

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

6 *The Ballad of the Cars*

(Wardour Street Border Ballad)

“Now this is the price of a stirrup-cup,”
The kneeling doctor said.
And syne he bade them take him up,
For he saw that the man was dead.

They took him up, and they laid him down 5
(And, oh, he did not stir),
And they had him into the nearest town
To wait the Coroner.

They drew the dead-cloth over the face,
They closed the doors upon, 10
And the cars that were parked in the market-place
Made talk of it anon.

Then up and spake a Daimler wide,
That carries the slatted tank: —
“Tis we must purge the country-side 15
And no man will us thank.

“For while they pray at Holy Kirk
That souls should turn from sin,
We cock our bonnets to the work,
And gather the drunken in. — 20

“And if we spare them for the nonce, —
Or their comrades jack them free, —
They learn more under our dumb-irons
Than they learned at their mother’s knee.”

Then up and spake an Armstrong bold, 25
And Siddeley was his name: —
“I saw a man lie stark and cold
By Grantham as I came.

“There was a blind turn by a brook,
A guard-rail and a fall: 30
But the drunken loon that overtook
He got no hurt at all!

“I ha’ trodden the wet road and the dry —
But and the shady lane;
And why the guiltless soul should die, 35
Good reason find I nane.”

Then up and spake the Babe Austin —
Had barely room for two —
“Tis time and place that make the sin,
And not the deed they do. 40

“For when a man drives with his dear,
I ha’ seen it come to pass
That an arm too close or a lip too near
Has killed both lad and lass.

“There was a car at eventide 45
And a sidelings kiss to steal —
The God knows how the couple died,
But I mind the inquest weel.

“I have trodden the black tar and the heath —
But and the cobble-stone; 50
And why the young go to their death,
Good reason find I none.”

Then spake a Morris from Oxenford,
(‘Was kin to a Cowley Friar): —

“How shall we judge the ways of the Lord
That are but steel and fire? 55

“Between the oil-pits under earth
And the levin-spark from the skies,
We but adventure and go forth
As our man shall devise: 60

“And if he have drunken a hoop too deep,
No kinship can us move
To draw him home in his market-sleep
Or spare his waiting love.

“There is never a lane in all England 65
Where a mellow man can go,
But he must look on either hand
And back and front also.

“But he must busk him every tide,
At prick of horn, to leap 70
Either to hide in ditch beside
Or in the bankès steep.

“And whether he walk in drink or muse,
Or for his love be bound,
We have no wit to mark and chuse, 75
But needs must slay or wound.”

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They drew the dead-cloth from its face.
The Crowner looked thereon;
And the cars that were parked in the market-place
Went all their ways anon. 80

1904

(From *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*. Definitive edition.
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