁴ The vitriol far exceeded the reality. And it wasn't very funny. Come 1909 and the new democratization of the automobile, we could start joking:

“He bought his automobile on the instalment plan.”

“Yes, and the way he runs it, I expect to hear of his being taken to the hospital in the same way, some day.”¹⁰⁵

Now, we move into a new automobile hysteria, expense and leveraged buying, that the nation would bankrupt itself buying autos. It was quite a turn. In 1905 a pastor warned,

The son of modern wealthy parents is a fool. You may give a man a million and an automobile, but he is still a fool.¹⁰⁶

Unfortunately for this point of view, things got worse when it wasn't just the rich using the machines. In 1910, complaining that more money was spent buying and maintaining autos than on “church work,” a pastor denounced the “overinfatuation of the automobile.”¹⁰⁷ For the technology, that was the highest possible compliment. The next compliment came to “mass automobility,” and thanks to Mr. Ford, as the Model T took over both automotive consciousness and its humor. But Ford must thank the other ones and things that prepared the way for him. As the machines started turning at Highland Park, G. F. Garter noted the new day in automobiles:

In 1910 approximately 150,000 American citizens will part with their antipathy to automobiles and become the worst, because the newest, of motor maniacs Whatever he may say for public consumption, the average man's real grievance against the automobile is that he doesn't own it.¹⁰⁸

Garter then discussed the possibilities at hand in the burgeoning market for the low-priced car, especially a certain, unnamed 5-passenger touring car that went for \$850. That and other inexpensive autos, including high-quality second-hand cars that were readily

¹⁰³ “Automobile Death Harvest Doubled in Three Years,” *New York Times*, February 2, 1913

¹⁰⁴ “Romances and Tragedy's [sic] of the Automobile”

¹⁰⁵ “Humor of Life,” *Life*, January, 1910, quoting from *Farm Journal*

¹⁰⁶ “Calls Sons of Rich Fools,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1905

¹⁰⁷ “Pastor Denounces Autos,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1910

¹⁰⁸ “Automobiles For Average Incomes,” *Outing Magazine*, January, 1910. Garter underestimated both the 1909 sales (guessing 100,000 as opposed to the actual 128,000) and 1910's actual 181,000.

available, meant that the automobile was there for just about anyone who wanted it -- and, finally, they wanted it:

In brief, the automobile is getting into the hands of the people just as fast as the two hundred million dollars invested in its manufacture and distribution can place it there. Just as rapidly the time is approaching when it will cease to be a nine day's wonder, when manufacturers will have to pay regular rates for their press notices and when the popular prejudice against the automobile will take its place in the museum of history along with the once prevalent belief that "love apples," otherwise tomatoes, were poisonous.

Whether they could afford it or not, whether they bought cars or not, it was not when the multitudes actually used autos that the Motor Age truly began ("automobility"), it was when the mass of people accepted motor cars generally, especially as against their previous opposition to the technology:

Farmer Grayneck -- "Spouse you'll get an automobile now that everybody's doin' it?"

Farmer Hornbeak -- "Not so you could notice it. Had my pocketbook vaccinated and it took."¹⁰⁹

A keen expression of the public's attitude towards something is in popular humor. The Ottenheimer twenty-five cent joke books, which the company claimed sold by the millions, first took to automobiles by the volume in 1913, with "James the Chauffeur" on "Automobile Jokes and Stories" and then "Ford Jokes and Stories." Automobile jokes started with the first machines, so we should note with care that a mass-market, low-humor press did not see a popular market for automobile jokes until that 1913.

Early that year, Henry Ford looked back to before the late triumph of the automobile. The comments came at the beginning of the Ford legend, nearly a year before Five Dollar Day and well before the Peace Ship, the lawsuits, the antisemitism. Ford was known in 1913, but not the way he became to be known later:

The first motor car was a crude affair when judged by present-day standards. People were inclined to be very much "from Missouri" during the first few years of the industry. Every time a car was sold it was by overcoming prejudice. Only the very rich were willing and could afford to own a car. The man with the average income did not have the price to risk on something the benefits of which existed only in theory and had yet to be demonstrated So it is no longer necessary to convince a man

¹⁰⁹ "Automobile Jokes and Stories," p. 22

that a motor-driven vehicle is practicable. The whole problem to-day is one of the greatest value and dependability of service for the lowest price. In the car that combines efficiency, continued service, and low price, the practical man of to-day finds his ideal vehicle.¹¹⁰

There, now, was something not to joke about. The socialization of the automobile was complete.

¹¹⁰ "Everyman's Car," *Outlook*, March 22, 1913

*Humor is a prelude to faith and
Laughter is the beginning of prayer.*

- Reinhold Niebuhr, "Discerning the Signs of the Times," 1949¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Bartlett's 16th edition. p 684 (17)