

Farmers Buy Forty Per Cent. of Motor Cars

Country Existence Ameliorated by Speeding Up from Three to Twenty Miles an Hour—Tremendous Influence in Rural Social Life.

FORTY per cent. of the automobiles sold thus far this year have been bought by farmers, according to an estimate obtained from the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce. This is considered the most significant shift in motor car distribution since the gasoline-driven vehicle passed from the toy to the practical stage, with the promise of an effect on farm life more far-reaching in certain respects than that wrought by any previous invention.

Iowa, a farm State, leads in the number of cars per capita. According to the new motor vehicle registration figures by States, now available for the first six months in 1917, there is one motor vehicle in Iowa to every nine persons, a gain over the same period in 1916 of 40 per cent. The percentage increase for the same period in the great manufacturing State of New York was 24. The new figures show that place of honor No. 2 in number of cars per capita is also held by a farm State, Nebraska. There is one motor vehicle for every ten persons, an increase since last year of 26 per cent. The gain in the great manufacturing State of Pennsylvania for the same period was 10 per cent. Third place in per capita distribution of motor vehicles is held by California, where there is now one motor car for every twelve persons. In this State, too, agricultural interests are large.

Another agricultural State, Kansas, occupies fourth place in percentage gain, with one car to every thirteen persons, with 22 per cent. advance over the corresponding six months in 1916. Linked with Kansas in fourth place again is a farm State, South Dakota, showing an increase of 24 per cent. In this period Illinois, one of the leading manufacturing States, registered an increase in number of automobiles purchased of 13 per cent. The next three places in this list are held by farm States—Minnesota and North Dakota tied for fifth position, with one motor vehicle for every fourteen persons, and Montana next with one out of every fifteen. And so it goes down the list of States.

What is the national significance of this? A look backward will bring out the answer, as seen by motor vehicle experts. Everybody knows about the outstanding rural problem—"The Isolation of the Farm." For thirty years it has been a leading topic in all discussions for the amelioration of farm life. Many times the problem seemed on the eve of being solved. There was the railroad. It was to intersect the country until no isolation would be left. Then came the

telephone. It was to knit the countryside together by wire and long distance conversation and thus banish isolation. Next came rural mail delivery. It was to make the change by the delivery of daily papers at the farmer's door, by establishing continuous touch with the city and the outside world.

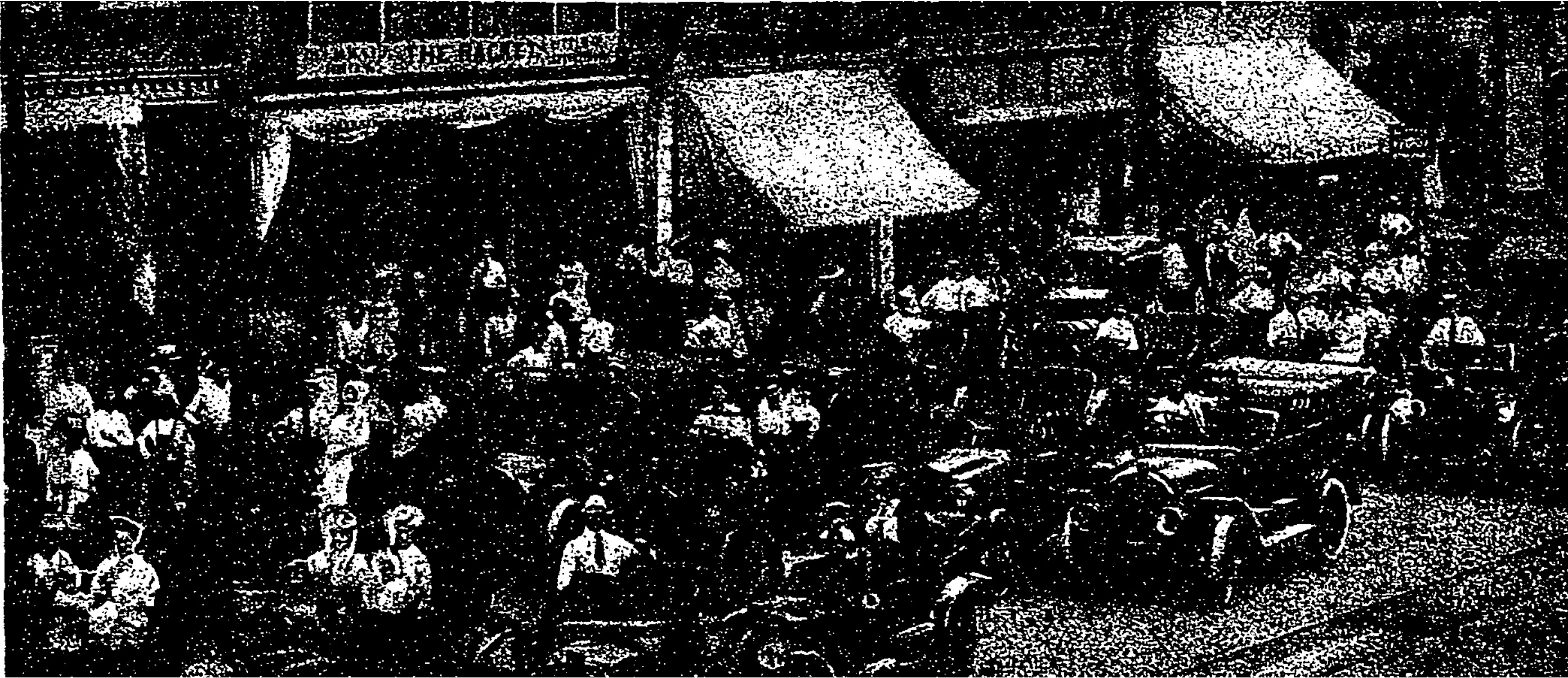
Each did effect a decided change, but the problem of lonesomeness of farm life remained. Telephoning at first afforded

labor-saving devices for the farm, such as the reaper, the riding plow, and the gasoline engine, weakening to some extent the theory that it was the burdensome work and the length of the hours that made farm work distasteful. Then came the introduction of the idea that the heart of the trouble was social, and that it would be solved only by the extension of social organization in the farm communities. Neighborhood societies,

monotony. The dull people became duller; many of the brighter ones made their escape.

What was needed for the farmer's family was twenty miles an hour. This the automobile supplies, and this is the real meaning of the remarkable increase in the number of automobiles now being bought by farmers. The city had various kinds of rapid transit before the automobile, but the automobile ever provided

for the farmer. Rapid transit made the big cities of today possible. Automobile rapid transit, experts on this subject say, is going to make a new kind of life possible on the farm. The practical utility of the automobile on the farm has already been much emphasized, the marketing and going back and forth in the day's work. It is a service of capital importance and must be appraised at a high value, but the practical side of farm life has received the almost exclusive



Farmers' Automobiles Crowding a Street in Salina, Kan., on Saturday Afternoon.

Brown Bros.

a few thrills, but still there was no place to go, nobody to see except the same old faces, Mary, Jane, Ed, and Reuben. Many of the best boys and girls, those with the most life in them, with the yearning to adventure beyond the little eddy of a village community, continued to leave the farm for the city. They came back home once a year and wondered how the other people there stood the monotony of it all for twelve months on end.

In 1880 29½ per cent. of our population was urban. In 1910 the gain in urban population had risen to 46.3 per cent. From 1880 to 1910 the gain in urban population amounted to 189 per cent., that of rural population to 39 per cent. The most significant result of this tendency to concentrate in cities was a falling off in the per capita production of staple foodstuffs. In the ten years cen-

improvement societies, and community circles followed in large numbers. They helped, but the old lonesomeness still cast its shadow over the farm.

No one hit upon the actual cause. The trouble with the farm was three miles an hour—three miles by horse and buggy or two by team and wagon. Even the best social ideas would not work at such a rate of moving about. This rate of three miles an hour limited the size of the community, set a bound on the number of people one would meet in the course of a lifetime. Twelve miles is a long drive by horse and buggy, and that was about the radius of the farm families' social life; the actual neighborhood life was restricted to about four miles from home. Six miles was a good way to go to church; seven or eight miles would be attempted for a social party. In this small

attention of those who would improve its conditions.

It may be said that therein lay its unattractiveness to many. It was too practical; too much work and too little play. All the inventors had been concentrating on providing the farmer with better tools to work with instead of giving at least a fair part of the thought to a device to afford him pleasure.

One name for the automobile is pleasure car. Vacations spring from the pleasure idea. The vacation is an urban institution, born in the city and developed there. It was an unknown practice on the farm until a few years ago. It was no pleasure to wear out a team on some long trip, over hot and dusty roads. But now the farmer automobile owner looks forward to his vacation with all the expectation of the city man. Thousands of Kansas and Nebraska farmers will make trips this year to Colorado and other scenic States of the Far West, after their rush season is ended.

In some of the most prosperous districts four out of five farmers own automobiles. To them a hundred miles is a short trip. This means the multiplication of the attendance at all social gatherings—more zest, more life, and, through the agency of the automobile, marrying in the country is undergoing a change. The old horse and buggy courting radius was about six miles from home. The farmer's son, with the automobile, has a range of 100 miles in which to seek for a wife. The sociologists would call it better mating, for the farmer's boy or girl now has a larger opportunity to choose the one most suitable. The automobile is making a farm the place to live.



Brown Bros.

In His Motor Car the Farmer Goes Into the Field to Watch His Thrashing Machine.

tring around 1880 we produced 8½ bushels of wheat per capita. In the ten years centring around 1910 the output was 7.7 bushels per capita.

This relative change in urban and rural population took place in the face of many

district one got to know all the people well, all their virtues and all their peculiarities, all their ideas, so that an observing person could tell in advance what a neighbor's opinion on a new subject would be. It was serene, but full of