THE AGE OF THE AVTO

BY

ELBERT HUBBARD
(FRA ELBERTUS)

THE ROYCFROTERS
EAST·AURORA·ERIE·COUNTY·N.Y.
NOTE: This booklet was written in 1910, when the automobile was just beginning to be felt as a "social influence." (General Motors was two years old. Production was starting to boom: Fifty-two auto makers turned out a total of 181,000 passenger cars that year. Buick led them all with more than 30,000 cars.)

Everybody was talking about the automobile. Elbert Hubbard, popular writer and lecturer of the time, observed:

"When you see a man who tells you what is going to happen if this benzine-buggy craze doesn’t stop, he is getting ready to buy one."

Many of his other observations in The Age of the Auto are as fresh and significant today as they were in 1910. This is a careful reproduction of the original booklet published by The Roycrofters, Elbert Hubbard’s famous printing shop at East Aurora, New York.
The Age of the Auto

"My lord, the carriage awaits without."
"Without what, base varlet, without what?"
"Without horses, my lord—it is an automobile."

That the automobile is here seems to be a fact beyond cavil.
That it is here to stay may safely be assumed.
The questions then for us to consider are these:
1. Why is it here?
2. What is its effect upon society?
3. What is its effect upon the individual who owns one?

As to why the auto is here, let it first be recorded that man is a migratory animal. The protest of the child, "I want to go somewhere," is a part of the race instinct and is not to be silenced. Man can not down nor still this universal desire for motion, movement, action—"to go somewhere."
The auto is here in answer to prayer, for "Prayer is the heart's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed."
Everything new in the world is the result of a want. If there had not been a desire for a horseless carriage, the inventors would not have imagined one, and then made the dream come true.

The auto is a result of the Law of Demand and Supply, in motion.

The desire to travel from place to place, rapidly and easily, is one of the signs of the times. It is a matter of human communication, a getting together of humanity—a big factor in human brotherhood.

Production and Transportation

A point of importance, the production of things comes first. Second in importance comes their transportation.

Man makes things, then he transports them. Also, he transports himself. Robert Fulton sent the "Clermont" on her trial trip up the Hudson in Eighteen Hundred Seven.

The first steamship to cross the Atlantic was the "Savannah." This was in Eighteen Hun-
dred Nineteen. And while an hon. gent. in the House of Commons was making a speech to the effect that no ship could carry enough fuel to feed her boilers on a transatlantic trip, the whistle of the "Savannah" was heard in the offing. She was answering his logic.

Later, the argument was put forth that the carrying of this awful mass of fire in the hold of a boat was flying in the face of Providence, and disaster was sure to come to every ship that incurred the risk.

But the steamship had come to stay, and still plows the waters.

About Seventeen Hundred Ninety came the discovery that a wagon moving on a rail, instead of on the dirt, could carry double the load.

The discovery by Watt of the expansive quality of water when subjected to heat gave the cue for the locomotive, which John Ruskin prophesied would ruin England. He declared that people would quit work to go trapesing up and down the land in search of thrills.
And, personally, Ruskin moved to Coniston, a place where the "screech of the iron horse would never be heard."

But the railroad had come to stay. Morse with his dot and dash came in Eighteen Hundred Forty-four as an added security—a necessity—in the running of trains in opposite directions on a single track. In Eighteen Hundred Seventy-six, Graham Bell, a canny Scot, gave us the telephone, in response to the universal desire for a quiet means of saying things to people out of sight. It was only a coup d'état that gave Broadway a horse-railroad and banished the 'bus.

Then came the cable-car, as an attempt to sidestep the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Our hearts bled for the poor old street-car horse, galloping, limping, panting, that we might fly through space at the rate of six miles an hour.

As a lover of the horse and a breeder of horses, I hail the automobile with glad acclaim. Horses never commanded so big a price as they do today: and all the time the demand
is for a higher-grade horse. Thus does the farmer thrive.

The electric car arrived as a matter of course, for when people want a thing they get it. We reach up in the air or dig down in the ground, and lo! we find it, for everything is everywhere.

Natural gas was discovered and piped for light, heat and fuel when it was needed, and thus are the lords of electricity kept civil.

In an attempt to render kerosene-oil non-explosive—so many servant-girls going to the Other Side by the Kerosene Route—gasoline was removed from illuminating-oil by chemical process. Many good people preferred candles, and called kerosene a fad, and dangerous. Kerosene was worth twenty cents a gallon, and gasoline two cents. Gasoline was a glut on the market.

To utilize this dangerous by-product, the explosive engine was invented.

From a plaything of one to five horsepower, the gas-engine grew in power.

The horseless carriage is in one sense a scheme
for utilizing a by-product—just as art is love's by-product.
And behold! Kerosene is now cheaper, and of better quality, than it has ever been in the history of commerce. Kerosene is now the by-product, and thus does the proletariat wax glad and the farmers rejoice. If gasoline ever soars as high here as it has in France, we will use denatured alcohol made from mangel-roots and turnips.

The Horse and the Automobile

The great value of the auto to Society is that it relieves the streets of horses, and thus adds to sanitation and cleanliness. Three years ago when the proprietor of a big hotel in New York asked the police to keep his curbs clear of cab-horses he was denounced as finicky and fussy.
Now, no good hotel man will allow horses to stand in proximity to his hostelry. One thing, horses attract swarms of flies in Summer, and their presence creates on paved streets an unsanitary condition all the time. Horses belong on the soil, anyway.
The horse's hoof is made for the dirt & The auto adds to commerce the value of increased time, since it carries the man or the parcel to the desired place in less than half the time that horses can turn the same trick. Next, the auto brings the outlying sections into proximity to the city, since twenty miles with an auto is equal to six with a horse. Thus will suburban property be brought into market and take on a value otherwise impossible. The telephone and the auto are doing away with the loneliness of the farm, and as a consequence farmers' wives have quit going insane as a business. The auto is here to stay, exactly as the steamship and railroad are here to stay. It can neither be laughed down nor argued down. When you see a man who tells you what is going to happen if this benzine-buggy craze does n't stop, he is getting ready to buy one.

**Some Figures**

OW, supposing the automobile were substituted for the horse for transportation purposes generally, we would have a
rather interesting lesson in economics. There are something like twenty-one million horses in these United States. About nine hundred thousand horse-drawn vehicles are sold every year, not counting farm and delivery wagons, of which about four hundred thousand new ones are sold annually.

Now, assuming, which we can safely do, that there are in daily use in this country seven million vehicles drawn by ten million horses, which travel an average of four miles a day apiece, and figuring the horses' keep at twelve dollars a month each, it costs to maintain this aggregation of horseflesh considerably in excess of a billion dollars a year!

Moreover, the cost of labor to drive these ten million horses is not less than three cents a mile. Hence it costs to drive the seven million vehicles rather more than three hundred million dollars a year. Adding the cost of driving the vehicles to the cost of maintenance of the horses, and we would have a total expenditure of over a billion and a half dollars a year for the twenty-eight million vehicle-miles traveled.
Let us figure now how we would come out by using a like number of automobiles for these twenty-eight million vehicle-miles per day, using the ordinary runabout for illustration. Estimating the cost of automobile depreciation and tires at two and three-tenths cents a mile, we get the total cost of six hundred forty-four thousand dollars a day. Similarly, figuring the cost of labor at one and one-half cents a mile, gasoline at one and two-tenths cents a mile, and oil at one-tenth cent per mile, we get a total of four hundred sixteen thousand, one hundred forty thousand and twenty-eight thousand dollars a day, respectively, for seven million automobiles, or a grand total per day of one million two hundred twenty-eight thousand dollars, which amounts in a year to four hundred forty-eight million two hundred twenty thousand dollars. Or, compared with the horse, the total saving effected by the automobile would be considerably more than a billion dollars a year. These figures are pretty big to grasp. Therefore, let us use as a comparison a one-horse
buggy and a small automobile runabout, retailing at, say, six hundred dollars. If we figure that a horse and buggy average four miles a day, this means a yearly mileage of one thousand four hundred sixty miles. A conservative estimate of the cost of this mileage would place it at not less than one hundred fifty dollars. Now, then, experience proves that a small runabout can be operated at an expense per mile of one and one-half cents for tires and depreciation, one-half cent for gasoline and one-tenth cent for oil. Allowing one-half cent for other expenses, we get a total of two and three-fifths cents a mile, or one and three-tenths cents per passenger-mile. That is to say, what the horse does at a cost of one hundred fifty dollars it takes our runabout less than thirty-eight dollars to accomplish. The question then quite naturally arises: as an economic factor alone, is n't the automobile to be considered as vastly superior to the horse and on the side of conservation of energy and economy of operation? Well, I guess so!
The Age of the Auto

Good Roads

The subject of good roads is a vital one to the autoist; everywhere throughout the world the owners of autos are agitating the subject.

In New York and in various other States of the Union, the money received from automobile licenses is being used for road-building purposes. The sum to be raised each year for good roads will exceed two million dollars.

The Romans of old built their famous roadways for but one purpose, and that was to transport an army quickly from one place to another. But, regardless of the motive, they taught the world a great lesson.

John Wesley says in his Journal, "I was beholden of the truth that farmers who live along a good road grow rich, while those who are on a bad road are usually very poor." The farmers are not organized so as to build good roads. About all they have done is to patch bad ones. To make a good road requires science, skill, money and wise foresight. Good roads are built for the future, quite as much as
for the fleeting present. The auto owners are mostly men of affairs, and it can safely be said that all men of affairs are auto owners. The type of man who used to have a carriage and coachman is not your typical autoist. The auto owner is a man with a fine scorn for ease and all soft luxury. His fad is motion. He possesses initiative and is a good sportsman. Wherever he goes he does things, for beside being an auto owner he is a farmer and is fast becoming a lover of the country and a loving student of Nature. Thus does the auto transform the man. The various automobile clubs are banded together so they can bring their influence to bear on legislation. The farmer is not a lobbyist, and his interests have been neglected. But now that the farmer and auto owner are grasping hands, this matter of good roads will not be allowed to palter, falter nor rest. The old-time Roman with his lust for conquest was the supreme type of road-builder. But now a broader, better, finer and stronger man is coming in on his high steed, and this
is the autoist. He has all the enthusiasm of the Roman, and ten times his resources. The boys with the autos are our modern "Invincible Seventh Legion."

**Influence of the Automobile**

The last question for us to consider is the effect of the auto on the owner and user. One thing sure, any man who has had a car never wants to get along hereafter without one.

I suppose it does not have to be shown that the auto is run out of doors. Thus it gives a play of fresh air that is not possible to him who lingers close to the steam heat. Man is a movable air-plant. He thrives only when he is in the open. Sun, wind, storm—all are things to which he must become inured. The auto takes you out of the crowded city, out of the fumes of noisome streets. It gives you an air-bath, and breathing more you think more, feel more, know more, live more. To reside ten or twenty miles from business and take that trip night and morning would double the capacity of most men. The
The Age of the Auto

A commuter in the smoker or “ladies’ coach” absorbs a lot of bad air and silly conversation that have already been used. The auto subdues conversation to things that should be said, and eliminates most of the vacuous mouthy nothings. That is, it gives you rest. As for the man who runs his own machine, there is demanded an exercise of eye and hand that develops judgment, skill, courage, and gives coolness to your cosmic engine under difficulties.

All these things must in a generation have a decided effect on the entire race. The North American Indian developed his noble body when he was obliged to hunt, and he lost his noble qualities, in great degree, when he was put on the Reservation and made to stay there with everything provided. The man with an auto is no Reservation Indian. He travels far and fast. He is pretty nearly a freewill agent. He sees, hears, grows, hikes, honks and becomes. His face is bronzed by the kiss of the wind and sun. His pulse is full and even. His appetite is prodigious.
The stimulant of ozone, and the sense of power coming from this thirty-horsepower or sixty-horsepower motor at his finger-tips, gives him all the bracer that his body craves. No man who really loves the merry music of the cut-off takes to strong drink. The auto is a great move in behalf of temperance. The man who runs a machine prizes his brain and rejoices in sinewy hands, muscles of braided silk and nerves of steel. Booze is for the wobbly and weak—your autoist will have none of it. Thus does the auto make for sanity, sound sleep, efficiency and length of days. Within two years' time there has come about a very decided protest in public opinion against the auto scorcher. The pace is now becoming reasonable and moderate. The nervous novelty is wearing off. To fly through the land, run over chickens, kill dogs, scare horses and put wagons in the ditch is getting to be decidedly bad form. One reason is that the driver—owner or hired chauffeur—is now a sober man. He neither
overeats nor overdrinks. A lifted hand will stop any machine, anywhere—this is today the rule. The natural goodness, decency and courtesy of strong and healthy men are being felt, for as we grow in health we evolve in consideration for the rights of others. The licensing of chauffeurs is a good thing, and is having its effect on character. The reckless driver is soon out of a job, and once out he is a marked man and out forever. You must keep your record clean. As for the extravagance of the people who buy a machine when they are not able to afford a baby- buggy, a word is in order. 

Is It an Extravagance?

That many autos have been bought by those who have no business with one, is true. A new invention, like a new reform, is bound to lure a lot of the heedless and unthinking. The world still has a full supply of the chuckleheaded. But there is one big protest against the extravagance of the automobile to which we should
hearken. It comes from Wall Street. Look you! The small traders in Wall Street are buying autos, and thus have ceased to gamble. The joy of the auto has replaced the joy of the Bucket-Shop. The chances of being put into the financial ditch are replaced with the risks of the road. ¶ Take your choice—of two evils choose the lesser!

From an editorial in the “Milliners’ Review” I see that the milliners and dressmakers are suffering from this craze for the auto. One editorial says, “Many women who before were well gowned are now content with khaki and little, tight, homemade automobile bonnets—anything that will keep the dust out of the hair. ¶ And when the husband lets his wife make choice between beautiful party gowns or a new machine, she votes for the machine without a word.”

In the “Jewelers’ Weekly,” I find a similar voice to this effect, “The diamond trade is suffering from this extravagance in automobiles.”
A Fifth Avenue tailor, recently interviewed, says, "The genuine, well-dressed gentleman is getting hard to find. Instead of clothes made to measure, everybody is buying a ready-to-wear suit at half price, saving the money for gasoline."

It will thus be plainly seen that there is going on an exchange of one extravagance for another, so the net loss isn't quite so bad as our pessimistic friends would have us think. We save on diamonds, picture-hats and party dresses, and this money goes into machines. Very well, let 'er go! The world is the gainer. It means tan, brawn, sound sleep and good digestion, against pale cheeks, weak eyes, and nerves that need a bracer.

¶ Then, note you this: The man with an auto takes the whole family with him; whereas, the old-time sport with his fast horse had a one-man wagon and went alone. The wife along is a governor to the social engine. Sure!

¶ Don't buy an auto if you don't see how to pay for it. Debt is a rope to your foot, cockle-burs in your hair, a fly in the cold-cream of
your beauty-dope. Keep within your financial speed limit, or Fate, like a country constable, will surely pinch you. There is lots of fun in walking, yet.

But extravagant and wasteful people have always lived. When Oliver Goldsmith dressed up the bailiffs and had them serve the feast, he was a fool as well as a poet. Look behind—also look in front—before you turn the corner into debt.

Any man who can afford an auto should have one. Moreover, he probably will. Also, anybody who insists on being extravagant and buying things he can’t afford, will, until Gehenna congeals. The extravagant man has found a way to waste time and money since Adam and Eve were shoplifters, and helped themselves to fruit and fig-leaves which they could ill afford.

But because there are extravagant people in the world is no reason, Terese, why we should have melancholia. Turn ’er over, and we’ll take a run out to old Aunt Mary’s. Honk, honk!
So here endeth the book, "The Age of the Auto," as written by Elbert Hubbard & The whole done into print by The Roycrofters, at their Shop, which is in the Village of East Aurora, Erie County, New York, October, mcmx

PUBLISHED FOR GM MEN AND WOMEN

INFORMATION RACK SERVICE
General Motors Personnel Staff

IR-56-23
LITHO IN U.S.A.
Man is Made to Migrate, and the Act of Moving Around is Natural and Right
OME to East Aurora and tramp the hills with me! We will stroll, pass the medicine-ball, and hoof it down the dusk, or in the sunshine, the shadow or the rain. Who cares—all weather is good! We will live the simple life, not merely TALK about it. Or, if you prefer, I’ll take you out in my auto for a whirl and a whizz and give you a ride that will make your hair curl.

ELBERT HUBBARD