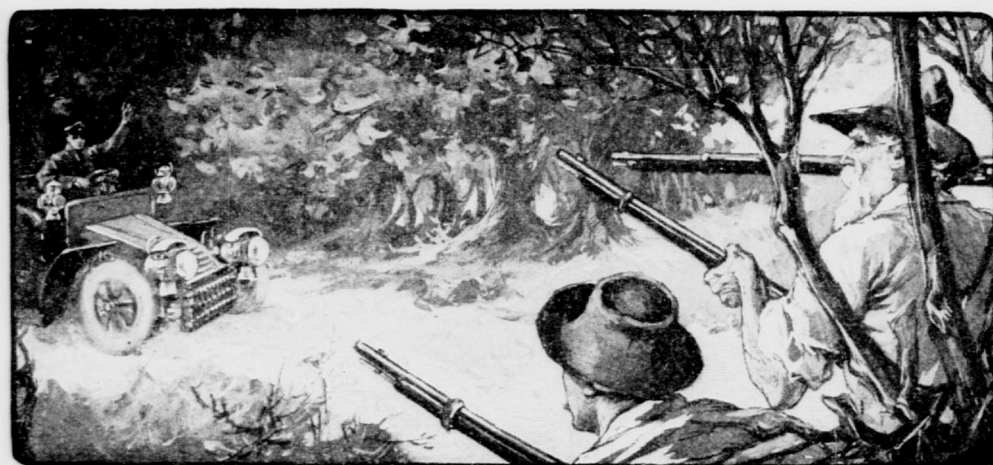


# AN AUTOMOBILE ADVENTURE

## WHEREIN CUPID GUIDED THE CHAUFFEUR



MY grandmother used to tell a story of the first steamboat that came up the river along which the family plantation extended for several miles. Some of the slaves were working by moonlight, when they heard the steamboat's whistle and saw the apparition of flame and smoke. Not a moment did they lose in making for the house at their topmost speed, and the faster they ran the more vivid became their fears. Big Sam, who was an exhorter and had more imagination than his fellows, led the procession and almost fell in the doorway. As soon as he could catch his breath he exclaimed between gasps:

"Hades am broke loose, an' de debil am a-swimmin' up de riber chawin' sinnahs an' spittin' out fiah an' brimstone!"

When the first railroad was opened in one of the Western States, a farmer, coming suddenly upon the new line, stood on the track and tried to stop the engine by holding out his hands, and the engineer was unable to prevent a tragedy.

The terror that a falling balloon causes in remote sections of the country sometimes is just as great now as it was in the early days of aerial experiments.

Those who live in the crowded centers of population practically have lost the feeling of astonishment; they are prepared for anything sensational in transportation and locomotion; but there are parts of the land where the new wonders of invention are unknown, and where the people are startled by such things as horseless vehicles.

Still, I never wholly believed Jamison's story about the negro bush-meeting in the South until I had had an experience of my own. Jamison was touring in the backwoods when he came upon a negro camp-meeting—a bush-meeting, it was called, because it was an assemblage without tents, a coming together of the negroes of the vicinity for revival services in the afternoon.

When Jamison hove in sight with his touring-car, the sounds of exhortation and shouting instantly ceased; then there was a mighty cry; then a relapse into nameless fear—and not a single negro would approach him or his "devil wagon."

Jamison tells the story with the necessary details. The explanation was that just before he came upon the scene the preacher had been vociferating: "Ye'd bettah git ready, sinnahs; ye'd bettah git ready right heah an' now, fer de chariot am a-comin', de chariot am a-comin', wid ole Gabriel tootin' de horn—" and just then Jamison appeared on the scene.

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It was pleasant to think that one might meet new adventures in an age when wonders have become prosaic, and so I decided to take my usual trip to Florida by easy stages and roundabout ways in my touring-car. I knew I should find many difficult roads, and there would be numerous commissary hardships; but I was not pushed for time, and the prospect of novelty was inviting.

I veered well to the west, so as to strike the more interesting life of the foothills of

### By Chester Peake

the Blue Ridge, and was several hundred miles below Mason and Dixon's Line before anything out of the usual happened. My observation showed that in most parts the auto was more or less familiar; but as I got well down into the pine belt where the settlements were few and far between and life was elementary my appearance caused women to drop their pans, and men to rub their eyes to see if they could believe their sight, and even dogs to swallow their growls in genuine and delightful consternation. Once two boys driving an ox-cart fled precipitately into the woods, and I had a hard time getting them back and convincing them that my machine was not a thing with wings that had taken its flight from another world.

Again I had trouble in getting shelter for the night, because the doubtful farmer declared: "Haow do we-uns know the blamed thing won't bust an' blow us inter kingdom come." We had to compromise by putting the machine in an old ramshackle shed a quarter of a mile away from the log hut in which the family slept—and, by the way, we all slept in the same room on the same rough floor, and when I got up in the morning I had more peaks and crevices in my anatomy than a mountain map.

Early in the afternoon of the following day I was going carefully along an excuse for a road through a wilderness of wonderful charm and beauty. I became anxious about the wear upon the tires, and stopped to see how they were faring. As I dismounted, I caught sight of a young man in the thick growth along the edge of the way.

"Hello!" I said.

"Hello yourself," he replied. "Who be you after?"



As Love's Chauffeur I Hope I Performed My Duty Well

#### Suddenly They Began to Raise Their Guns

"No one; I am merely on my way south." "What kind of an engine (pronounced enge-ine) is that?"

"An automobile."

"Runs itself, eh?"

"I don't pull it," I answered.

He came out to look at it. He had a good face, one of those blue-eyed, firm-mouthed, solid countenances that indicate fearlessness and meet any situation, however unfamiliar.

"Goin' fur?"

"I've got three or four hundred miles to make yet."

"How much before sundown?"

"It will depend upon the roads. Forty miles, I should say on a guess."

I was bending down doing some patching on the front wheel and not particularly caring for the inquisitiveness of my new acquaintance, and so when he said, "So long! Good luck!" I thanked him without looking up from my work, and dismissed the incident.

In a few minutes I got under way again and gave my thoughts to the wildness through which I was passing. I broke into a hearty laugh at the antics of a rabbit, whose enormous ears shot up straight and whose eyes seemed to be bulging out of his head, and later I slowed down to watch two squirrels that stopped their play to gaze at the wondrous thing that had invaded their forest. I had gone several miles when the road came to an opening, and a hundred yards distant I beheld three men—a tall patriarch with long whiskers and two younger persons, who may have been his sons.

They halted as though frozen in their tracks, and by some impulse which I did not understand I slowed down. Suddenly they began to raise their guns.

"Hold on there!" I exclaimed. "I'm a stranger down here, and don't want to be used as a target."

There was a minute of suspense—and they laughed, or rather smirked as though they felt sheepish; but I was glad to see the smile, for it meant safety.

"I do eternally declar'!" said the old man, rubbing his head and then pulling his beard, "ye knocked us clean plum' out! What in blazes is that there thing anyhaow?"

I tried to explain; but their wonder grew, until they had to accept it all without understanding it. "Well, say, mister, ye've got ther mule skinned ter death, ain't ye?" he finally said.

"What are you hunting to-day?" I asked. "Rabbits?"

"Yeh—a two-legged rabbit. Didn't happen to see him as ye come along, did ye? Smooth-faced young feller?"

"What has he done?"

"More'n plenty," was the grim reply.

"But you don't mean you're going to shoot him, do you?" I asked incredulously.

They laughed. "Wall, we don't calculate on a funeral all at once, but we may pepper him up some if he don't behave right."

I did not intend to become a party to the performance, and so I told them that I had seen no

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