

THE MAGIC OF THE THUMB

A Rambling Account of a Family and a Car

I SUPPOSE, taking one thing with another, there didn't used to be a meaner man than our father, when he wanted to be. Of course he's only little and we girls are tall, being like our mother in that respect. And I suppose, being little and being in some danger of being imposed upon by the people of higher altitudes, our father has to be especially careful of his rights, so they won't get tramped on. But there is such a thing as being too careful, and he is that.

For years and years we five have wanted an automobile. That's Julia and George and I, and mother and father. That was when we were poorer than we are now, so we couldn't have the automobile. In the very first days, when motors were just invented, we never thought about owning one any more than we'd think about buying a whole train of cars to-day or an office building for a country residence. In those times it was only silk-hatted people who owned motor cars, and they trained their coachmen as chauffeurs and made them wear silk hats too, and livery, and sit up straight. Those times dad was just a junior book-keeper down in his office on King Street, and we had hardish times getting along, so the neighbours wouldn't know I wore George's things cut down. By and by the funny papers began making jokes about the way automobiles would get stuck on hills and in mud holes, and we would all laugh at the jokes and think how foolish the motor car business was, anyhow. But after awhile they got motors so they would run without breaking down every block, and instead of bicycles streaming out College Street on a Sunday afternoon, it'd be nothing but motors. But father had enough to do at times to keep our mother from borrowing money from her rich uncle, who'd always been offering to do something handsome for us, without dreaming about automobiles. Being a little man, he refused to be in debt or under obligation to anyone, worst of all to our mother's uncle, who was tall and handsome, with a big nose and a sort of Emperor's mouth. And he owned a big automobile painted red. We felt a great deal better about our not having an automobile when people began saying automobiles were only driven

referred to father's family as being "low" just on account of that one aunt and her pipe. Soon after mother had seen the old lady being driven in the automobile, we discovered a great many really respectable people rode in them, and our minister came to call on us in one one day and seemed quite proud to, too. It turned out it was his first ride in one, and he couldn't talk of anything else while he was paying us the visit until he prayed and went.

"Now I know for sure," said George, who's the oldest, "that father's been encouraging us 't believe motor cars are sinful, just so's we wouldn't be wishing for one."

Mother said nothing, but Julia piped up and said:

hands with him in little snatches when he could manage the wheel with one hand. I knew this by the way she kept her shoulder still, so mother wouldn't notice if her hand strayed away. We drove a great many miles and felt fine driving up in front of our house again with the headlights showing up the neighbours sitting on their front verandahs, while we'd been motoring with George's young man. We'd had a great time and we forgot to feel vengeful toward dad. Dad was sitting in the kitchen with his feet on a kitchen chair and the tea-pot at his elbow. Our girl was out and he'd been making himself tea and reading poetry. There are two things dad likes: they are poetry and power! He says money isn't worth so very much, and dresses and silk gloves and jewels are of no account beside the things of

Scenes that are opened by—the Magic of the Thumb. The joys of the road are known only to those who seek them and chiefly those who seek them in a car. One of these views was taken in Ontario, another on



Vancouver Island and the third on the mainland of British Columbia, among the mountains. The increasing mileage of good roads in Canada is extending the range of the Magic of the Thumb.



"And father's got a better position now. He's local manager of the company. He could buy us an automobile now. He ought to buy one."

Mother, who's got mean feet and rheumatism, didn't say much, but she seemed to be thinking a great deal and she looked as big as the city hall tower beside dad when he came home that night, and we thought dad had a sort of sneaky and guilty look, as though he knew we'd found him out. And he was specially pleasant to everybody and told us the joke he'd read from the front page of the paper that morning, which is all we ever see of the paper,

real value like poetry. He is always called on to recite at his lodge when they have special occasions. And Power! Dad would be a Prussian—in manners and methods—if he could. He has always believed in efficiency and soldiering and pomp. Perhaps that is because he has never been able to possess any of these things, or get near them himself—except efficiency. He is wonderful on that, they say. If he could he would be a Czar, but being small and having tall daughters and a tall wife, he takes out his wishing in being stubborn.

By and by George's young man didn't ask the rest of us to go joy-riding, except once a week or so. Every other time he'd take Georgie out alone. They were engaged, father having consented rather than bring on a struggle which would only have shown how little and helpless he was against George and Mother and Julia and me—and Larry. George told us quite plain one night that we didn't always need to say "yes" when Larry drove up and asked all of us to go motoring. He had to ask us all out of politeness, she said, but we had to refuse out of politeness. So we did, and we sat at home and Dad thundered out poetry till you'd have thought he was a giant with seven eyes and a sword as high as our house. But when he got through the poetry and turned 'round to the table for his cold tea, you knew at once he wasn't, and Dad, too, knew he wasn't, and looked little and defiant. We stood the poetry pretty well till we remembered that Dad ought to buy us an automobile. Then we set at him and even our mother helped—for she was thinking of her feet and his rheumatism—but Dad was adamant. First he said he couldn't afford one, but we proved he could. Then he said they were dangerous, and we answered that till finally he just jabbed his spectacles on, flattened out his book of poems and went on reading without listening to us at all.

"Think of the power of money," says Dad, one night. "Money is coined power. It is the power to buy other men's services!"

"Hmph," says Julia. "And it's the power to keep folks miserable when they could be having a good time."

"Twaddle!" snarls m'father. "Twaddle, Jul-ee. Money, properly used, is a power for good."

"Yes, if y' use it," says Julia, and Dad looked crushed. He hadn't seen that answer coming. He was just finding his place in his book again when

by "fast" people, and only "horsey" looking women were seen in such things. That helped for a long time and made us feel sort of patronizing even to our mother's uncle—who was supposed to be a kind of benevolent black sheep, anyway—and we decided we wouldn't want an automobile even if we could afford one, or if one was given us for a present by anybody. We felt very proud and superior to automobile people, and mother'd click her tongue and shake her head as much as to say, "I told you so," whenever we'd read of some scandalous party of joy-riders getting run into a ditch and killed. You'd have thought we were blood-thirsty, though we weren't really.

ONE day mother saw an old woman with very white hair being driven in a motor. She was surprised, because old ladies are nearly always respectable, except when they smoke, like a great-aunt of father's did—till she died, and mother always

dad being, as I said before, mean about some things.

We were all getting ready to go at dad and corner him and make him say why he wouldn't buy an automobile, but just then George got a "bow," and the "bow" had an automobile with a black body, and green stripes. We three girls all agreed he was a handsome "bow" for Georgie and advised Georgie she ought to take him as he would make a splendid father for her children, and we hinted that if George didn't take him we'd be glad to be nice to him just for his own sake, whether he had an automobile or not. But George only laughed and pretended to box our ears, and the next night her young man came and invited us all to go motoring in his car. He even took mother, but dad wouldn't go. He said he had some reading to do, though I thought to myself it was just because he didn't intend to be patronized by any six-foot young whipper-snapper who owned an automobile. George sat in the front seat beside Larry—that was her young man's name—and held