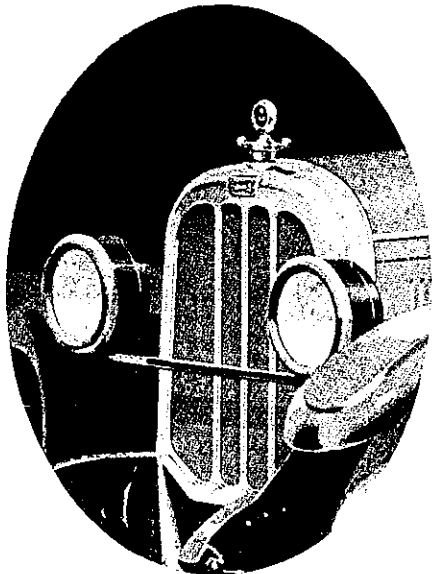


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**FLINT SIX**

# Slow Starters

By STEPHEN LEACOCK



IN the days before the motor-car, when a man said good-bye, he shook hands and was gone. If he was to ride on horseback, he made a brief farewell to each person present, shook hands, leaped upon his horse and was off.

Now that the motor-car has come into use as the general instrument of visiting, this no longer happens. The people say good-bye, get into their motor-car, and are *not* gone. They make an affectionate farewell and then sit looking out of their glass windows, while the car goes "Phut, Phut—bang," and sticks there. The more dramatic the good-bye, the more touching the farewell, the more determined the car always is to say, "Phut, Phut—bang," and refuse to move.

Witness the familiar scene of the good-bye of the Joneses to the Smiths at 6 p.m. on any Sunday evening at any rural place near any big city. The Joneses have motored over in their own car—a real peach, tin all over—and have spent Sunday afternoon with the Smiths, who have a cottage which they call *OPEN HOUSE* (and where they take care that nobody gets in at meal times).

When the time has come for the Joneses to go they all mingle up in a group with the Smiths, and everybody says good-bye to everybody else, and shakes hands with each one, and they all say, "Well, we've had a *simply lovely time*." Then they all climb into the car, with Mr. Jones himself at the wheel, and they say, "Well, good-bye, good-bye!" and wave their hands.

And then the car goes—  
Whr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r — phut — bang.

A wisp of thin blue smoke rolls away and when it has gone, the Joneses are seen sitting there absolutely still, and their car hasn't moved an inch.

JONES, at the wheel, sticks his head down among the gadgets and clutches and says, "I suppose she is a little cold," and the Smiths say, "Yes, it often takes a little time to start them." Then there's a pause and nothing seems to be happening, and then, very suddenly and cheerfully, the engine of the car starts making a loud—

Pur-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r.  
On this, all the Joneses and all the Smiths exclaim, "There she goes," and they break out into good-byes again all talking together:—

"Well, come back soon— We certainly will— We've had a great time— Remember us all to Jim— We certainly will.— You've a simply too sweet cottage here— We have enjoyed ourselves—well—good-bye, good-bye, good-bye!"

And then the car goes—  
Whir-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r — phut — bang!

And there is another puff of blue smoke, and when it clears away, what is behind it? Why, the Joneses, still there in their car.

When the machine goes "bang!" all the Joneses in the car and all the Smiths standing beside the road are knocked into silence for a few seconds. Then Jones mutters, "Seems to be something wrong with the ignition," and somebody else says, "She doesn't seem to be feeding right," and there's a little chorus of, "Oh, she is just a little cold." "They take a little warming up." "She'll start in a minute," and then the engine begins again, this time at a terrific speed, about a million revolutions to the minute—

Whir-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-R-R.

AT this happy sound, the good-byes break out all over again in a chorus—"Good-bye— Look after yourselves— Tell Winnie we'll see her Friday— Good-bye— We certainly had a—"

Bang!

All stopped again.

This time Jones is determined that when the engine starts he'll keep it started.

There shall be no false alarms this time. "Let her get going well," some of them advise him, and so when the engine next starts, Jones doesn't throw in his clutch, but just lets her go on humming and roaring till everybody feels assured that this time the start is actually going to happen, and the good-byes break out all over again.

The noise gets louder and louder, the conversation rises into shouts mixed with the "phut, phut, phut" of the machine, and then all of a sudden there's a tremendous "bang!" and a volume of blue smoke, and when it clears away, where are the Joneses? Gone—clean gone; they seem to have vanished off the earth! At last you catch a glimpse of their car already two hundred yards away, disappearing in a cloud of smoke.

"They're off!" murmur the Smiths, and the painful scene is over. . . .

THINKING over this scene I cannot but reflect how fortunate it has been for mankind that the motor-car was not invented earlier in our history. So many of the great dramas of history have turned upon farewells and departures that some of the most romantic pages of the past would have been spoiled if there had been any petrol in them.

Take, for example, the familiar case of Napoleon saying good-bye to his officers and soldiers at Fontainebleau before going into exile. The fallen emperor stood beside the steed he was about to mount, turned a moment and addressed to his devoted comrades words that still echo in

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