

CHAPTER XXII

HEAVY ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

WHILST steam as a prime mover in all industrial operations owes its origin to British talent and energy, electricity as a motive power cannot be said to have been a British home-created industry. Electrical projects were at the outset regarded with suspicion by British engineers. They could not accept the possibility of practical rivalry between electricity and steam. The study of electricity was, in consequence, neglected, and its development for industrial and lighting purposes left to the United States, France and Germany. Such interest as was taken in this country in electrical matters forty years ago was mostly confined to speculation in the shares of what was called "Father Brush" and other companies formed for the purpose of exploiting lighting inventions. Most of them came to nothing.

Electricians, however, forged ahead elsewhere, and electric railways were actually running on the continent of Europe before British engineers had come to regard electrical traction as a practical proposition. The first British railway to adopt electrical traction was the Metropolitan. Before a decision was arrived at to abandon steam, the late Thomas Parker, the technical adviser of the line, accompanied by the present writer, visited Italy and Switzerland to observe the working of electric railways in those countries. The public then urgently demanded a faster and more frequent service of trains in better atmospheric conditions. When the railway company was prepared to make this change, British firms of