

My Friend The Chauffeur.

By C. N. & A. M.
WILLIAMSON,
Authors of
... THE ...
Lightning Conductor
... THE ...
Princess Passes,
ETC.

(Continued).

At first I didn't know but Sir Ralph would be the real hero, for by an odd coincidence he is twenty-nine, which is my age—if it's true, as Madame says, that a woman has a right to count herself no older than she looks. Besides, I'm very partial to the English; and though I was a little disappointed, after seeing that advertisement of his, to learn that the "titled Englishman" owning a motor-car, was no higher than a baronet, I thought he might do. But somehow, though kind and attentive, he has never shown the same warm interest that Prince Dalmat. Kalm takes in me, and then it is so romantic that I should be buying an estate with one of the titles belonging to the Prince's family. I can't help feeling now that the Prince, and no one but the Prince, is meant for the hero of this story of which I am the heroine. After all, what title sounds so well for a woman as "Princess?" It might be royalty, and I'm sure it would be admired in heaven. The change in me may be partly owing to the excitement of realizing that I'm in a grander sphere than any I have ever entered into, or dared hope to enter, and that this may be but a kind of ante-chamber to something still grander. Of course I might have gone on this trip in the Prince's automobile, if he had known in time that I had a fancy to try motoring, but perhaps it's better as it is. I like being independent, and it's just as well to have several men in the party, so that no one among them can think he's going to have his own way.

Who, that knew me a few years—or even a few months—ago, would have believed that I could be perfectly happy sitting all day in a cramped position in an automobile, covered with dust or wet with sudden showers; tired, hungry, putting up with all sorts of discomforts by the way, and half the time frightened out of my wits by appalling pretexts or terrific wild beasts? But happy I am, happier than I've ever been, though I keep asking myself, or Maids, or Beechy, "Why is it so nice?"

Maids says she doesn't know why, she only knows it is, and much more than aise. "The Quintessence of Joy-of-Life," that is what she has named the sensation; and as Maids uses it, it is sure to be all right, though I must admit that to me it sounds almost improper.

Then there is another thing which strikes me as queer about myself and the two girls since we've been travelling in an automobile. We used to be glad when a train journey was over, and thankful to arrive at almost any place, whether beautiful or not, but now we're always in a perfect fever to go on—on—on. We shoot into some marvellous old town, that we would once have thought hundreds of miles just to see; and instead of wanting to get out of the motor-car and wander about, visiting all the churches or museums or picture galleries, we think what a pity to stop the record of so many miles in so many hours. If we stop long of course it brings down the average, and that seems nothing less than a calamity, though why on earth we should care so much or care at all (considering we have our whole future before us) is a mystery. Even Maids, who is so fond of history, and countries that have made history in dim old ages, feels this. She thinks there is a motorist's microbe that gets into your blood, and other microbes, so that it's a disease, only instead of being disagreeable it's almost dangerously pleasant. You know you ought to pause and do justice to a place, says Maids, but the motorist's microbe wriggles and writhes against the decision of your reason, and you have to use violent measures before you can dull it into a state of coma for awhile.

Mr. Barrymore tries to explain this phenomenon by arguing that, of all modern means of getting about the world, motoring is in itself the most enjoyable. "The mere journey is as good a part of your tour as any; if not better; and that's the reason why, according to him, you never have the same longing to 'get there' or 'stay there' (wherever 'there' may be) that you have when you travel by train, or boat or carriage. It is the thrill of flying through the air at such a rate that intensifies your sense of speed, and you are conquering the world as you go. Perhaps he's right. But after all, reasons don't signify much. The principal thing is that you do feel so, and it is lovely.

"I was so tired that long day from Quebec to Milan that I wouldn't get up and go and look at the cathedral. I'd seen it by moonlight, and it couldn't be better by day, so I just lay in bed, and made a comfortable toilet afterwards without hurrying, which was a nice change, and gave me time to use my electric face-roller.

When the girls came back, they were raving about magnificent statues, aisles, columns, windows, vistas, gargoyles, and saints' bodies in gorgeous shrines of silver. Beechy had apparently forgotten that she'd been vexed with me over night, and I was relieved, for she will not agree with me about the Prince, and I don't know what I should do if she really did carry out any of her threats. If she should put on the long frock she had before Mr. Kidder died (which she says she's got with her, looked up in her post-mortem), and should fix her hair on top of her head, that would be just about the end of my fun, once and for all. But she is such a dear girl at heart, in spite of the peculiarities which she has inherited from poor Simon. I can't think (if I manage her pretty well) that she would do anything to spoil my first real good time and hurt my feelings.

We had an early lunch, and started about one with such a crowd outside the hotel to see us away, that we made up our minds there must be precious few automobiles in Milan, big and busy city as it is. The whole party was so taken up with the cathedral, that for a while they forgot to talk of anything but Gian Galeazzo Visconti (who seemed to have spent his life either in murdering his relations or founding churches), or marble from the valley of Tosa, or German architects who had made the building differ from any other in Italy, or the impulse Napoleon had given to work on the facade, or the view from the roof all the way to Como with the Apennines and lots of other mountains whose names I'd never heard; but presently as we got out into the suburbs the road began to be so awful that no one could talk rationally on any subject.

We three Americans were not quite so disgusted as Sir Ralph and Mr. Barrymore seemed to be, for we are used to roads being pretty bad outside large cities but the gentlemen were very cross, and exclaimed that it was a disgrace to Milan. Our poor automobile had to go bumping and grinding along through heaps of sharp stones, more like the dry bed of a mountain torrent than a road, and my nerves were on edge when Mr. Barrymore told us not to be frightened if we heard an explosion like a shot, because it would only be one of the tyres bursting. No pretty little ladylike automobile, said he, could possibly hope to come through without breaking her bones; only fine, manly motor cars, with noble masculine tyres, could wisely attempt the feat; but ours would be all right, even if a tyre did go, for the damage could be repaired inside half an hour.

Still, the thought of the possible explosion that might go off right under my ears at any instant kept me in a state of suspense for a long distance—about thirty kilometres, Mr. Barrymore said; and then the way improved so much that I settled down again. Even the scenery had been ugly up to that time, as if to match the road, but it began to change for the better at precisely the same moment.

The only interesting things we had seen so far were peasants playing bowls in the villages through which we passed (for it was a fete day), and the curious carts with wooden frames for awnings arched over them, which gave an effect as if the passengers were crowding inside the white bits of some skeleton master. Such pretty women and children were in the carts, too; the women like beautiful, dark maidens with their soft eyes looking out from under graceful head-drapes of black cashmere, or blue or yellow silk, glorious in color as the sun touched it.

They didn't seem to mind the bumping over the stones, though the carts were springless, but then, they had no hats lolling over to one side, or stays to pinch in their waists and make them uncomfortable as I had, though—Beechy says—my daytime motoring waist is inches bigger round than my evening waist.

I was glad when I could put my hat straight again, once for all, and have time to enjoy the scenery through which, as I told myself, the Prince must lately have passed on his car, perhaps thinking of me as he had promised.

Behind us was the great plain in which Milan lies, and before us soared into the air a blue chain of mountains, looking majestic and inaccessible in the far distance, though we were sweeping on towards them, charging down hill after hill into a more exquisite landscape than I could have imagined, enchantingly Italian, with dark old chateaux crowning eminences above fertile fields; pretty brown villages on hillside clustering round green valleys, and here and there a few green-black cypresses (which Maids says seem like sharp notes in music) and slender, flat-topped trees that Mr. Barrymore calls umbrellas pines.

We were now in a region known as the Brianza, which, it appears, a summer resort for the Milanese, who come to escape the hot weather of the plains, and find the breezes that blow up from the lakes—breezes so celebrated for their health-giving qualities that nobody who lives in the Brianza can die under ninety. There were a great many inviting looking, quaint farm houses, and big cottages scattered about, where the people from Milan are taken as lodgers.

I had forgotten my nervousness about the tyres, when suddenly a queer thing happened. There was a wild flapping and beating as if a big bird had got caught in the engine, while something strange and horrifying kept leaping up and down with every revolution of the wheels, like a huge black snake rising along with us and trying for a chance to pounce. It was so like a wild and horrid dream that I shrieked; but in a few seconds Mr. Barrymore had stopped the car. "We are in luck," said he.

"Why?" I asked. "Have we killed the serpent-thing-whatever it is?" "The serpent-thing-whatever it is," he explained, "is the outer covering of the tyre on one of our driving-wheels," he explained. "And we're in luck because, after that ghastly road it isn't the tyre itself. This is nothing; I'll tear it off, and the good old tyre's so sound that we can go on with its skin off, until Bellagio, when I'll put on a new one before we start again. It has cracked the mud-guard in its gyrations, though fortunately not enough to make it unsafe for the luggage."

In about three minutes we were tearing on once more, but we hadn't been going for ten minutes when, half-way up a hill, the motor gave a weary sigh, and moved languidly, as if it were very tired and discouraged, yet trying its best to obey. We were on the outskirts of a village called Erba, and the automobile

crawled on until it saw a little inn, with a lot of peasants sitting in the cool shade of an arbour, drinking wine; there it stopped, which was wonderfully intelligent of it.

"The poor animal wants water after its hard work," said Mr. Barrymore; so he got down and asked a boy to bring some, ordering at the same time a syphon of iced lemonade for everybody. While we were sipping the cold, sweet stuff, Mr. Barrymore burst out laughing, and we all looked up to see what was the matter. There was that silly boy bringing a pint of water, in a carafe, to pour into the tank of the motor; and he seemed quite surprised and disgusted when he was told to go back and fetch about twenty litres more.

(To be continued).

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The ball and concert given last night by the Knights of Pythias in celebration of their 42nd anniversary proved a brilliant success. Castle Hall, Germain street, the Knights' headquarters, was nicely arranged for the comfort and enjoyment of the 500 guests. The large lodge room which was used for the dancing and also the concert was tastefully arranged with bunting—red, yellow and blue, the Pythian colors, predominating. Over the pictures, four in number on the side walls, were draped the colors of the two uniform rank companies. The chandeliers were trimmed with various colored tissue paper, a large bell hanging from each. Over the carpet was stretched a waxen linen for the dancing. In the supper room down stairs, everything was done quite informally, small tables were conveniently placed in the adjoining rooms.

Grand Chancellor G. L. Ganter occupied the chair in the concert hall and the following programme was thoroughly enjoyed.

CHAMBERLAIN IN OPPOSITION

He Takes Ex-Premier Balfour's Place in British House and Delivers Fighting Speech.

London, Feb. 19.—The pointed reference to Ireland contained in King Edward's speech to the House of Parliament today, coupled with the announcement of the determination to grant constitutional government to the Transvaal, brought these two questions immediately to the forefront in the debates in the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the motions on the address in reply to the speech from the throne.

In the House of Lords the debate was almost perfunctory except where Lord Lansdowne, assuming his new role as leader of the opposition, pointed out certain dangers connected with the proposed changes and incidentally commented on the Algeiras conference and the situation in Macedonia, warning the government of possible difficulties arising in the near east unless Great Britain maintained a firm attitude.

It was in the House of Commons that the debate on the address became interesting when Joseph Chamberlain, in the absence of former Premier Balfour, took the place of the leader of the opposition and in a brilliant and lengthy speech attacked the government on all points, and especially on its South African policy. He threw down the gauntlet regarding Home Rule for Ireland. Regarding tariff reform, Mr. Chamberlain promised to give the government several bad quarter hours.

Mr. Chamberlain's speech undoubtedly was the feature of the first day in the House of Commons. The small coterie of Unionists took heart under his spirited leadership and his brilliant thrusts and sarcasms were greeted with the heartiest cheers. Even some of Mr. Chamberlain's opponents could not refrain from acknowledging him the meed of acclaim for his remarkable attack.

Premier Campbell-Bannerman's reply was lengthy and perfectly good-humored, the speaker assuming that his position was one of such strength that he could afford to be generous.

The reference to Ireland in the King's speech is received with mingled feelings and some degree of doubt. The Nationalists are non-committal and decline to accept as more than a possibility this seeming step towards Home Rule.

John Redmond, who followed Premier Campbell-Bannerman at the night session, boldly announced that the Nationalists would not be satisfied with anything short of complete self-government. On the other hand some of the less radical Irish members do not hesitate to say that the clause in the King's speech means a modified form of Home Rule, and intimate that Mr. Redmond would be satisfied with such a step, as it would surely guarantee home rule in the future.

The Laborites profess themselves well pleased with the clause in the King's speech and affecting their special interests. They do not intend to introduce an amendment. Indeed, it is probable that there will be fewer amendments offered than usual and that the regular business of the session will commence earlier than it did in the previous parliament.

The House of Commons was crowded when the business of the session began. The King's speech having been formally read by Speaker Lowther, W. H. Dickenson (Liberal) moved the address in a brief speech, and E. D. Acland (Liberal) seconded it.

Joseph Chamberlain, rising from the front opposition benches, said he was speaking at the request of former Premier Balfour, who was temporarily absent. Mr. Chamberlain added that he felt sure the premier, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, on personal grounds, would welcome back the man who for a longer period than any other during the last century had led the deliberations of the house.

Mr. Chamberlain then paid a tribute to Mr. Redmond's speech, and turning immediately to the fiscal question, he said the government should remember that its majority in the house of commons was much greater in proportion than its majority in the country. In fact, the opposition had nearly half the country behind them.

Continuing, Mr. Chamberlain said he was pleased to learn that there would be a continuity of Great Britain's foreign policy, and asked if the government could give the house any information in regard to the Algeiras conference. He hoped that there would be fewer amendments offered than usual and that the regular business of the session will commence earlier than it did in the previous parliament.

Proceeding, Mr. Chamberlain lengthily discussed the proposed changes in the government of the Transvaal colony. Mr. Chamberlain delivered a fighting speech, he denouncing the government's present plan answers regarding the proposed legislation for South Africa and Ireland, and said that any measure looking to home rule would meet with strenuous opposition. He also warned the government that it had not heard the last of the tariff reform.

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