

Traffic Problems in France

Engineering

EARNEST ELMO CALKINS in *If Big Business Came to France* (Atlantic Monthly, April, 1929):

In the course of a recent vacation in France I amused myself by imagining the effect on that country and its people of the introduction of our big business methods: huge manufacturing plants making goods distributed by advertisement to every town, village, and hamlet; the pleasant land of France mapped out in red-headed tacks on the glasstopped desks of sales managers; salesmen primed with sales psychology from instruction books; brief cases stuffed with portfolios of advertising campaigns; sales conventions, drives, "Eat - more - tripe-à-la-mode-de-Caen weeks," chain stores, the Rotary Club holding its weekly luncheon at the Grand Hôtel de l'Europe et de l'Épée; the sky line of Paris broken by steel-skeletoned skyscrapers dwarfing the towers of Notre Dame; the picturesque individuality of the *rues nationales* punctuated by the standardized store fronts of chain stores, and everywhere houses built of the same materials on the same plan, filled with the same furniture and inhabited by people wearing the same clothes. France would lose her great national industry, tourism, but worse, she would lose her point of view, her philosophy, her individualism; and that would be a catastrophe. The world would be poorer with France other than she is.

The open road is not a bad place from which to study a people. One soon gets away from the sophisticated spots where contact with outsiders has blurred individuality and produced a sort of hybrid civilization which, like all hybrids, retains the worst features of each. The motor car gives us a cross section; cities, villages, open country; farms, olive orchards, vineyards; mountain, seacoast, river; and the changeful life that is lived in all of them. I have the deaf man's facility in using his eyes, and my conclusions are based on observation, on what I see as I go about. All I have to contribute to an important controversy are the habits and character of the French people as seen by a man who has few means of contact, but who long ago learned that what people are speaks louder than what they say.

In cities the problem of motor-congested streets affords us an index to national temperaments, for we

Americans too have a traffic problem. Compare the three great capital cities, New York, London, and Paris.

The New York traffic cop is an autocrat. He likes to disregard the red and green signals to show you, as Don Marquis says, "who is king." The supreme sin of the motorist, in his eyes, is *lèse-majesté*. And he is often quite violent about it.

The London bobby is an opportunist. His only concern is clearing the traffic. He winks at violations of the rules if they are intelligent and successful. He is less assertive, and yet obeyed more implicitly, than his New York counterpart. But he is dealing with a more law-abiding populace.

The Paris *gendarme* is not concerned with the motor traffic at all. His care is the pedestrian. At regular intervals he cleaves a swath through the moving stream of vehicles, like Moses dividing the Red Sea, and the swarms of *piétons* cross over. Then he waves his white baton and the cars resume their struggle for gangway without interference from him. And yet it is easier to go about in a car in Paris than in London or New York. In the country there is no speed limit, but drivers are held strictly accountable—a more intelligent regulation than our own.

Another comparison shows the different applications of a similar idea.

Feverish activity on the New York Stock Exchange recently caused the market to outstrip the ticker, and our inventive ingenuity is being directed toward producing a recording device to register sales and quote prices as fast as they are made.

In France they are installing at race courses near Paris a calculating machine which will work out the odds on the *pari mutuel* system in less time than the old hand-and-head method. In one country a machine to measure business; in the other a machine to measure pleasure.

In France one is never at a loss to identify a road. The companionable white kilometre stones accompany one everywhere, recording on the hither side the next two communes and their distances, on the front the number and class of the road, tying up perfectly with the map. The name of each village is displayed in its civic centre, white letters on a blue plaque—a device so obviously useful one wonders why it has not obtained here. Have you never tried in vain to learn the name of the town you were passing through? Nor is all this a development of motoring; it preceded the gasoline era by many years. For the French realize that roads are civilizers. The motorist merely inherits them, but they make France a motorist's paradise. *Science News-Letter, May 25, 1929*

Static and Storms—Continued

many others the sources of atmospheric were apparently low-pressure areas where thunderstorms may have occurred, though none was observed at Weather Bureau stations. We are inclined to believe from these results as well as from the work of others, that most atmospheric are due to lightning discharges, although, of course, the evidence is too incomplete to permit us to draw positive conclusions.

"A low-pressure area seems to produce more atmospheric when it is moving rapidly. When it is more or less stationary and quiescent it produces few atmospheric. In the summer, lows produce many more atmospheric when over land than after they pass out to sea, but in cool weather the reverse is sometimes true. In the winter, sources as far away as Texas, the West Indies, South America, and Africa can be observed, but in the summer the effects of nearby disturbances usually overshadow these

distant sources. On days when there is nearly a complete absence of thunderstorms in the United States, the atmospheric are generally light, unless there is a source due to a low not far out in the Atlantic."

Mr. Dean suggested that this method could be used to a special advantage in tracing storms out at sea or in regions where there are no weather stations.

"It would seem that as few as three stations, one on the north Atlantic coast, one on the south Atlantic coast, and one in the middle west, would cover the eastern part of North America and the western part of the Atlantic Ocean fairly well," he said. "Our experience indicates that such a system might be helpful in the location of storms in northern Canada, the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and the West Indies, as well as those in the eastern half of the United States."

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