

THE CARRIAGES OF LONDON.

Private Vehicles and their Changes

AN "ESTABLISHMENT" NOW AND IN THE "GOOD OLD TIMES."

BY ONE OF CHARLES DICKENS' BEST FRIENDS.

The disappearance of pitfalls and leather breeches from the House of Commons, the rise and fall of the Stanhope gig and cabriolet, the decline of chariots, the extinction of the vis-a-vis, and the introduction of the Brougham.

There can be no doubt that among the many remarkable social changes within the recollection of our middle-aged men, none has been more decisive than that in the character of our pleasure carriages.

Although still quite a young man, as compared with the venerable horse-keepers, my earliest recollections—as an untutored boy, whose greatest joy was to sit on a horse in the stall, while a groom, the nurse's sweetheart, passed through his work—go back to the palmy days of posturing and saluting between Dover and Calais.

It is rather surprising that the noble lord who gave the idea and his name to this invaluable improvement in town carriages has never made the subject of a paragraph in one of those wonderful discourses on everything in general and nothing in particular, addressed to social science meetings.

The germ of the Brougham is to be found in certain street vehicles drawn by one horse in use in Birmingham and Liverpool forty years ago, under the name of one-horse cars.

It was on this journey that, near an English manufacturing town, we called with a letter of introduction on one of the most men of the place, at his stucco-painted mock Italian villa, staring at the highway.

The carriage with the silver roof flourished in its most expensive shape, with no driver or attendant, in the time of George the Regent. The little boot which in later days carried the grooms was an economical compromise; four horses and two coachmen, and a carriage to carry two persons in a pair of horses, and a coachman, was surely the height of extravagance.

The most celebrated currier of the last century was built of copper, in the shape of a sashell, and was driven by that caricature of an English, Romeo Coates. The last currier about town was Court O'Grady's, and although the shape of the body of the carriage was inelegant, the effect of that kind of be-plated luxury was very striking when the horses were perfect, and the harness gorgeous and well varnished.

The mail phaeton of the last generation of the great-railroad age has been reduced in size and weight, and (in the majority of instances) by the abolition of the perch, transformed into the Stanhope phaeton. It is likely to continue popular with the large number who enjoy driving, and can afford to drive, a pair of horses. The old mail phaeton, some specimens of which may still be seen driven by country bankers and masters of hounds, required a pair of full-sized expensive horses to draw it well, instead of the small horses which best suit a Stanhope phaeton; but it was, of its kind, a luxurious carriage, by its strength and weight defying the jolts of the worst roads, and overpowering the impudence of the drunken drivers of market-carts.

The fashionable two-wheeled half-covered town carriage of Reform Bill days was the cabriolet. It was a very handy vehicle, and its changes of great debates. Now, you may count on your fingers the number that are worth looking at in the Park, or at the doors of the best clubs.

The Brougham, invented in 1839, gave a fatal blow to the cabriolet, by affording the maximum of appearance and convenience at the cost of one horse and one servant.

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