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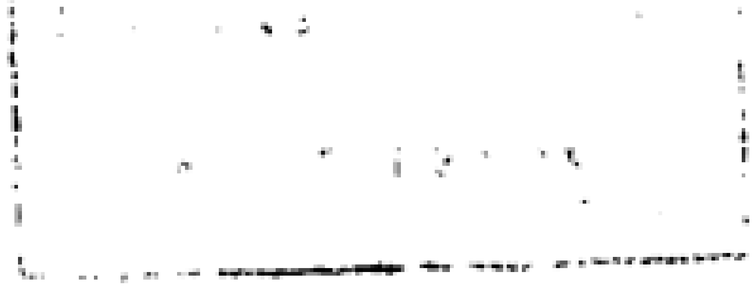

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THE MOTOR PIRATE

By

G. Sidney Paternoster

With a Frontispiece by Charles R. Sykes

Boston * * * *
L. C. Page & Company
* * * * MCMIV

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THE MOTOR PIRATE

CHAPTER I

MAINLY ABOUT MYSELF

Of course every one has heard of the Motor Pirate. No one indeed could help doing so unless he or she, as the case may be, happened to be in some part of the world where newspapers never penetrate; since for months his doings were the theme of every gossip in the country, and his exploits have filled columns of every newspaper from the moment of his first appearance until the day when the reign of terror he had inaugurated upon the roads ended as suddenly and as sensationally as it had begun. Who the owner of the pirate car was? Whence he came? Whither he went? These are questions which have exercised minds innumerable; but though there have been nearly as many theories propounded as there were brains at work propounding them, so far no informed account of the man or his methods has been made public.

Nearly twelve months have now elapsed since he was

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last heard of, and already a number of myths have grown up about his mysterious personality. For instance, it is not true, as I saw asserted in a sensational evening paper the other day, that the Motor Pirate was in the habit of abducting every young and attractive woman who happened to be travelling in any of the cars he held up. On only one occasion did he abduct a lady, and in that case there were special circumstances with which the public have never been made acquainted. His deeds were quite black enough without further blackening with printer's ink, and it would be a pity if the real Motor Pirate were lost sight of in mythical haze such as has gathered about the name of his great prototype, Dick Turpin.

It has occurred to me, therefore, to tell the story of his doings—it would be impossible for any mortal man to give an absolutely detailed account of his life and actions—but I know more than the majority of people about the personality of the man. Of one thing my readers may be assured: I personally can vouch for the accuracy of every fact which I chronicle. You see I am not a professional historian.

How it happened that I am in a position to give hitherto unknown particulars about the Motor Pirate will appear in the course of my narrative. Sufficient for the moment let it be for me to say that it was purely by chance that the opportunity was thrown in my way; though, as it happened, it was not entirely without my own volition that I became involved in the network of events

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which finally resulted in the tragedy which closed his career. By that tragedy the world lost a brilliant thinker and inventor, though unfortunately these great talents were accompanied by an abnormal condition of mind, which led the owner to utilise his invention in criminal pursuits.

It may probably seem strange that, being in possession of facts as to the identity of this mysterious person, I did not lay them before the police, who, at any time during the three months of his criminal career, would have given their ears to lay him by the heels. You may even think it is their duty to take proceedings against me as an accomplice. Well, I am quite prepared to answer any question which the police, or any one else for that matter, desires to put to me. James Sutgrove, of Sutgrove Hall, Norfolk, is not likely to change his address. When my poor old governor died he left me sufficient excuse, in the shape of real estate, for remaining in the country of my birth; though, if the necessity had arisen, I should not have hesitated about going abroad. At twenty-five, my age within a few weeks, a man has usually sufficient energy to enable him to carve out a career for himself in a new country, and I do not think I am very different to my fellows in that respect. But the fact is, I have nothing to fear from the police. My criminality was less than theirs. An ordinary citizen may be forgiven if he is blind to the meaning of things which occur under his nose, but the police are expected to be possessed of somewhat sharper vision. The utmost that can be urged

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against me is, that if my eyes had been keener than those of Scotland Yard, reinforced by the trained vision of some hundreds of intelligent chief constables throughout the country, I might have been able to lay my hands upon the Motor Pirate before—but I must not anticipate my story.

One word of apology, however, before I begin. In order to make my narrative fully intelligible I shall have to refer to matters which may seem of a purely personal nature. I will make these as brief as possible, but it was entirely through such that I was brought into closer touch with the Motor Pirate than, perhaps with one exception, any other person in the world. If therefore I seem to be devoting too much attention to what appears to be merely personal interest, I trust I may be excused. To begin, then, at the beginning.

* * * * *

On the evening of March 31, 19—, I had arranged to dine in town with a couple of friends, both of them neighbours of mine. I am not going to mention the name of the restaurant. It was not one of the fashionable ones, or probably neither the cuisine nor the wines would have been so good as they were, though both would unquestionably have been more expensive. I prefer, therefore, to keep the name to myself. It was in the neighbourhood of Soho, however, and the reason I had invited my friends was in order to disabuse their minds of the idea that everything in that neighbourhood was of necessity cheap and nasty. I had determined

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that their palates should be charmed by the dinner they were to eat, so, in addition to sending a note to the proprietor, I thought it as well to arrive at the restaurant a quarter of an hour before the appointed time, in order to make assurance doubly sure that everything was as I desired it. Had my guests been casual acquaintances, I must confess that I should never have taken this trouble. But they were not. One of them was the renowned Colonel Maitland. I never heard anything about his war service, but I do know that as a gastronomist his reputation is European. The cool way he will condemn an *entrée*, presented to him by an obsequious waiter, merely after casting a single glance upon it, speaks volumes for his critical insight; and as for wines—well, he can tell the vineyard and the vintage of a claret by the scent alone. I verily believe that were he to be served with a corked wine, the result would be instant dissolution between his gastronomic soul and body. Naturally I had to make some preparations, in order that such delicate susceptibilities should not be offended. In addition, I had a special reason for seeking to please him. Colonel Maitland had a daughter.

I have only to mention the name of my other guest to reveal his identity to every one with any knowledge of the motoring world. It was Fred Winter, *the* Fred Winter, leading light of the Automobile Club, holder of more road records than I can count, in fact the most enthusiastic motorist in the country. It was in consequence of this, indeed, that he came to be my guest.

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There were few questions in regard to motoring upon which Winter was not competent to give an opinion, and being myself a victim to the prevailing motor-mania, I was deeply indebted to him for many valuable tips. By this time I had passed my novitiate, and was still driving a neat little 9½-h.p. Clément in order to fit myself for a more powerful and speedy car.

I arrived then at the restaurant about a quarter to eight, and having had a brief but satisfactory interview with the proprietor, I made my way to the table I had reserved in my favourite corner of the dining-room. Finding I had ten minutes to spare, to kill time I ordered a vermouth and the evening papers. The *Globe* was the first upon the pile the waiter brought to me, and following the example of most sane men, I skipped the parliamentary intelligence and turned to the "By the Way" column. I remember distinctly there was only one amusing paragraph therein, and I was about to throw the paper aside, with the customary lament as to the decadence of British humour, when my attention was arrested by a paragraph at the bottom of the next column. The heading was "Strange Highway Robbery." This was the paragraph :—

"Our Plymouth correspondent reports a novel highway robbery on the road between Tavistock and Plymouth. Two gentlemen who had been for a run on their motor to Tavistock, left the latter town about eight o'clock last night. Their journey was uneventful until they reached Roborough, where they were suddenly

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overtaken by a motor-car occupied by a man, who presented a pistol at their heads, and ordered them to stop. Thinking that the stranger merely intended to scare them, and that the summons was only an ill-advised piece of pleasantry, they paid no attention to the demand; whereupon the driver of the strange car, with a well-directed shot, so damaged the machinery of their vehicle that they were compelled to obey. Their attacker then demanded all the money and articles of value they had in their possession under threat of completely wrecking their car, and after securing his booty the highwayman decamped. In consequence of the damage to their motor, it was not until late at night that they reached Plymouth, and were enabled to give particulars of the occurrence to the police. From their description of the stranger's vehicle, identification should not be difficult. It is a long, low, boat-shaped car of remarkable speed, and from the little noise it creates is probably driven by an electric motor. As to the personal appearance of the driver, the gentlemen who were robbed could form no opinion, for he wore the usual leather coat affected by tourists, and his head was completely enveloped in a hood."

On reading this paragraph, my first impulse was to lay aside the paper and indulge in a hearty laugh. My impression was that some wag had been hoaxing either the Plymouth correspondent or the London editor of the *Globe*. However, my curiosity was sufficiently aroused to lead me to take up another paper, to see if the *Globe* was the only paper which reported the occurrence.

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The next paper on my pile was the *Star*, and the moment I unfolded the pink sheet, I perceived that this liveliest of evening journals was not going to be left behind by the *Globe* in providing the public with particulars of the latest sensation. Under the heading of "A Motor Pirate," with descriptive headlines extending across a couple of columns, and as attractively alliterative as the cunning pen of a smart sub-editor could make them, was the account of a similar incident. At first I thought it must be the same occurrence, but a brief perusal showed me that this impression was a wrong one. But I will give the *Star* account in full, and I do so the more readily, not only because it contains the first detailed account of the man whose extraordinary audacity was shortly to raise the interest of the public to fever pitch, but also because it tells the story with a force and colour of which my unpractised pen is incapable. Apologising therefore to the editor for the liberty I have taken, I reprint the *Star* account verbatim. I think, however, the story deserves a new chapter.

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CHAPTER II

THE COMPTON CHAMBERLAIN OUTRAGE

"A MOTOR PIRATE

"TAKES TOLL OF TRAVELLERS IN THE WEST.

"A VEILED STRANGER ON A MYSTERIOUS MOTOR FLIES

"THE BLACK FLAG NEAR SALISBURY.

"ON receipt of the following extraordinary story from the Central News Agency this morning, the *Star* at once sent a representative to make inquiries on the spot. His inquiries reveal the existence of a new terror to all who travel by road. Following are the facts communicated to us by the agency :—

"'A daring highway robbery was committed near Salisbury late last night. The victims were two gentlemen who had been touring in the west country by motor. They had intended to reach Salisbury early yesterday evening, but were delayed by a puncture. When about eight miles from Salisbury they were attacked by the occupant of another car, who wrecked their vehicle, and, after robbing them of all their valuables, decamped, leaving them badly injured by the wayside. There they

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were discovered some time afterwards and removed to the nearest inn at Compton Chamberlain, where they remain under medical attendance.—*Central News.*'

"The *Star* special correspondent wires :—

"Compton Chamberlain, 12.30.

"There is no doubt but that the Motor Pirate has a real existence. On arriving at Salisbury I at once proceeded to make inquiries as to what was known of the outrage, but Salisbury generally was sceptical on the subject. I found, however, that the affair had been reported at the county police office ; and I at once drove on here, and am now in a position to assert that this quiet Wiltshire village has been the scene of the most astounding robbery of modern times. It is safe to prophecy that in a few more months Dick Turpin will be forgotten. He has a rival in the field whose exploits will soon relegate him into comparative obscurity.

"The first visible evidence of the outrage was afforded me about a quarter of a mile from Compton. The road dips here slightly, and at the end of the incline a motor-car was drawn to the side of the road, or rather the remains of what had once been a smart Daimler of some 7 or 8 h.p. A stonebreaker was at work on an adjacent pile of flints, and when I alighted to examine the wreck, he hailed me with, 'Hoy, mister ! Ye'd better leave thick thur car alone. The p'lice be comin' to tek un up zhortly.'

"I gathered from him that he had been told to keep

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an eye upon the car, but beyond having heard that the owners had met with an accident, he knew nothing. There was no doubt about the accident. The car was so broken up that it looked as if it had been in collision with an armoured train.

"Compton Chamberlain, 2.45 p.m.

"I have just succeeded in interviewing the owner of the motor-car, a Mr. James Bradshaw, of 379, Maida Vale. His companion was Mr. Gainsborough Roberts, of 200, Clapham Common. Mr. Roberts is suffering from severe concussion, and has not regained consciousness; but fortunately Mr. Bradshaw's injuries, though painful, are not dangerous, and he has been good enough to give me a full account of his unique adventure. It seems the two gentlemen had been touring in the west country for ten days, and were on their way home. They stopped the previous night at Exeter, leaving about ten in the morning with the intention of reaching Salisbury about five or six yesterday evening. They lunched at Ilminster, and afterwards had traversed another twenty-five miles of their journey when one of their tyres unfortunately punctured. This was shortly after they had passed through Wincanton. When the tyre was mended, something went wrong with the electric ignition, and altogether the repairs proved such a tedious job that they could not make a fresh start until close upon lighting-up time.

"The delay had not troubled them, for the weather

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was beautifully fine. As, however, they were very hungry, they determined to stop at Shaftesbury for dinner before finishing the day's run they had mapped out. There is a particularly long hill into Shaftesbury, and they did not reach that town until 8.30. At the hotel they met another party of motorists, and, agreeing to dine together, it was not until after ten that they found themselves once more on their way, with twenty miles of a hilly road to cover. The lateness of the hour did not trouble them much. They had wired to Salisbury for rooms; the night was fine and clear; a bright moon was shining; the roads were clear of traffic, and their motor was guaranteed to do its thirty-five miles an hour. They thought that it would be a good opportunity to find out what Mr. Bradshaw's car was really capable of doing on a hilly track.

"Mr. Bradshaw declares that he had never enjoyed a run more than he did on this occasion. A brisk wind was blowing behind them, they found there was more downhill than up, the road was absolutely clear, and they were able to take the declines at a pace which took the sting out of the ascents.

"So for twenty minutes they ran at full speed, and after slowing to pass through a village, they had just put on full speed again when Mr. Bradshaw's attention was arrested by a curious humming sound which appeared to arise from something behind. He was, of course, unable to glance back, as all his faculties were engaged in driving the car; but Mr. Roberts, whose attention was attracted

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at the same moment, informed him that another motor-car was coming up behind. Then, to quote Mr. Bradshaw's own words, 'Thinking the other chap was on for a race, I did everything I knew to get every ounce out of my motor. But,' he continued, 'though I'll swear we were running nearer forty than thirty-five, the other fellow swooped up and passed us as if we were standing still.'

"For the moment he thought that the stranger was one of those American speed motors specially built for racing on the track, but only for a moment. The strange car slackening speed, allowed them to come alongside. What followed may be best described in Mr. Bradshaw's own words.

"'There was only one occupant of the strange car, and, seeing him slacken speed, I naturally thought he wished to speak to us. So, as he came level, I shouted to him, my exact words being, if I remember aright, "Hallo, sir! You've got a flyer there." I fancied I heard a chuckle from beneath his mask (he wore a hood covering the head fitted with a mica plate in front) and he replied, "Yes; I fancy my car is fast enough to overtake anything that is to be found on the road." There was something in his tone that struck me as peculiar, but I merely attributed it to the motorist's pride in his car. As however he said nothing further, but continued to keep alongside, in a manner that looked as if he were inclined to gloat over the owner of a less speedy machine, I asked with some little irritation, "Is

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there anything I can do for you, because if not——— ”
He did not allow me to finish my query. “Yes, sir,”
he replied promptly, “there is something I am going to
ask you to do for me,” and he gave another of his infernal
chuckles.

“‘“Well, what is it?” I demanded, with a little
warmth.

“‘“I must request you to hand over all your money
and valuables to me,” he replied.

“‘I could not believe my ears. I was so astonished
that I gave the wheel a turn that nearly landed us in
the ditch. Will you believe it? Even in that swerve
the strange car followed mine, and when I had got her
straight in the road, I heard him chuckle again. His
manner angered me beyond bearing.

“‘“What the deuce do you mean?” I shouted.

“‘“There's no need for you to lose your temper,”
he answered coolly. “I must, however, trouble you to
stop that car at once.”

“‘As he spoke he raised his hand, and I saw the barrel
of a revolver glisten in the moonlight. There seemed
to be only one way out of the predicament, for I thought
I had to deal with a madman, and I took it. I pretended
to be so alarmed that I fell over the steering wheel, and
made my car swerve again. But this time we swerved
towards, instead of away from, the stranger. I doubt
whether there was light enough for him to have read
my intention in my face, but it was obvious that he
anticipated my move, for his car shot forward with such

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wonderful speed that the fate I intended to force upon him befell myself. I saw his car disappearing ahead, and the next moment I was just conscious of a shock that sent me flying into oblivion.

"'Exactly how long I remained unconscious I do not know, but when I came to my senses I found myself lying on the grass at the roadside, having fortunately been thrown on the soft turf. Roberts was lying unconscious on the road; the car was smashed to bits; our pockets had been turned inside out, and our money, watches, and every article of value we had about us, taken. Needless to say, the stranger had disappeared.'

"Mr. Bradshaw was not in a state to be of much assistance to his more badly injured friend, and he was at a complete loss as to what course to pursue, when a trap coming from Salisbury fortunately made its appearance on the scene. Assistance was procured, and the two injured gentlemen were conveyed to Compton, and medical attention quickly provided. Though much shaken, and badly bruised, Mr. Bradshaw has sustained comparatively little injury. Mr. Roberts, however, is dangerously ill, and his relatives have been telegraphed for.

"As regards the appearance of his assailant, Mr. Bradshaw can give few particulars, save that he was clad in a large leather motoring coat, and his face completely hidden by a mask. The car can, on the contrary, be easily identified. It is boat-shaped, running to a sharp, cutting edge both in front and behind. The body is not raised more than eighteen inches from the ground.

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The wheels are either within the body, or so sheathed that they are completely hidden. It has apparently seating accommodation for two persons, the seat being placed immediately in the centre of the car. Mr. Bradshaw is quite convinced that petrol is not the motive force used for its propulsion, and as he cannot imagine that an electric motor of any kind was employed; the rapidity of motion, the perfection of the steering, the absence of noise and vibration, are so remarkable that he is utterly at a loss as to what build of car was driven by the stranger."

I had just finished reading this extraordinary story when I felt a tap on the shoulder, and, looking up, saw Colonel Maitland standing before me.

"'Pon my word, Sutgrove," he remarked, "I have never before seen any one so completely enthralled in a newspaper in my life. I've been standing watching you for nearly a minute."

I sprang to my feet, and held out my hand.

"What's the latest from Mr. Justice Jeune's division? When you come to my years of discretion you will be more interested in the *menu*."

I laughed. "It was not the inanities of the divorce court, Colonel," I remarked; "but the most astonishing——"

He checked me with uplifted hand. "Being a rational being," he said, "I prefer my stories with my cigar. One should come to dinner with a calm mind."

At this moment Winter entered the room, and, giving

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a signal to the waiter, the *hors d'œuvre* were placed before us as he seated himself at the table.

When he had greeted me I had observed that Colonel Maitland's face had worn a slightly resigned expression that reminded me of a picture I had seen somewhere of Christian martyrs being led to the stake. He took a mouthful of caviar and the cloud lifted. After the soup the dominant note of self-sacrifice had vanished entirely. With the fish his features attained repose. When we reached the *entrée* his face had the radiance of a translated saint's. Then, with my mind at rest as to the effect of my little dinner upon my chief guest, I found time to devote a little attention to Winter. Yet, bearing in mind the Colonel's objection to anything but light generalities during the serious business of dinner, I forbore to introduce the topic I was burning to discuss with him. Not until the coffee was upon the table, and Colonel Maitland had expressed his contentment with the dinner, did I venture to refer to it. Then, while our senior was dallying with an early strawberry, Winter gave me a lead.

"By the way, Sutgrove," he said, "what's this I saw on the evening paper bills about a motor pirate?"

I told him. His interest was awakened to such an extent that he forgot to taste the glass of port which stood before him, and which I had ordered out of compliment to the Colonel's ideas of what was desirable.

When my story was concluded Winter was silent. Colonel Maitland, however, hazarded the remark that

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the whole narrative was "a concoction of some of those newspaper fellows. I have been at the War Office," he said, "so I ought to know of what they are capable."

"I can scarcely imagine that any newspaper would dare hoax its readers to such an extent," remarked Winter.

"They are capable of anything—anything," replied the Colonel, vigorously. "I have known them on more than one occasion to attack even my department."

"That of course is scandalous," I replied warmly; "but here the conditions are different. They are referring to people who are able to reply if the facts are not as stated. In your case your mouth, of course, was closed."

"Umph!" growled the Colonel.

"At the same time," said Winter, "it may very well have happened that consciously or unconsciously the papers have been made the victims of a practical joke. To-morrow is the first of April, remember. Or even apart from the joke theory, the event happened after dinner, and Mr. Bradshaw may have found it necessary to be prepared with an explanation of his accident."

"But the robbery?" I objected.

"A passing tramp may have thought the opportunity too good to be neglected."

"At all events," I persisted, "it is curious that two similar accidents should have occurred the same night in the same part of the country."

"Certainly the coincidence is remarkable," answered Winter. "But do not forget that the two occurrences

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took place at least a hundred and thirty miles apart within less than three hours of one another. I will swear that no motor yet built would cover those roads inside three hours. I know them. No, Sutgrove. The moral seems to me to be that it is unwise for a motorman to look upon the wine when it is red, if he wants to get anywhere afterwards."

The Colonel stretched his hand across the table and removed the glass which stood on the table before Winter.

"My young friend," he observed, "you have, I believe, undertaken to bring me safely home to-night?"

"You need not fear," replied Winter, laughing, "it's only the liquors supplied at country inns which drive motor-cars into ditches."

The Colonel replaced the glass with a smile and refilled his own from the cradled bottle at his elbow.

"I am merely a passenger, but you drive," he remarked. "I think, Sutgrove, under the circumstances, I will be responsible for the remainder of this bottle. It is endowed with certain qualities which particularly recommend themselves to me. It would be a sad thing if an accident were to befall us on our journey. In times of stress such as these one never knows when the War Office may not require the services of a capable man."

Though the Colonel spoke in jest, in the event his words indicated with a fair amount of accuracy the destination of the port, for while we continued to discuss every point in the story, he sipped and sipped and nodded

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his head beatifically. I did not replenish my glass, but when we rose the bottle was empty.

"Well, Colonel, what do you say to a music hall?" I asked.

"My boy," he replied, as he patted me on the back, "I sleep far more comfortably in my bed."

I realized where the contents of the bottle had gone by the sententiousness of my friend's phrasing, the slight turgidity, so to speak, of his articulation.

"My dear boy," he continued, "I have never known you until this moment. You are greater than Columbus. Any one might discover a new continent, but in these days it needs exceptional qualities of enterprise and endurance to discover a fresh restaurant. I am content. Let us go home."

We donned our overcoats and came into the open air. Winter's motor was waiting at the door in charge of a man from the *garage* where he had left it. We stepped in.

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CHAPTER III

WHEREIN I MEET THE PIRATE

We were soon out of the narrow Soho street, and I observed that the time was just half-past ten as Winter steered us carefully through Piccadilly Circus. Colonel Maitland occupied a seat behind while I sat beside Winter.

The car my friend drove was a magnificent 22-horse Daimler, built to his own specification and capable of doing considerably more than any car I had hitherto been privileged to ride upon. Of course while passing through the streets there was little chance of exhibiting its capabilities. Yet even there, the way the car glided in and out of the traffic, delicately responsive to the slightest touch of the steering wheel, was sufficient evidence of its quality to set the most nervous passenger at ease. As it was as yet too early for the after theatre traffic to fill the streets and compel us to stop every few minutes, we followed the main road up Oxford Street as far as the Marble Arch. There we turned to the right. Once clear of the narrow part of the Edgeware Road, Winter put on his second speed and a very few minutes seemed

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to have passed before we were bumping over a rough bit of roadway by Cricklewood.

"There's not much of this," said Winter, cheerily over his shoulder to the Colonel.

Our gastronomic friend merely grunted for reply, and I should have thought him to be asleep had not the red glow of his cigar assured me that he was still awake.

Winter jammed on his third speed and the hedges began to fly past us. We were in the country now and were able to appreciate the fineness of the night. Indeed it was a perfect night. The air was sharp but without sting. The moon shone with a clear brilliance which betokened rain in the near future. The road was clean and dry, and there was no dust in the air except the thin cloud which floated behind us. We passed the Welsh Harp without a check, and not until we reached Edgeware did Winter revert to his second speed. We ran through the little town with only momentary slackening of pace, and so we sped onwards until we opened the stretch of road leading to Brockley Hill. Here Winter, seeing the road clear ahead, jammed on his highest speed and the wheels droned like a hive of bees as we darted towards the incline. We were half way up the hill before Winter found it necessary to transform his speed into power, and we finished the ascent with ease. Then once more the order was third speed, and we whirled away through Elstree and passed through Radlett a bare half hour from the time we started.

Just at this time I looked back to see how Colonel

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