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LABOR AND INDUSTRY IN BRITAIN

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

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BRITISH INFORMATION SERVICES
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“The Life of Lord Nuffield” by P. W. S. Andrews and Elizabeth Brunner. (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1955, 356 pages 25s.)

The story of the British motor car industry is mainly a history of a small group of men who became famous by entering the industry in its pre-1914 days and staying with it through the early trials and difficulties to see it emerge as one of the great manufacturing industries of the world. Charles Stewart Rolls, Frederick Henry Royce, Herbert Austin, George Singer, and William R. Morris (now Lord Nuffield) are some of the men who helped to give the British motor vehicle industry its leadership and make it — as it is today — the world’s leading exporter of automobiles.

The future Viscount Nuffield started work at the age of 15 with a local Oxford firm in 1893 to learn the bicycle trade.

After a few months he left this firm when his employer refused his request for a raise of one shilling (then 25 cents) weekly. With £4 (then \$20) working capital he started out on his own to repair bicycles and sell accessories, his first workshop being a brick building at the back of his father’s house in James Street, Cowley St. John, near Oxford.

Morris made his first bicycle in 1893 — the year of his 16th birthday. The bicycle is of some significance in Morris’s career for it was made specially for a clergyman of exceptional size, and the sight of the large (27-inch) “bike” being ridden by a large clergyman was a good advertisement for young Morris.

Between 1900 and 1902 Morris made his first moves in the motor vehicle field. In 1900, for instance, using purchased castings, he machined and built a single cylinder $1\frac{3}{4}$ h.p. engine which he fitted into a frame of his own. His motor cycle performed well on the road, but

the main benefit to Morris was the encouragement it gave him to make his own motor cycles for sale.

In 1902, Morris took as a working partner, with working capital, Mr. Joseph Cooper — the firm becoming Morris and Cooper, cycle dealers. The partnership collapsed very shortly afterwards on a difference of opinion about building three motor cycles all at once (then a somewhat risky venture), and Morris resumed business on his own. It soon became Morris's ambition to produce a popular motorcar, and he achieved his ambition in the usual way — by starting repairing motor cars.

This business, too, expanded, and it was not long before Morris had a car of his own and began hiring out cars with drivers. A taxicab service, developed later, was also successful, and further plant expansions became possible. New premises and sufficient finance enabled him to go ahead to produce his first car in April 1913 — a Morris-Oxford 2-seater, 8.9 h.p. and costing £165 (then about \$800).

A most interesting table on page 341 shows the aggregate financial results of the businesses controlled by Viscount Nuffield between 1906 to 1951 — the latter being the last year before Morris Motors merged with Austin Motors to form the British Motor Corporation — now the largest motor firm after the "Big Three" in the United States.