

# The Farmer's Advocate

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### EDITORIAL

#### INJUSTICE ON THE HIGHWAYS.

"I would suggest that you begin a warfare in the columns of 'The Farmer's Advocate' against the practice of killing people and destroying property on the public highway by the use of automobiles. It seems to me that anyone who can see justice in such highway robbery as our Government legalizes must be warped indeed. You advocate split-log drags and other devices to better the road conditions; why not agitate for a law that will prevent the makers of good roads from being deprived of the privilege of using them? Why not agitate for an expression of the electorate of rural districts at the next municipal elections? We have nothing against autos, but let the owners of them find their own roads; then they can smash each other to their hearts' content, and, if we venture on their tracks, we will put up with the consequences."

The foregoing letter, recently to hand, as well as others published from time to time, raise a complicated issue which cannot be disposed of with a cavalier imputation of "prejudice against a new invention." Apart from all questions of law and jurisdiction, there are principles of equity and public rights at stake, for which it is the business of our legislators to exercise careful regard. On this, as on all other matters, we are unwilling to adopt any narrow view, and the great majority of our readers are, without doubt, similarly minded. We are reluctant to say to any class of people that such and such methods of propulsion shall be debarred the freedom of our highways. Above all, we are loath to adopt any attitude that history might pronounce as opposition to progress. It is for these reasons that the reign of fear and carnage of death and destruction have been tolerated as long as they have. One consideration tending to forbearance has been the knowledge that not all autoists were utterly callous and reckless, and it was hoped that once the novelty of the plaything wore off, reckless driving would become less frequent, while familiarity would render horses accustomed to the new terror, as they had previously grown accustomed to bicycles. To further mollify the long-suffering rural public, it has been predicted that motor vehicles would eventually come into vogue among farmers as means of convenience and pleasure.

In gracious accord with these and similarly magnanimous views, legislation has been framed with a view to curbing the more flagrant abuses, undertaking to limit the speed of automobiles, and to provide means for identification by numbers, in order that violations of the law might be punished more certainly and damages collected where warranted. There is no doubt the increasing number of motor vehicles have resulted in the majority of horses in the older-infested districts becoming reasonably immune to motor-fright, and some inveterate enemies of autos and automobilists have come to look upon them as unpreventable evils. But an incorrigible evil is an evil none the less, and if we could bulk up in one heartrending sensation all the distress and inconvenience occasioned to the hundreds of thousands of farmers, farmers' children and farmers'

wives—saying nothing about urban pedestrians—owing to the presence of this expensive traffic on our roads, would it not vastly outweigh the small quota of real pleasure and advantage obtained by the dust-choked, grimy-eyed, heavy-veiled, purse-proud beneficiaries thereof? For a luxury that costs so much to its participants and entails such danger, displeasure and loss to other users of the highway, automobiling surely looks like a sorry form of enjoyment. Even in the older districts the automobile is still a curse, while in every new section its advent is followed by trepidation and inconvenience, like unto that caused by an outbreak of smallpox.

Summed up, here is the indictment against the automobile on country roads: Weekly accidents, resulting in destruction of property, mutilation and death; repair seldom complete, and often impossible; punishment frequently evaded; farmers, who built and who maintain country roads, deprived of no small part of the pleasure of using them; wives and children obliged to forego trips they otherwise might take; inconvenience and loss of valuable time by the head of the house in busy seasons; people dissuaded from attending church, or compelled to go at serious risk of mishap; the value of many a spirited horse discounted; clouds of ill-smelling vapor, also of dust, raised and scattered over the country, to the serious injury of fruit, vegetable, forage crops and pasture, and to the annoyance and injury to health of travellers. Lastly, it is asserted, on scientific authority, that automobiles destroy roads by sucking up dust, thus reducing the crown and breaking the surface bond, allowing pieces of stones, gravel and sand to be jarred loose by traffic, and the hard-finished surface destroyed.

The automobile regulations at present in force in Ontario were enacted in 1906, in the Act to Regulate the Speed and Operation of Motor Vehicles. This measure provides that the maximum speed for such vehicles on country roads shall be not more than 15 miles per hour. Within the limits of a city, town or village, the highest speed allowed is 10 miles per hour. When meeting or overtaking other vehicles on country roads, 7 miles only is permitted. In passing a rider or driver, the person operating the car shall signal his desire to pass, and give the driver an opportunity to turn out to a place of safety. He shall also stop on request, and remain stationary as long as necessary. In addition to this, it is provided that persons in charge of cars shall use every reasonable precaution not to frighten horses, and are prohibited from driving in a careless and reckless manner. Section 11 provides that, in the case of an accident, the car shall return to the scene of the accident, and, upon request, the operator shall give his name and address in writing; also that of the owner, and the number of the license. In the event of an offense against this section, arrest may be made without a warrant. In all cases of accident, the onus is cast on the owner of the car. The Act also provides that the license number shall be displayed on the front of the car, as well as on the back, and searchlights are prohibited.

The trouble is to enforce the law, to apprehend the offenders, to make sure of the number on the machine, to retain a clear impression of the circumstances in the melee following an accident, or to prove to the satisfaction of the court that the speed limit has been exceeded. The worst offenders are the hardest to bring to time. Besides, law proceedings are so notoriously expensive and

unsatisfactory that one generally stands to lose more than he gains by carrying a case to the courts. Even if the law were scrupulously observed, much inconvenience would still result. The traffic is a nuisance at the best.

In view of all these facts, there is much to be said for the petition submitted by the Dominion Grange for submission to the Ontario Legislature, asking for further regulations in regard to motor traffic. It is asked that the speed in rural sections be limited to ten miles per hour in daylight, and seven miles between sunset and sunrise; lights carried to be limited to two, one in front and one in rear, of a strength not more than sufficient to throw a reflection fifty feet; that a man be not allowed to drive a car without a license based on strict examination; that no automobile traffic be allowed on rural highways on Sundays, Tuesdays and Saturdays, save by permission of the local county council; that the penalty for a third conviction, under any provision of the act, shall involve imprisonment without the option of a fine, together with cancellation of license; that, when a violation of any provision of the act results in damage to person or property, the penalty may be imprisonment for any offence, first, second or third; that the annual fee be increased and graded in accordance with the capacity of the vehicle; that provision be made for the enforcement of the act by Provincial officers, and that, when conviction is secured on complaint of a person not a Provincial officer, half the fine shall go to the person laying the charge.

In harmony, more or less, with the clauses of this petition, are several bills to amend the Motor Vehicle Act, introduced at the present session of the Provincial Legislature by a number of private members. One of the more drastic is Mr. Devitt's, which would provide that no motor vehicle should be allowed to run or stand upon any public highway in a town, township, incorporated village, or police village, during Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday in any week, or between the hours of 9 a. m. and 2 p. m. on Sunday. One by Mr. Bowyer would compel the driver of a motor vehicle meeting or overtaking a funeral procession to stop his vehicle, and, where practicable, turn out into any intersecting street, road or lane until the procession has passed. Others, by Mr. Ross and Mr. McIlroy, relate to infringements. All these bills are to be entrusted to a special committee of the Legislature.

The question is indeed an awkward one to deal with. One thing is certain: Motor vehicles should be heavily taxed, if only on account of the injury done to roads and crops. The restrictions should be close, and punishment for infraction exceedingly severe. As to the matter of limiting their use to certain days of the week, that would be a distinct hardship on the users, and only a palliative remedy for those for whose benefit it is designed. Another plan would be to stipulate a certain limited number of highways, conspicuously designated, for motor traffic, reserving all others for pedestrians and horse-drawn vehicles. Even this might work a hardship, unless modified, by preventing a farmer on a prohibited road from using an automobile. However, we fancy there are very few who would not willingly forego the privilege. The automobile is not by any means a sine qua non of civilization's progress, and, on the principle of the greatest good to the greatest number, automobile traffic should certainly be regulated far more thoroughly than has yet been attempted in this Province. Our columns are open to practical suggestions.