

# *The BOWLING GREEN* by Christopher Morley

## The Chevvy That Hung Her Head

**C**HEVVY hung her head: she was ashamed.

Every line of her smart little body showed it. She might still have been—after nearly five years and 30,000 miles—the handsomest open phaeton on the road. But all the admiration and care seemed to go to the big Family Ford. No one but the Old Man ever drove Chevvy, and even he only for errands and to the train. Where were the grand picnics of her youth when the whole gang would pile in for swimming at Lloyds Neck or trips across the Sound? She had been as far as Quebec once; and through the Catskills all the way to Ithaca and the Finger Lakes. And now look at her. Her sandy complexion had faded almost white in years of weather. Her floor mats were gone. Her accelerator pedal was off. From her front bumper (rusty) and her winged radiator-cap (askew) to her clanking luggage-rack (loose) she looked lonely and abused. Her canvas top sagged damply with the afternoon's fall of snow; there wasn't enough anti-freezing stuff in her radiator; and from cylinder head to oil-pan drain plug she was bitterly and savagely cold.

Cars are like women: you mustn't give them too much time for brooding. I'm afraid poor Chevvy, in long days under the lamp-post at Roslyn station or in the parking lot at Manhasset, had abundant leisure to meditate. The little glass dials on her dashboard would mist over as she enumerated her woes. Her spark plugs were foul, her horn was faint, her valve-tappets rattled, her windshield wiper was short of breath. She felt a fatal weakness in her battery, her tires had soft corns, and there was a nasty one-sided tightness in her brakes accompanied by hot shooting pains in the drums. Growing a little morbid as she pondered these symptoms, she would think wistfully of the commandments in Holy Writ, viz. the Instruction Booklet which was still in her pocket and which her Old Man had never properly heeded. She felt quite sure, for instance, that the S.A.E. viscosity of her oil was all wrong for this winter weather. S.A.E., I suppose, means Society of Automotive Engineers? but as far as the Old Man was concerned it might have meant Saint Agnes Eve: he would have been pleased if it had. The gap between her spark plugs was undoubtedly wider than .032" prescribed in her breviary; her carburetor was full of sediment; she had rheumatism in most of her gaskets and her front wheels didn't toe in properly. The diaphragm of her fuel pump was leaking, her gears had tooth-

ache, and certainly there was something eccentric about her cam-shaft. As for more intricate and secret delicacies, the intimate cones and sleeves and bearings of her syncro-mesh transmission or her differential joint, she didn't dare think about them.

So she hung her head, and other cars sneered. Big shiny Fords, Buicks, Dodges, Packards, warmed with heaters, suave with fashionable streamline figures, rich with rugs and upholstery and wreaths of holly and ribbon hanging in their rear windows, purring smooth with costly Ethyl, filled the parking lot and smiled condescendingly at her naked leather cushions, her flaccid tires. As they swung round her in dignified arcs they looked patronizingly at her humble and sparse little instrument board with so few gadgets. Chevvy was glad they couldn't see—unless the key was turned on—how low the gas usually was; and of the cheapest kind. (No wonder she had that hacking cough in one cylinder.) No clock, no lighter, no stove, no radio—and even the poor little Free Wheeling button had never been used. Having once learned to shift gears the Old Man wasn't going to fangle with anything new.

But these merely physical contrasts, to which our unassuming heroine was accustomed, were not the most painful. Give her a good pull on the choke, with any sort of sparkle in her poor little frost-bitten battery, and she'd leap to life prompter and louder than any other. What really was hard to bear was the times when (for whatever reason) the Old Man was late coming home. Dusk would fall over the parking lot, and other

people's Old Men came pouring out from the train, and one by one the cars would back and turn and crunch off over the gravel, home for dinner and the warm garage. Train after train rumbles through the Manhasset cutting, and you can see all the parked cars peering through their big lenses, wondering if he's on that one, or will it be the next? And the cars that have to wait the longest always get a razz from those whose owners are punctual. Nothing is so domestic, so censorious of broken routine, as a middle-class family sedan. In the very way they spurn the pebbles behind them as they turn out of the parking lot and rumble for home you can divine their contempt for the other cars that are still tarrying. Once the fine deep-cut tire-tread of a departing limousine picked up a pebble and flung it deservingly right against Chevvy's windshield.

She had grown sensitive about this matter. Though she was secretly proud of the Old Man, and pleased that his work was different from most so that he kept irregular hours, yet there were times when she believed he was later than necessary. It was painful to get an ironical honk from some purse-proud Packard or pharisaical Ford as they coughed away. More painful still was the disdainful silence of other cars leaving discreetly as the late trains came in. Not even station wagons, the most self-righteous of vehicles, would be likely to make talk about a car that doesn't pull out by midnight—when the theatre train arrives—but if you hang around the lot very much later than that, you get chaffed about it. And there were occasions when Chevvy was a bit peeved about George and Eddie: for these, or may be Frank and Bucky, I'm not sure

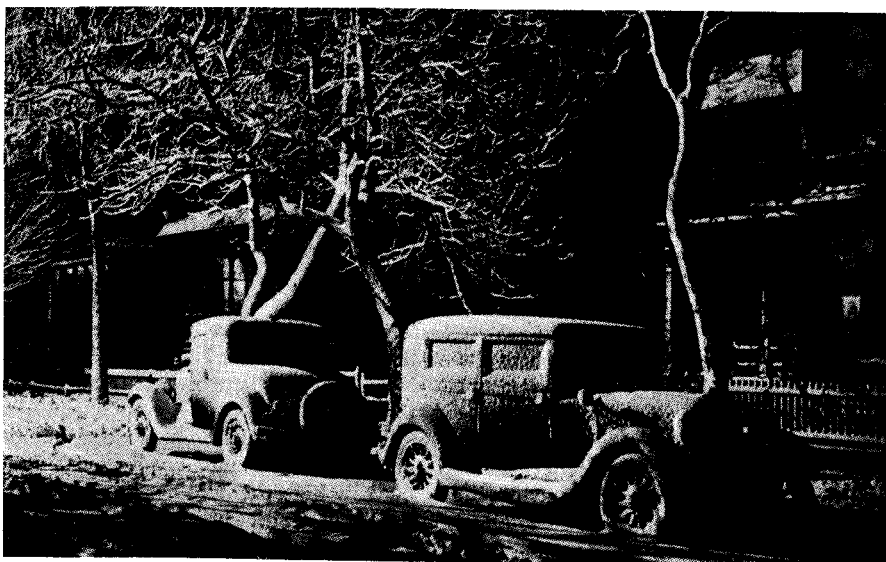


PHOTO BY FRED G. KORTH: From "U. S. Camera, 1936" (Morrow).

of the names, were most often mentioned by the Old Man as the cronies whose affectionate insistence had so lingeringly detained him. It appears that there was a ski-ball resort where these gentlemen would relax from a difficult evening's work; and as far as Chevvy could learn there is something about ski-ball that makes it impossible to keep track of time. . . . Anyhow, what happened on Christmas Eve may have been due to Chevvy's own delicate state of health; or to the surfeit of ignitions too long repressed; or just plain miracle.

It could only have happened just where it did: because Chevvy lived half-way between two different railroad lines, and her Old Man commuted indiscriminately (if that's the word), or promiscuously, sometimes on one line and sometimes on the other. He could take the steam train at Roslyn, which was slower and more expensive, but nearer and more to his antiquarian taste. Or he could take the electric train at Manhasset, faster and cheaper but used by less picturesque people. And once in a while, after a busy day in town, or a game of ski-ball, and his mind full of his own ideas, in which he was very happily interested, he would quite simply and actually forget which line he had used that day. This was difficult, because at one place or the other—four miles apart—Chevvy was waiting for him.

So it was Christmas Eve; and our story, already too long delayed by explanation, has all the requisite setting. It was cold, and a damp snow had come on during the day, and Chevvy was very unhappy. She hung her head, and the others sneered. The 5:41 (the train that has the club cars) had come; and the 6:21 (which you can recognize by the fact that it always gets in at 6:25); and the 6:56; but no Old Man. And everyone else was home, getting ready to dress the Tree; and Chevvy was fed up with seeing other cars roll by (their snow-chains clacking merrily and censoriously) while she stood solitary and sore. The specific gravity of her battery was dangerously low (she could actually feel the amperes fading) and her radiator was getting ready to freeze. It's Christmas Eve, she said to herself, and he's got no business to play ski-ball tonight. Or highball either. If he thinks he's going to be late he's very much mistaken. I'm going in town and hunt for him. I've heard enough about the places they're so fond of, I bet I can find them.

To this day no one knows just how she did it; sheer will-power I suppose; but with a fearful effort of electrolysis, gasoline vapor, and grinding flywheel, which convulsed the battery down its last numb ampere, she cranked herself, moaned with lumbago and excitement, and came alive.

What she proposed to do was even tougher than you might think. Chevvy has a horror of driving in New York.

Moreover it was snowing; she hadn't any chains; she didn't dare turn her lights above dim because something's gone queer in her wiring so the fuse blows if you give the lamps full juice. She felt sure that if and when she got to town she'd make some mistake—it runs in the family—and get picked up by a cop. If she braked too suddenly at a traffic light she'd surely skid, yet if she didn't make pretty good time she'd never get the Old Man home within the hours of decency. But she loved him, and dared everything. A warming current of heroism ran through her engine; the ice crystals melted in the radiator; she pulled away from the familiar lamp-post where he had left her that morning, and set off. The new Parkway was since her time; no, she thought, I'll stick to the familiar Northern Boulevard. Then I can't go wrong.

Through the forested curves of the Roslyn Estates she throbbed cautiously; sliding a bit on those worn old tires, and wishing she had some glycerine for the windshield. Snow was drifted deep on her unsheltered cushions, but her heart was stout. At the traffic light on Northern Boulevard she had to wait. She gathered all her forces now for the long run. She remembered the old dashboard formula and took heart: "I've got water, I've got amperes, I've got oil, I've got gas, I've got miles." That was what the Old Man used to sing to himself, checking up the dials. But wait a minute—*have* I got gas? Not enough for a ride to town. Damn the parsimonious old fool, why does he never buy more than 5 at a time. If I stop at a filling station they'll be sure to think something's wrong.

There was no way out of it, she must appeal for help. How could she persuade someone to chaperone her as far as a gas pump? Through the whirling snow and in the pale beam of her lights she saw a form approaching. Panting a little with eagerness she rolled towards him, misjudged, braked hard, slid sideways, and stalled.

It was the Old Man himself, who had not been playing ski-ball, but (after calling on a publisher) had forgotten whether he had parked at Roslyn or at Manhasset; and guessed wrong. So he had been walking home two miles in the snow, and enjoying it.

I guess I'm going gently and serenely nuts, he remarked afterward to Frank and Bucky (or Bill and Max, I'm not sure of the names). I couldn't remember where I'd parked the Chevvy, but I seem to have left her just where you come out from the Estates onto Northern Boulevard. What do you suppose was the idea in that?

He brushed out the snow, and climbed in, and drove home—hardly even noticing how high she held her head, how loving and quick her combustion. They weren't more than a few minutes late for dinner; as a matter of fact they weren't really late at all because the children

were busy telephoning. Chevvy felt a glow of satisfaction that quite bucked up some of the anaemic amperes; and even the Old Man, having taken some anti-freeze himself, had the good sense to give her a strong slug of alcohol in her radiator—which, for man or motor, is good Christmas medicine.

## Pragmatic Democrat

*GREAT LEVELER, THE LIFE OF THADDEUS STEVENS.* By Thomas Frederick Woodley. New York: Stackpole Sons. 1937. \$3.50.

Reviewed by PAUL H. BUCK

THIS is not a new biography but a partially revised and slightly condensed edition of Mr. Woodley's "Thaddeus Stevens," published in 1934. Mr. Woodley's work makes no positive contribution as history because it does not change in any vital respect the factual structure of Stevens's life established by earlier writers. It is not distinguished as biography because it does not possess sufficient artistry to achieve completely successful character delineation. But it is a full record of Stevens's career written from a point of view sympathetic to Stevens. As such it comes as a challenge to the prevailing practice of relegating Stevens to the lowest hell of American historical characters.

The chief value of the book is its plea for justice. Mr. Woodley is quite correct in pointing out that Stevens is thought of as a sinister figure in American history and that historians have become progressively harsher in their condemnation. This seems to Mr. Woodley prejudice, and he presents in contrast a Stevens who was a great "pragmatic democrat," who had the true corrective for inequality in American life and the proper solution for the problems of reconstruction. He marshals as evidence Stevens's passion to make God's law of equality prevail on earth, his anti-Masonic leadership, his battle for free public education, his persistent struggle against slavery, his realistic view of the Constitution, and his program of reconstruction. In respect to the last point, Mr. Woodley believes that Stevens's plan would have succeeded provided Congress had done all that Stevens wanted, including confiscation of rebel property, and had Stevens lived beyond the year 1868.

All that is necessary to explode this argument is to contrast the methods and achievements of Stevens with those of Lincoln. In time of great crisis the former espoused force and vengeance as means to his end; the latter charity and moderation. Every important action of Stevens's life resulted in increased animosity, greater chaos, and delayed solutions. The American people made no mistake in choosing Lincoln and rejecting Stevens as the exemplar of American democracy.