PROGRESS

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EDITORIAL COMMENT.

The motor car has long ceased to attract the attention that it once did. In fact, a car now attracts no attention at all; that is to say, it has become an accepted factor in our everyday life, and, as such, evokes no more display of interest than a passing tram or any other daily accessory to our comfort or convenience.

The motor car has passed from being a luxury to a necessity. Lord Haldane recognises this, and is at present organising the Army Motor Corps. Last month several hundred cars were requisitioned for manoeuvres, and carried a battalion of the Guards from London to Hastings and back. A thorough motor transport service is being arranged for in case of war, and the Automobile Association and Motor Union of Great Britain go a step further in banding themselves together for what they style "amateur road carrying," in the event of the disorganisation of traffic by strikes or war. The proposal which the A.A. & M.U. is discussing is:—

(1) The carriage of all mails where railways are now used.

(2) The supply of milk, ice, and necessaries to all hospitals and nursing homes.

(3) The supply of milk, fish, and perishable produce to London and other large towns.

(4) The supply to country villages of stores not produced in or near their area, such as sugar, tea, etc.

(5) The carriage of troops or police.

(6) The conveyance of passengers if on urgent business in connection with family matters or trade.

This will bring some measure of comfort to the average Briton, who had it brought home to him very forcibly, during the strike, that old England is only about 48 hours off starvation in the event of a sudden stoppage of supplies.

It has been said, and English engineers have regretfully to admit the truth of it, that for every British built car (commercial vehicles alone excepted) that is sold in the Dominion, there are at least six American cars sold.

Such a state of the market makes one wonder what is wrong. Where is our British superiority in manufacture. Hard-headed business men don't buy American cars if they are inferior to British make. Are they as good? Are they better?

When asked these two questions, a prominent American replied to the first in the affirmative, to the second in the negative. He said: "There is no car better than your best English car, but"—yes, there is a "but," and it explains the whole position.—"but your English makers do not make a 20 h.p. car of less weight than 38 hundredweight or two tons, and the road cost in tires is prohibitive to the average man, while we Americans make a light, strong car that does the work on a weight of fifteen to nineteen hundredweight. That's the difference. Our cars run four times the mileage per tire that yours do, and you people are wise and buy our cars."

There are upwards of a million and a half automobiles running the roads of the United States of America, and "all" manufactured there, not one imported from Great Britain or the Continent. Mr. S. F. Edge took six Napier cars to the States on a selling campaign, and brought them all home again with him. Yet there are thousands of American cars running in England.

This may seem to be a very poor state of affairs for British trade, but it is only in keeping with British trade conservatism. They began by making heavy cars, and they have kept on, while the ground has been cut from under their feet by the Yankee with his lighter, more economical car. But, again a "but," it will not be for long.

When the bicycle boom was on some few years ago, the English shops were turning out safety bicycles weighing 36 pounds. In a very short time England was inundated with lighter American machines weighing 10 or 11 pounds less. America captured the market and the English manufacturer was at his wits end to know what to do. He did the only obvious thing. He revised his specifications and his parts, made a lighter machine and recaptured the market. Today you will see very few, if any, American bicycles in England, where before nine-tenths of the machines were American. The same thing happened in the boot trade. The English bootmaker sold boots made in fixed sizes and shapes which were a torture to wear at first until the foot and boot became "broken in" to one another. Along came the Yankee with his half sizes and patent scientifically designed lasts, which turned out a boot to fit the foot, and all the trade became his. After a due space of time the Englishman woke up to the requirements of the trade, and even sent to America for models. Then he set to work in earnest to recapture his lost trade, and to-day he more than holds his own.

The same thing will happen in the motor trade, or we are very much mistaken. Undoubtedly the American car has the market now, because, in addition to its superiority in weight, owing to the standardisation of parts and the colossal scale on which some of the cars are manufactured, it can be sold cheaper than the English car made in small factories, where each car is an individual job—not one of a dozen or gross. But *tempora mutandur et nos in eis* and soon our British manufacturers will be turning out thousands of light, cheap and good cars, and getting a fair share of the market. Then we shall all be happy.

* * *

The performance of the recess does not, it is said by the critics, conform to the promise of last year's statement. It is true that last year's statement set forth a large and complicated scheme with numerous installations of power stations. But this was accompanied by the announcement, reported several times to make it stick in the memory of all concerned, that it would be necessary, before doing anything definite to any scheme but the Lake Coleridge scheme, to spend something like £60,000 in surveys. Well, the Lake Coleridge scheme has been gone on with definitely and is approaching completion, whereas the