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Air Transport as an Imperial Link

The dominions comprising the British Empire are great distances from the motherland Britain. Whenever explorers set out to ^{found} overseas colonies, British sailors and adventurers were never excluded. Sir Walter Raleigh was the first man who thought of building an overseas Empire. He, however, was not allowed to go himself and found it. Other people carried on the work of colonizing and Britain could not keep out of it.

How is this scattered Empire brought nearer to the motherland? There are many means of transportation now, and many new inventions. But during the time when the British Empire was ^{being} founded there was no way of crossing the sea, except by sailing vessels. Land travel was accomplished on horse back or in stage coaches; the rich owned their own carriages and coaches. Or wagons were used in some countries to carry heavy loads.

Inventions involving the use of steam helped transport considerably. Later still motorcars were invented and were gradually improved. The latest inventions are the aeroplanes. But flying

has been a source for research even in Leonardo da Vinci's time. The Greeks represented one of their legendary heroes with wings fixed to his shoulders with wax, which melted when he approached too near the sun.

Henry Cavendish discovered hydrogen in 1776; the first balloon was sent up in public in 1783 - but not with hydrogen which had to wait a little longer to be used.

Two French brothers Joseph Michael and Jacques Etienne Montgolfier, watching the smoke rising from a fire, speculated as to whether, being lighter than air, smoke would lift a weight. They tested this question by inflating a paper bag with smoke, and the bag floated up to the ceiling. It was suggested that they tie a dish of smoke and fire to the balloon itself. They did so and the balloon remained in the air much longer than usual.

And so improvements were made and the aeroplane gradually came into being.

The man who invented the aeroplane never knew of his success: ^{He was} Samuel Pierpont Langley an American scientist, born in 1834 at Roxbury in Massachusetts. He tried first of all to get a machine heavier than air flying independently. Many trials showed to him that an engine will carry a larger weight at twenty miles an hour than at ten miles an hour and a still larger weight at forty miles than at twenty.

Numberless were the tests and experiments tried by professor Langley, before at last on May 6 1896 he went out with his friend Dr. Graham Bell the telephone inventor and launched a model from the top of a house-boat moored on the river

Potomac. The first power driven plane weighed twenty five pounds. It had a wingspan of thirteen feet, it was driven by a little steam-engine, and it flew!

Langley was persuaded to make a man-carrying plane. He made one in 1903 which with its engine weighed one hundred and twenty five pounds. At the fatal moment something went wrong with the starting mechanism, causing the aeroplane to plunge into the river. He died in 1906 leaving his machine ~~to~~ the Smithsonian Institute in Washington where he was a professor. In 1914 some of his old pupils brought out the machine and fitted floats to it like the modern seaplane. Then they launched it on the Potomac, a pilot took his seat in it, the engine was started the propeller hummed, the aeroplane spluttered for a little while and then rose and flew like a bird!

Wilbur and Orville Wright two American brothers, were the first people really to fly. Langley failed in 1903, they flew in that same year. They flew their plane in France. The people jeered. But Wilbur and Orville took no notice. The people no longer jeered when Wilbur flew among the birds.

nothing can draw one country nearer to another in actual fact. But it is the time it takes to travel from one place to another, that brings them nearer. Places which ~~had~~^{we} previously taken more than a month to reach, can now be reached in a few days. Trains cover the distance by land. Boats cover the distance by sea. Now

if somebody meets with an accident in the snow covered plains of North America and is in such a state that nothing could be done except in New York, one naturally charts an aeroplane. He would be safely installed in a hospital, before the accident has given rise to any serious condition.

aeroplanes were first used only for trips across land; as they were improved upon they went on the great adventure of flying across oceans. The British Empire is drawn closer by the goodfellowship which we show to each other in times of need. The aeroplane draws it closer by lessening the distance with its great speed.

When the leaders of our Empire have a conference to determine the welfare of all the citizens, people have to come together from all over the Empire. They would go by the fastest way possible and that is the aeroplane which has no rival. So when the conference is over they would be home before many hours have elapsed. Thus flight draws the Empire closer and closer together.

Flight is certainly the fastest method of travel. But this great speed cannot be attained cheaply. All good things have their price. However essential it may be for a poor man to get to a certain place quickly, he cannot travel by aeroplane as the price is prohibitive.

Another reason for the great cost is that before the war there were not so many planes and the demand was so great that the price naturally rose. After the war there will be so

many planes available for commercial purposes, that this difficulty may be overcome. Fuel must be considered. Fuel for war purposes has been found. Surely enough can therefore be found for peaceful purposes.

It is doubtful if we shall be able to do away with ships and trains to carry heavy goods and substitute aeroplanes, as the latter are not yet used to carrying very heavy loads. The aeroplane and the weight of its engine are too heavy to carry any other very heavy weight.

Giant gliders have been built during this war to carry loads as heavy as a motorcar and they are towed along by an aeroplane which has sufficient power to tow two or three gliders and their loads. This glider idea may be improved upon for the transport of goods.

In "A Midsummer Night's Dream" Oberon commands Puck to fetch a flower from India and return, "ere the leviathan can swim a league" and Puck replies, "I'll put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes". This in Shakespeare's day must have sounded fantastic to the audience: today it is almost true.

I should like to point out that this pupil's home language is Afrikaans.

J. Parker

Principal
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