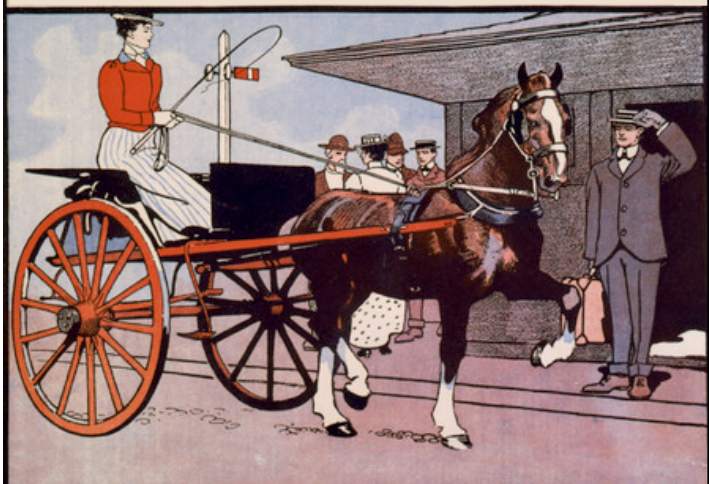


THE CLAIMS AGAINST



THE FEMALE DRIVER

— J. VERNE —

THE CLAIMS AGAINST THE FEMALE DRIVER

(Revendications à faire face à des Pilotes Féminines)

J. Verne

With illustration by various artists

It has come to the attention of this author, both through experience personal and information anecdotal, that a recent ruling by a misguided magistrate in our city of Amiens has opened a doorway to a most dangerous occurrence. Namely, this is the allowing of the female of our human race to be given free reign—or rein as the case may be—to providing that women of at least the age of eighteen might be found sitting in control of horse-drawn carriages.

And, to increase the seriousness of the matter, they are to be given allowance to pilot carriages alone, without a male presence to stabilize their movements and to wrest control back when and if the horse bolts due to lack of handling prowess.

All that I might think of this magistrate is that he is of the sub-category of males who listen with too open an ear to their wives and who subsequently allow themselves to be convinced by the same. This appears to follow a pattern beginning with household duties, where it is the *opinion* of the wife that the husband is “not performing enough” of such things as washing dishes and care of the children.



Next comes the word spoken in the unwilling ear that the eyes so attached will not be permitted to spend time admiring others of the fairer sex from that day hence.

It then progresses to being informed, and then admitting that one's most favoured politician may not be "a good man," when that opinion is held by his wife, or that a shop which has until that point provided services of an almost perfect nature, only to have the wife decide that "they" no longer wish to shop with that merchant.

At the pinnacle, or so I believed until this most recent news was announced, comes the day in which the husband gives into the wife when she continually informs him that his favoured acquaintances are not the "right kind of people," and that he ought to henceforth cease associating with them.

As it begins in all innocence it is amazing that not each and every husband is so reshaped by the woman over whom he is suppose to rule. But that is the mark of the cleverness of women that they should show us love and then demand the sort of concessions from us that lead to being give the rights of men to drive horse-drawn vehicles.

And what will be next? Trains? Trolley cars? Conveyances of the sky?

I shudder to think of the potential for damages coming to us all.

Ah, but you ask for my arguments as promised in the title of this article? Good! I shall tell you of them.

Let us begin with the temperament of the average woman. To begin with she may be the keeper of our homes, but is so easily distracted by such things as fineries and baubles. It is firmly believe by many experts that the mind of the woman is incapable of sustaining serious concentration for a period long enough to perform much of the work that men are so easy at accomplishing.

Others believe that women think at a different rate than men and therefore I submit to you that my belief is they ought to be rigorously tested and examined for soundness of mind and to detect any signs of instability of thought.



Such examinations would be under the care of professional physicians with some experience in dealing with female concerns, and would be by necessity witnessed by other women with medical qualifications of a nurse to ensure that no undue influence is offered by the female subject, nor is the doctor unrightly harsh in his assertion of stability or otherwise.

Men naturally are capable of determining if they are able to handle the many-detailed chore—and yes, it is a chore and not as some women might believe, a “fun day out!”—of driving. That is, unless, the man is under undue influence of heavy spirits or of too much wine.



The thought has just struck me with some horror of seeing women also liquor-influenced careening down one of the avenues or boulevards with her horse team wild in their harnesses sensing the lack of care or ability at the other end of the leather. *Mon dieu!*

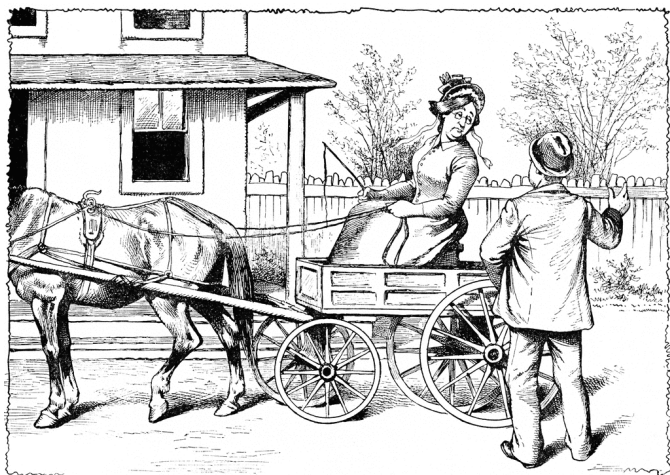
The next step to ensure the safety of the population at large would need to be a period of rigid instruction. This would start with the need to have an understanding of the workings of the general carriage from bottom to top. Women should know the steps necessary to unfasten an old, damage wheel—which they will no doubt provide by the dozens—and henceforth install a new or repaired wheel.

Following that, a course on the maintenance of the horse. A noble steed will provide many good years of service but requires that the owner provide for its welfare. Chief among these items includes proper nourishment and at proper intervals. I cringe at the idea of women driving their carriages along only to have the horse or horses stop due to fatigue from lack of grains or straw.

There is no known service to bring such items to a stranded carriage, although as I write that a thought has occurred that such an enterprise might be begun and some handsome profits made from dealing with this new breed of carriage operator.

Notwithstanding that issue or opportunity, the female operator will also need to know when and how much water to provide the horse or team. Too little and they will overheat even on a moderate day and too much and they could suffer bloat from which they might see some damage.

But the most serious of the tutelage will need to be that of the proper handling of the reins and an appreciation of the level of time and effort that must be gone into at each and every second of travel. I have spoken to several other males and the general agreement is that women will not concentrate on the road or path before them, and it will be up to other operators—male no doubt—to watch out for them and take corrective and evasive measures in order to avoid collisions that could cause damage to both carriages, their operators, horses and to standers by.



Of course this all falls on the shoulders of the husband of the woman who wishes to avail herself of this new freedom. And when precisely do these modern women expect their husbands to locate ample time in which to perform these unexpected—unnecessary?—duties?

Ah, my friend, now you must be beginning to see what might be termed a “fly in the ointment.”

For, as surely as the sun rises over fields of flowers most fragrant in the spring-time, if our foolish magistrate can be convinced of the sanity of my propositions that will mean that I am bringing down upon my common male a job of such a nature that might cause both arguments as well as ill feelings between husband and wife.

Worse yet, anger directed at your humble servant.

Perhaps my suggestion should contain a provision that an agency of the local council, or one private if this is acceptable, be begun to take on the job of thus training the new feminine drivers.

I would hope that harmony in the marriage might be maintained in this fashion.

Another hope of mine is that women will receive instructions in how to comport themselves, particularly when driving alone.

Clothing must not be adjusted while the horses are in motion. Likewise, any application of rouge or other facial adornment ought to be made an offense. As I contemplate this further, I foresee that the eating of foodstuffs, or the taking care of infants or scolding of unruly older children must not be allowed while the carriage is underway.

These things can be accomplished, but only once the conveyance has been pulled to one side of the avenue.

One of the most vulgar of things I witness practically every day is the sight of young women with cigarettes

dangling loosely from a mouth corner flicking up and down as they speak to their companions.

Of this nothing may be done by law or decree as it is a condoned activity up to the highest levels of our own government, but I would hope that such behaviour will be proscribed in women at the command of a carriage.

It is difficult enough to keep your eyes on everything around you much less to have stray ashes or embers jumping from the end of a roll of tobacco and into ones eye.

There must be other items that should be added to this small article but time and the pressure of the editor of our *Amiens Résumé* to submit before his deadline preclude this.

Ah, but there is one further item I must add.

It is most difficult enough to control the behaviours of our young men who, of a Saturday evening, are apt to be found parading down the boulevards in carriages sometimes carrying four, five or six of them, all the while making comments both provocative and often rude to people strolling on the sidewalks.

Surely the sight or thought of numerous young women or girls engaged in such an activity is enough to make any magistrate rethink the possible results of this misdeed.

I can only trust that I have provided enough grist to start discussion and to sway the magistrate away from the blind following of his wife's latest favoured endeavour.

Finally, I will add one thing. Can you imagine the indignity of the husband forced to sit to his wife's left side while on the way to a formal function? All dressed from top hat to a suit of tails, and freshly scrubbed at the direction of his spouse, he must sit as meekly as a new lamb while the carriage is being manoeuvred through other traffic, helpless in case of a mistake, and

impotent to insist that it be he who ought to be sitting in the driver's position.



Fin

Ah, but another, most pleasant thought has just occurred to me. If my wife were to be busy at the control of the horses of our own carriage I might be able to spend many fine moments viewing the pretty young women and girls that seem to flourish in Amiens.



*Dieu merci pour
les petites faveurs!*