

Round the World in Seven Days eBook

Round the World in Seven Days

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Page 1

PRELUDE

Lieutenant George Underhill, commanding H.M. surveying ship *Albatross*, had an unpleasant shock when he turned out of his bunk at daybreak one morning. The barometer stood at 29.41'. For two or three days the vessel had encountered dirty weather, but there had been signs of improvement when he turned in, and it was decidedly disconcerting to find that the glass had fallen. His vessel was a small one, and he was a little uneasy at the prospect of being caught by a cyclone while in the imperfectly-charted waters of the Solomon Islands.

He was approaching the eastern shore of Ysabel Island, whose steep cliffs were covered with a lurid bank of cloud. If the shore was like those of the other islands of the group, it would be, he knew, a maze of bays, islets, barrier reefs, and intricate channels amid which, even in calm weather, a vessel would run a considerable risk of grounding, a risk that would be multiplied in a storm. Anxiously noting the weather signs, Underhill hoped that he might reach a safe anchorage before the threatening cyclone burst upon him.

As is the way with cyclones, it smote the vessel almost without warning. A howling squall tore out of the east, catching the ship nearly abeam, and making her shudder; then, after a brief lull, came another and even a fiercer blast, and in a few minutes the wind increased to a roaring hurricane, enveloping the ship in a mist of driving rain that half choked the officers and crew as they crouched under the lee of the bulwarks and the deckhouse.

The *Albatross* was a gallant little vessel, and Underhill, now that what he dreaded had happened, hoped at least to keep her off the shore until the fury of the storm had abated. For a time she thrashed her way doggedly through the boiling sea; but all at once she staggered, heeled over, and then, refusing to answer the helm, began to rush headlong upon the rocks, now visible through the mist.

"Propeller shaft broken, sir," came the cry from below to Underhill as he stood clinging to the rail of the bridge.

He felt his utter helplessness. He could not even let go an anchor, for no one could stand on deck against the force of the wind. He could only cling to his place and see the vessel driven ashore, without being able to lift a hand to save her. Suddenly he was conscious of a grating, grinding sensation beneath his feet, and knew that the vessel had struck a coral reef. She swung round broadside to the wind; the boats on the weather side were wrenched from their davits and hurled away in splinters; and in the midst of such fury and turmoil there was no possibility of launching the remaining two boats and escaping from the doomed vessel.

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All hands had rushed on deck, and clung to rails and stays and whatever else afforded a hold. Among those who staggered from the companion way was a tall thin man, spectacled, with iron-grey hair and beard, and somewhat rounded shoulders. Linking arms with him was a young man of twenty-two or twenty-three: the likeness between them proclaimed them father and son. The older man was Dr. Thesiger Smith, the famous geologist, in furtherance of whose work the *Albatross* was making this voyage. The younger man was his second son Tom, who, after a distinguished career at Cambridge, had come out to act as his father's assistant.

Underhill knew by the jerking and grinding he felt beneath him that his ill-fated vessel was being slowly forced over the reef towards the shore. His first lieutenant, Venables, crawled up to the bridge, and, bawling into his ear, asked if anything could be done. The lieutenant shook his head.

"Water's within two feet of the upper deck forward, sir," shouted Venables; "abaft it is three feet above the keelson."

"Get the lifebuoys," was the brief reply.

Venables crawled down again, and with the assistance of some of the crew unlashed the lifebuoys and distributed them among the company. Meanwhile the progress of the vessel shorewards had been suddenly checked. She came up with a jerk, and Underhill guessed that her nose had stuck fast in a hollow of the reef, and prayed that the storm would abate for just so long as would enable him to get the boats clear and make for the land before the ship broke up. But for a good half-hour longer the hurricane blew with undiminished force, and it was as much as every man could do to avoid being washed away by the mountainous seas that broke over the vessel.

At length, however, there came a sudden change. The uproar ceased as by magic, and there fell a dead calm. Underhill was not deceived. He judged that the vessel was now in the centre of the cyclone; the calm might last for forty or fifty minutes, then a renewal of the hurricane was almost certainly to be expected. Without the loss of a moment he gave his orders. The boats were made ready; into one they put arms, ammunition, and tools, together with the ship's papers and chronometer, a compass, and Dr. Thesiger Smith's specimens and diaries; into the other more ammunition, and a portion of what provisions could be collected from above or below water. The boats were lowered, the men dropped into them and pulled off, leaving Underhill and two or three of the crew still on the vessel to collect the remainder of the provisions and whatever else seemed worth saving. The sea was so high that the boats had much difficulty in making the shore; but they reached it safely, and one of them, after being rapidly unloaded, returned for the commander.

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Before it regained the ship, Underhill felt a light puff of wind from the south-west. Lifting a megaphone, he roared to the men to pull for their lives. The boat came alongside; it had scarcely received its load when the hurricane once more burst upon them, this time from the opposite quarter. Underhill leapt down among his men, and ordered them to give way. Before they had pulled a dozen strokes the storm was at its height, but the force of the wind was now somewhat broken by the trees and rocks of the island. Even so it was hard work, rowing in the teeth of the blast, the boat being every moment in danger of swamping by the tremendous seas. Underhill, at the tiller, set his teeth, and anxiously watched the advancing cliffs, at the foot of which the remainder of his company stood. The boat was within twenty yards of them when a huge wave fell on it as it were out of the sky. It sank like lead. Thanks to the lifebuoys Underhill and the men rose quickly to the surface. Two of them, who could not swim, cried out despairingly for help. Underhill seized one and held him up; the other was saved by the promptitude of young Smith. Seeing their plight, he caught up a rope which had been brought ashore, and flung it among the group of men struggling in the water. The drowning man clutched it, the others swam to it, and by its aid all were drawn ashore, gasping for breath, and sorely battered by the jagged rocks.

"All safe, thank heaven!" said Underhill, as he joined the others; "but I'm sorry we've lost the boat."

The shipwrecked party found themselves on a narrow beach, behind which rose steep cliffs, rugged and difficult to climb. Against these they crouched to find some shelter from the storm, and watch the gradual dismemberment of the ill-fated *Albatross*. Wave after wave broke over her, the spray dashing so high that even her funnel sometimes disappeared from view. The spectators held their breath: could she live out the storm? At last a tremendous sea swept her from the hollow in which she was wedged, and she plunged beneath the waters.

CHAPTER I

THE CABLEGRAM

"Tenez! up! up! Ah ca! A clean shave, mister, hein?"

A touch on the lever had sent the aeroplane soaring aloft at a steep angle, and she cleared by little more than a hair's breadth the edge of a thick plantation of firs.

"A close shave, as you say, Roddy," came the answer. And then the speaker let forth a gust of wrathful language which his companion heard in sympathetic silence.

Lieutenant Charles Thesiger Smith, of H.M.S. *Imperturbable*, was normally a good-tempered fellow, and his outburst would have deceived nobody who knew him so well as Laurent Rodier.

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It was the dusk of an evening in mid spring. Above, the sky was clear, washed by the rain that had fallen without intermission since early morning. Below, the chill of coming night, acting on the moisture-laden air, had covered the land with a white mist, that curled and heaved beneath the aeroplane in huge waves. It looked like a billowy sea of cotton-wool, but the airmen who had just emerged from it, had no comfort in its soft embrace. Their eyes were smarting, they drew their breath painfully, and little streams of water trickling from the soaked planes made cold, shuddering streaks on their faces and necks.

An hour ago they had sailed by Salisbury spire, calculating that a few minutes' run, at two or three miles a minute, would bring them to their destination on the outskirts of Portsmouth. But a few miles south the baffling mist had made its appearance, and Smith found himself bereft of landmarks, and compelled to tack to and fro in utter uncertainty of his course. He was as much at a loss as if he were navigating a vessel in a sea-fog. To sail through the mist was to incur the risk of striking a tree, a chimney, or a church steeple; to pursue his flight above it in the deepening dusk might carry him miles out of his way, and though a southerly course must presently bring him to the sea, he could not tell how far east or west of his intended landing-place. Meanwhile the petrol was running short, and it was clear that before long his dilemma would be solved by the engine stopping, and bringing him to the ground willy-nilly, goodness knows where.

This was vexing enough, but in the particular circumstances it was a crowning stroke of misfortune. To-day was the twenty-first of his twenty-eight days' leave: to-morrow he was to begin a round of what he called duty visits among his relatives; he would have to motor, play golf, dance attendance on girls at theatres and concerts, and spur himself to a thousand activities that he detested. There was no escape for him. Perhaps he could have faced this seven days' penance more equably if he had had the recollection of three well-employed weeks to sweeten it. Even this was denied him. Ever since he came on leave the weather had been abominable: high wind, incessant rain, all the elements conspiring to prevent the enjoyment of his hobby. Rodier had suggested that he should apply for an extension of leave, but Smith, though he did not lack courage, could not screw it to this pitch. He remembered too vividly his interview with the captain when coming off ship.

"Don't smash yourself up," said the captain, "and don't run things too fine. You're always late in getting back from leave. Last time you only got in by the skin of your teeth, when we were off shooting, too. If you overstep the mark again you'll find yourself brought up with a round turn, you may take my word for it."

"I couldn't beg off after that," he said to Rodier. "Anyway, it's rotten bad luck."

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“Precisement ca!” said Rodier sympathetically.

For some little time they sailed slowly on, seeking in vain for a rift in the blanket of mist: then Rodier cried suddenly—

“Better take a drop, mister. In three minutes all the petrol is gone, and then—”

“I’m afraid you’re right, Roddy, but goodness knows what we shall fall on. We must take our chance, I suppose.”

He adjusted the planes, so as to make a gradual descent while the engine still enabled him to keep way on the machine, and it sank into the mist. Both men kept a sharp look-out, knowing well that to encounter a branch of a tree or a chimney-stack might at any moment bring the voyage, the aeroplane, and themselves to an untimely end. All at once, without warning, a large dark shape loomed out of the mist. Smith instantly warped his planes, and the machine dived so precipitately as almost to throw him from his seat. Next moment there was a shock; he was flung headlong forward, and found himself sprawling half suffocated on a damp yielding mass, which, when he had recovered his wits, he knew to be the unthatched top of a hayrick.

His first thought was for the aeroplane. Raising himself, and dashing the clinging hay wisps from his face, he shouted—

“Is she smashed, Roddy?”

“Ah, no, mister,” came the answering cry. “She stick fast, and me also.”

Smith crawled to the edge of the rick and dropped to the ground. Two or three dogs were barking furiously somewhere in the neighbourhood. A few steps brought him to the aeroplane, lying in a slanting position between the hayrick and a fence, over which it projected. Rodier had clung to his seat, and had suffered nothing worse than a jolting.

“This is a pretty mess,” said Smith despairingly, “one end stuck fast in the hayrick, the other sticking over the fence: they’ll have to pull it down before we can get her out. Get off, you brute!” he exclaimed, as a dog came yapping at his legs.

“Seize him, Pompey: seize him, good dog!” cried a rough voice.

“Call him off, or I’ll break his head,” cried Smith in exasperation.

“You will, will you?” roared the farmer. “I’ll teach you to come breaking into my yard: I’ll have the law of you.”

“Don’t be absurd, man,” replied Smith, fending off the dog as well as he could. “Don’t you see I’ve had an accident?”

“Accident be jiggered!” said the farmer. “You don’t come breaking into my yard by accident. Better stand quiet or he’ll tear you to bits.”

“Oh, come now!” said Smith. “Look at this. Here’s my aeroplane, fixed up here. You don’t suppose I came down here on purpose? I lost my way in this confounded mist, and don’t know where I am. Just be sensible, there’s a decent chap, and get some of your men to help us out. I’ll pay damages.”

“I’ll take care of that,” said the farmer curtly. “What the country’s coming to I don’t know, what with motors killing us on the roads and now these here airypplanes making the very air above us poison to breathe. There ought to be a law to stop it, that’s what *I* say. Down, Pompey! What’s your name, mister?”

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Smith explained, asking in his turn the name of the place where he had alighted. Farmer Barton was a good patriot, and the knowledge that the intruder was a navy-man sensibly moderated his truculence.

"Why, this be Firtop Farm, half-a-mile from Mottisfont station, if you know where that is," he said. "Daze me if you hain't been and cut into my hayrick!" He sniffed. "And what's this horrible smell? I do believe you've spoilt the whole lot with your stinking oil." He was getting angry again.

"Well, I've said I'll pay for it," said Smith impatiently. "Get your men, farmer, or I shan't be home to-night. I suppose I can get some petrol somewhere about here?"

"You might, or you might not, in the village; I can't say. My men are abed and asleep, long ago. You'll have to bide till morning."

"Oh well, if I must, I must. Roddy, just have a look at the machine and see that she's safe for the night. I'll run down to the station and send a wire home, and then get beds in the village."

"Better be sharp, then," said the farmer. "You can't send no wire after eight, and it's pretty near that now. I'll show you the way."

Smith hurried to the station and despatched his telegram; then, learning that there was a train due at 8.2 from Andover, he decided to wait a few minutes and get an evening paper. An aviation meeting had just been held at Tours, and he was anxious to see how the English competitors had fared. The train was only a few minutes late. Smith asked the guard whether he had brought any papers, and to his vexation learnt that, there being no bookstall at Mottisfont, there were none for that station. However, the guard himself had bought a paper before leaving Waterloo.

"Take it and welcome, sir," he said. "I've done with it. You're Lieutenant Smith, if I'm not mistaken. Seen your portrait in the papers, sir."

"Thanks, guard," said Smith, pressing a coin into his reluctant hand.

"Englishmen doing well in France, sir. Hope to see you a prize-winner one of these days. Goodnight!"

The train rumbled off, and Smith scanned the columns by the light of a platform lamp. He read the report of the meeting in which he was interested: a Frenchman had made a new record in altitude; an Englishman had won a fine race, coming in first of ten competitors; a terrible accident had befallen a well-known airman at the moment of descending. The most interesting piece of news was that a Frenchman had maintained for three hours an average speed of a hundred and twenty miles.



"I'm only just in time," said Smith to himself. He was folding the paper when his eye was caught by a heading that recalled the days of his boyhood, when he had revelled in stories of savages, pirates, and the hundred and one themes that fascinate the ingenuous mind.

Shipwrecked among cannibals.

Terrible situation of famous scientist.

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(From Our Own Correspondent.)

Brisbane, Thursday.

A barque put in here to-day with four men picked up from an open boat south of New Guinea, who reported that the Government survey vessel Albatross has run ashore in a storm on Ysabel Island, one of the Solomon group. The crew and passengers, including Dr. Thesiger Smith, the famous geologist, were saved, but the vessel is a complete wreck, and the unfortunate people were compelled to camp on the shore. They are very short of provisions, and being practically unarmed are in great danger of being massacred by the natives, who are believed to be one of the fiercest cannibal tribes in the South Sea. Four of the crew put off in the ship's boat to seek assistance, but they lost their mast and had to rely on the oars, and drifted for several days before being picked up in the Coral Sea. A gunboat will be despatched immediately, but since it cannot reach the island for at least five days, it is greatly to be feared that it will arrive only to find that help has come too late.

Smith ran his eyes rapidly over the lines, then folded the paper, and put it into his pocket. He did not notice that his hand was trembling. The station-master looked curiously after him as he strode away with set face.

"Seems to have had bad news," he said to his head porter.

"Bin plugin' on a wrong un, maybe," replied the porter.

Smith left the station, and hastened down the road towards the farm. He had clean forgotten his intention of bespeaking beds in the village; indeed, he walked as one insensible to all around him until he caught sight of the word *garage*, painted in large white letters, illuminated by an electric lamp, over a gateway at the side of the road. Then he swung round and, passing through the gate, came to a lighted shed where he found a man cleaning a motor car.

"Any petrol to be got here?" he asked quickly.

"As much as we're allowed to keep, sir," replied the man.

"Send a can at once to Firtop Farm, down the road."

He turned, and was quitting the shed when a word from the man recalled him.

"Beg pardon, sir, but—"

"Oh, here's your money," cried Smith, handing him a crown-piece. "Be quick. By the way, can you lend me two or three men for half-an-hour or so at five shillings an hour?"

“Right you are, sir,” was the reply. “I’m one; I’ll get you a couple more in no time. Be there as soon as you, sir.”

Smith hurried away. On reaching the farm he found that Rodier and the farmer were engaged in a friendly conversation, by the light of a carriage lamp which flickered wanly in the mist.

“Wonderful machine, sir,” said the farmer, whom Rodier had talked out of his ill-humour. “Your man has been showing me over it, as you may say, leastways as well as he could in this fog.”

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"We must get her out at once," rejoined Smith. "Some men are coming up. We must get on to-night."

"Good sakes! that's impossible. She lies right athwart the fence, and you'll have to rig a crane to lift her."

"The fence must come down. I'll pay."

"But drat it all—"

"Look here, farmer, it's got to be done. Here are the men; just oblige me by showing them a light at the fence, and set them to take down enough of it to free the aeroplane—carefully; I don't want it smashed. There's a sovereign on account; you shall have a cheque for the rest when you send in the bill."

Apparently the magic touch of gold reconciled the farmer to these hasty proceedings, for he made no more ado, but took the lamp and bade the three men to follow him.

"What's wrong, mister?" asked Rodier. "You look as if you had been shocked."

Smith drew the paper from his pocket, gave it to Rodier, and then, striking a match, showed him the paragraph, and lighted more matches while he read it.

"Mon dieu!" ejaculated the Frenchman, when he was halfway through. "It is your father!"

"Yes; my brother is with him. I must get home; it will kill my mother if she sees this."

Rodier read the paragraph to the end.

"My word, it is bad business," he said. "These cannibals!... And they have no arms. What horror!"

Smith left him abruptly and walked to the fence to see how the work of dismantling it was proceeding. Rodier whistled, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, sat down on a bag of straw and appeared to be deep in a brown study. Sounds of hammering came from the fence; a light breeze was scattering the mist, and he could now see clearly the three men under the farmer's direction carefully removing the fencing beneath the aeroplane. Rodier watched them for a few minutes, but an onlooker would have gathered the impression that his thoughts were far away.

Suddenly he sprang up, muttering, "Ah! On peut le faire, quand meme. Courage, mon ami!" and hastened to rejoin his employer.

"What distance, mister," he said, "from here to there—to the cannibals?"

“Thirteen thousand miles, I suppose, more or less.”

“Ah!” the Frenchman’s face fell. “Thirteen thousand!” he repeated, then was silent for a while, touching his brow as if making some abstruse calculation. Smith turned away.

“Ah! Qu’importe?” cried Rodier, after a few moments. “On peut le faire!”

He hastened to Smith, drew him aside, and spoke rapidly to him for a few moments. The look of doubt that first came to Smith’s face was soon replaced by a look of confidence. He engaged in a hurried colloquy with his man, at the close of which they shook hands heartily and went to the fence to lend a hand there.

In half-an-hour the work was done; the fence was down, and the six men carefully dragged and lifted the aeroplane over the debris, and placed it on the road outside. While Rodier made a rapid examination of it, to see that no damage had been done, Smith got the men to empty into the tank the can of petrol they had brought, paid them for their work, and handed his card to the farmer.

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"Send in your bill," he cried. "Ready, Roddy?"

"All right, mister."

They jumped into their seats. Smith called to the men to stand clear, and pulled the lever. At the same moment Rodier switched on the searchlight. The propellers flew round with deafening whirr; the aeroplane shot forward for thirty or forty yards along the road, then rose like a bird into the air.

The men stood with mouths agape as the machine flew over the tree-tops, its light diminishing to a pin-point, its clamour sinking to the quiet hum of a bee, and then fading away altogether. In a minute it had totally disappeared.

"Daze me if ever I seed anything like that afore," said the farmer. "A mile a minute, what?"

"More like two," said the motorman. "I lay she'll be in Portsmouth afore I'm half-a-mile up road. Good-night, farmer, I'm off to the Three Waggoners."

"Bust if I don't go, too. There be summat to wet our whistles on to-night, eh, men?"

CHAPTER II

Eastward Ho!

Before the farmer reached the hospitable door of the Three Waggoners, Smith had made his descent upon a broad open space in his father's park near Cosham. There stood the large shed in which he housed the aeroplane; adjoining it were a number of workshops. It was quite dark now, and no one was about; but Smith clearly had no intention of putting his machine up for the night. As soon as he came to the ground he hurried off on foot in one direction, Rodier on a bicycle in another, their purposeful movements betokening a course of action arranged during the few minutes' conversation at the farm.

Smith walked rapidly through the park, and, entering the house, found his mother placidly knitting on a settee in the large old-fashioned hall.

"Ah, my dear boy," she said, as he appeared; "how late you are, and how dirty! We have waited dinner for you."

"You shouldn't have done that, mother," he replied cheerfully; "though it's very good of you."

“Well, you see, it’s your last night with us for ever so long, and with Tom and your father away—”

“Yes, I’m sorry I’m so late,” Smith broke in hastily. “We were caught in a mist. I shan’t be ten minutes changing.”

He ran up the stairs, and before going to his room put his head in at the door of his sister’s.

“You there, Kate? You didn’t get my telegram, then? Come to my room in ten minutes, will you? I want to see you particularly before dinner.”

With a seaman’s quickness he was bathed and dressed within the time he had named.

“Come in,” he said, as his sister tapped. “You’ve got a pretty cool head, Sis; look at this, quickly.”

He handed her the evening paper, pointing out the fateful paragraph. Kate went a little pale as she read it; her bosom heaved, but she said nothing.

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"It must be kept from Mother," he said. "Get hold of to-morrow's paper, and if the paragraph is there, cut it out or tear off the page."

"But people will write, or call. They are sure to speak of it."

"That's your chance. Intercept 'em. You always read the Mater's letters to her, don't you? Keep the servants' mouths shut. And I want you to write for me to all those people and cry off; pressing business—any excuse you like."

"But you, Charley?"

"I'm off to London, to-night; must see what can be done for the old dad, you know."

"How shall we explain to Mother? She has been looking forward to your spending your last night at home."

"Roddy will come up by and by with an urgent telephone message. The Mater is so used to that sort of thing that she won't smell a rat."

"How you think of everything, Charley! But I'm afraid Mother will notice something in our manner at dinner."

"Not if we're careful. You take your cue from me. Come along!"

No one would have guessed at that dinner table that anything was amiss. Smith seemed to be in the highest spirits, talking incessantly, describing his sudden descent on Firtop Farm and his interview with the farmer so racily that his mother laughed gently, and even Kate, for all her anxiety, smiled. In the middle of the meal the belated telegram arrived, giving Smith an opportunity for poking fun at official slowness.

Dinner was hardly over when a servant announced that Mr. Rodier was below, asking to see Mr. Smith upon particular business. Smith slowly lighted a cigarette before he left the room. He found Rodier in the hall.

"Got it, Roddy?" he asked.

"Yes, I ask for globe: Mr. Dawkins give me first a pink paper. 'Sad news this!' says he."

"I hope to goodness he'll hold his tongue about it."

"He must have it back to-morrow, he said. The inspector is coming."

"All right. Now cut off to the housekeeper and stroke as hard as you can. I don't know when you'll get another meal."

Returning to the dining-room, Smith said—

“Sorry, Mater, I’ve got to go to London at once. Too bad, isn’t it, spoiling our last night. Ah well! it can’t be helped.”

“Is it Admiralty business, Charley?” asked his mother.

“Well, not exactly; something about a wreck, I think.”

“I suppose I had better send on your things to the Leslie’s in the morning?”

“I’ll send you a wire. I mayn’t go there, after all. Nuisance having to change again, isn’t it?”

He hastened from the room, got into his air-man suit, covered it with an overall, emptied his cash-box into his pocket, and returned to say good-bye. Kate accompanied him to the door.

“Buck up, old girl,” he said, as he kissed her. “I’ll let you know what happens, if I can. By the way, there’s a globe in the shed I want you to send back to Dawkins, the school-master, first thing to-morrow. Good-bye! Send Roddy after me as soon as he has finished his grub.”

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He hurried through the park, and coming to the shed, switched on the electric light, which revealed a litter of all sorts of objects: models, parts of machinery, including an aero-cycle on which he had spent many fruitless hours, and, on a bench, a small geographical globe of the world. Taking up a piece of string, he made certain measurements on the globe, jotting down sundry names and rows of figures on a piece of paper. Then he went to a telephone box in a corner of the shed, and rang up a certain club in London, asking if Mr. William Barracombe was there. After the interval usual in trunk calls, he began—

“That you, Billy? Good! Thought I’d catch you. Can you give me an hour or two?... What?... No: not this time. No time for explanations just now.... Right!... Exactly: nothing ever surprises you.” (A smile flickered on his face.) “Well, I want you to wire to Constantinople—Con-stant-i-no-ple—to some decent firm, and arrange for them to have eighty gallons of petrol and sixteen of lubricating oil ready first thing to-morrow.... Yes, to the order of Lieutenant Smith.... Also means of transport, motor if possible: if not, horses.—I say, Central, don’t cut me off, please. Yes, I know my time’s up: I’ll renew.—You there, Billy? That all right?... No, that’s not all. I want you to meet me on Epsom Downs about midnight.... Yes, coming by ’plane.... Wait a bit. Bring with you four bottles of bovril, couple of pounds meat lozenges, half-dozen tins sardines, bottle of brandy—yes, *and* soda, as you say; couple of pounds chocolate, two tins coffee and milk.... No: I say, hold on.... Also orographical maps—maps ... o-ro-graph-i-cal maps ... of Asia Minor, Southern Asia including India, Straits Settlements, Polynesia.... I don’t know: Stanford’s will be shut, but I *must* have ’em.... That’s up to you. Bring ’em all down with you.... Well, you’d better light a bonfire, so that I can tell where you are. You’ll manage it? Good man! See you about midnight then.... Yes: I saw it; bad business. Hope they’ll manage to hold out.... Tell you when I see you. Goodbye!”

He replaced the receiver, and turned to find Rodier at his elbow.

“Now, Roddy,” he said, “we’ve got two hours. Slip into it, man.”

For the next two hours they worked with scarcely the exchange of a word, overhauling every part of the engine quickly, but with methodical care, cleaning, oiling, testing the exhaust and the carburettor, filling the petrol tank and the reservoir of lubricating oil, examining the turbines and the propeller—not a square inch of the machinery escaped their attention. When their task was finished they were as hot and dirty as engine-drivers. They washed at a sink, filled two stone jars with water and placed them in the cage, adjusted the wind screens, and then sat down to rest and talk over things before starting on their night journey. Smith pencilled some calculations on a piece of paper, referring more than once to the globe. Then taking a clean piece, he drew up a schedule which had some resemblance to a railway timetable.

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"There! How does that strike you, Roddy?" he said, when he had finished it.

"It strikes me hot," said the Frenchman. "What I mean, it will be hot work. But that is what I like."

"So do I, so long as I can keep cool. At any rate we can start to the second. Are you ready?"

The sky was brilliant with stars when, just after midnight, they took their places in the aeroplane. Twenty-five minutes' easy run, east-north-east, brought them within sight of the dull red glare northward that betrayed London. Smith had so often made this journey that, even if the stars had been invisible, he could almost have directed his course by the lights of the villages and towns over which he passed. He knew them as well as a sailor knows the lights of the coast.

Just before half-past twelve, in a steep slope on his right, looming up black against the sky, he recognized Box Hill. Passing this at a moderate pace, which allowed them to take a good look-out, they saw in a minute or two a small red flame flickering in the midst of a dark expanse. Every second it grew larger as they approached; Smith did not doubt it was the bonfire which he had asked his friend Barracombe to kindle. Dropping to the ground within a few feet of the fire, which turned out to be of considerable dimensions, he found a motor-car standing near it, and Barracombe walking up and down.

"Well, old man," said Barracombe, as Smith alighted; "they call me a hustler, but you've hustled me this time. What in the world are you after?"

"Have you got the stuff?" returned Smith with the curtness of an old friend.

"Yes; chocolate, bovril, the whole boiling; but—"

"And the maps?"

"*And* the maps. A nice job I had to get them. All the shops were shut, of course. I stole 'em."

"Played the burglar?"

"No. I went to the Royal Societies' Club, and pinched them out of the library. Posted a cheque to pay for 'em, but there was nobody about and I couldn't stop for red tape."

"Well, you're a big enough man to do such things with impunity. That's why I 'phoned you: knew you'd do it somehow."

Although Barracombe was a potentate in the city, who controlled immense organizations, and held the threads of multifarious interests, he was very human at bottom, and Smith liked him all the better for the glow of self-satisfaction that shone upon his face at this tribute to his omnipotence.

“But now, what’s it all mean, you beggar? Are you off to reorganize the Turkish navy or something?”

“I’m off to the Solomon Islands.”

“What!”

“That’s it: going to have a shot at helping the poor old governor.”

“But, my dear fellow, he’ll either be relieved or done for long before you can get there. The paper said they were practically unarmed.”

“Exactly. I’m going to pick up some rifles and ammunition at one of the Australian ports, and so help ’em to keep their end up until the gunboat reaches them. I’ll probably get there a day before the boat.”

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“But do you know how far it is? It’s thirteen thousand miles or more.”

“I know. I’m going to have a try. I’ve got seven days to get there and back; then my leave’s up. I can do it if the engine holds out, and if you’ll help.”

“My dear chap, you know I’ll do anything I can, but—well, upon my soul, you take my breath away. I’m not often surprised, but—what are you grinning at?”

“At having knocked the wind out of your sails for once, old man. Seriously, we’ve thought it out, Roddy and I. We’ve more than once done a speed of a hundred and ninety. Of course it’s a different matter to keep it up for days on end, but how long have you had your motor-car?”

“Three months. Why?”

“And how often has it broken down?”

“Not at all; but I haven’t done thirteen thousand miles at a go.”

“You’ve done more, with stoppages. Well, I shall have stoppages—just long enough to clean and take in petrol and oil, and that’s where I want your help. I want you to arrange for eighty gallons of petrol and sixteen of oil, to be ready for me at three places besides Constantinople. Here’s the list; Karachi, Penang, and Port Darwin. Could you cable me to the address in Constantinople the names of firms at those places?”

“Of course. I’ll look ’em up the first thing in the morning.”

“Too late. It must be done to-night. If all goes well I shall be in Constantinople soon after eight to-morrow—our time; and I must leave there in a couple of hours if I’m to stick to my programme.”

“Very well. I’ll look out some names as soon as I get back to town. You mean to keep me up all night. There you are, man; it’s absurd; you can’t drive night and day for seven days without sleep.”

“Roddy and I shall have to take watch and watch.”

“But suppose you’re caught in a storm; suppose the engine breaks down when you’re over the sea—”

“My dear chap, if we fall into the sea we shan’t hurt ourselves so much as if it were land. I’ve got a couple of lifebuoys. If a storm comes on, too bad to sail through, we must come down and wait till it’s over. Of course any accident may stop us, even a speck of grit in the engine; but you’re the last man in the world to be put off a thing by any bogey of what-might-be, and I’m going to look at the bright side. It’s time I was off,

so I'll take the things you've brought—oh, I see Roddy has already shipped them, so I'll get aboard."

"Well, I wish you all the luck in the world. Send me a wire when you land, will you, so that I may know how you are getting on."

"If I have time. Good-bye, old man; many thanks."

They shook hands, and Smith was just about to jump into his seat when there came the sound of galloping horses, and the incessant clanging of a bell. Smith laughed.

"Your blaze has roused the Epsom Fire Brigade," he said with a chuckle.

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"Well, I thought I'd better make a big one to make sure of you," replied Barracombe.

Smith waited with his hand on the lever until the fire-engine had dashed up.

"What the blazes!" cried the captain, as he leapt from his seat, looking from the motor-car to the aeroplane with mingled amazement and indignation.

"Good-bye, Billy," cried Smith; "I'll leave you to explain."

The propeller whirled round, the machine flew forwards, and in a few seconds was soaring with its booming hum into the air. Smith glanced down and saw the fireman facing Barracombe, his annoyance being evidently greater than his curiosity. He would have smiled if he could have heard Barracombe's explanation.

"W-w-why yes," he said, affecting a distressing stutter; "this kind of b-b-bonfire is a hobby of m-mine; it's about my only r-r-recreation. M-m-my name? Certainly. My name's William bub-bub-Barracombe, and you'll find me in, any day between t-ten and f-five, at 532 mum-mum-Mincing Lane."

CHAPTER III

ACROSS EUROPE TO THE BOSPHOROUS

It had just turned half-past twelve on Friday morning when Smith said good-bye to his friend William Barracombe on Epsom Downs. The sky was clear; the moon shone so brightly that by its light alone he could read the compass at his elbow, without the aid of the small electric lamp that hung above it. He set his course for the south-east, and flew with a light breeze at a speed of at least two hundred miles an hour.

His machine was a biplane, and represented the work and thought of years. Smith never minimized the part which Laurent Rodier had had in its construction; indeed, he was wont to say that without Rodier he would have been nowhere. Their acquaintance and comradeship had begun in the most accidental way. Two years before, Smith was taking part in an aeroplane race from Paris to London. On reaching the Channel, he found himself far ahead of all his competitors, except a Frenchman, who, to his chagrin, managed to keep a lead of almost a mile. Each carried a passenger. Not long after leaving the French coast, a cloud of smoke suddenly appeared in the wake of the Frenchman's aeroplane, and to Smith's alarm the machine in a few seconds dropped into the sea. Instantly he steered for the spot, and brought his own aeroplane to within a few feet of the water. To his surprise, he saw that part of the wreckage was floating, and a man, apparently only half conscious, was clinging to one of the stays. But for the engine having providentially become disconnected in the fall, the whole machine with its passengers must have sunk to the bottom.

Smith saw that it was impossible for him to rescue the man while he himself remained in his aeroplane, for the slightest touch upon the other would inevitably have submerged it. There was only one thing to do. Leaving the aeroplane to the charge of his friend, he dived into the sea, and rising beside the man, seized him at the moment when his hold was relaxing, and contrived to hold him up until a fast motor launch, which had witnessed the accident, came up and rescued them both.

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The man proved to be the chauffeur of the aeroplane; his employer was drowned. Smith lost the race, but he gained what was infinitely more valuable to him, the gratitude and devotion of Laurent Rodier. Finding that the Frenchman was an expert mechanic, Smith took him into his employment. Rodier turned out to be of a singularly inventive turn of mind, and the two, putting their heads together, evolved after long experiment a type of engine that enabled them to double the speed of the aeroplane. These aerial vessels had already attained a maximum of a hundred miles an hour, for progress had been rapid since Paulhan's epoch-making flight from London to Manchester. To the younger generation the aeroplane was becoming what the motor-car had been to their elders. It was now a handier, more compact, and more easily managed machine than the earlier types, and the risk of breakdown was no greater than in the motor-car of the roads. The engine seldom failed, as it was wont to do in the first years of aviation. The principal danger that airmen had to fear was disaster from strong squalls, or from vertical or spiral currents of air due to some peculiarity in the configuration of the land beneath them.

Smith's engine was a compound turbine, reciprocating engines having proved extravagant in fuel. There were both a high and a low pressure turbine on the same shaft, which also drove the dynamo for the searchlight and the lamp illuminating the compass, and for igniting the explosive mixture. By means of an eccentric, moreover, the shaft worked a pump for compressing the mixture of hot air and petrol before ignition, the air being heated by passing through jackets round the high-pressure turbines. The framework of the planes consisted of hollow rods made of an aluminum alloy of high tensile strength, and the canvas stretched over the frames was laced with wire of the same material. To stiffen the planes, a bracket was clamped at the axis, and thin wire stays were strung top and bottom, as the masts of a yacht are supported. The airman was in some degree protected from the wind by a strong talc screen, also wire-laced; by means of this, and a light radiator worked by a number of accumulators, he was enabled to resist the cold, which had been so great a drawback to the pioneers of airmanship.

In this aeroplane Smith and Rodier had made many a long expedition. They had found that the machine was capable of supporting a total weight of nearly 1,200 lbs., and since Smith turned the scale at eleven stone eight, and Rodier at ten stone, in their clothes, the total additional load they could carry was about 900 lbs. Eighty gallons of petrol weighed about 600 lbs. with the cans, and twenty gallons of lubricating oil about 160 lbs., so that there was a margin of nearly 150 lbs. for food, rifles, and anything else there might be occasion for carrying at any stage of the journey.

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Smith was in charge of the aeroplane attached to his ship, the Admiralty having adopted the machine for scouting purposes. It was only recently that he had brought his own aeroplane to its present perfection, after laborious experiments in the workshops he established in the corner of his father's park, where he toiled incessantly whenever he could obtain leave, and where Rodier was constantly employed. His machine had just completed its trials, and he expected to realize a considerable sum by his improvements. Of this he had agreed to give Rodier one half, and the Frenchman had further stipulated that the improvements should be offered also to the French Government. This being a matter of patriotism, Smith readily consented, remarking with a laugh that he would not be the first to break the *entente cordiale*.

Just as a voyage round the world was a dream until Drake accomplished it, so a flight round the world was the acme of every airman's ambition. It was the accident of his father's plight that crystallized in Smith's mind the desires held in suspension there. The act was sudden: the idea had been long cherished.

He had decided on his course after a careful examination of the globe borrowed from Mr. Dawkins, the village school-master. The most direct route from London to the Solomon Islands ran across Norway and Sweden, the White Sea, Northern Siberia, Manchuria, Korea and Japan, and thence to New Guinea. But since it traversed some of the most desolate regions of the earth, where the indispensable supplies of petrol and machine oil could not be secured, he had chosen a route through fairly large centres of population, along which at the necessary intervals he could ensure, by aid of the telegraph, that the fuel would be in readiness.

And now he was fairly off. Constantinople was to be the first place of call. He knew the orographical map of Europe as well as he knew his manual of navigation. It was advisable to avoid mountainous country as far as possible, for the necessity of rising to great heights, in order to cross even the lower spurs of the Alps, would involve loss of time, to say nothing of the cold, and the risk of accident in the darkness. Coming to the coast, in the neighbourhood of Dover, about half-an-hour after leaving Epsom, he steered for a point on the opposite shore of the Channel somewhere near the Franco-Belgian frontier. As an experienced airman he had long ceased to find the interest of novelty in the scenes below him. The lights of the Calais boat, and of vessels passing up and down the Channel, were almost unnoticed. On leaving the sea, he flew over a flat country until, on his right, he saw in the moonlight a dark mass which from dead reckoning he thought must be the Ardennes. The broad river he had just crossed, which gleamed like silver in the moonlight, was without doubt the Meuse, and that which he came to in about an hour must be the Moselle. At this point Rodier, who had been dozing, sat up and began to take an interest in things; afterwards he told Smith that they must have passed over the little village in which he was born, and he felt a sentimental regret that the flight was not by day, when he might have seen the red roof beneath which his mother still lived.

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After another half-hour Smith began to feel the strain of remaining in one position, with all his faculties concentrated. The air was so calm, and the wind-screen so effective, that he suffered none of the numbing effects which the great speed might otherwise have induced; but it was no light task to keep his attention fixed at once on the engine, the map outspread before him, the compass, and the country below; and by the time he reached a still broader river, which could only be the Rhine, he was tired. As yet he had been flying for only three hours: could he live through seven days of it? He had once crossed America in the Canadian Pacific, and though he got eight hours' sleep every night, he felt an utter wreck at the end of the journey. To be sure, he was now in the fresh air instead of a stuffy railway carriage, and he was riding as smoothly as on a steamer, without the jar and jolt that made journeys by rail so fatiguing. Still, he thought it only good policy to pay heed to the first signs of strain, and so he slowed down until the noise of the engine had abated sufficiently for him to make his voice heard, and said:

"Roddy, you must take a turn. We're near the frontier between Baden and Alsace, I fancy. The Bavarian hills can't be far off. You had better rise a bit, and don't go too fast, or we may be knocking our noses before we know where we are."

"Right O, mister," replied the Frenchman. "You take forty winks, and eat some chocolate for what you call a nightcap."

"A good idea. I'd rise to about 4,500 feet, I think. Keep your eye on the aneroid."

They exchanged places. Smith ate two or three sticks of chocolate, took a good drink of water, and in five minutes was fast asleep. But his nap lasted no more than a couple of hours. It appeared to him that he never lost consciousness of his errand. When he opened his eyes the dawn was already stealing over the sky, and at the tremendous pace to which Rodier had put the engine the aeroplane seemed to rush into the sunlight. Far below, the earth was spread out like a patchwork, greens and whites and browns set in picturesque haphazard patterns; men moving like ants, and horses like locusts.

"Where are we?" he bawled in Rodier's ear.

The Frenchman put his finger on the map. Smith glanced at his watch; it was past five o'clock. They must be near the Servian frontier. That broad streak of blue must be the Danube. Another three hours should see them at Constantinople, the first stage of their journey. On they rushed, feeling chill in the morning air at the height of nearly five thousand feet. Lifting his binocular, Smith saw a railway train running in the same direction as themselves, and though from the line of smoke it was going at full speed, it appeared to be crawling like a worm, and was soon left far behind. Now they were in Bulgaria: those grey crinkly masses beyond must be the Balkans. Crossing the Dragoman Pass, they came into an upward current of air that set the machine rocking,

and Smith for the first time felt a touch of nervousness lest it should break down and fall among these inhospitable crags. Rodier planed downwards, until they seemed to skim the crests. The air was calmer here: the aeroplane steadied; and when the mountains were left behind they came still lower, following the railway line.

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Here was Philippopolis, with its citadel perched on a frowning rock. It seemed but a few minutes when Adrianople came into view, and but a few more when, descending to within five hundred feet of the ground, they raced over the plains of St. Stefano. Now Rodier checked the speed a little, and steering past the large monument erected to the memory of the Russians who fell in '78, came within sight of Constantinople. Smith was bewildered at the multitude of domes, minarets, and white roofs before him. It would soon be necessary to choose a landing-place, and Rodier planed upwards, so that he could scan the whole neighbourhood in one comprehensive glance.

"Slow down!" Smith shouted.

There was a large open space below him; it was the Hippodrome. He made a quick calculation of its length, and decided not to alight. A little farther on he came to the Ministry of War with its large square; but there a regiment of soldiers was drilling. Rodier steered a point to the north-west, and the aeroplane passed over the Galata bridge that spans the Golden Horn. The bridge was thronged with people, who, as they caught sight of the strange machine flying over their heads, stood and craned their necks, and the airmen heard their shouts of amazement. To the right they saw, beyond the hill of Pera, a stretch of low open country. Passing the second bridge over the Horn, they came to a broad green space just without the city. It was the old archery grounds of the Sultans.

"Dive, Roddy!" Smith cried.

Rodier jerked the lever back: the humming clatter of the engine ceased; and the aeroplane swooped down as gracefully as a bird, alighting gently on the green sward.

CHAPTER IV

A FLYING VISIT

It was Friday morning. Groups of Turkish women, out for the day, hastily veiled their faces and ran away, shrieking, "Aman! Aman! oh dear! oh dear!" Swarms of children, clustering, like ants, about nougat-sellers, fled in terror, screaming that it was the devil's carriage, and the devil was in it. Two Greek teams playing at football stopped their game and gazed open-mouthed; young naval cadets at leapfrog rushed with shouts of excitement towards the aeroplane; and a crowd of Jewish factory girls (for all races and classes use this common playground), realizing with quick wit what it meant, flocked up with shrill cries: "C'est un aviateur: allons voir!" A grave old Turk mutters: "Another mad Englishman!" A Greek shouts: "Come on, Pericles, and have a look"; and suddenly, amid the babel of unknown tongues Smith hears an unmistakable English voice: "Oh, confound it all, Crawford, I'm in the ravine."

Peering through the crowd of inquisitive faces, Smith sees two golfers and hails them heartily. They elbow their way through, and Smith, who has not yet dared to leave the machine lest the mob should invade it and do it an injury, steps out and grasps the hand of a fellow Englishman.

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"Well, I'm hanged!" cried the new-comer; "Charley Smith, of all men in the world."

"Hullo, Johnson!" said Smith, recognizing in the speaker a messmate of his middy days, now a naval officer in the Sultan's service; "I say, you can do something for me."

"I dare say I can," replied the other laughing, "but where do you spring from? I didn't know you were in these parts."

"Only arrived five minutes ago, from London."

Johnson stared.

"Not in that machine?"

"Yes, certainly. Eight hours' run; a record, isn't it? But I'm short of petrol. There's some ordered by wire from a man named Benzonana; can you put me in the way of getting it quickly?"

"Of course. Benzonana's a Jew, with stores at Kourshounlou Han. But there's no hurry. We'll get some one to look after your aeroplane, and you'll come back with me to the club: this sort of thing doesn't happen every day, old man. By Jove! Do you really mean to say you've got here in eight hours from London?"

"I left there at 12.35 this morning. Barracombe—you remember him—saw me off. But I'm sorry I can't come with you, Dick. I've only a couple of hours to spare, and must get the petrol at once."

"My dear chap, are you mad? You can't go on at once, after eight hours in the air. You'll crock up. Of course, if it's a wager—"

"It's a matter of life and death."

"Oh, in that case! But I'm afraid you won't get off in two hours. Things go slow in this country, and here's the first obstacle."

He pointed beyond the crowd, and Smith saw a troop of cavalry approaching at a hand-gallop. The throng of Turks, Jews, and Armenians, who had all this time been volubly discussing the wonderful devil machine, broke apart with shouts of "Yol ver! Yol ver!" (Make way!) The troop of horsemen clattered up, and Smith saw himself and his aeroplane surrounded by a cordon of soldiers.

The captain looked suspiciously from the two grimy travellers to the spick-and-span Englishmen in golfing costume. He said something in Turkish to his lieutenant.

"What does he say?" asked Smith in a whisper.

“He’s telling the lieutenant they must draw up a *proces-verbal*. Don’t lose your temper, old man; he talks of putting you under arrest as a Bulgarian spy. You’ll have to be patient. I’ll do what I can, but if they make a diplomatic incident of it you’ll be kept here a week or more.”

Johnson went up to the captain and addressed him politely in Turkish. The officer looked incredulous, and said something to his lieutenant, who trotted off across the field. In a few minutes Johnson returned to Smith, who was walking up and down in agitation. Rodier was fast asleep in the car of the aeroplane.

“I’ve given the captain the facts of the case,” said Johnson, “and he does me the honour to disbelieve me. The lieutenant has gone off to the Ministry of War for instructions. Meanwhile, you are under arrest, and they won’t let you quit this spot without authority. If you really mean that you must go at once——”

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"I do indeed. The loss of an hour may ruin everything. My plan was to leave here at 10.30."

"But, my dear fellow, it's that now, and past."

Smith drew out his watch: it indicated 8.50. "London time," he said. "You're two hours in advance of it, aren't you?"

Johnson laughed.

"Of course, we get used to our own time, here. But I was saying, if you *must* go, this is what I suggest. You can't appear, and it's as well, for you would certainly be delayed. I will go off to the Embassy and hustle a bit. If the wheels can be hurried, they shall be, I assure you. Then I'll go on to Benzonana, get your petrol, and come straight back. Meanwhile take my advice and have a sleep, like your man there. You look dead beat, and no wonder. Why, I suppose you've had no breakfast?"

"I've had something, but not bacon and eggs, certainly. I shall do very well. I will take your advice; sleep is better than food just now. When you see Benzonana, ask if he has any addresses for me: Barracombe was going to wire some from London. Many thanks, old man."

Johnson said a word or two to the captain, who nodded gravely as Smith flung himself down beside the aeroplane, and, resting his head on his arms, prepared to go to sleep.

The golfer knew the short cuts from the Ok Meidan to the city. He went at a fine swinging pace through the hamlet of Koulaksiz, down Cassim Pasha, up the steep hill through the cemetery, past the Pera Palace Hotel. At that point he jumped into a carriage, and commanded the driver to make all speed to the British Embassy. There he was lucky to find a friend of his on the staff of the Embassy, a man well versed in the customs and character of the Turks.

"The only thing to do," said the official, when Johnson had briefly explained the circumstances, "is to get an order from the Minister of War; but we shall have to hurry, as he may be attending a council, or a commission, or something of the sort. What is your friend's hurry?"

"I don't know. He says it's a matter of life or death."

"I should say death if he goes at such a preposterous speed. It must have been nearly two hundred miles an hour: the Brennan mono-rail is nothing to it. At any rate, it's rather a feather in our cap—this record, I mean, after so many have been made by the French and the Americans—and if he has more recording to do we mustn't let Oriental sluggishness stand in the way."

This conversation passed while they were making their way from an upper room of the Embassy to the street. There they jumped into an araba with a kavass on the box, dashed down Pera Street, past the banking quarter, over the Galata bridge, up the Sublime Porte Road and into the Bayazid Square, where they reached their destination. A crowd of servants was grouped about the Grand Entrance, and as Johnson and his friend Callard came up, the Turks flocked around them officiously, assuring them with one voice that the Minister was attending a commission. Callard took no notice of them, but passed on with Johnson into the central hall, where, sitting over a charcoal brazier, they found a group of attendants rolling cigarettes and discussing the merits of the city's new water supply. Among them Callard spotted an acquaintance, who rose and said politely, "Welcome, dragoman bey, seat yourself."

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Callard knew very well the necessity, in Turkish administrations, of having a friend at court, and was aware, too, that where a high official failed, a servant might succeed. But he was too well acquainted with the customs of the country to attempt to hasten matters unduly. He began to discuss the weather; he compared the climate of his interlocutor's province with that of the city; he spoke of the approaching Bairam festivities. Then, apparently apropos of nothing, the man said, "I have been at the sheep-market to-day," a remark which Callard took as a broad hint for bakshish: the Turk wanted money to buy a fat sheep for the impending sacrifice. He produced two medjidies. The effect was magical. The two Englishmen were guided to the small chamber where the Minister's coat hung, where his coffee was prepared and his official attendants sat. From this room access could be had to him without the knowledge of the hundreds of people outside waiting for an audience: wives of exiled officers, officials without employment, mothers come to plead for erring sons who had been dismissed.

Introduced to the Minister's presence, Callard wasted no time. The case was put to him; Johnson, whom he knew by sight, vouched for the respectability and good faith of his old comrade; and the Minister, apologizing for his subordinate's excess of zeal, scribbled an order permitting Lieutenant Smith to pursue his business free of all restrictions by the military authorities.

"But," he said, "I have no power to give him exemption from Custom House control."

The Englishmen thanked him profusely, and with many salaams retired.

"We have succeeded better than I hoped," said Callard, as they passed out; "but we are still only half way, confound it! We shall have to hurry up if Smith is to get off in time. Arabadji," he cried to the coachman awaiting them at the door, "the Direction-General of the Custom House."

The driver whipped up his horse; they dashed down the Sublime Porte Hill, and drew up at the entrance to the Custom House.

"Is the Director-General here?" Callard asked of the doorkeeper.

"He is a little unwell, but the English adviser is here."

"We will see him," returned Callard; adding to Johnson, "We are in luck's way; the English adviser does his best to lessen the inconveniences of the Circumlocution Office."

They went up-stairs, and were met by an attendant who showed them into an unpretentious room, where an Englishman, wearing a fez, was seated at a table covered with papers and surrounded by a crowd of merchants and officials. Questions of infinite variety were being submitted to him.

“Excellence, are we to accept as samples two dozen left-hand gloves? This merchant brought two dozen right-hand gloves last week.”

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Then the merchant and the official began to wrangle. For some minutes Callard in vain tried to get a word in edgeways; then at last the Councillor, pushing back his fez with an air of weary patience, turned to the newcomers and asked their business. A few words sufficed; the Councillor rang a bell on the table, and when his secretary appeared, ordered him to make out a *laissez-passer* for Lieutenant Smith for all the Custom Houses of the Empire. This done, he turned once more to listen to the interminable dispute about the left-hand gloves.

"We are doing well," said Callard, as the two left the Custom House. "There's still nearly an hour to spare. Now for the petrol."

They drove across the Galata bridge to the district of Kourshounlou Han, and found that Benzonana had had the petrol ready at early morning, and, what was more, had it at that moment in a conveyance for transport. Johnson asked him if he had received any addresses from London, and the man handed him a folded paper. Then, asking him to send the petrol and some machine oil at once to the Ok Meidan, the two Englishmen reentered their carriage, dashed up the Maltese Street, past the Bank and the Economic Stores, up the Municipality Hill, and again down by a short cut to the Admiralty. It was an hour and a half since Johnson had set forth on his errand.

They found Smith and Rodier talking to the second golfer, boiling coffee in a little portable stove, and eating a kind of shortbread they had purchased of one of the simitdjis or itinerant vendors of that article who had been doing a roaring trade with the children, and even the elders, among the sightseers.

"Don't taste bad, spread with Bovril," said Smith, as Johnson and Callard alighted from their carriage.

The crowd had grown to immense proportions. Smith said they had been clamouring ever since Johnson had been gone, and he would rather like to know what they said.

"Probably discussing whether the Commander of the Faithful won't order you to be flung into the Bosphorus," said Callard.

The soldiers were still on guard round the aeroplane. Johnson approached the captain and showed him the Minister of War's order. Almost at the same moment an aide-de-camp came galloping up from the Minister himself to assure the officer that all was right.

"But don't go yet, captain," said Johnson anxiously. "My friend will require a clear space for starting his aeroplane, and without your men we shall never get the crowd back."

The officer agreed to wait until the Englishman departed, and Johnson returned to Smith to give him the paper he had received from Benzonana. Callard had already related their experiences at the Ministry of War and the Custom House.

“But what about the petrol?” asked Smith. “Time’s getting on.”

“He said he had it all ready to send. Ah! I guess this is it coming.”

A way was parted through the crowd, and there came up with great rattling and creaking a heavy motor omnibus of the type that first appeared on the streets of London. It was crowded within and without with Turks young and old.

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"Where did you get that old rattler?" asked Smith, laughing.

"Oh, several came out here a year or two ago; bought up cheap when the Commissioner of Police couldn't stand 'em any longer. They're always breaking down. No doubt your petrol is inside, and you may think yourself lucky it has got here."

The car came to a stand: the Turks on the roof retained their places; those within lugged out the cans of petrol and oil, and placed them in the aeroplane at Rodier's direction. Smith meanwhile was chatting with the Englishmen, fending off their questions as to his destination.

"I may send you a wire from my next stopping-place," he said. "That reminds me. Will you send a wire to Barracombe for me, Johnson? You know his address. And one to my sister at home. I promised I would let her know. Simply say 'All well.' Now can you get the captain to clear the course for me?"

The captain and his men took a long time over this business, and Smith longed for a few London policemen to show them how to do it. But the excited crowd was at length forced back so far as to allow a sufficient running-off space. Smith shook hands warmly with the Englishmen; with Rodier he took his place in the car; then at a jerk of the lever the aeroplane shot forward, and, amid cries of "Good luck!" from the Englishmen, clapping of hands and loud "Mashallahs!" from the excited mob, it rose gracefully into the air.

"Only five minutes late, mister," said Rodier. "All goes well."

CHAPTER V

THE TOMB OF UR-GUR

Charles Thesiger Smith was not one of the romantic, imaginative order of men. Even if he had been, the speed at which he travelled over the Bosphorus gave scant opportunity for observation of the scenes passing below. He had no eye for the tramps, laden with grain from Odessa, coming down from the Black Sea; for the vessels of ancient shape and build, such as the Argonauts might have sailed in when questing for the Golden Fleece; for the graceful caiques rowed by boatmen in zouaves of crimson and gold, in the sterns of which the flower of Circassian beauty in gossamer veils reclined on divans and carpets from the most famous looms of Persia and Bokhara. These visions touched him not: he was crossing into Asia Minor, a country of which he knew nothing, and his attention was divided between the country ahead and the map with which Barracombe had nefariously provided him.

The next stage of his journey, the first place where a fresh supply of petrol awaited him, was Karachi, in the north-west corner of India. It was distant about 2,500 miles. A



gallon of petrol would carry him for forty-five miles, and his tank had a capacity of eighty gallons, so that with good luck he would not need to replenish it until he reached Karachi. Though he hoped that his own endurance and the engine's would stand the strain of the whole distance without stopping, he had chosen his course so that, if he felt the necessity of alighting for brief intervals, he might at least find pleasant country and amicable people.

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His aim was to cross the Turkish provinces in Asia and strike the Persian Gulf, a slightly longer route than if he had gone through central Persia, but having the great advantage of affording a possible half-way house at Bagdad, Basra, or Bushire, in each of which towns he would almost certainly find Europeans. It had the further advantage that, when he had once sighted the Gulf, he would have no anxiety about the accuracy of his course, since by keeping generally to the coastline of Persia and Baluchistan he could not fail to arrive at Karachi. It was a great thing to be independent of nautical observations, for as he approached the shores of India it might be difficult to take his bearings by his instruments, this being the season of the monsoon.

When he left Constantinople his anemometer indicated a velocity of eighteen miles in the south-west wind, which, as he was steering south-east, was partly in his favour. One of the disabilities which he, in common with all airmen, suffered, was the impossibility of ascertaining the velocity of the wind when he was fairly afloat. He had to make allowance for it by sheer guesswork, unless he was prepared to slow down or even to alight. He had reckoned that, even with the slight assistance of the wind, he could hardly hope to reach the head of the Persian Gulf before six o'clock, which would be past nine by the sun; but he thought he might reasonably expect to reach the Euphrates before sunset; and since the map assured him that that river ran a fairly direct course to the Gulf, he might follow it without much difficulty if the night proved clear, and so assure himself that he was not going astray.

The country over which he was now flying was hilly, and he kept at a fairly high altitude. The map showed him that the great Taurus range lay between him and the eastern extremity of the Mediterranean. Within an hour and a half after leaving Constantinople he came in sight of its huge bleak masses stretching away to right and left, but still a hundred miles or more distant, although, on the right, spurs of the Cilician part of the range jutted out much nearer to him. On the right, too, he descried from his great height a broad and glittering expanse of water, which the map named Lake Beishehr. Making for the gap in the mountains near the Cilician coast he found himself passing over a comparatively low country, and soon afterwards descried the blue waters of the Mediterranean and the island of Cyprus rising out of it a hundred miles away.

Setting now a more easterly course, he passed over an ironbound coast, its perpendicular cliffs fringed with dwarf pines; and then over a large town which could be none other than Antioch. Half-an-hour more brought him within sight of another city, doubtless Aleppo. He still steered almost due east, though a point or two southward would be more direct, because he wished to avoid the Syrian desert; a breakdown in such a barren tract of country would mean a fatal delay. Soon afterwards he reached a broad full river, flowing rapidly between verdant banks.

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"The Euphrates," he shouted to Rodier.

"Ah! I wish we had time for a swim," replied the man.

For some time Smith followed the general course of the river, avoiding the windings. Severely practical as he was, he could not pass through this seat of ancient civilizations without letting his mind run back over centuries of time, recalling the names of Sennacherib, Cyrus and Alexander; and how Cyrus had not shrunk from drying up the bed of this very river in his operations against Babylon. On the ground over which he now flew mighty armies had fought, kingdoms had been lost and won, four or five thousand years ago. The passage of so modern a thing as an aeroplane seemed almost a desecration of the spirit of antiquity, an insult to the *genius loci*.

Hitherto the weather and the conditions for flying had been perfect. The wind had dropped, the sun shone brilliantly, but its heat was tempered to the airmen by the very rapidity of their flight. At length, however, about two hours before sunset, Smith noticed a strange wobbling of the compass needle. It swung this way and that with rapid gyrations, its movements becoming more violent every moment. Suddenly the aeroplane reeled; the sky seemed to become black in one instant; there was a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a tremendous thunder-clap and a flood of rain.

Smith was desperately perturbed. He had run straight into an electric storm. It was hopeless to attempt to make headway against it; the strain upon the planes would certainly prove more than they could stand. He had already slackened speed and planed downwards, so as to be able to alight if he must, with the result that the machine became more subject to vertical eddies of the wind, that continually altered its elevation, now hurling it aloft, now plunging it as it were into an abyss. Once or twice he tried to rise above the storm, but abandoned the attempt when he saw how great an additional strain it placed upon the planes. It seemed safer to keep the engine going steadily and make no attempt to steer. He was no longer over the river, and the ground below was comparatively flat, presenting many a clear spot suitable for alighting; but with the wind blowing a hurricane a descent might well prove disastrous. The worst accidents he had suffered in the early days of his air-sailing had always happened near the ground, when there was no way on the machine to counteract the force of the wind.

All that he could do was to cling on and do his best by quick manipulation of the levers to keep the machine steady. After fifteen very uncomfortable and, indeed, alarming minutes, the violence of the wind abated, and the rain became intermittent, instead of pouring down in a constant flood. The compass was oscillating less jumpily, and it was now possible to see some distance ahead. Owing to the extraordinary behaviour of the compass, the baffling gusts of wind, and the necessity of keeping his whole attention fixed on the machinery, he had lost all idea of direction and even of time, and he began to be anxious lest darkness should overtake him before he had regained his course. But guessing that the area of the storm was of small extent, he hoped to run out of it,

and increased his speed, expecting in a few minutes to discover the Euphrates again, when all would be well.

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Unhappily, though the wind had dropped, the sky became blacker than ever, and another deluge of rain fell, so densely that at a distance of a few yards it seemed to be an opaque wall. Coming to the conclusion that he had better take shelter until he could at least see his way, he planed downwards, calling to Rodier to keep a sharp look-out for a landing place. Suddenly, in the midst of the downpour, a huge dark shape loomed up ahead, appearing to rise almost perpendicularly above the plain. For a few seconds it seemed to Smith that he was dashing into a solid wall of rock. Luckily he had checked the speed of the engine. He now stopped it altogether, but the aeroplane glided on by its impetus, and he felt, with a sinking of the heart, that nothing could save it.

All at once the mass in front seemed to open. Instinctively Smith touched his steering lever; the aeroplane glided into the fissure; in two or three seconds there was a bump and a jolt; it had come to a stop, and was resting on an apparently solid bottom.

Monsieur Alphonse Marie de Montause, a distinguished member of the Academy of Inscriptions, a pillar of the Societe d'Histoire diplomatique, and a foreign member of the Royal Society, had been for nearly a year engaged at Nimrud in the work nearest to his heart, the work of excavation. It was a labour of love for which he was very jealous. He believed it was his mission to reveal to an astonished world the long-buried secrets of ancient civilizations; he could not bear a rival near the throne of archaeological eminence; and in this exclusive attitude of mind he had undertaken this expedition without the companionship of a fellow-countryman, or even of any white man, devoting himself to his patient and laborious toil, assisted only by an Egyptian cook, a number of Arab labourers, and such natives of Babylonia as he had attracted to his service by the promise, faithfully kept, of good and regular pay.

His excavations had been, on the whole, disappointing. He had unearthed specimens of pottery and metal-work, tradesmen's tablets of accounts, seals, bas-reliefs, differing little from those which could be found in many a European museum; but he had not for many months lighted upon any unique object, such as would open a new page in the history of archaeological research, and make Europe ring with his name.

His money was nearly all expended; his permit from the Ottoman Government was on the point of expiring; he was sadly contemplating the necessity of leaving this barren field and returning to France; he had, indeed, already despatched a portion of his caravan to begin its long journey to the coast, remaining with a few men to finish the excavation of the *tell*—the mound covering the remains of a Babylonish city—on which he was engaged, in the hope of discovering something of value, even at the eleventh hour. He had almost completed it, and he could easily hurry after the slow-moving caravan, and overtake it in a day or two.

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One Friday, to his great joy, he came across, in the wall of the *tell*, a large inscribed mass of brickwork, weighing, perhaps, half-a-ton, which, from the cursory inspection he was able to make of it in the semi-darkness, he believed might prove sufficiently valuable to compensate all the disappointments of the weary months. In his enthusiasm he had no more thought of his caravan, and though a terrific thunderstorm burst over the place just as his men were getting into position the rude derrick by means of which they would lower the masonry into the trench cut in the side of the *tell*, his ardour would suffer no intermission in the work. It is true that in the trench they were in some measure protected from the storm. The lashings had been fixed on the brickwork under his careful superintendence; the men were on the point of hauling on the ropes, when a thing of monstrous size and uncouth shape glided silently into the opening of the trench, and came to rest there.

Instantly the men gave a howl of terror, released the ropes, and took to their heels. Monsieur Alphonse Marie de Montause was left alone.

Remembering that he was an explorer, an enthusiast, and a Frenchman, the reader will hardly need to be told that Monsieur de Montause was beside himself with fury. The dropping of the ropes had caused the masonry to fall against one of the feet of the derrick, and it came down with a crash. But this was not the worst. In the semi-darkness, the nature of the intruder could not have been clear to Monsieur de Montause; but he heard a voice calling in some unknown tongue; some human being had dared to interlope upon his peculiar domain; and the wrathful explorer did only what might have been expected of him: he began to pour forth a torrent of very violent reproof and objurgation, to which the sober English tongue can do scant justice.

“Ah! scelerats!” he cried. “What do you mean? De quoi melez-vous? You are rogues: you are trespassers. Know you not that I—oui, moi qui vous parle—have alone the right of entry into this *tell*? Has not the administration of the French Republic arranged it? Allez-vous-en, allez-vous-en, coquins, scelerats!”

“Mais, monsieur—” began Rodier, stepping out of the car.

The sound of his own language only added fuel to Monsieur de Montause’s wrath. Had some rival appeared on the scene at the very moment when he saw the crown of his long toil? Had some overeager competitor obtained a permit, come before his time, and arrived to enter upon the fruits of his predecessor’s labours and rob him of half his glory? “Mais, monsieur,” said Rodier, but the explorer fairly shrieked him to silence, approached him, smote one fist with the other, and hurled abuse at him with such incoherent volubility that Smith, whose French was pretty good, could not make out a word of it, and held on to the levers in helpless laughter.

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“Mais, monsieur, je vous assure—” began Rodier again, when he thought he saw a chance; but the explorer shouted “Retirez-vous! J’insiste que vous vous en lieez, tout de suite, tout de suite!” And then he began over again, abuse, recrimination, expostulation, entreaty, pouring in full tide from his trembling lips. More than once Rodier tried to stem the flood, but finding that it only ran the faster, he resigned himself to listen in silence, and stood looking mournfully at his ireful fellow-countryman until he at length was forced to stop from sheer lack of breath.

“Mais, monsieur,” Rodier’s voice was very conciliatory—“I assure you that our visit is purely accidental. My friend and myself desire only too much to quit the scene. But you perceive, monsieur, that our aeroplane—”

“Ah, bah! aeroplane! What have I to do with aeroplanes? You interrupt my work, I say: the aeroplane is a thing of the present; I have to do only with the past; there were no aeroplanes in Babylonia. Once more I demand that you withdraw, you and your aeroplane, and leave me to pursue my work in tranquillity.”

“Mais, monsieur, il s’agit précisément de ça! Withdraw: yes, certainly, at the quickest possible: but how? You perceive that our aeroplane is so placed that one cannot extricate it without assistance. If monsieur will be so good as to lend us his distinguished help, so that we may remove it from this hole—”

“Hole! Mille diables! It is a trench; a trench excavated with many pains in this *tell*. As for assistance, I give you none, none absolutely. You brought your aeroplane here without assistance: then remove it equally without assistance; immediately: already you waste too much time.”

“Mais, monsieur, our mission is of life or death.”

“N’importe, n’importe. I tell you I am quite unmoved. No interest is superior to that of science—the science of archaeology. I tell you I have just made a discovery of the highest importance. I have but a short time left; you, you and your ridiculous machine, have scared away my imbeciles of workmen; they will not return until you have gone away; the leg of my derrick is smashed; I demand, I beseech, I implore—”

“Pardon, monsieur,” said Smith, coming forward, and courteously saluting the stout, spectacled little Frenchman, whom he could just see in the growing darkness. “We regret extremely having put you to this trouble and inconvenience, and I assure you that but for the storm we should never have dreamed of entering here, and interrupting the great work on which you are engaged.”

Smith’s quiet voice and slow, measured utterance made an instant impression. A man can hardly rave against a person who remains calm. Moreover, the Frenchman was mollified by the speaker’s evident appreciation of the value of his work.

“Eh bien, monsieur?” he said courteously.

“I am a seaman, monsieur,” proceeded Smith; “my friend here is an engineer, and between us I have no doubt that we can repair the leg of your derrick and assist you to place the masonry where you will. All that I would ask is that you in return will help us to remove our aeroplane from your trench into the open plain.”

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"Certainly, certainly; with much pleasure," said the Frenchman eagerly; "I will light my lantern, so that we may see what we are about."

Smith and Rodier stripped off their drenched coats, and by the light of Monsieur de Montause's lantern soon spliced up the broken leg of the derrick, set the contrivance in a stable position, and lowered the mass of brickwork to the spot the explorer pointed out. It was no sooner safely settled than Monsieur de Montause, oblivious of everything else, bent over it, and, holding one of the lanterns close to the inscription, began to pore over the fascinating hieroglyphics. Smith could not help smiling at the little man's enthusiasm: but it was necessary to remind him of his share of the compact.

"Ah, oui, oui," he said impatiently; "in a few moments. This is a magnificent discovery, monsieur; your aeroplane is completely uninteresting to me. This is nothing less than a portion of the tomb of Ur-Gur; see, the inscription: 'The tomb of Ur-Gur, the powerful champion, King of Ur, King of Shumer and Akkad, builder of the wall of Nippur to Bel, the king of the lands.' This was written nearly five thousand years ago; what is the aeroplane, a thing of yesterday, in comparison with this glorious relic of antiquity?"

"Precisely, monsieur; beside it the aeroplane sinks into insignificance; yet, as a man of honour—"

"Ah, oui!" cried the Frenchman, starting up. "Let us be quick, then; you take one end, I the other. You push, I pull; voila!"

"It is perhaps not so simple, monsieur," said Smith; "we must first see that there is no obstruction, and then if you could persuade some of your men to come back, we should be able to remove the aeroplane more quickly. I fear we could hardly do it alone."

Monsieur de Montause was so anxious to get rid of his visitors that he assented eagerly to this course. Four or five of the men, drawn back by the light of the lantern, were hovering at the end of the trench; the explorer hailed them, and assuring them that they would suffer no harm, persuaded, them to lend a hand. Rodier, meanwhile, had walked through the trench to see that the course was clear, and shoved aside with little ceremony some of the objects Monsieur de Montause had unearthed. With the aid of the Frenchman himself and his men the aeroplane was carefully dragged out into the open.

"It is done. Adieu, messieurs," said Monsieur de Montause. Then, turning to his men: "As for you, imbeciles, I have no more need of you at present. Go and eat your supper. I shall eat nothing until I have deciphered the whole of the inscription."

"One moment, monsieur," said Smith; "we were driven out of our course by the storm, and I am not certain of our whereabouts. Can you tell me the latitude and longitude of this place?"

“Ah, no. I am not a geographer. The surface of the globe: bah! It is the rind of the orange, it is the shell of the nut; I seek the juice, the kernel. But I can tell you this: We are not far from the left bank of the Tigris, near its confluence with the Zab, and about a hundred kilometres from the ruins of Nineveh. Adieu, monsieur.”

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The two airmen resumed their coats, switched on their searchlight, and made a rapid examination of the engine, which appeared to have suffered no injury: then took their places. When the sparking began, and noisome smoke poured from the exhaust, the workmen again yelled, but as the machine, after a short run, sailed noisily into the air, they fell prostrate in utter consternation.

CHAPTER VI

WITH GUN RUNNERS IN THE GULF

A glance at the sodden map showed Smith that he had been driven at least fifty miles out of his course. He could not afford time to return to the Euphrates: he would now have to follow the course of the Tigris until it joined the larger river. It would be folly to attempt a direct flight to Karachi, for in so doing he would have to pass over the mountainous districts of Southern Persia and Baluchistan, where, if any mishap befel the aeroplane, there would be absolutely no chance of finding assistance. Luckily the moon was rising, and by its light he was soon able to strike the Tigris near the spot where it flowed between the hills Gebel Hamrin and Gebel Mekhul into the Babylonian plain. From this point, keeping the hills well on his left, he steered south-east until about midnight he came upon an immense expanse of water, shimmering below him in the moonlight, which he concluded to be nothing else but the Persian Gulf.

By this time he was both tired and hungry. Rodier and he had eaten a few biscuits spread with Bovril, and drunk soda-water, while they were examining the engine, but they both felt ravenous for a good square meal. Smith, however, had set his heart on completing his flight to Karachi, where his scheme would allow an hour or two for rest and food, and he was the more determined to carry out his programme, if possible, because of the delay caused by the storm.

His plan was to keep close to the left shore of the Persian Gulf, not following its indentations, but never losing sight of the sea. The coast, he saw by the map, made a gentle curve for some six hundred miles, then swept southward opposite the projecting Oman peninsula, and thence ran almost due east to Karachi. The coast was for the most part hilly, and as he was now travelling at full speed there was always a risk, unless he flew high, of his being brought up by a spur or a rock jutting out into the Gulf; and as he did not wish to maintain too great an altitude, he altered his course a point or two to the south, flying over the sea, but not far from the shore.

Rodier and he took turns at the engine, each dozing from sheer weariness during his spell off. They flew on all through the night, and when dawn began to break, saw straight ahead land stretching far to right and left. There was no doubt that this was the Oman peninsula, which, jutting out from the Arabian mainland, almost closes the Gulf. Steering now a slightly more northward course, and rising to clear the hills of the

peninsula, Smith passed over the neck of land, and found himself in the Gulf of Oman, half-way between the head of the Persian Gulf and Karachi.

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Now that it was light, there was no longer the same necessity for keeping out to sea. Indeed, it was merely prudent to come over the land, so that if anything happened to the engine he would at least have an opportunity of descending safely. The engine had worked so well that he scarcely feared a breakdown, but he was not the man to take unnecessary risks.

Glancing at his watch, he calculated that he was about two hours behind time. As he had been flying at full speed except during the storm, he could hardly hope to make up the lost time except by diminishing the intervals for rest which he had allowed for before starting. It was, at any rate, important to lose no more. He had just come to this conclusion when there was a sudden snap in the framework of one of the planes. Looking round anxiously, he at once reduced the speed, feeling very thankful that the mischief had not developed during the storm, when the aeroplane must have inevitably crumpled up. Now, however, the weather was fair, and he could choose his landing-place. He had no doubt that the accident was due to the enormous strain which had been put upon the structure by the storm. A glance showed him that the plane was still rigid enough to stand the strain of motion at a lower speed, but that would neither satisfy him nor achieve success, and so he decided to alight and try to remedy the defect.

As he began to plane downwards, Rodier pointed to a cluster of huts at the mouth of a small river. A dhow lay moored to a rough wooden jetty beyond the hamlet. Between it and the huts was an open space of considerable extent, and though when Rodier first drew his attention to the place they must have been more than a mile distant from it, he could see, even without his binocular, a crowd of people moving about the open space.

"We may find a forge there," shouted Rodier.

Smith nodded, but he felt a little uneasy. It seemed likely that he had now reached what is known as the Mekran coast, and he remembered the ill reputation it bore with the officers of British ships who had seen service in these waters. The people had been described as greedy, conceited, unwilling, and unreasonable as camels, and their treacherous and cruel disposition was such that, thirty or forty years before, Europeans who landed on any part of their seaboard would have done so at great peril. Smith, however, had a vague recollection of their having been taught a salutary lesson by the Karwan expedition, and no doubt the presence of British war vessels in the Gulf had done something to correct their turbulence. He had to choose between finding a landing-place inland, out of sight of the inhabitants of this fishing village, and landing among them on the chance of getting the use of a forge, for it would probably be necessary to weld the broken stay. Deciding for the latter course, he steered straight for the village, and, circling round it, dropped gently to earth in the open space near the jetty.

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The aeroplane had been seen and heard some time before it reached the spot, and its flight was watched with open-mouthed curiosity by the men, who paused in their work of carrying ashore bulky packages from the dhow. When they saw the strange visitant from the sky descending upon them, they gave utterance to shrill cries of alarm, dropped their burdens, and fled in hot haste up the shore, disappearing behind the huts. As he alighted, Smith noticed, close to the aeroplane, one of these packages, which had burst open in the fall, and saw with surprise that it contained rifles.

"I say, Roddy," he said; "this is rather unlucky. We have interrupted a gun-running."

"Ah, no, it is lucky, mister," returned the Frenchman. "We shall not need now to buy rifles *en route*; we can help ourselves; these are contraband, without doubt."

"That's true, I suspect; rifles are sure to be contraband here; but this is a wild district, and the people won't be too well-disposed towards us, coming and stopping their little game. We've a right to impound the rifles, I daresay, but I really think we had better look the other way."

"Wink the other eye, as you say. Well, at present there is no one to look at. The people do not speak French, I suppose?"

"Nor English, probably. They are Baluchis, I suppose, and perhaps haven't seen a white man before. Just look and see what's wrong with the stay while I go up to the village and parley."

Rodier stripped to his shirt, got his tools out of the little box in which they were kept, and set to work in as unconcerned and business-like a way as if he had been in the workshop at home. Meanwhile Smith, puffing at a cigarette, walked slowly towards the nearest hut. His easy manner gave no sign of alertness; but in reality he was keeping a keen look-out, and had already descried some of the natives peeping round the walls of the huts. Having taken a few steps he halted, looked inquiringly around, and hailed the lurking villagers with a stentorian "Ahoy!" At first there was no response, but on his advancing a little farther and repeating the call two or three swarthy and dirty-looking men came slowly from behind the nearest hut. Smith noticed the long spears they carried. He smiled and held out his hand, but the men stopped short and eyed him doubtfully, jabbering among themselves. He bade them good morning, inviting them to come and have a talk, but saw at once by the lack of expression on their faces that they did not understand him.

Somewhat perplexed, and trying to think of signs by which he could explain what he wanted, he saw a different figure emerge from the background, a small, bent, olive-skinned old man, clad in a white turban and dhoti. He came forward hesitatingly.

"Salaam, sahib," he said humbly.

“Oh, I say, can you speak English?” asked Smith eagerly, suspecting that the man was a Hindu.

“Speak English very fine, sahib,” replied the man, with a smile.

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"Thank goodness! Well, now, is there a smith in the village? You know what I mean: a blacksmith, a man who makes iron things?"

It was not a very clear definition, but the Hindu understood him.

"Yees, sahib," he said; "smif that way." He pointed to a hut at a little distance.

"That's all right. Fetch the smith along, and I'll get you to tell him what I want."

"I know, sahib, I tell them. I do big trade in this place. They silly jossers, sahib; think you a djinn."

"Well, put that right, and hurry up, will you?"

The Hindu salaamed and returned to the group of villagers. An excited colloquy ensued, the man pointing now to the Englishman, now to the aeroplane, and now to the dhow alongside the jetty. Presently the Hindu came back.

"Silly chaps say what for you come here, sahib. You know too much, they say."

Smith guessed that they supposed his visit had something to do with the smuggling operations in which they were engaged. He explained quickly that he was merely an ordinary traveller, on his way to India in one of the new air carriages in which Englishmen were accustomed to make long journeys, and he promised to pay the smith well for any assistance he could give in repairing a slight injury which the carriage had suffered in a storm. The Hindu carried this message to the villagers, who were now increasing in number as they regained confidence, and after another discussion he returned, accompanied by a big man, the dirtiest in the crowd, the others following slowly.

He found it no easy matter, through his smiling but incompetent interpreter, to explain that he wanted the use of the smith's appliances. To quicken their apprehension he produced a couple of half-crowns, pointing out that they were worth four rupees, and offered these as payment when the work was done. The Hindu recognized the King's head on the coins, and eagerly assured the Baluchis that they were good English money; but the smith, true to the oriental habit of haggling, rejected them scornfully as insufficient, and was backed up by a chorus of indignant cries from the crowd.

Smith, impatient at the loss of time, and forgetting that any show of eagerness would merely encourage the natives to delay, was incautious enough to show them a half-sovereign. Though the Hindu appeared to do his best to persuade them that this was generous pay, they showed even greater contempt, and became more and more clamorous.

"Greedy chaps want more, sahib," said the Hindu deprecatingly.

“Very well,” replied Smith, pocketing the coin. “We’ll do without them.”

He turned his back on them, and returned at a saunter to the aeroplane, the crowd, now swelled by the arrival of apparently all the inhabitants of the village, old and young, pressing on behind. It was evident that they had now lost their fear of the strange machine.

“How are you getting on, Roddy?” he asked. “These asses won’t take half-a-sovereign to lend a hand.”

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"Imbeciles! But the stay must be welded."

"Well, we'll pretend we can do without 'em. I daresay that will bring them round."

For a few minutes the two men made a great show of activity, completely disregarding the crowd curiously watching them. The plan had the desired effect. The Hindu came forward and said that the smith would accept the gold piece, if he were paid in advance.

"Not a bit of it. If he likes to help he shall have it when the work is done," replied Smith, turning to resume his interrupted work.

The smith, now fearful of losing his customer, began to abuse the Hindu for not completing the bargain. At length, with a show of reluctance, Smith relented, and with the aid of the villagers the aeroplane was wheeled to the smithy. It proved to be very poorly equipped, having a very primitive forge and a pair of clumsy native bellows; but Rodier set to work to make the best of it, welding the broken stay with the smith's help, while his employer remained outside the hut to keep watch over the aeroplane, which the people were beginning to examine rather more minutely than he liked. To drive them off, Smith set the engine working, causing a volume of smoke to belch forth in the faces of the nearest men, who ran back, holding their noses and crying out in alarm.

Smith filled in the minutes by opening a tin of sardines and eating some of the fish sandwiched between biscuits. The sight of small fish brought from a box struck the villagers with amazement, which was redoubled when he removed the stopper from a soda-water bottle and drank what appeared to be boiling liquid. Presently, however, he noticed that some of the men were quietly withdrawing towards the huts, behind which they disappeared. Among them was the Hindu, who was apparently summoned, and departed with a look of uneasiness. Smith went on with his meal unconcernedly, though he was becoming suspicious, especially when he found by-and-by that all the men had left him, the crowd consisting now only of women and children.

"Nearly done, Roddy?" he called into the hut.

"Yes, mister. The smith has took his hook, though."

"All the men have gone behind the huts. I wonder what they are up to."

Rodier took up a hammer, and gently broke a hole in the flimsy back wall of the hut.

"There's a big crowd beyond the village," he reported. "Having a pow-wow, too. They've got spears and muskets."

"That looks bad. Hurry up with the stay. The sooner we get out of this the better."

He noticed that the smith had now rejoined the crowd. No doubt he intended to make sure of getting his money. The mob behind the huts was growing noisy, and Smith gave a sigh of relief when Rodier came out with the mended stay and proceeded to fix it in place. While he did this, Smith beckoned some of the lads forward, and made them understand by signs that he wished them to help him wheel the aeroplane round.

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The slope between it and the sea was very rough ground, but it afforded space for starting off, and the moment Rodier had finished his job he swung the aeroplane round and started the engine. The smith, looking on suspiciously, took this as a signal for departure and rushed forward, clamouring shrilly for the promised payment. Smith gave him the half-sovereign, then jumped into his place, Rodier running beside the machine as it moved down the slope.

At this moment there was a shout from the village, which swelled into a furious din as the men came rushing from behind the huts, and saw the white men preparing to leave them. The aeroplane gathered way. Rodier was on the point of clambering into his place, as he had often done before, by means of the carriage supporting the wheels. But the machine jolting over the rough ground delayed him. The yelling crowd rushed down, some hurling spears, and others endeavouring to seize the Frenchman. He kept his grip on the rail, but another jolt forced him to loosen his hold, the machine suddenly sprang upwards, and Rodier fell backward among his captors.

Smith scarcely realized what had happened until he was many feet in the air; but seeing at a glance over his shoulder that Rodier was left behind, he put the helm over and warped the planes to a perilous degree. The aeroplane was fifty or sixty yards from the starting place when Smith's action caused it to swerve like a wounded bird; then it recovered itself, and turning in a narrow circle swept back towards the confused knot of men on the beach. Smith planed down straight upon them, intending to land and rush to Rodier's assistance. But perceiving that the Frenchman was struggling on the ground, with a dozen turbaned figures clustering over him, he steered straight for the middle of the group. There was a dull thud, and then another, and he felt a harsh jolt as the chassis struck some of the standing men. Smith had stopped the engine when he turned, and the aeroplane, brought up by this obstruction, sank to the ground, being saved from damage only by the spring attachments of the carriage.

Drawing his revolver, Smith leapt from his seat and dashed towards the group. Six or eight men lay on the ground, some of them too badly hurt to rise; the rest of the crowd had taken to their heels, and the whole population was in full flight, the children screaming with terror. In an instant, to Smith's relief, Rodier sprang to his feet. Together they turned the machine once more towards the sea.

"Are you hurt, Roddy?" asked Smith.

"Ah, the villains! they have given me a dig or two. Let us get away from this, mister. We are getting later and later."

He jumped into the car; Smith again started the engine; and as the machine rose into the air it was followed by a howl of rage from the baffled Baluchis. Half-a-dozen slugs

pattered about it, piercing several holes in the planes. Already one of these had been gashed by a spear, which still stuck in it. But no serious damage had been done, and in a few seconds the aeroplane was flying at full speed over the sea.

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It is one of the drawbacks of aerial travel that conversation can only be carried on in shouts. Smith would have liked to talk over things with Rodier, but the noise of the engine and the boom of the air as the machine cut through it smothered his voice unless he bellowed. Only a few words passed between them as they flew along a little distance out to sea. Rodier bathed two slight wounds he had received in the scuffle with water from the pots filled during the storm, and assured Smith that they were nothing to trouble about.

Some few minutes after leaving the inhospitable village they noticed the smoke of a steamer, a good deal nearer the shore than the dhows which they had seen occasionally on the Gulf. It was too far distant for them to determine its size and nationality, or to guess the direction in which it was bound. Smith decided to speak it in passing, but, observing that the stay had not been thoroughly fixed in the hurry of their departure, he looked about for a suitable landing-place, where the finishing touches might be given. The coast was rocky and precipitous, and the tops of the cliffs were strewn for a considerable distance inland with innumerable boulders, large and small, which would render landing dangerous, and starting perhaps more dangerous still. At length, however, just as he was thinking of running inland, in spite of the loss of time, Rodier caught sight of a large expanse of smooth rock, left bare by the falling tide. He pointed it out to Smith, who made a hasty calculation of its extent, and judged that it would serve his purpose. Steering to it, he circled round it and dropped gently upon its western end, scaring off a flamingo that was sunning itself there in solitary state.

"We came well out of that, Roddy," he said, as they set to work on the stay.

"But we lose time by all these stops, mister," replied Rodier. "We can perhaps make it up if you keep your gold in your pocket."

"I made a mistake there, certainly. If anything of the kind occurs again our motto must be 'take it or leave it.'"

"Just as you say to a cabby."

"You are sure you are not hurt much?"

"No more than with a cat's scratches. You came in the stitch of time, though."

"A stitch in time saves nine," quoted Smith, smiling a little at the Frenchman's mistake. "That's why we had better make a good job of this. We don't want to stop again."

Ten minutes' work sufficed to fix the stay firmly in its place. Smith again started the engine, the aeroplane taking the air when it was only half-way across the rock. They looked around for the steamer when they were again going at full speed, but it was no longer visible. In a few minutes, however, the smoke again came into view, and as they

rapidly approached it Smith was delighted to see that it came from the funnel of a small gunboat, which was steaming in the same direction as their own flight, making probably for Bombay or Karachi. The chances were that such a vessel in these waters was British, so Smith steered towards it, shouting to Rodier that they might perhaps arrange a tit-for-tat with the Baluchis.

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There was much excitement on board the gunboat when the aeroplane planed down and soared over it at its own pace, just high enough to be out of reach of sparks from the funnel.

“Who are you?” shouted Smith through a megaphone.

“Gunboat *Penguin*, Captain Durward, bound for Bombay. Who are you?” came the answer.

“Lieutenant Thesiger Smith, of the *Imperturbable*, bound for Karachi.”

“The deuce you are! What do you call that vessel of yours?”

“My pet lamb,” replied Smith, grinning. “I say, sir, I’ve no time for explanations. Are you policing these seas?”

“This is my beat. Why?”

“Some Baluchis are gun-running fifty miles up the coast, that’s all. Thought you’d like to know.”

“Are they, begad! Thanks for the tip. Can you describe the spot?”

“A tiny village lying behind a point. A river runs through it, and there’s a short jetty. Sorry I can’t give you latitude and longitude. You’ll catch ’em if you hurry up. Hope you will, and—run ’em in. Good-bye.”

He set the engine at full speed again, and as the aeroplane soared on like a swallow its departure was followed by a lusty British cheer.

“Three hours late, mister,” Rodier bawled in Smith’s ear.

CHAPTER VII

THE WHITE DJINN

It was half-past six by Smith’s watch, near eleven by local time, when the aeroplane sailed across the long mangrove swamp that forms the western side of the harbour of Karachi. The sun was intensely fierce, and Smith, who found its glare affecting his eyes painfully, had donned a pair of huge blue-glass goggles. He was glad that he had done so when, passing over the crowded shipping of the port, he saw the sandy arid tracts around and beyond the town. Steamers hooted as the aeroplane flew above them; half-naked coolies lading the vessels with wheat and cotton, the produce of Sindh and the Punjab, dropped their loads and stared upwards in stupefied amazement. Smith could

not wait to enjoy his first view of an Indian city. His business was to land at the first convenient place and find Mr. John Jenkinson, whose godown was near the Custom House, and obtain from him the petrol bespoken by Mr. Barracombe.

Being in complete ignorance where the Custom House lay, though he guessed it would be somewhere near the seafront, he was at first at a loss in which direction to make. There was no suitable landing-place in the crowded city itself, and to the immediate south of it there appeared to be nothing but mangrove swamps. Ascending to a considerable height, however, he saw, some distance to the east, near a railway line, a stretch of open brownish ground on which little red flags stood up at intervals. He instantly jumped to the conclusion that this was the golf course, though at this time of day there were no players to confirm his judgment. This was an advantage, because it promised that he might land without being beset by curious spectators. Accordingly he steered in that direction, hoping that having safely landed his aeroplane he might find some means of reaching the merchant whose name Mr. Barracombe had cabled to him.

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It happened that, just as the aeroplane swooped down upon the golf course, an open vehicle like a victoria was driving slowly along a road that crossed it from the railway towards the city. The turbaned driver pulled up his horse and stared open-mouthed at this extraordinary apparition from the sky, and when the aeroplane alighted, and from the car stepped a tall, dirty creature with a monstrously ugly face, the native whipped up his horse and with shrill cries sought to escape the clutches of what he felt in his trembling soul must be a djinn of the most evil kind.

Smith shouted to him to stop, but in vain; whereupon he picked up his heels and ran to overtake the carriage. The horse was a sorry specimen, and Smith, being a very passable sprinter, soon came up with it, jumped in, and called to the driver to take him to Mr. Jenkinson's godown. The man yelled with fear, and in sheer panic flogged his horse until it went at a gallop, the vehicle swaying in a manner that any one but a sailor would have found unpleasant. Both horse and driver seemed to be equally affected with terror, but since the carriage was going towards the city Smith was perfectly well satisfied, and did not turn a hair even when it narrowly escaped a collision with a bullock-wagon.

On they went, past some buildings on the right which appeared to be barracks, until they reached a street in which there were so many people that Smith thought it time to pull up before mischief was done. Leaning forward, he gripped the driver's dhoti and drew him slowly backward. The man yelled again; the passers-by stood in wonderment; but with his backward movement the driver tightened his grip on the reins, and within a few yards the panting horse came to a standstill.

"Where is Mr. Jenkinson's godown?" said Smith, releasing the driver. But the man's terror was too much for him. Throwing the reins on the horse's back, he sprang from his seat and fled, a vision of bare brown legs twinkling amid white cotton drapery.

By this time a crowd of chattering natives had gathered round, who, not having seen the aeroplane, were more amazed at the driver's evident terror than at the passenger. He was dirty, it is true, and not clad like the sahibs whom they were accustomed to meet, but when he had removed his goggles they saw that he was certainly a sahib. Smith was about to ask some one to direct him to Mr. Jenkinson's when a native policeman pushed his way through the crowd, and in a shrill, high-pitched voice and wonderful English, announced that he had come to take the number of the carriage; it was clearly a case of furious driving to the danger of the public.

"Shut up!" said Smith impatiently. "Find me a driver to take me to Jenkinson sahib."

"Certainly, your honor," said the man, becoming deferential at once.

One of the bystanders, seeing the chance of earning a few pice, volunteered to drive.

“Jenkinson sahib? all right, sahib; down by Custom House. You bet!”

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The carriage rolled off, followed by a crowd of runners, eager out of pure inquisitiveness to see the matter through. They passed Government House, turned into dusty Macleod Road, and in five or six minutes reached the Custom House, where, turning to the left for a short distance along the Napier Mole, the driver pulled up at a wooden godown, and said—

“Here we are again, sahib. Jenkinson sahib, all right.”

Smith ordered the man to wait for him, and went into the godown. Here he met with a disappointment. In answer to his inquiry the native clerk, looking at him curiously, said that Mr. Jenkinson was not there, was not even in Karachi.

At this Smith looked blank.

“Your name, sir, is Lieutenant Smith?” said the clerk politely, but with an air of doubt.

“It is.”

“Then I tell you what, sir. Cable came yesterday for Mr. Jenkinson. I wired it, instanter, as per instructions, to esteemed employer at Mahableshtar, where he recuperates exhausted energies. Reply just come. Here you are: ‘Refer Lieutenant Smith Mr. Macdonald. Regret absence.’ Mr. Macdonald, sir, little way off. I have honour to escort you: do proper thing.”

He conducted Smith some distance down the Mole, the carriage following. Luckily Mr. Macdonald had not returned to his bungalow for tiffin, but was napping in a little room behind his office, darkened by close trellises, which are found necessary for keeping out the clouds of sand blown up from the shore.

“Eh, what?” said Mr. Macdonald, when his clerk awakened him. “A visitor this time of day? Well, show him in.”

He let a little light into the room, and stared when Smith was introduced. Smith was dripping with perspiration, and not having been able to wash since leaving London, he felt that his appearance must give a fellow-countryman something of a shock.

“What do ye want, man?” asked Mr. Macdonald, somewhat testily.

“Mr. Jenkinson referred me to you, sir—”

“I have no vacancies, none whatever, and—”

“My name is Lieutenant Smith, of His Majesty’s navy, and I have just arrived from England.”



"I beg your pardon, Mr. Smith; I took ye for—well, I don't know what. Take a wee drappie? You came by the *Peninsular*, no doubt. I hear she came in this morning."

"No. I came by aeroplane."

The Scotsman stared.

"What's that ye were saying?"

"By aeroplane. The fact is, Mr. Macdonald, I'm in a hurry. I've got to get off within an hour or so; and I want some petrol for my engine. Mr. Jenkinson was to have arranged it for me, but being absent he refers me to you, and I shall be immensely obliged if you can manage it for me, and excuse my not entering into particulars, for which I really haven't time."

"Is that a fact? Petrol, is it? Come away with me; only, upon my word, sir, I will take it very kind if you will give me a few particklers of this astonishing business as we go."

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He put on a sun helmet, and led the way from the room. Jumping into the victoria, he ordered the temporary coachman to drive to Harris Road, a quarter of a mile beyond the Custom House. In the two minutes occupied by the drive, Smith told the Scotsman merely that he had come from Constantinople and was proceeding immediately to Penang on important business.

"It took ye a week, I suppose?"

"No, I left there rather less than twenty-four hours ago."

"Man, you astonish me; fair take my breath away. But here we are."

He alighted at a store kept by a Parsi. It was a matter of a few moments to purchase the petrol and machine oil, Smith paying for it with English gold. The tins were rolled out; Mr. Macdonald hailed a closed cab, into which they were put, and then they set off to return to the golf links, Mr. Macdonald accompanying Smith, curious to see the machine which had performed such an astonishing journey.

"I've read in the papers about these aeroplanes, but never seen one yet. Is it your opinion, now, that we'll have a war in the air one of these days?"

"I shouldn't wonder. We shall have cruisers and battleships, air torpedoes and destroyers, air mines and air submarines."

"Are you pulling my leg, now?" asked Mr. Macdonald, but he received no reply, for Smith had noticed an European provision shop, and remembering that his biscuits and chocolate were running low, he called to the driver to stop, and made some purchases. He took the opportunity to lay in a dozen bottles of soda-water, and added a few packets of Rodier's favourite cigarettes, for smoking during the halts, for he would never allow a match to be struck near the engine.

Mr. Macdonald plied him with questions during the remainder of the drive, and Smith was ready enough with his answers except on his personal concerns. When they arrived at the links they found the aeroplane surrounded by a vast crowd. The majority were natives, but there was a sprinkling of Englishmen in the inner circle, and some soldiers from the barracks were doing police duty in keeping the onlookers at a distance from the aeroplane. Two British officers and some civilians were talking to Rodier, who was cleaning the engine with the assistance of a young fellow with the cut of a ship's engineer.

The arrival of the cabs caused a stir among the spectators. Smith alighted, asked Mr. Macdonald to see that the petrol and provisions were carried quickly to the aeroplane, and advanced to ask Rodier how he had been getting on.

“Like a house on fire, mister,” replied the man. “Mr. Jones here is just off the *Peninsular*, and has helped a lot.”

“I say,” said one of the officers, “is your man stuffing us up? He says you have come from London in twenty-four hours.”

“Quite true, Hawley,” said Smith, with a smile. “Remember I googlied you for a duck at Lord’s last year?”

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The officer stared.

“By George, it’s Charley Smith! I didn’t know you; you’re like a sweep. Yes, by George! and I stumped you and got it back on you. How are you? Rogers, this is a gentleman of the King’s navee—Charley Smith, Elphinstone Rogers.”

“How d’e do? Rummy machine, what!” said Captain Rogers.

“Yes, by George!” said Hawley. “What’s your little game?”

“I’ve got seven days’ leave, and am off big game hunting. Can’t wait for liners in these times.”

“You don’t say so!”

“Tigers, eh?” said Rogers. “Wish I was you! But is it safe? Looks uncommon flimsy, what!”

“I hope for the best, but I haven’t got a minute to spare. Sorry I can’t have a go at your pads again, Hawley. Finished, Roddy?”

“All complete, mister.”

“All the stuff onboard?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Mr.—Jones, is it? Much obliged to you. Roddy, pay those fellows who’ve carried the stuff, and the drivers.”

He handed him some silver.

“Hoots, man,” said Mr. Macdonald; “that’ll never do. They’ll swank for a week if you give them all that. Leave it to me.”

“All right. You know best. Many thanks for your help. Hawley, d’you mind getting your men to clear the course? I don’t want to break any bones. And perhaps you’ll send a cable home for me. Address Thesiger Smith, Cosham. Say ‘All well.’”

“I’ll do it, with pleasure.”

“Thanks. Good-bye. Sorry I’ve got to rush off.”

He shook hands all round, and jumped on board.



Rodier had already taken his place at the engine. It took a minute or two for the soldiers to force the crowd back, an interval which Smith utilized to trace on the map, for Rodier's guidance, the course he had decided to follow. Then, the clatter of the starting engine silencing the clamour of the crowd, the aeroplane ran forward and soared into the air. Its ascent was hailed with a babel of shouts and cheers. Smith waved his hand to his friends below; then, seeing that Rodier had the map before him, he spread himself in his seat for a comfortable nap.

CHAPTER VIII

A SHIP ON FIRE

Rodier had his full share of the Gallic dash which had won first honours in airmanship for France, but it was combined with the coolness and circumspection bred of scientific training, so that Smith was able to take repose in serene confidence that, barring accidents, the aeroplane would fly as safely under Rodier's charge as under his own. Karachi was soon a mere speck amid the sand. In less than half-an-hour the aeroplane was crossing the swampy delta of the Indus. Soon afterwards it flew over the Run of Cutch into Gujarat, leaving the hills of Kathiawar on the right. Sweeping over the head of the Gulf of Cambay, it crossed the railway line from Bombay to Baroda, and then the broad river Nerbudda.

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The city gleaming white in the sunlight, far to the left, must be Baroda itself. The course traced by Smith in the few minutes before leaving Karachi, avoided the high western Ghauts that fringe the Indian coast to far south of Bombay. Rodier therefore steered somewhat to the east, coming in the course of twenty minutes to the river Tapti. Seeing a line of mountains straight ahead, he swung round still more to the east, following the valley of the river until he had completely turned the mountains, the northernmost spurs of the Ghauts.

Now he turned south-east once more, crossed the Chaudaur chain, and presently came in sight of the Godavari river, which traverses the whole breadth of Hyderabad. Near Indor he left the river on his left. By this time it was becoming dark. Smith still slept, and Rodier, who was not able to steer by the stars, was considering whether he had not better waken his employer when he spied the characteristic glare from a locomotive furnace far ahead. In half-a-minute he had caught up the train, and slowed down to make sure of the direction in which the railway ran. He found that it was almost exactly south-south-east, and concluded from a glance at the map that he was above the connection of the Hyderabad railway running from Warangal to the coast of the Bay of Bengal. Reassured, he resolved to let Smith have his sleep out, followed the line until it swept eastward at Secunderabad, and then, steering a little to the left, put the engine once more to full speed. In less than an hour afterwards he saw a vast expanse of water glistening in the light of the rising moon, and knew that he had reached the sea.

Being by this time thoroughly stiff and tired, and knowing, moreover, that Smith would navigate the aeroplane over the sea with much more certainty than himself, he shouted to awaken him. This proving ineffectual, he leant over and nudged his shoulder. Smith was awake in an instant.

"Where are we?" he cried; but no answer was necessary; he saw the sea below him, and stretching far to the east, north, and south. He exchanged places with Rodier, who, too tired even to eat, fell asleep at once.

"Good thing he woke me," thought Smith. It was one thing to fly over land, with guiding marks in the shape of rivers, mountains, and other physical features that could be recognized more or less easily from the map; and quite another to cross the pathless ocean. But with a compass and a clear sky the course would present no difficulty to a seaman, and Smith settled down to a flight that would be without obstruction for at least seven hundred miles.

He knew that in the Bay of Bengal the prevailing wind at that season is south-westerly. Whether there was any wind or not it was impossible to ascertain while the aeroplane was maintaining its enormous speed; certainly there was none to cause unsteadiness. If wind there was, it blew in his, favour, and all that he would have to do would be to

allow in steering for a slight northerly drift. He would certainly sight the Nicobar group, and possibly the Andaman Islands if he did not make sufficient allowance for the wind; but he was determined not to alight if he could help it until he arrived at Penang; he had lost time enough already.

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It was the first time he had flown across so wide an expanse of sea, and he felt a touch of anxiety lest the engine should break down. If any accident should happen he had made up his mind that the only thing to be done was to don the lifebuoys, cut the engine loose, and trust to the buoys to keep them and the planes afloat until their plight was observed from some passing vessel. In the darkness this would, of course, prove a vain hope; even in daylight the chance that a vessel would be in sight was remote. But the die was cast: the engine was as yet working perfectly; and in three or four hours, all being well, he would come in sight of land.

There being no obstruction to fear, he kept at a height of only a hundred feet above sea level. The sea was calm, gleaming like a sheet of silver in the moonlight, so that the aeroplane seemed to fly over a continuous glistening track. Steadily it flew on; Smith had nothing to do but to sit still, feed the engine with petrol, and keep his eyes alternately on the compass and the stars.

At length, about six o'clock by his watch—past eleven in the longitude to which he had arrived—he caught sight ahead of a dark outline on the water, no doubt a group of islands, though whether the Andamans or the Nicobars he did not feel sure. Knowing that they were all hilly in formation, he slackened speed, intending to run down their coastline rather than cross them. It would not be difficult to find one of the many channels between them through which he could continue his flight, past the northern end of Sumatra to Penang. By taking a southerly course, moreover, he would, be able to assure himself of his direction.

After a short run parallel with the coastline he came to a wide channel which he believed to be, and subsequently ascertained to be, the Ten Degree channel between Little Andaman and Car Nicobar. From this, if he was right, there would be an uninterrupted course south-east to Penang. But within half-an-hour of entering the channel, still flying low, he suddenly ran into a dense cloud of exceedingly pungent smoke, which completely hid the sea beneath him. It made him cough, and woke Rodier with a start.

"What's this, mister?" he shouted, rubbing his eyes.

"Forest on fire," shouted Smith in reply, though he was surprised to meet with the smoke so far from land as he supposed himself to be. He hastily planed upwards, in case, by some error of navigation, he had come upon land and might endanger the aeroplane among hills or tree-tops, and also to avoid the risk of explosion from a stray spark. Still more surprised was he when, after only a few seconds, the aeroplane passed completely through the smoke, and he saw the sea again. At that instant, just as they reached the windward side of the smoke-cloud, which was evidently blown by an easterly wind, Rodier gave a cry.

"Mon Dieu! A ship on fire!"



Smith instantly checked the engine, and, swinging round in a narrow circle, saw a dark shape below him from which smoke was pouring up. There was no flame, but as the aeroplane dropped gently downwards Smith saw that Rodier's explanation must be correct, the ship being a sailing vessel.

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A fire at sea is the sailor's worst terror. Urgent as was his own errand, Smith could not pass without at least inquiry, so he sank still lower, steering as close alongside the vessel on the windward side as the planes would allow. He perceived now that she was dismasted and had a bad list. Lifting his megaphone, he shouted—

"Ahoy there! Who are you?"

No answer reached him, though he saw that the crew were crowding on deck, gazing up at him, and one man, no doubt the captain, was making a trumpet of his hands.

"I can't hear owing to the noise of my engine," shouted Smith. "Haven't you got a megaphone?"

He was acutely conscious at that moment of two disadvantages which the airman had not yet been able to surmount. He had not yet invented a noiseless engine, nor could he keep the aeroplane motionless in the air. If Smith could have transformed his vessel for a few minutes into a Zeppelin airship he would gladly have done it.

Now a megaphone had been brought to the captain, and his words came, though faintly, to the ears of the airmen.

"Barque *Elizabeth*, from Calcutta to Dundee with jute. Dismasted in a cyclone ten days ago west of the Andamans; been adrift ever since. Fire broke out in cargo in the fore hold; had as much as we could do to keep it under; no time to rig a jury mast. Afraid of flames bursting through any minute."

He asked no questions and showed no surprise about the aeroplane. It was evident that he could give no thought to anything but the desperate plight of his vessel.

Smith was in great perplexity. He could do nothing for the ship; perhaps his best course would be to make all speed for the nearest port and send a steamer to her assistance. An idea struck him.

"Can't you get off in your boats?" he called.

"All carried away but one. She won't hold half of us. Besides, can't desert the ship."

"Many passengers?"

"Only my daughter."

"His daughter, Roddy. I wish we could do something, but I don't know what."

"Ah! go down and lift her off, mister."

Smith reflected. A girl would probably weigh little more than the petrol they had consumed. The suggestion was feasible, and if the captain's daughter had pluck enough to risk the journey, no doubt her father would be glad to know that she at least was safe.

"We can but make 'em the offer," he said to Rodier; then shouted through the megaphone: "We're coming down. Get your men to clear the deck aft, and show lights and stand by to lend a hand."

All this time the aeroplane was moving slowly in circles over the vessel, being still careful to keep on the windward side for fear of sparks. When Smith's instructions had been carried out, he selected a landing place just abaft the mizzen and, warping his planes alternately, brought the aeroplane gently to the deck. Fortunately the bulwarks were sufficiently low not to catch the planes or the stays supporting them.

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Smith and Rodier stepped on deck, and were instantly surrounded by a group of the officers and crew.

“Get for’ard,” shouted the captain to the men. “D’you want to see a blaze?”

He was left with the first mate.

“I’m in a pretty fix, sir,” he said, after a rapid glance at Smith. “We drifted south and southeast after the storm, then lay becalmed for a day or two; yesterday an east wind sprang up and carried us northward.”

“What are your bearings?” asked Smith. “I’m in the Navy.”

“You don’t say so, sir! Yesterday’s observations gave us latitude nine degrees forty-seven minutes south and longitude ninety-four degrees thirty-two minutes east.”

“Well, look here, the best thing I can do is to run for a port and send you help.”

“I’d take it very kind if you would, sir. I was thinking of sending my daughter off in the boat to-morrow with a few men; but we’ve managed to keep the fire under so far, and if there’s a chance of getting help within a day, say, perhaps we can keep all together. It’s terribly risky in these seas in an open boat.”

“Well, I’ll set a course for Penang—”

“Port Blair’s nearer, sir, in South Andaman.”

“But I’m more likely to find a fast steamer at Penang. And as to your daughter, captain, she’d better come along with us.”

“In that what-you-may-call-it, sir?”

“Yes, certainly. We can easily carry her, and make a comfortable seat for her behind ours if you give us a cushion. We’ve come from London, so she needn’t be afraid.”

“From London! Near seven thousand miles! Jigger me if ever I heard the like of it! What do you think of that, Mr. McWhirter?”

“Rather a long un,” replied the mate.

“Well, hang me, if you’ve come across the Bay of Bengal, you’re sartin sure to be able to make Penang. She shall go with you, and that’ll be one load off my mind. Go and fetch her, Mr. McWhirter. She’s rather a superior gal, sir, though I say it myself. She’s had a rattling good eddication; talks French like a native, and as for music and singing, I’ve never heard any gal as could touch her, that’s a fact. Here she is.”

Smith was not sorry that the outflow of paternal pride was checked. He wanted to get on. A girl of about twenty came forward with the mate. She was very self-possessed, and met Smith's look frankly.

"My daughter, Mr. ——. I don't know your name, sir," said the captain.

"My name's Smith." He doffed his cap.

"Now, Margy, my girl, Mr. Smith, who's in the Navy, is going to be so kind as to take you in his what-you-may-call-it to Penang, and send a steamer to take us off or tow us in, as the case may be."

The girl looked startled, glancing from Smith to the aeroplane, and then at her father.

"I think I'd rather stay with you, Father," she said quietly.

"And I'd rather you didn't," he said bluntly. "You don't know the risk as I do, my gal," he added kindly. "The blessed ship may blaze at any moment."

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"I know, Father; but we've been in danger for several days, and I've got used to it."

"Ay, that's true, and you've been an uncommon plucky girl, I *will* say. She ain't like them females that faint and go into high strikes and fidget your life out," he said to Smith, who observed the girl's face flush. "Now, my dear, you'll go with Mr. Smith, and please your old father. There ain't a morsel of danger; he's come safe all the way from London, and I never see a better bit of manoeuvring, I *will* say, than when he brought the what-you-may-call-it down on the deck as light as a feather. It'll be a big sight safer than this poor old hulk, and I'll be thankful to know as you're safe in Penang. You can berth with my old friend Sam Upton and his missis, and please God I'll come for you in a day or two."

"I assure you, Miss—Miss Margaret," said Smith, "that there's really very little risk. We've come six thousand odd miles safely, and it's not far to Penang, you know. You won't be the first lady to fly in an aeroplane."

"Ma foi, non!" cried Rodier, unable to keep silence any longer. "I myself, mademoiselle, have kept company in an aeroplane with a lady. Ah, bah! vous parlez francais; eh bien! cette femme-la a ete ravie, enchantee; elle m'a assure que ce moment-la fut le plus heureux de sa vie."

"Shut up, Roddy," whispered Smith, smiling, however, as he caught a twinkle of amusement in the girl's eyes.

"I will go if you wish," she said to the captain, without replying to Rodier.

"That's right. Mr. McWhirter, will you please get a couple of cushions and put them in the thingummy where Mr. Smith shows you."

The seat was quickly prepared. Meanwhile Smith consulted with Rodier on the somewhat delicate problem how to make a start from the deck, which obviously did not afford more than a few feet of running-off space. Rodier hit on a solution, and by the time the passenger's seat was ready the necessary arrangements had been made.

"Now, my gal," said the captain, "step aboard. You sing like a bird; it's only right you should fly like one." It was obvious that the worthy seaman was making clumsy efforts to be cheerful. "I'll see you in two days, or three at most; we've got a raft ready, you know, in case the fire beats us. But, bless you, I shouldn't be surprised if we have a fire-engine coming through the sky next; there's no knowing what these clever young sparks won't be inventing. God bless you!"

The girl threw her arms round her father's neck. Smith turned away; there were tears in the old man's eyes. The captain conducted her to her place. Then he took Smith aside.

"You'll look after my gal, sir?" he said in an undertone. "She's all I've got. Suppose you *do* come down; what then?"

“I shall jettison the engine and keep afloat by the planes. We’ve a couple of life buoys, too. But I don’t think we shall come down, so make yourself easy, and we’ll save your vessel.”

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"There's one man that never forgets a good turn, and that's John Bunce. Where shall I find you in Penang, sir, if I get there safe?"

"Oh! I shan't be there. I'm going straight on to the Solomon Islands."

"Well, sir, if you're ever Rotherhithe way, you'll find me at 197 Prince's Road; I'm retiring after this voyage. Margy'll be proud to give you a cup of tea, and I *will* say I'd like you to hear her sing."

"All right, I won't forget. All ready, Roddy?"

"Ready and waiting, mister."

Smith went to his place.

"Are you quite comfortable, Miss Bunce?" he said, noticing that the girl was pale and nervous. "I'm sorry I can't give you my seat, but my man and I must sit together. You'll forgive us for turning our backs on you."

The girl smiled faintly without speaking. Several of the crew had ranged themselves on each side of the aeroplane, to hold it steady until the propellers had worked up a good speed. Smith started the engine; the deafening whirr began: then at the word "Go!" the sailors released their holds and the aeroplane lurched forward just clear of the bulwarks. Margaret Bunce clutched the rail nervously. One or two of the men had been somewhat slow in letting go, causing the aeroplane to cant over in a manner that was alarming to the onlookers. But long practice with the aeroplane in all kinds of gusty weather had developed in Smith an instinct for the right means of meeting an emergency of this nature. Like a bicyclist, he did the right thing without thinking. The vessel righted itself at a touch on the warping lever, and in two or three seconds she was sailing rapidly away from the ship.

CHAPTER IX

A PASSENGER FOR PENANG

From the information given him by Captain Bunce, Smith hoped to pick up the lights of Penang without much difficulty. While on the ship's deck he had noticed that the easterly breeze was very light, so that even with the slight additional weight he carried, his speed would not be greatly diminished. With good luck three or four hours would see him safe in port.

Rodier pulled out his watch soon after they started, and comparing it with the schedule of the journey, shouted in Smith's ear—

"We are four hours late, mister."

"I know we are," cried Smith. "Confound you, Roddy, you're always telling me I'm late. If you say anything like that again I'll throw you out."

Rodier grinned.

"Mademoiselle wouldn't like that," he shouted. "Tout va bien, mademoiselle?" he said, turning to the lady. "Vous n'avez pas peur?"

"It is terribly fast," said the girl breathlessly, and Rodier came to the conclusion that Captain Bunce's opinion of his daughter's linguistic ability was exaggerated.

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The moon had set, and the flight was continued in almost total darkness. At length, shortly before four o'clock in the morning, Smith caught sight of lights ahead. He had touched at Penang some years before, when his first ship was on her way out to the Australian station, and he knew that the most suitable place for alighting was a large open space, clear of vegetation and buildings, about a mile from the port. In a few minutes the aeroplane was flying over the sleeping town. He slackened speed, and circled around for some time, seeking the spot with the aid of his searchlight. He discovered it with more ease than he had dared to hope, and bidding Rodier look out for obstacles, descended to the ground.

"Here we are, Miss Bunce," he said cheerfully, as he stepped out. "I hope you feel none the worse for your ride."

"It is wonderful," said the girl. "I shall never forget it."

"The question is, what are we to do now? Your father mentioned a friend of his, but as I have little time to spare I think you had better come with me to my friend Mr. Daventry. He is in the administration here, and I am sure Mrs. Daventry will be glad to do anything she can for you. You see, I can find my way there in the dark, I think, whereas we should have to wait until daylight to find your father's friend, and that would be a nuisance in every way."

"I will do whatever you think best."

Leaving Rodier with the aeroplane, the other two set off towards the town.

"You will try to send help to Father?" said the girl.

"As soon as it's light. This is Sunday morning, by the way. *You're* all right, but I'm afraid I look far from Sundayish. Still, no one can see me, and I shall be off before the people go to church."

"So soon as that? Aren't you very tired?"

"Not so tired as I've been in the manoeuvres. We get a nap in turn, you know."

"How *can* you sleep when you're in such terrible danger?"

"Well, you see I'm used to it. We don't think of the danger. Perhaps it's because I've never had a bad accident. The want of a decent meal is the worst of it. We haven't had one since Thursday night, but I daresay we can keep going on light fare for another three or four days."



“You know I’ve often wanted to go up in an aeroplane, though I suspect I should have backed out if I had really had the chance. I’m very glad Father insisted on my coming, but I wish it had been daylight; I could only hold on and try not to be afraid.”

“I’m sorry we can’t take you with us—no, I don’t quite mean that, Miss Bunce; of course you couldn’t come careering about; what I mean is that I shall be very glad to take you a daylight trip one of these days if you care to come—when we get back home, of course. Captain Bunce was kind enough to give me an invitation; he said you would give me a cup of tea—”

“And sing to you! I know exactly what he said; but you mustn’t pay too much attention to Father. He’s a dear old man, but quite absurd over my little accomplishments.”

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"But I may have a cup of tea?"

"With or without sugar—if you really mean it."

"Of course I mean it. One of these days you will find my aeroplane at your door—"

"Good gracious! it will be in pieces, then, for our street isn't wide enough to give it room."

"Well, you'll find *me* at the door then; and after I have had my cup of tea, with three lumps of sugar, and you have sung a little song—just to please your father, of course—we will walk to where my man is waiting with the aeroplane, two or three streets off, and we'll take a jaunt to Greenwich Park, or Richmond, or wherever you like."

"That will be very nice," said Miss Bunce, and Smith wished it were not too dark to see her face, for the tone expressed utter disbelief. He wanted to assure her that he meant what he said, but, reflecting that he had better not seem to suggest that she doubted it, he said—

"That's settled, then. I suppose it will be three or four months before you get home, and I shan't have another leave for I don't know how long, so we won't fix a date. Now Mr. Daventry's bungalow is in this direction; I hope I shall be able to find it."

They walked about for some minutes before Smith was able to satisfy himself that he had discovered the bungalow. They passed through the compound, looked with a smile at the native servant sleeping on a mat at the door, and laughed to see him jump when awakened by Smith's vigorous rapping. At a word from Smith the man went into the dwelling, but a moment afterwards a window above the entrance was thrown open, and a loud voice demanded what was the matter.

"That you, Daventry?" Smith called.

"Yes. Who are you? What's the matter?"

"It's Charley Smith. Sorry to disturb you at this unearthly hour, old chap."

"What in the name of—! All right. I'll come down."

They saw a light struck; in a minute they saw framed in the doorway a tall man in pyjamas, holding a candle.

"Come in, Smith," he cried. "Why, what the—! Here, I say, I won't be a minute."

Setting down the candle on the doorstep, he hurriedly fled. Smith glanced at the girl. She was quite unembarrassed, and when she caught his eye she frankly smiled. "She's

the right sort," he said to himself. Presently Mr. Daventry returned in trousers and a smoking jacket.

"Excuse my leaving you. I went to—to waken Mary," he said. "She'll be down in a minute; come in. Didn't know you were married, old boy," he whispered, taking Smith by the arm.

"Hush!" said Smith anxiously, hoping that Margaret Bunce had not caught the words.

Mr. Daventry led them into his dining-room, turned on the lights, and looked inquiringly at his visitors. The girl was already unpinning her low cloth hat.

"Why, what on earth—!" exclaimed Mr. Daventry; "what have you been doing to yourself, Smith?"

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"I *am* a bit of a sweep, no doubt, but you can give me a bath. The fact is—well, it's plaguey difficult to tell it shortly—but the fact is I picked up this lady—no, hang it all! Miss Bunce, please help me out."

"Mr. Smith picked me up, as he says, from a burning ship in mid-ocean, and was kind enough to bring me here in his aeroplane."

"Sounds simple, don't it?" said Smith, as Mr. Daventry looked from one to the other in amazement.

"But—I don't understand—mid-ocean—an aeroplane? Mary," he added to a lady in a dressing-gown who had just entered, "come and listen to this. You know Charley Smith? Miss—Miss—"

"Margaret Bunce," said the girl, rising.

"My wife. Now, let us all sit down and see if we can make this out. If I understand aright Miss Bunce was in a burning ship in mid-ocean—"

"Oh, poor thing!" said Mrs. Daventry sympathetically, going to Margaret and taking her hand.

"And—correct me if I'm wrong—Smith descended out of the clouds, caught up Miss Bunce, and flew with her to the house of his nearest friend. Is your aeroplane outside, old man?"

"It's a mile away, in charge of my chauffeur. I think I had better tell the whole story from the beginning."

"I think so, too; it's rather cloudy at present. Have a cigar—if the ladies don't mind."

"Well, two days ago I learnt that my father was shipwrecked along with the company of his survey vessel on one of the Solomons, practically unarmed, the report says. As the news was taken to Brisbane by some of the crew in an open boat, they must have been at the mercy of the savages for a week or more, and probably hard pushed. Of course a gunboat was to be sent to relieve them, but as every hour was important I decided to try to get to them in my aeroplane and take them some ammunition. Last night, coming somewhere south of the Andamans, we saw a ship on fire; she was adrift, lost her masts and all boats but one. The captain asked me to send help as soon as I got here, and Miss Bunce was good enough to accept our escort, and here we are."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Daventry. "But—I don't understand yet. How did you come to be by the Andamans? Where did you come from?"

"Left London early Friday morning: came by Constantinople and Karachi."

“Upon my word, Smith, if I didn’t know you I should be inclined to ask if you are sober. You have come all the way from London since Friday morning?”

“Exactly. But I know you’ll excuse me: I haven’t time to tell you any more. We are already four hours late, and every hour means nearly two hundred miles. There are two things I want to do. First to arrange with the port officer to send help to Captain Bunce; then to get the petrol and lubricating oil ordered for me here. Van Kloof’s the man. You know him, of course.”

“Yes, but it’s Sunday.”

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"The better the day, the better the deed. I must have the petrol; I must start in two hours or less. And I should like a good bath and a breakfast first."

"You shall have both, but surely you can wait till daylight."

"I'm afraid I can't. It is very awkward, I admit, and I fear I shall give you and several others a lot of trouble; but needs must when the devil drives, as they say, and the devil in this case is Father Time. You see, I've not only got to take some rifles and ammunition to the shipwrecked party, but I must rejoin my ship by Friday morning, or there'll be ructions. I've got a name for overstepping the limit, and my captain warned me that I'd better rejoin promptly this time."

"We mustn't hinder him, Jack," said Mrs. Daventry.

"But, hang it all, Mary, do you understand what it means? He'll kill himself, rushing round the world like this."

"Not at all; I'm pretty tough," said Smith. "Now, old fellow, what is the best you can do for me?"

"Go and get your things on, Jack," said Mrs. Daventry practically. "You can take Mr. Smith down to the harbour and get what he wants. I'll see about the bath and the breakfast, and I am sure Miss Bunce will help; I won't disturb the servants. Really, it is quite exciting."

"Thank you, Mrs. Daventry. It is very good of you. But I'm sure Miss Bunce ought to go to sleep."

"I am not a bit sleepy," said the girl, "and I shall certainly help Mrs. Daventry."

"Come along then, my dear," said the hostess. "We will go and see to things at once."

In five minutes Mr. Daventry was down. He and Smith left the house and made their way rapidly to the harbour. The port officer complained at having his beauty sleep disturbed, and when he learnt that his assistance was wanted for a burning ship near the Andamans he declared that he wished wireless had never been invented.

"People know too much nowadays," he grumbled. "They'll know what we think before we think it next."

"Don't undeceive him," whispered Smith to Daventry, anxious to escape the necessity of lengthy explanations. The port officer agreed to send a steamer in search of the *Elizabeth* as soon as it was light. Then, without losing a minute, Daventry led Smith to the house of Mr. Van Kloof, of whom the petrol had been ordered.



“He’s a bit of a slow-coach,” said Daventry, “and will want to know all about it, so I advise you to tell him everything; or better still, leave it to me.”

“Very well. Anything to save time.”

Mr. Van Kloof was hard to awaken. When he was at last aroused by his servants, he put his head out of his bedroom window, and demanded gruffly what was the matter.

“Come down, Van Kloof, and I’ll explain. It’s a matter of life or death,” said Daventry.

“Vat is it? An earthquake?”

“Worse than that. Slip into your breeches, man.”

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The merchant presently appeared at his door in shirt and breeches, and carrying a revolver.

“You got a cable from London ordering eighty gallons of petrol to be held ready for Lieutenant Smith?” said Daventry.

“So. Dat is quite true.”

“Well, here is Lieutenant Smith, and he wants the petrol at once.”

Mr. Daventry explained where the petrol was to be sent.

“No, it cannot be done, Mr. Daventry. It is Sunday morning. My store is closed, and I do not understand the hurry.”

“Lieutenant Smith is off to the Solomon Islands to save his father from being eaten by cannibals. There isn’t a moment to lose.”

“Dat is strange. For vy should I take oil for a motor-boat up country? You are playing games vid me?”

“Of course not. He’s not going by motor-boat, but by aeroplane.”

“Oho! Tell dat to the marines.”

“Hang it, Van Kloof, listen without interrupting. Mr. Smith has come by aeroplane from London, and is going on at once. Give me the key of your store, and we’ll go and get the stuff ourselves.”

“Veil, of all the—pardon me, gentlemen, but you vill allow me to be shocked to hear such news at five o’clock on a Sunday morning. I vill come vid you. I must vake up some coolies to carry the cans. But it shall be done; I vill myself see to it. I must look vell at dis aeroplane.”

“You’re sure we can rely on you?”

“I vill bring all before an hour, you may trust me for dat.”

“Then we’ll hurry back, Smith, and see about your breakfast. What about your man, by the way?”

“He’s cleaning the engine by searchlight, and eating sardines and biscuits, or something of the sort.”

“Couldn’t we fetch him?”

"I'm afraid there isn't time, and besides, he can hardly leave the aeroplane unattended. It's hard lines, but I'll make it up to him when we get back."

They returned to the bungalow. A steaming bath was ready. When Smith had bathed, he found hot coffee and eggs awaiting him. He ate and drank ravenously, and in a quarter of an hour declared that he must get back to the aeroplane.

"Nonsense," said Daventry. "The petrol won't be there for half-an-hour yet. You'll just lie down and rest, and have a comfortable smoke. I'll go up the hill and take some food to your man."

"You're a good fellow," said Smith, dropping into a capacious arm-chair. Mrs. Daventry arranged a cushion behind his head, Miss Bunce placed a stool for him to stretch his legs on, and in half-a-minute he was fast asleep.

"Don't wake him for an hour," said Mr. Daventry, as he left the house; "I'll see that all is ready for him."

The sun was rising when Mrs. Daventry, now dressed for outdoors, wakened the sleeper by lifting his hand. He sprang up with a start.

"Now, don't be agitated," said Mrs. Daventry. "It's just six o'clock. Jack has gone to see that all is ready for you, and Miss Bunce and I are coming to see you start. Really, I quite envy her, though I'm sure I should never have the courage to go up in the air."

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"You'll think nothing of it some day. You've been very kind, and I'm immensely obliged to you. By the way, will you ask Daventry, in case I forget it, to send a cable to my sister to say that I'm all right?"

"I won't forget. Now shall we go?"

They found that a small crowd had collected round the aeroplane. Mr. Daventry and Mr. Van Kloof were there, with several other Englishmen, and a number of Chinese coolies and nondescript natives stood at a little distance, gazing in wondering silence. Rodier had his watch in his hand, and looked reproachfully at his employer. Smith pressed through the crowd, shaking hands with the Englishmen one after another, but declaring that he had no time for talking. He shook hands with the Daventrys and Miss Bunce last of all, thanking them very heartily for their assistance; then, calling for a clear space, he followed Rodier to his seat. Almost before the onlookers could realize what was happening, the aeroplane was in action, and while they were still discussing the extraordinary nature of this means of locomotion, it had soared into the air, flown humming away from them, and become a mere speck in the eastern sky.

They were scarcely clear of the ground before Rodier, raising his voice to a bellow, shouted—

"Mister!"

"Yes. What?" replied Smith, fearing that something was wrong.

"Mister! We are four hours ten minutes late!"

INTERLUDE

"I'm afraid it's all up, doctor."

Day had just broken. Lieutenant Underhill, standing rifle in hand at his post in a corner of the barricade, addressed Dr. Thesiger Smith, who had come to relieve him.

"You think we can't hope for relief?" replied the doctor.

"Yes. The boat must have foundered, or got lost, or perhaps has fallen into the hands of the savages. We've come to our last tin of biscuits; we've hardly ten rounds of cartridges among us."

"What can we do then?"

"Either fight till we drop, or give in; there's nothing else. The end will be the same either way, but the first would be the quicker."

The doctor stroked his beard with his thin hand. His son joined them; not the ruddy, clean-shaven youth that had landed from the wreck twelve days before, but a gaunt man whose hollow cheeks were dark with a stubby beard.

“Underhill gives up hope at last,” said his father.

“Then I’m ashamed of him,” said Tom cheerfully. “Never say die. Go and have a sleep, old man; it’s enough to give any one the blues, keeping watch in the dark. You’ll feel better after a nap. Had any trouble?”

“No, they haven’t made a sound. I almost wish they had. Anything would be better than this eternal keeping watch for an enemy that’s afraid to come on.”

“Well, not being a fighting man, I prefer for my part to keep a whole skin as long as I can. Go and sleep, and the pater and I will talk things over.”

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Underhill, who was tired out, withdrew to the centre of the camp, and throwing himself on a tarpaulin, was soon plunged in an uneasy slumber.

It was twelve days since the wreck, ten since the boat had put off to seek assistance. When the storm had subsided, the castaways, drenched to the skin, had taken stock of their situation. It was a wild and desolate spot, far from the track of ships; months might pass before a vessel came in sight. They had only a small store of food, barely sufficient, even if husbanded with the utmost care, to last a fortnight. From their position at the foot of rugged cliffs it was impossible to tell what sustenance the island afforded, and the evil reputation of the natives did not give promise of peaceful exploration. While not actually head hunters, like the inhabitants of the New Georgian group to the south, they were said to be treacherous and vindictive. At the southern end of the island, as Underhill knew, there was a Wesleyan mission station, placed in a somewhat inaccessible spot, and at Tulagi, on Florida Island to the south, was a Government station and the seat of the Resident. It might be possible to reach one or the other of these, but even so they would be compelled to wait indefinitely, there being no telegraphic communication between either and a civilized port.

Reflections like these did not tend to cheer the castaways; but, now that the sun shone once more out of a clear sky, the invincible optimism of the British sailorman displayed itself, and the men began to scramble up the cliffs with almost light-hearted eagerness. At the top they found themselves at the edge of a dense and tangled forest. Underhill sent some of the crew to search for a likely camping place, while the remainder hauled up the boat's cargo. A comparatively clear space, about a hundred and fifty yards square, was discovered within a short distance from the cliffs. A stream running through the midst ensured a good supply of water, and here Underhill determined to make his camp.

Great havoc had been wrought in the forest by the storm. Many trees had been snapped off or uprooted; the ground was strewn with broken branches; and when the whole party were assembled at the spot, and the arms and provisions had been covered with a tarpaulin, Underhill sent all hands to collect broken timber for forming a breastwork. Fortunately, a good number of tools had been brought from the vessel, and as the men came in with their loads, Rumbold, the ship's carpenter, set to work, with the assistance of two or three, to surround the enclosure with a rough fence. Underhill ordered them to avoid the use of hammers and axes, the noise of which, carrying far in these solitudes, might attract the attention of the natives, who, for all he knew, had a village in the neighbourhood. There was no lack of tough creepers which were serviceable for binding the logs together, and a great number of cactus-like plants were cut down to form a defensive lining to the barricade.

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In the course of three or four hours the whole encampment had been roughly fenced. It would not, in its present condition, prove a very formidable obstacle to a determined attack; but the day had become very hot, and Underhill was anxious to avoid overworking the men. The barricade could be strengthened next day.

Just before nightfall the company ate a spare supper of tinned meat and biscuit, and then, in a little group apart from the rest, Underhill, with his officers and the Smiths, held a council to decide on a course of action. They determined, after brief discussion, that next day four of the men should take the boat and try to make their way to Tulagi. The loss of the second boat had rendered it impossible for the whole party to embark; but no doubt the Resident at Tulagi would have boats of some sort at his disposal, and in these the castaways could be taken off. When once at Tulagi, they would have to wait until the first vessel touched at the island. Four men, including Venables, volunteered to make the voyage, and were ready to start that night; but every one was exhausted by the adventures and fatigues of the day, and Underhill thought it best that they should have a night's rest before they set off. Having arranged for watches to be kept as on board ship, he gave the order to turn in, and their clothes and the ground having been well dried by the afternoon sun, they passed a comfortable and undisturbed night.

Up at daybreak, they first of all occupied themselves with completing the barricade; then, about eleven o'clock, when they were preparing to escort the four men to the boat, which had been anchored at the foot of the cliff, some one cried out that he saw brown men advancing through the woods. Underhill instantly ordered the barricade to be manned, and served out arms and ammunition as far as they would go round. There were only a dozen rifles, however, among twenty men; the rest armed themselves with tools and implements of various kinds.

Soon a large body of brown-skinned, fuzzy-headed natives, armed with spears, clubs, and bows and arrows, came slowly towards the camp. Their attitude was apparently friendly, but, remembering their reputation for treachery, Underhill did not trust them, and refused to leave the shelter of the barricade in answer to their invitation, expressed by signs, to come forth and palaver with them. It was well he refrained, for when they were within a few yards of the camp they suddenly darted forward with a wild whoop. Underhill ordered his men to fire a volley over their heads, hoping to scare them away without bloodshed; but the reports of the rifles did not make the astounding impression it usually produced upon savages, and Underhill could not but believe that they were not wholly unacquainted with the use of firearms. They advanced with the more ferocity, and it was not until several had fallen to another volley from behind the barricade that they drew back to the shelter of the woods.

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It would clearly be unsafe to attempt to reach the boat while the savages were in view. As time went on they appeared to increase in numbers, and every now and then they sent a flight of arrows into the camp. But the garrison kept out of sight behind the barricade nearest to the enemy, and their missiles either stuck in it, or fell harmlessly within the enclosure.

So the day passed. The fact that trouble had come so soon impressed Underhill with the necessity of sending for assistance without delay. The prospect of a siege, with only a limited supply of ammunition to repel assaults, and a scarcely greater supply of food, was very disturbing. He had little fear of being able to beat off attack so long as ammunition lasted, but when it was all spent, the savages must overpower the white men by sheer weight of numbers. Venables now wished to recall his undertaking, and remain in the fighting line; but Underhill decided that he must go in command of the other men. Accordingly, at nightfall, the four crept through a small gap made in the seaward face of the barricade, and clambered down the cliff. Underhill listened anxiously for a time, wondering whether the men had been discovered, or whether they had safely reached the boat; but after an hour of silence he concluded that either the enemy had not been watching in that quarter, or that the boat had slipped away unobserved in the darkness.

The night was undisturbed, but with dawn the natives reappeared. The lesson of the previous day had not proved effectual; they came resolutely up to the barricade in a vast yelling horde. Underhill ordered his men to reserve their fire until the enemy was within a few yards of the enclosure; then two rapid volleys with repeating rifles and revolvers opened a great gap in the throng, and the survivors, scared by their losses, once more betook themselves to the woods. Several times during the day they returned to the attack, pushing it home each time with more determination, and towards evening with a rage and frenzy that could only be due to the stimulation of strong liquor. At this last onset the defenders were almost overwhelmed, repeated volleys seeming only to inflame the fierce warriors. For some minutes there was a hand-to-hand fight as they made desperate endeavours to scale the barricade, and only when a score of their number lay dead and wounded did they relinquish the contest. They took away the wounded, but left the dead where they lay, and in the night the garrison had the gruesome task of carrying the bodies to the edge of the cliff and casting them into the sea. For some time Dr. Smith was kept busy in attending to the wounded among his own party, and next day one of the stokers, struck by a poisoned arrow, succumbed to blood-poisoning, and his comrades, at dead of night, gave him sailor's burial.

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Some days passed, and no serious attack was made, though the garrison had to be very wary to avoid the arrows which flew at intervals into the enclosure. One evening, soon after sunset, one of the men on watch noticed a small light approaching the barricade, and thought at first it was one of the phosphorescent insects which abounded in the woods, and which the garrison had seen every night like little lamps among the trees. But as it came nearer he perceived that it grew larger and brighter, and moved from side to side with more regularity than was probable with an insect, and at length he saw that it was a smouldering torch held by a native, who was waving it to and fro to cause a flame. Evidently he was coming to fire the barricade. A well-directed shot brought him down, but to guard against any more attempts of the same kind Underhill had the barricade constantly drenched with water from the stream, a fatiguing job, but one that was welcome to the men, in that it gave them something to do.

Day after day went by. It was clear that the enemy were trusting to famine to accomplish their end. Luckily, it never entered their heads to hasten the inevitable by damming up the stream before it entered the enclosure. If they had done this the garrison could hardly have held out for a day. In that hot climate a constant supply of water was a prime necessity. But water without solid food would not keep them alive, and as the stock of provisions diminished, and no help came, they saw the horrors of starvation looming ever nearer. Underhill and Tom Smith assumed a false cheerfulness before each other and the men, but on the morning of the twelfth day Underhill was unable to keep up the pretence any longer.

"I didn't want to show Underhill," said Tom to his father, when the lieutenant had gone; "but we're just about done, I think."

"I'm afraid so, Tom. Poor Jenkins had a touch of delirium in the night, and we are all getting so weak that we shall go off our heads."

"Well, I've got an idea. I thought I'd mention it to you before I spoke to Underhill. The blacks haven't been near us for a day or two, but you may be sure they are not far off. I fancy they've got a camp or a village in the woods yonder. They must have food there, and I don't see why we shouldn't try a night attack on them, and run away with all we can lay hands upon. If we must, perish, better perish fighting than starving."

"Yes, but it would be folly to attempt it unless we saw a chance of success, and I see none. We don't know where their camp is; they may be constantly on the watch, and could take us in the rear and occupy our camp before we could get back. Besides, we might have to go a long way, and how could we find our way back again?"

"One difficulty at a time, Father. As to finding our way back, we could light small fires at intervals, which would serve as guide-posts."

"And betray us to the enemy."

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"But I shouldn't undertake it unless we discover that the course is clear. I don't believe these natives ever keep watch by night; we have seen no sign of them at night since they tried to burn us. The chief difficulty is that we don't know the exact direction of their camp, but why shouldn't I go out to-night and locate it?"

"Very dangerous, my boy."

"There's danger anyway," replied Tom, with a shrug. "I should take my pocket compass; two or three of those insects would be enough to light it."

"I think we had better remain all together, Tom. Help may yet come. Why should you imperil your life, perhaps in vain?"

"Well, Father, I think I ought to chance it. I'll be careful! if I'm seen I can make a bolt for it; and I fancy I can pick up my heels quicker than the fuzzy-wuzzies, even though they don't wear boots."

Dr. Smith was still loth to acquiesce in the proposal, but Tom returned to it more than once during the day, and at last obtained his father's consent. It was scarcely easier to win over Underhill; but with him Tom cut the matter short.

"You command the men," he said, with a smile. "My father commands me—in a sense, for I'd have you know I am over age. I'm going to have a try. Get the men ready to make a dash when I come back, for if I succeed the sooner we set about it the better."

The knowledge of his intended expedition had a wonderful effect on the spirits of the men. Their faces brightened: they threw off the lethargy of despondence which had settled upon them, and discussed with some animation the chances of success.

An hour after nightfall, having first looked and listened for any sign of the enemy, Tom was let out through a gap in the barricade. He caught two or three light-giving insects in the bushes just beyond, and set off in the direction in which the natives had always retreated when their attacks were beaten off.

It was pitch dark in the belt of forest. Night insects hummed around; sometimes Tom heard the rustle made by some small animal as it darted through the undergrowth; there was no other sound. He was able to determine his general direction by means of the compass, but as the forest grew thicker he began to fear that he would find more difficulty than he had anticipated in retracing his course. The damp warm air was oppressive; now and then he struck his head against a low branch, stumbled over a stump or a fallen bough, or found his feet entangled in the meshes of some creeping plant. He was soon bathed in perspiration; every new sound made him jump; and with every stumble he waited and listened with beating heart, wondering if he had betrayed his presence to the enemy. He thought ruefully that his speed as a sprinter would avail

him little on ground like this; he had his revolver, but that would be useless against numbers; discovery would mean death.

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Amid so many obstructions his progress was terribly slow. It was seven o'clock when he started; when it occurred to him to look at his watch he was startled to find that two hours had passed. He could not tell how far he had come, nor guess how far he had yet to go. He hesitated; should he go back? Was there any use in struggling further? What chance was there in this dense forest of finding what he sought? Might he not even miss the savages' camp altogether, go beyond it, leave it either on his right hand or his left, or perhaps stumble upon it suddenly, and be discovered before he had a chance to flee? But he put these questions from his mind. He had set out to find the camp; no harm had befallen him. There was a strain of doggedness in his nature; he had won his scholarships at school and at Cambridge by sheer grit; his tutor had declared that Tom Smith was certainly not brilliant, but he was much better: he was sound and steady; and the same qualities that had won him successes which more brilliant men envied, came out in these novel circumstances in which he was placed. Tom decided to go on.

Presently he came to a break in the woodland; he saw the stars overhead. He was very wary now, and waited at the edge of the clearing for a long time, peering all round, turning to listen on every side, before he crossed and entered another belt of forest beyond. Again he had to struggle through darkness and dense entanglements, then suddenly he started; far ahead he thought he discerned amid the blackness the dull glow of a fire. With infinite caution he picked his way through the thinning undergrowth; the glow increased; and at length he found himself on the edge of a wide open space in the midst of which there was a camp fire, and around it the rude grass huts of the savages. He saw no one, heard no sound; all were asleep.

Stealthily he crept round the encampment. Here and there he saw cooking-pots, and caught the faint odour of roasted flesh. Had the savages any store of food, he wondered. If not, his journey was vain. The fire did not give light enough for him to see anything very clearly. At last, however, when he had almost made the circuit of the camp, he saw a man move out from one of the huts towards the fire, on which he cast some logs that lay beside it. A flame shot up. As the man returned to his hut, he put his hand into one of the cooking-pots and drew out the limb of a small animal, from which he tore the flesh with his teeth. Tom was satisfied. No doubt each of the pots contained a quantity of food. Surely if he brought his comrades to the spot, and they fell upon the camp suddenly, with loud cries and the noise of firearms, they might strike panic into the savages, and at least have time to possess themselves of the contents of the pots.

He looked at his watch. It was past ten o'clock.

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He could return more quickly than he came, and, if he did not lose his way, would regain his camp within half-an-hour after midnight. There would be plenty of time for the whole party to reach the savages' encampment before the dawn rendered it dangerous. Moving away slowly until he was out of earshot, he then walked as quickly as he could back through the forest. But he was not a mariner, and even a mariner would have been at fault in tracking his course by compass through dense forest. He judged his general direction accurately, but he swerved a little too far to the right, and suddenly found himself on the brink of the cliff. He dared not go back into the forest, lest he should lose more time in wandering, so he decided to keep as close to the sea as possible, thinking that he must in time arrive at his camp. His path was tortuous; once he had to strike inland to avoid a deep, wooded ravine; but presently he heard the sound of falling water, and, quickening his steps, came almost suddenly upon the barricade.

The whole company were awake. They had almost given him up for lost. It was one o'clock. Underhill sternly checked a cheer from the sailors, when Tom ran up. He told what he had seen.

"Hadn't we better wait till to-morrow night?" suggested Dr. Smith.

"To-night! to-night!" cried the men eagerly. The knowledge that food was within reach of them was too much for famishing men. Who knew if they would have strength or sanity for the task after another sweltering day? Underhill could not refuse them; he gave orders for the whole company to march at once.

None was left to guard the camp; the little company of sixteen could not be divided. They set off in single file, Tom leading the way, not because he had any hope of treading in his former course, but because he alone had traversed the forest, and he alone had a compass.

The plan of lighting fires to guide them on the return journey was given up. The forest was so dense that such fires would have been of little use; further, they might cause an immense conflagration which, though it would effectually scare the enemy, would destroy what the famished men so urgently needed, food.

Their progress was even slower than Tom's had been. They had to stop frequently to make sure that all were together, and, as ill luck would have it, Tom found that he was leading them through a part of the forest where the entanglements were more intricate and less penetrable than those he had formerly encountered. But he plodded on doggedly, speaking to no one of his anxiety when a glance at his watch told how time was fleeting. If they did not reach the camp of the savages before dawn their toil and fatigue would be wasted, and their peril greater than it had ever been.

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Here and there, where the trees grew less close together, he felt a slight breeze blowing in his face, and at length he detected a faint smell of wood smoke. He halted, and told the rest, in a whisper, that they were approaching a settlement. From this point they advanced still more slowly and cautiously. Then, with a suddenness that took them aback, they came to the edge of a clearing. At first Tom was not sure whether it was the same that he had seen before. He had indeed approached it from a different direction. But a glance around satisfied him on this point, and the party stood within the shelter of the trees while Underhill gave his orders. They were to fire one shot, then rush forward with loud shouts, seize what food they could lay hands on, and flee back in all haste. There was no time to be lost, for the sky already gave hint of dawn.

Underhill had scarcely finished speaking when there was a cry from a point near at hand. They had approached the camp from the wind-yard side; the breeze had carried either some murmur of Underhill's voice, low as he had spoken, or some faint scent which the natives, as keen in their perceptions as wild animals, had detected. Instantly the camp was in commotion: the dusky warriors poured forth from their little huts, and swept, a wild, yelling horde, upon the weary company.

CHAPTER X

SOME PRAUS AND A JUNK

Smith's destination, on leaving Penang, was Port Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia. He had never been at that port, and knew that a few years before it had been little more than a collection of grass humpys, inhabited by Chinese and Malays, with an iron shed for a Custom House, and a vast expanse of forest and jungle behind. But it was the principal port in the northern part of Australia, and he had no doubt that at Palmerston, the thriving town on the eastern shore, he would be able to obtain the necessary supply of petrol and oil.

His map informed him that his course lay across the Malay Peninsula, Dutch Borneo, and the islands of Celebes and Timor. It was necessary to rise to a considerable height to cross the hills that run like a spine on the Malay Peninsula, and having passed those, he came in little over an hour to the eastern coast, about a hundred and fifty miles north of Singapore. In another hour and a half he reached the coast of Borneo, whence for nearly three hours he saw beneath him an almost unbroken sea of foliage, only one range of hills breaking the monotony. Somewhat after midday he came to the straits of Macassar, at the south-east extremity of Borneo. As he crossed these, he had an unpleasant shock. The engine missed sparking once or twice when he was half-way across the Straits, and he shouted to Rodier to loose the life buoys in case it failed. There were several small craft beneath him, so that he had no doubt of being picked up if the aeroplane fell, unless,

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indeed, sharks “got in first,” as he put it. But the interruption of the sparking was only temporary, and he reached the island of Celebes safely. Then he thought it merely prudent to descend and overhaul the engine, though he deplored the loss of time. He landed on a solitary spot where there was no likelihood of being molested, and Rodier having cleaned the fouled plug that had caused the trouble, they went on again.

They were sailing low over the deep bay formed by the two huge tentacles that run south and south-east from the crab-like body of the island, when suddenly, above the noise of the engine, they heard the sharp crack of a shot, then two or three more. Glancing up the bay to his left, Smith saw a large junk, its sails hanging limp, surrounded by a number of small craft which from their appearance he guessed to be praus. He had read many a time of the fierce Malayan pirates that used to infest these seas, and was somewhat surprised to find that piracy had apparently not been wholly suppressed. As a matter of fact, European vessels no longer ran the same risks as of old, the Malays having learnt by experience that sooner or later retribution was bound to overtake them; but it was a different matter with Chinese junks. So long as these could be attacked successfully and secretly, with no witnesses to carry information to the outside world, there was little risk in swooping down upon them. The celestial government did not follow up piratical forays of this kind in seas distant from the Empire itself; and the Malays were not likely to attack unless they had a great advantage over their victim in point of numbers. A junk might be seized and its crew massacred without the slightest whisper of the event coming to civilized ears.

Smith saw the praus clustering round the junk like a swarm of bees. It was impossible to doubt what the result would be. He was loth to lose more time: the plight of a Chinese vessel was no concern of his; yet as he glanced up and down the bay and saw that it could obtain help from no other quarter, he could not bring himself to leave the hapless Chinamen to the fate that must overtake them unless he intervened. Slackening speed, he cried to Rodier—

“We must do something.”

The Frenchman nodded. Smith swung the aeroplane round, and descended until it was circling immediately over the junk and its assailants. Cries of amazement broke from some of the Malays as they caught sight of this strange portent from the sky, but the greater number were climbing up the sides of the junk, heedless of all else than the work in hand. There was something fascinating to Smith in the spectacle: the almost naked Malays, armed with their terrible crises, swarming on every part of the vessel; the Chinamen with pikes, muskets, and stink-balls fighting with the courage of despair to keep the boarders at bay. As yet the Malays had not gained a permanent footing on the deck, but for every man that was felled or hurled back into the praus there were a dozen

to fill the gap, and the most valorous of fighters could not long contend against such odds.

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For a little while Smith was perplexed as to what he could do to help them. The necessity of keeping the aeroplane in motion did not permit either Rodier or himself to use his revolver effectively. Without doubt the Malays would be scared off if they fully realized his presence, for they could scarcely have seen an aeroplane before, and it must be to them a very terrifying object. But a Malay, when drunken with hemp and his own ferocity, is as little subject to impressions of his surroundings as an infuriated bull. The men left in the praus were gazing up in terror at the humming aeroplane; but even during the few seconds of Smith's hesitation the others gained the deck of the junk forward of the mast, and with fierce yells and sweeping strokes of their krises began to drive the Chinamen towards the poop. In a few minutes the whole crew would be butchered and thrown to the sharks.

Suddenly an idea occurred to Smith. He planed upwards till the aeroplane reached a height of about a hundred feet above the vessel, calling to Rodier to bombard the boarders with the full bottles of soda-water which they had with them. The Frenchman chuckled as he seized the notion. Smith kept the aeroplane wheeling in a narrow circle over the scene of combat, and when it was vertically above the deck Rodier flung down several bottles one after another among the Malays. The effect was instantaneous. These novel missiles flung from so great a height, acted like miniature bombshells, exploding with a loud report as they touched the deck, and flying into myriad fragments. Not even the most rage-intoxicated Malay could withstand the shock. The noise, the prickly splinters of glass, peppering their half-naked bodies like a charge of small shot, altered their blind fury to dismay and panic. With screams of affright they rushed to the sides of the junk. But the men left in the praus had already begun to paddle frantically away, heedless of the fate of their comrades. These plunged overboard, and swam after the departing vessels, whose flight Rodier speeded with another bottle or two. In less than a minute the junk was clear.

For some minutes Smith shepherded the praus toward the shore. Every now and then he saw a swimmer disappear suddenly: without doubt the sharks were gathering to claim their prey. Then, feeling sure that the Malays were too much terrified to think of renewing their attack on the junk, he again set his face eastward towards the open sea.

CHAPTER XI

AUSTRALIAN HOSPITALITY

Darkness was falling when the airmen came in sight of the chain of small islands running from Java eastward almost to the Australian coast. Knowing that these islands were very hilly, Smith rose to a great height, using his flashlight every now and then to guard against mishap. If he had not known the nature of the islands he could almost have guessed it from the behaviour of the aeroplane, which now tended

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to shoot upwards, now to sink downwards, irrespective of any volition of his own. This proved to Smith that he had come into a region of variable currents of wind, such as might be set up by the hollows and ridges of mountain tops. The forcing of the machine upwards implied that the pressure of the air ahead was increased, owing to a lull in the wind behind; the sinking implied that the force of a contrary wind was diminished, and that the inertia of the machine prevented it from readily accommodating itself to the new conditions. During this part of the voyage Smith had to be constantly alert to warp the planes instantaneously when he detected the least sign of instability, and he was very glad when he saw once more the reflection of the stars in the sea beneath him, and knew that he would encounter no more obstacles between Timor, which he had just passed, and Port Darwin.

His concern now was to pick up the light which, according to the Admiralty's sailing directions, shone from an iron structure a hundred and twenty feet high, about a mile south of Point Charles, the western extremity of Port Darwin. Approaching the port from the west, as he was, he should have no difficulty in seeing the light at a distance of eighteen or twenty miles, the sky being clear. But as time went on neither he nor Rodier caught sight of the red speck for which they were looking. Half-past eight came, local time, as nearly as Smith could calculate it by his watch, which still registered London time; and even allowing for the hours lost he should by now have touched land. He was beginning to feel anxious when he suddenly found land below him—a land of dense forests, apparently low and flat. The question was, whether this was the mainland of Australia or an island, possibly Bathurst Island, north of Port Darwin. It was impossible to tell. There was no time to ponder or weigh possibilities; yet if he took the wrong course he might be hours in discovering his mistake, and this part of Australia being almost wholly uninhabited he might fail to find any guidance even if he descended. By a rapid guess—it could not be called reasoning—he concluded that he had probably steered a too southerly course, and that he would do right if he now steered to the north-east. His indecision had lasted only a few seconds; he brought the aeroplane round until she flew over the line of breakers washing the shore, and followed the coast at full speed.

Within a quarter of an hour both the men caught sight at the same moment of the red glow of the light, which grew in brilliance as they approached it, and then diminished as the lamp revolved. Steering now to the east, in ten minutes they were sailing over the town of Palmerston, the capital of the Northern Territory. The lighted streets, crossing at right angles, formed a pattern below them like the diagram for the game of noughts and crosses. They found a landing place a little to the north-east of the town, beyond the railway, and having safely come to earth, Smith left Rodier to attend to the engine and hastened towards the nearest house, a sort of bungalow of wood and iron. Sounds of singing came from within.

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A Chinaman opened the door to his knock. Smith asked if the master was at home.

“Massa inside allo lightee,” answered the man. “Me go fetchee, chop-chop.”

He soon returned, followed by a stalwart bearded Australian of about fifty years, smoking a big pipe.

“Well, mate,” he said, eyeing Smith curiously by the light of the door lamp; “what can I do for you?”

“I must apologize for troubling you on Sunday night,” began Smith.

“No trouble, I assure you. Come in.” He led Smith into a little room near the door.

“We’ve a few friends in the parlour,” he added, “and I guess you can tell me here what you want.”

“Well, to put it shortly, I should be very much obliged to you if you’d direct me to Mr. Mackinnon. He’s got some petrol waiting for me, at least I hope he has, and I’m in great need of it.”

“Well, that’s real unlucky now. He went to Pine Creek down the line only yesterday, and won’t be back till to-morrow. Are you Lieutenant Smith, may I ask?”

“Yes, that’s my name.”

“Mackinnon got a cable from Java on Friday about the petrol. He told me about it, and mighty astonished he was. Motor-cars are pretty scarce about here, and he hasn’t got a great quantity of petrol. I suppose it’s for a motor-boat you want it? When did you leave Java?—before the cable, I guess.”

“I haven’t come from Java at all. The cable was sent through there from London. The fact is, I’ve come in an aeroplane.”

“What! Over the sea?”

“Yes, over sea and land. I left Penang early this morning, and must go on at once.”

“Well, if I ain’t just about flummuxed! D’you mean to say you’ve come pretty near two thousand five hundred miles to-day?”

“Yes; I’ll tell you in a word all about it.”

His host, whose name was Martin, listened in mute amazement as Smith briefly related the occasion of his long journey.

“Why, man,” exclaimed Mr. Martin, when he had concluded his story; “wonders’ll never cease. You must be dead beat. I never heard the like of it. Come into the other room. The boys’ll be mad to hear this.”

“Really, I’d rather not. I haven’t any time to lose, and Mr. Mackinnon being away—”

“Oh, that don’t matter. He didn’t expect you so soon, but we’ll get what you want, though it is Sunday. But a bite and a sup will do you all the good in the world, and won’t take you long, and the boys will just go crazy if they don’t see you. Why, it’s round the world you’re going. My sakes! Come along.”

He almost dragged Smith into a large, low room, where several men and women, boys and girls, were seated round the wall. They were singing hymns to the accompaniment of a harmonium. A table loaded with eatables was pushed into a corner. The entrance of Mr. Martin, followed by a dirty, unkempt, and oddly dressed stranger, caused an abrupt cessation of the singing. The girl at the harmonium sprang up with a startled look.

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"What is it, Father?" she asked anxiously.

"Nothing to be scart about, my girl. Neighbours, this gentleman has come all the way from London in an aeroplane."

The announcement was received in dead silence. Smith stood like a statue as he listened to Mr. Martin's hurried explanation, resigning himself to be the target of all eyes. Everybody crowded about him, silent no longer, but all asking questions at once. Mrs. Martin went to the table and brought from it a dish of chicken patties, which she pressed upon him.

"Do'ee eat now," she said, in the broad accent of Devonshire. "I made 'em myself, and you must be downright famished."

"Not quite so bad as that," said Smith, with a smile, "I had a good breakfast at Penang, and have nibbled some biscuits and things on the way."

"Biscuits are poor food for a hungry man. Eat away now, do."

Other members of the family brought ale, cider, fruit, cakes, enough for a dozen men, and for some minutes Smith's attention was divided between eating and drinking and answering the questions which poured upon him in a never-ending flood. Conscious of the lapse of time, he at last said that he must go and obtain the fuel for his engine. The men rose in a body, prepared to accompany him.

"I don't think we had better all go, neighbours," said Mr. Martin. "I'll take Mr. Smith to the Resident; we shall have to see him about the petrol, you know."

"There's one thing your friends can do for me," said Smith. "I want ten or a dozen rifles, and a lot of ammunition. Can you provide them at such short notice?"

"I should just think we can," said Mr. Martin. "Neighbours, get together what Mr. Smith wants, and take 'em out along to the aeroplane. It's just a step or two beyond the railway, from what he says. Mother, send out some eatables, too, something better than biscuits, to Mr. Smith's man, who's looking after it. Now, Mr. Smith, come along. The Residency isn't far off: we're only a small town."

The two set off, and in a few minutes arrived at the Residency, a stone building of more pretensions than the wood and iron erections of which the town mostly consisted. The Resident was at home. Once more Smith had to tell his story, once more to listen to exclamations and reply to questions, grudging every moment that kept him. The Resident had heard of the wreck of the *Albatross*, in which he had been particularly interested, because he had some slight acquaintance with its commander.

“I heard by wire only yesterday, Mr. Smith, that a gunboat had been sent from Brisbane to the relief of your friends. She started three days ago, and can’t possibly reach the wreck until to-morrow at earliest. But surely she will be there before you?”

“Not if I can get off soon, and don’t meet with an accident on the way. It’s nearly two thousand miles from here to Ysabel Island, I think?”

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"I can't tell you within a hundred or two, but it's about that. When do you think you will get there?"

"About midday to-morrow, with luck. I shall take on here enough petrol to last the whole way, if I'm not thrown out of my course or meet with mishap; but I suppose I can get a fresh supply at Port Moresby, if necessary?"

"I very much doubt it. And what about getting back?"

"I'm going on as soon as I've seen that my people are safe—if I'm not too late. I've got to rejoin my ship at 9 a.m. on Friday morning, or I run the risk of being hauled over the coals."

"Surely not. They will make allowances, seeing what your errand has been."

"They don't make allowances easily in the Navy, sir. Besides, I've set my heart on being back in time."

"You will return this way, then. Ysabel Island is this side of the 180 degree line."

"Well, no, sir. Having started, I mean to get round the world if I can."

"You're a sportsman, I see. Well, now, what will your best course be?"

He opened a map.

"I've planned it all, sir," said Smith hurriedly. "I go on to Samoa: I'm sure to find petrol there; then Honolulu, San Francisco, St. Paul, and St. John's, all big places, where I shall be able to get all I want. Now, sir, I know Sunday night must be an awkward time, but, with your assistance, I daresay I can get the petrol from Mr. Mackinnon's store."

"There is a little difficulty which we shall have to get over. We've a very strict regulation against entering at night any godown containing explosives, owing to the risk of fire. Mr. Mackinnon's godown will be locked up; his Chinaman will have the key; and as Resident I can't openly countenance a breach of the rules. We have had a great deal of trouble to enforce them, and any relaxation would have a very bad effect on the Chinamen: they wouldn't understand it."

"Don't you worry about that, sir," said Mr. Martin. "Leave it to me. There'll be a fine to pay to-morrow," he added, with a chuckle; "and you can make it pretty stiff as a warning to the Chinese; it'll be paid on the nail, I assure you."

"Very well, Mr. Martin. I shall know nothing about it officially until you come before me to-morrow, and I'll read you a severe lecture in addition to fining you. You can come to

me for a subscription afterwards. Good-bye, Mr. Smith: good luck. I sincerely hope you'll find your friends safe and sound. Give my kind regards to Lieutenant Underhill."

Smith left the Residency with Mr. Martin, who led him to the Chinese quarter of the town, a dark assemblage of small huts, pig-sties, and poultry runs.

"I don't know where Mackinnon's boy lives," said Mr. Martin. "We shall have to hunt him up."

All the huts were apparently in darkness, and Smith, as he walked rapidly beside his guide, thought that he preferred the smell of petrol smoke to the mingled odours that assailed his nose. At length they discovered a light amid the gloom, and hastening towards it, discovered that it proceeded from an oil-lamp within one of the huts, the door of which was open. Here they saw a group of Chinamen squatting on the floor, engaged in playing a game with small figures carved in bone.

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"Hi, boys," called Mr. Martin; "can tell where Ching-Fu keeps?"

"My tellee massa," cried one of the younger men, rising. "My go long that side, show wai-lo."

"Come on, then: chop-chop."

"Allo lightee, massa: my savvy."

He led them through what appeared to Smith an intricate maze of narrow alleys, and presently pushed open the door of a hut, and called the name of Ching-Fu, entering without ceremony. The Englishmen heard voices raised as in altercation, and after some minutes the guide reappeared, followed by a burly compatriot, rubbing his eyes.

"He catchee sleep, say what for come fetchee this time."

"Now, Ching-Fu," said Mr. Martin, "this gentleman wants seventy gallons of petrol, at once. Mr. Mackinnon got a cable about it yesterday. Come and get the cans, and have them taken up to my house at once."

"No can do, massa," replied the man in a shrill tone of voice, that seemed singularly unbecoming to his massive frame. "Topside man catchee my inside godown this time, ch'hoy! he makee big bobbely."

"Never mind about that. I'll pay the fine."

"No can do, no can do so-fashion. Massa pay squeeze; all-same, my catchee plenty bobbely, makee my too muchee sick."

"I'll take care you don't suffer. Come along: there's no time to lose."

"This time Sunday, look-see, massa. No workee Sunday, no fear; that joss-pidgin day."

"I can't waste time talking." Smith whispered in his ear. "Yes; Mr. Smith will give you ten shillings for yourself if you hurry up."

"Ch'hoy!" cried the other man. "Massa numpa one genelum; my go long too, Ching-Fu. No can catchee ten bob evely day."

Ching-Fu suffered himself to be persuaded. He beat up three or four of his neighbours, and proceeded with them to the godown, the Englishmen following to ensure that no time was lost. In half-an-hour the necessary supplies of petrol and lubricating oil were being wheeled up on trucks towards Mr. Martin's house. On the way Smith noticed a number of reddish lights at irregular intervals, moving in the same direction, and there were more people in the streets than when he had come down, all hurrying one way.

“By Jingo!” said Mr. Martin, “the news has spread, and it looks uncommonly like a torchlight procession. Hullo, Jenkins, what’s the matter?”

“That you, Martin?” replied the man addressed. “Everybody’s talking about an aeroplane that’s come down somewhere near Mackenzie’s shed, and I’m off to see if it’s true. Haven’t you heard about it?”

“I did hear something of the sort. I’ll be up there, too, by-and-by.”

Smith was a little annoyed at the possibility of being delayed by a crowd of spectators, but there was evidently no help for it. He returned to Mr. Martin’s house, being assured by his host that he need have no anxiety about the safe delivery of the petrol.

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Meanwhile Rodier, on Smith's departure, had, as usual, set to work to clean the engine. He was tired and sleepy, and he would have been more than human if he had not thought that his employer had rather the best of the arrangement. But any private soreness he might have felt did not affect the speed or the thoroughness of his work. He first of all examined the wires: there was nothing wrong with them. Then he unscrewed the plugs and laid them on top of the engine, pulled the engine over, and finding that there was a poor spark, concluded that it was rather sooty. After cleaning the parts thoroughly with petrol, he again started the engine. The sparking being still weak, he examined the magneto: it was choked with grease. The next thing was to clean the brush with petrol and try the plugs again. The spark was now strong, and after giving everything a final polish, he replaced the plugs, satisfied that the engine was in good working order.

Switching off the searchlight for economy's sake, and leaving only the small light that illuminated the compass, he sat down, opened a tin of sardines, and began to eat them with biscuits. A fastidious person might have objected to the mingling of flavours, olive oil and petrol not combining at all well; but Rodier was too old a hand to be dainty. He was in the act of munching a mouthful when his head dropped forward on his breast, and he fell into a sound sleep.

He was wakened by a voice in his ear. Jumping up with a start, he beheld a crowd of people watching him, men in Sunday coats, men in shirt sleeves, ladies in light dresses, boys in knickerbockers and Norfolks, girls in pinafores, Chinamen in coats of many colours, many of the throng holding torches and lanterns.

"Ah! mille diables!" he cried. "Keep back! This is not a penny theatre."

"Nor yet a cook-shop," said one of the visitors, with a laugh; "though you might think so."

And then Rodier saw that the men and boys foremost in the group carried plates, dishes, bowls, bottles, jugs. One had a dish of chicken patties, another a plate of bananas, a third a bowl of Devonshire junket, a fourth a loaf of bread; others had cheese, apples, bottled beer, Australian wine, doughnuts, pork sausages, sponge cake, ham sandwiches; in short, all the constituents of a high tea except tea itself.

"Thought you might be hungry after your ride," said one. "Have a sandwich?"

"Have a banana?" said another. "You won't get 'em like this in London."

"Dry work, ain't it?" said a third, pulling a cork. "That'll buck you up."

"Please take one of my doughnuts," piped a small boy, creeping around the right leg of a sturdy planter.

“Ma foi! This take the cake,” cried Rodier, laughing heartily. “Thank you, thank you, thank you! But truly I shall be very—very uncomfortable if I eat all this riches. Ah; this is good, this is hospitality. My friends, I thank you, I love you; vive l’Australie!”

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Bubbling with excitement, he shook hands with this one and that; and both hands being engaged at once in this hearty mode of salutation, he would have been able to enjoy little of the good fare provided had not one of the group begun to fend off the enthusiastic visitors.

"That's enough," he said; "give him breathing space. Eat away, man; the junket won't keep; everything else will, and you can take with you what is left."

Thus, when Smith arrived on the scene, he found his man surrounded by an alfresco confectioner's shop, eating, laughing, talking, and breaking forth into eloquent praise of Australian hospitality.

"Ah, mister," he cried, as Smith joined him; "this is a country! We are pigs in clover. There is here enough for a regiment of Zouaves."

Here a diversion was caused by the arrival of Mr. Martin's friends with rifles and ammunition enough to equip a company of grenadiers. Smith accepted a dozen rifles and two or three hundred rounds of ammunition; and these had just been placed in the car when the Chinamen arrived with the petrol. He implored the torchbearers to stand back while the inflammable fluid was put on board. This was done amid a buzz of excitement, everybody talking at once.

"Speech! speech!" cried some one in the crowd, and Smith, thinking the shortest way out of his embarrassment was to comply, stood up in the car and thanked his good friends in Palmerston for the warmth of their reception, and their kindness in supplying his wants.

"You will excuse me from saying more, I know," he added. "I have nearly two thousand miles still to go; my father is in great danger; and we are already several hours behind time. I can't shake hands with you all, but I shall never forget your kindness. Now, if you will clear the course so that I can get a run-off, I will say 'good-bye,' and hope that some day I may come back and not be in such a hurry."

His simple words were cheered to the echo. Then Mr. Martin and three or four more pressed the throng back. The good people cheered again as the machine ran forward and sailed above them, and Smith, as he looked down upon the sea of faces lit up by the flaring torches until it became a blurred spot of light, felt cheered and encouraged, and set his face hopefully towards the starlit east.

CHAPTER XII

STALKED BY PIGMIES



Smith had noticed before leaving Palmerston that the wind had risen and was blowing steadily from the north-west. He was very anxious not to miss Port Moresby, the principal harbour in British New Guinea, for he hoped, in spite of what the Resident at Palmerston had said, to be able to replenish his stock of petrol there, knowing very well that among the smaller islands of the South Pacific the places where petrol was kept must be very few. He determined, however, if he should fail to make Port Moresby, to steer straight for Ysabel Island. If it turned out to be impossible to obtain petrol, he would have to resign himself to the inevitable, return to Australia on the gunboat that had been dispatched to relieve the castaways, and endure as philosophically as he might the consequences of overstepping his leave.

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His course lay across the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria. By daybreak, if he were able to keep up full speed through the night, he should have passed the northernmost end of the Yorke Peninsula, and it might then be possible to take his bearings by the group of islands in the Torres Straits. On leaving these islands behind him he should soon come in sight of the mountain chain running from the middle of the Gulf of Paqua to the south-eastern extremity of New Guinea. He might expect to sight these mountains from a very great distance, and in particular, if he could distinguish Mount Astrolabe, the square, flat-topped mountain lying behind Port Moresby, he would have no further anxiety about his position.

The engine was working as well as ever, and by keeping over the sea, Smith was able to avoid any gusts or cross-currents of air that might be set up by irregularities in the conformation of the land. Taking turns as usual with Rodier at the wheel, he was able to get a few hours of sleep; about an hour and a half after daybreak he descried the strange shape of Mount Astrolabe towering nearly four thousand feet into the sky, and in less than a quarter of an hour afterwards he came to the coast, a little to the west, as he judged, of Port Moresby.

The aspect of the coast was far from inviting. There were long stretches of mangrove forest lining the shore, from which unpleasant exhalations arose, affecting his sense of smell even at the height of a hundred feet. Beyond rose limestone hills, very scantily wooded, with a plentiful crop of rocks and stones. There was scarcely a patch of level ground to be seen. He came almost suddenly upon the port, lying in a hollow of the hills, and for some time looked in vain for a suitable landing place. The aeroplane, circling over the harbour, was seen by the sailors on the ships and the people on the quays, and its appearance brought all work to a standstill.

At length Smith discovered at the north end of the little town a spot where landing was just possible if the descent was not endangered by the wind. He felt more nervous than at any other time during his voyage, and was on the alert to set the propellers working at the first sign that the wind was too strong for him. To his great relief he came safely to the ground, with no other misadventure than collision with a huge eucalyptus tree at the edge of the clearing. Without loss of time he made his way down to the town, and accosting the first white man he met, asked to be directed to the residence of the Administrator.

"You're a stranger, I guess," said the man, who had not seen the aeroplane. "Come from Sydney?"

"No, from Port Darwin."

"Gosh! We don't often have vessels from there. How's my friend Mr. Pond?"

"I don't know him."

“Well, that’s real strange. I thought everybody knew Dick Pond; he’s lived there fifty years or more. Say, what’s up?” he asked of a man hurrying in the opposite direction.

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"It's down. Didn't you see it or hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"The aeroplane."

"An aeroplane! You don't say so."

"It's a fact. Wonder you didn't hear it. It made a noise like a thousand humming birds, and came down not half-a-mile over yonder. Some German fellow, I shouldn't wonder, from Constantine or Finsch. Hope we're not in for trouble; I'm off to see."

"So will I. Go straight on, stranger; you see that constable there? Well, turn down by him, and you'll come to the Administrator's in about five minutes."

Smith had taken off his overalls, so that his appearance attracted no more than a passing glance from the sailors, clerks, merchants, and natives whom he met hurrying towards the spot where the aeroplane had descended. He found the Administrator's house without difficulty. Not having a card, he gave his name and rank at the door. The Administrator was at breakfast with his family when Lieutenant Smith was announced. Imagining that a war vessel had unexpectedly put in at the harbour, he rose and went to the door to greet his visitor and invite him to his table. A look of disappointment crossed his face when he saw a dirty, unshaven object before him, dressed in stained brown serge, offering no resemblance to the trim spick-and-span officer he had expected to see.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, sir," said Smith, "I'm in need of some petrol, and—"

"I don't keep petrol," said the Administrator shortly. "You've come here by mistake, no doubt. There's no petrol for sale in the port, to my knowledge."

"That's awkward. I'm afraid I must go on without. The aeroplane uses—"

"The aeroplane! What aeroplane?"

"I've come from Port Darwin in my aeroplane, and am going on at once to the Solomon Islands. I think I can just about manage it, so I won't detain you any longer, sir."

"Come now, let me understand. You have come from Port Darwin—by aeroplane! Where is it?"

"About half-a-mile beyond the town, sir."

"But—from Port Darwin—across the sea?"

There was nothing for it. Once more Smith retailed the outline of his story, the Administrator listening with growing amazement. In the midst of it a young Englishman came up, out of breath with running.

“Good morning, sir,” he panted. “An aeroplane has just come down; people say it is a German. What had we better do?”

“Keep our heads, I should think,” said the Administrator. “Mr. Williams—my secretary—Mr. Smith. The aeroplane is Mr. Smith’s, and has come from Port Darwin in ten hours. Just run down to the harbour, Williams, and tell Captain Brown to send up all the petrol there is in the launch, and a few gallons of machine oil as well. Be as quick as you can.”

The secretary opened wide eyes.

“Where’s it to be taken, sir?”

“To the aeroplane, as quickly as possible.”

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The young man ran off, looking as though he had received a shock.

“This will give us excitement for a twelve-month, Mr. Smith,” said the Administrator. “It’s lucky I can help you. I have just returned from a tour of inspection, and there are a few gallons of petrol in my motor-launch: not very much, I’m afraid, but better than nothing. I’m afraid I was rather short with you just now, but you’ll admit that there was some excuse for me.”

“Don’t mention it, sir.”

“It’s the queerest thing I ever heard in my life; in fact, I’m only just beginning to believe it. Come in and have some breakfast; it’ll be an hour or more before they get the petrol up, and I’d like my wife and youngsters to hear about it from your own lips. You’d like a wash, eh? Come along.”

He led the way to his bath-room, turned on the water, arranged the towels, and bidding Smith come to the first room downstairs on the left when he was ready, he went off to prepare his family for the guest.

Smith was by this time used to the exclamations of wonder, the volleys of questions, the compliments and gusts of admiration which his story evoked. He came through the ordeal of that breakfast-table with the coolness of a veteran under fire. His hostess asked whether sailing in the air made him sea-sick; her elder son wanted to know the type of engine he favoured, the quantity of petrol it consumed per hour, and what would happen if he collided with an airship going at equal speed in the opposite direction. The younger boy asked if he might have a ride in the aeroplane; the girl begged Smith to write his name in her album. The governess sat with clasped hands, gazing at him with the adoring ecstasy that she might have bestowed on a godlike visitant from another sphere. Presently the Administrator said—

“Now get your hats on. We’ll take Mr. Smith up in the buggy and see him off.”

When they reached the aeroplane they found Rodier demolishing some of the good things provided by Mrs. Martin, the centre of an admiring crowd of curious white men and wonder-struck natives. Two Papuan constables were patrolling around with comical self-importance. The petrol had arrived. When it was transferred to the aeroplane the Administrator insisted on drinking Smith’s health in a glass of Mr. Martin’s beer, and then called for three cheers for the airmen. His daughter had brought her kodak and took a snapshot of them as they sat in their places ready to start. The natives scattered with howls of affright when the engine began sparking, the constables being easily first in the stampede, one of them pitching head first into the eucalyptus. The engine started, the men cheered, the women waved handkerchiefs, and as the aeroplane soared up and flew in the direction of the coast the whole crowd set off at a run to gain a position whence they might follow its flight with their eyes.

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For some time Smith steered down the coast, intending to cross the Owen Stanley range as soon as he saw a convenient gap. After about twenty miles, however, he ran with startling suddenness into a tropical storm. It was as though he had passed from sunlight into a dark and gloomy cavern. Rain fell in torrents, and he knew by the extraordinary and alarming movements of the aeroplane that the wind was blowing fiercely, and not steadily in one direction, but gustily, and as it seemed, from all points of the compass. For the first time since leaving the Euphrates he was seriously perturbed. It was true that the force of the wind did not appear to be so great as it had been before his meeting with Monsieur de Montause on the Babylonian plain; but his situation was more perilous than then, for he was passing over hilly country, and the vertical wind-eddies were infinitely more difficult to contend with. To attempt to alight would be to court certain destruction; his only safety was to maintain as high a speed as possible, trusting to weather through. He judged by the compass that the wind was blowing mostly from the south-east, almost dead against him. Fearing lest the enormous air-pressure should break the planes if he strove to fly in the teeth of the wind, he decided to swing round and run before it for a time, in the hope that it would drop by and by. As he performed this operation the aeroplane rocked violently, and he thought every moment that it must be hurled to the ground; but by making a wide circle he got round safely, and keeping the engine at full speed he retraced his course, soon seeing Port Moresby again, far below him to the left. He had no means of exactly determining the rate at which he was now travelling under the joint impulse of the wind and his propellers; but from the way in which the landscape was slipping past him he thought the speed could hardly be less than two hundred and twenty miles an hour.

It occurred to him now to increase his altitude, with the idea of rising above the area of the disturbance. But he found that the mountains on his right hand rose higher than he had supposed. In proportion as he ascended, they seemed to rise with him. He saw their snow-clad tops stretching far away into the distance, and became conscious of a great difference in the temperature. He began to feel dizzy and short of breath, and presently his eyes were affected, and he saw everything as in a mist. When Rodier shouted that he was feeling sick Smith at once checked the ascent.

The aneroid indicated a height of 8000 feet, and it was clear from the greater steadiness of the machine that it had risen out of the stratum of air affected by the storm. But Smith's satisfaction at this was soon dashed by the discovery that there was something wrong with the engine. It missed sparking, recovered itself for a minute or two, then missed again. Smith looked anxiously below him. The nearest ground was about a thousand feet beneath; on his right the mountains still rose hundreds of feet above him, blocking the way to his true course. Hoping that the failure in the sparking was only temporary, Smith swung the aeroplane round, in order to take advantage of this calm region of air and at least fly in the right direction. At the same time he looked out anxiously for a spot to which he might descend if the defect in the engine proved persistent.

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In a very few moments it was clear that to continue his flight would be no longer safe, and he prepared to glide. While he was searching for a convenient landing place the sparking ceased altogether. The whole country was rugged; below, almost wholly forest land as far as the eye could reach; above, bare rocks or scrub, and at the greatest altitude, snow. The aeroplane flew on for a little by its own momentum, and Smith wasted a few painful seconds before, despairing of finding level ground, he began to descend in a long spiral.

As he neared the ground, Rodier's quick eye detected a little river cutting its way through the forest, and at one spot a widening of its bed, due, probably, to the action of freshets. Here there was a narrow space of bare earth, the only clear spot in the landscape, and even this was surrounded with dense woodland. He pointed it out to Smith. There was no room for mistake or misjudgment. Smith knew that if he did not strike the exact spot the aeroplane must crash into the forest that lined both banks of the river. Never before had so heavy a demand been made upon his nerve and skill. But the severe training of the Navy develops coolness and judgment in critical situations; his long apprenticeship to aerial navigation enabled him to do the right thing at the right time; and, thanks to the calmness of the air in this lofty region, the machine answered perfectly to his guiding hand, and settled down upon the exact spot he had chosen, the little open stretch on the right bank of the stream, within eight or ten yards of the water.

His hand was trembling like a leaf when he stepped out on to the land. The teeth of both men were chattering.

"Mon Dieu!" cried Rodier. "That was a squeak, mister. Le diable de machine! It seem I do nothing at all but clean, clean, all the way from London, and yet—"

"And yet down we come, 'like glistening Phaethon, wanting the manage of unruly jades,'" quoted Smith. "Still, we're safe, and I've known men killed or lamed for life getting off a horse."

"But with the horse you have the whip, with the machine you have only the rags to clean her with. Ah! coquine, I should like to flog you, to give you beans." He shook his fist at the engine.

Smith laughed.

"Beans would suit a horse better, Roddy," he said. "Let's be thankful the breakdown didn't happen while we were in the storm. That would have been the end of us. Come on, we'll soon put things to rights. This loss of time is getting very serious."

They set to work to discover the cause of the failure. As they expected, the sparking plugs were completely clogged. Smith took these down to the stream to give them a

thorough cleaning, while Rodier overhauled the other parts of the machine. When, after half-an-hour's hard work, everything appeared to be in order again, they sat down to snatch a meal, leaving the plugs to be replaced at the last moment.

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While thus engaged, Smith scanned the surroundings with some curiosity. The stream, in cutting its way through the hillside, had hollowed it out in a gentle curve. The channel itself threaded the base of a huge natural cutting, most of which was covered with trees, only the middle part, where the torrent had laid bare a path, being comparatively clear. All around were trees large and small, tall and stunted, leafy and bare. As Smith's eye travelled upward, he noticed about a hundred and fifty yards distant, almost at the top of the gorge, a small ape-like form flitting across a part of the forest that was a little thinner than the rest.

"See that, Roddy?" he said.

Rodier looked round.

"What, mister?"

"An ape, I fancy, perhaps an orang-outang. I know they infest the forests of the Malayan archipelago, but I can't call to mind that they're natives of New Guinea."

"All the natives of New Guinea are apes," said Rodier viciously. "At Port Moresby they came round me like monkeys at the Zoo."

"There he is! Do you see him?"

Smith's hand stole mechanically to his hip pocket, where he kept his revolver. Then he smiled, remembering that the chances of stopping an orang-outang with a revolver bullet were about one in ten thousand.

"I don't see him, mister."

"He has disappeared. But, my word, Roddy, there's another, and another—four or five; look at them, in the undergrowth yonder. I don't like this. They're savage beasts if offended, and if they attack us we shall be in rather a tight corner."

He rose, keeping his eye on the spot where the ape-like forms had shown themselves for an instant, to vanish again. As his eye became accustomed to the gloomy depths of the forest, he became still more alarmed to see a number of black, apish faces at various points among the thick undergrowth surrounding the clearing. Another form flitted across the thin open space in which he had seen the first.

"By George! he's got a bow in his hand. They're men! This is worse still. The orang-outang is bad enough, but he avoids men, I believe, unless interfered with or alarmed. These forest savages are dead shots with their arrows, and they'll look on us as intruders. If they're as spiteful as most of their kind we shall have trouble. Get your revolver ready, but we must pretend we haven't noticed them. You've got to replace those plugs; do it as quickly as you can. Don't look round; I'll keep guard."

He saw several of the savages pass across in the same direction as the first, and now he noticed, what had escaped him before, that they were diminutive creatures, certainly not more than four feet high. He had clearly stumbled upon a settlement of forest pigmies. From what he had read of pigmy races he knew that it required extreme patience and a great expenditure of time to win their confidence. That was out of the question now. His first impulse was to

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hail them, and try to make friends of them by offering some small present; but he checked himself as the thought flashed upon him that a movement on his part might startle them and provoke a discharge of their tiny arrows, which were probably poisoned. He could not doubt they had seen him long before he had seen them, and had been for some time playing the part of silent spectators, being kept at a distance, perhaps, by the aspect of the strange object which they had observed descending among them from the sky. It must be sufficiently alarming to their untutored eyes. But after a time their dread seemed to be overpowered by curiosity or hostility, and Smith saw, with alarm, that the little figures were gradually drawing nearer, flitting silently as shadows from tree to tree, and hiding themselves so effectually, even when they came to closer quarters, that nothing but the flicker of a brownish form among the undergrowth, or a round black head projecting from tree or bush, betrayed their presence.

“Nearly done, Roddy?” he asked, without turning.

“Pretty near.”

With an outward calmness that corresponded little to his inward sensations Smith lit a cigarette, racking his wits for some means of keeping the pigmies at a distance without provoking a cloud of arrows or a dash in force. The half-circle was gradually becoming narrower. He fancied that their silent movements were checked when he began to smoke, and this suggested to him that an appeal to their curiosity might hold them intent or awestruck until Rodier had finished his task.

“How much longer, Roddy?” he asked quietly.

“Three minutes.”

Smith did the first thing that occurred to him. He took a letter from his pocket, tore it slowly into small pieces, and let the fragments float away on the breeze. This device appeared to be successful for a few seconds; but when the scraps of paper had disappeared or fallen to the ground the pigmies resumed their stealthy silent advance. Smith had another idea. Whistling the merry air of the “Saucy Arethusa,” he took two backward steps towards the aeroplane, seized a half-empty petrol can, and strolled unconcernedly with it to the bank of the stream, which at this point formed a slowly moving pool. As he went he unscrewed the stopper, and on reaching the brink, he poured some of the petrol into the water. Then taking two or three matches from his box, he struck them together, and flung them into the petrol floating on the surface.

The effect of his stratagem was immediate. The spectacle of water apparently on fire was too much for the simple savages. For the first time they broke their silence, and



were seen rushing up the wooded slope, uttering shrill cries of alarm. Only then did Smith become aware how numerous they were. The whole forest seemed to be alive with them.

“Done, mister,” cried Rodier.

Smith hurried back to the aeroplane, noticing as he approached several small arrows sticking upright in the ground close to it.

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"They shot at you when you turned your back," said Rodier. "Shall we fire at them?"

"No; leave them alone. I think they're scared now. But it's lucky I thought of setting fire to the petrol, or they would certainly have been upon us, and there's such a crowd of them that we might have been done for. Set the engine working. The noise will keep them away."

With some difficulty they turned the aeroplane round to face down stream, where there was a fairly level stretch of a few yards for running off. Vaulting on board, they started, and in five or six seconds the aeroplane was humming along a hundred feet above the trees.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RESCUE

Smith had taken no account of the time he had lost, first by the storm, then by the overhauling of the engine; but, little or much, it increased the peril of his father, and lessened his own chance of accomplishing what he had set out to do. When an engine is always running at full speed, time lost can only be made up by reducing the length of stoppages, and Smith felt even this to be almost out of the question. As soon as he was once more afloat, he thought his best plan was to make for the coast again, and follow this without attempting to cross the mountains.

The storm had ceased; the engine was working smoothly, and, steering south-east, Smith in a few minutes found himself again in the neighbourhood of Port Moresby. Again he ran down the coast, but when about half-way between the port and the extreme south-east corner of the island he espied a gap in the mountain chain and sped through it, almost exactly on the ten-degree line. He had to rise to a considerable height, and was for some moments troubled by the masses of snow-white cumulous clouds that lay beneath him, cutting off all view of the ground. The vast expanse of cloud lay dazzling white in the sunlight, with peaks and crags such as he imagined Alpine summits must show. But though it appeared to be perfectly still, every now and then he saw small jets of mist shoot upward, like water from a geyser, and at such times the vertical currents affected the elevation of the aeroplane. He soon crossed this cloudy sea, however, and in a few hours reached the north-east coast of New Guinea, and knew that nothing but an island-spangled sea separated him from his destination.

About noon he came in sight of the mountains of Vanguna Island to the east of New Georgia. Ysabel Island lay beyond this, running from north-west to south-east. His intention was to round Cape Prieto, the south-eastern extremity of it, and search the eastern shore northward. In another hour he saw Russell Island, a green gem in the ocean southward, and beyond this, to the south-east, the peaks of Guadalcanar.

Another twenty minutes brought him abreast of Florida Island, and he was heading up the Indispensable Strait, with Thousand Ships Bay and the lofty peaks at the southern end of Ysabel lying on his left hand.

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All at once Rodier descried a cloud of smoke on the horizon far up the strait. Lifting his binocular, he shouted excitedly—

“It is a gunboat, mister. She flies the British flag.”

“We’ve beaten her!” cried Smith.

He was divided between pleasure at his success, and sorrow that the castaways were as yet unrelieved, for he could not doubt that the gunboat was the same that had been dispatched from Brisbane to their assistance. Before many minutes had elapsed he had overtaken the vessel. Slowing down and wheeling overhead, he saw that the aeroplane was the object of wondering interest on the crowded deck.

“Ahoy, there! Who are you?” he shouted through his megaphone.

“Gunboat *Frobisher*, Captain Warren,” came the reply. “Who are you?”

“Aeroplane without a name, Lieutenant Smith of H.M.S. *Imperturbable*, bound for Ysabel Island to relieve Lieutenant Underhill.”

“The dickens! That’s my job! Where do you hail from?”

“From London, sir. I’m afraid I’ve beaten you by a neck.”

“Great Scott! Is this the Admiralty’s latest?”

“Not official, sir; I’m here in a private capacity. My father’s among the wrecked party. I’m on leave.”

“So it seems. When are you due back?”

“On Friday morning.”

“I’m sorry for you, then. But, goodness alive! when did you start? The wreck was only reported four days ago.”

“Started Friday morning, sir.”

“Gammon!”

“Rasher to you, sir.”

“You haven’t lost much time, at any rate. What’s your speed?”

“About a hundred and ninety. Whereabouts was the wreck, sir?”

“A hundred miles or so up the coast, according to the men of Underhill's party with me.”

“Then I'll bid you good-bye for the present. I'll tell him you're coming.”

“Hope you'll find him alive.”

Waving a good-bye, Smith flew on at full speed. For twenty minutes he did not attempt to follow the indentations of the coast, but set a course parallel with its general trend. Then, however, he steered so that, without actually tracing every curve of the shore, he was able to survey it pretty closely. By dead reckoning and the assistance of his chart he was able to check from minute to minute his approximate position.

He had passed Mount Gaillard, and saw, some miles to the north, the remarkable saddle shape of Mount Mahaga. Then he made a bee-line for Fulakora Point. Rounding this, his course was to the north-west. The coast was steep and precipitous; here and there were reefs, over which the sea broke in white upward cascades, and he was at no loss to understand how even the most skilfully navigated vessel might easily come to grief. About forty miles from the extremity of the island he flew over an immense lagoon, extending for several miles between Ysabel Island and a series of islets and reefs lying off the shore. From

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this point the sea was dotted with islets so numerous that it was impossible, at his high speed, to identify them. But he recognized the deep indentation of Marcella Bay, confirming his observation by the conspicuous wooded islet rising some hundred feet from the sea at its northern arm. He knew that the scene of the wreck must be within a few miles of this point, and reduced his speed so that he might scan the sea for any sign of the *Albatross*.

For some time he flew up and down, but failed to distinguish a battered hull, a funnel, or any remnant of the vessel. It was plain that she had been entirely broken up. This was perplexing. He wondered how he was to discover the party, if they were yet alive. The island itself appeared, from his position off the shore, to be an impenetrable mass of forest. Flying in a little nearer, and going dead slow, Rodier presently caught sight of a square fenced enclosure within a few yards of the edge of the cliff. Smith steered directly over it, descending to a height of about fifty feet, and then saw in the middle of the space a long piece of navy tarpaulin, several biscuit tins, a hammer, two or three hatchets, and other objects, which only white men could have placed there. It flashed upon him in a moment that the shipwrecked party had encamped here. But there was not a human being in sight, and he felt a stabbing conviction that he had come too late.

Sick at heart, he made up his mind to descend and examine the place and its surroundings more closely. There was plenty of room for the aeroplane within the enclosure. Coming to the ground, he stepped, with Rodier, out of the car, each carrying his revolver. Now he saw, in addition to the articles before mentioned, a good number of arrows at various points, a few broken spears, a tomahawk of a rude kind. Here and there, on the barricade and below it, there were dark stains. These signs only increased his anxiety, but at the same time awakened wonder. Why had the party left their fort? It seemed scarcely likely that they had been overpowered in an assault, for there were no marks of a struggle within the barricade, and if the savages had succeeded in an attack they would certainly have appropriated all that they could lay hands on; even the most trivial objects would be precious to unsophisticated children of nature. Rodier suggested that the castaways had been taken off by some passing vessel, and Smith, catching at the hope, was beginning to accept this view, when, lifting the tarpaulin, he found beneath it the papers of the *Albatross*, some notebooks filled with jottings in his father's spidery handwriting, and a few small cases that contained bits of rock, fossils, and other specimens dear to the geologist, each labelled with the name of the place where it had been found.

Smith was now thoroughly alarmed. He knew that his father, if he had quitted the place voluntarily, would never have left behind these fruits of his labours. Yet why was the fort deserted?

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"Ah, bah! They have gone foraging," said Rodier, unwittingly hitting on the truth.

"But they would never leave the place unguarded," replied Smith. "The savages certainly attacked them; look at the arrows and spears. But Mr. Underhill would not have yielded without fighting; yet there are no dead bodies, not even the cut-up earth there would be if they had had a tussle. I can't account for it any way."

"Well, mister, we better look them up."

"In the aeroplane, you mean?"

"Yes. They must be here, in this island, or not here. In the aeroplane we search all over."

"It will be like looking for rabbits in bracken," said Smith, pointing to the forest. "Still, we must try."

He sat down on a biscuit tin to think over the position and evolve a plan. A random search might be mere waste of time. Starting with the assumption that the castaways were still on the island, he said to himself that they must have left the fort voluntarily, or there would certainly be signs of a struggle. That they had left no one on guard seemed to show that they were in no alarm, otherwise they would have carried their belongings with them. His father, he knew, would not abandon his note-books and specimens. Was it possible that they were making reprisals on the enemy who had previously attacked them? But even in this case they would hardly have left their fort wholly undefended, unless in the heat of victory they had rushed out in headlong pursuit, a rash movement which a naval officer would hardly countenance. Besides, they were but ill-provided with arms. Had they been enticed forth by the savages? In that case the savages would surely have plundered the camp, unless—and now his thought and his pulse quickened—unless there had not yet been time. Perhaps they had only recently left the place. Then they could not be far away, and if they had yielded to allurements there might still be time to save them. He started up, and told Rodier, who had begun his customary task of cleaning the engine, the conclusion to which he had come.

"We will ascend at once," he said, "and scour the neighbourhood. The forest is thick, but perhaps there are clear spaces in it. Let us lose no time."

They dragged the aeroplane to the inner extremity of the enclosure, turned it round, and started it towards the sea. In less than a minute it was two hundred feet in the air. Then Smith wheeled round and steered across the camp, intending to take that as a centre, and strike out along successive radii, so that in the course of an hour or two, even at moderate speed, he would have searched a considerable extent of country in the shape of a fan. It was a question how far he should proceed in one direction, but relying on his

idea that the evacuation of the camp could only recently have taken place, he resolved to content himself at first with a distance of about ten miles.

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Having risen to a height of about three hundred feet, he found that he commanded a view of many miles of the country. Far to the south were the mountains; all around was forest, broken here and there by patches of open rocky ground. Beneath him the trees were so densely packed that a whole army might have been encamped among them without giving a sign of its presence. He sped in a straight line west-north-west of the fort, at a speed of between forty and fifty miles an hour; to go faster would have rendered careful exploration of the country difficult. Having completed ten miles without passing over a single spot of clear ground, he flew about five miles due west, then turned the machine and steered back towards the fort along the next imaginary radius of his circle. He had arranged that Rodier should scan the country to the left while he himself kept as good a look-out to the right as was possible when he had engine and compass to attend to. They had not flown far on this backward journey when Rodier, who was using his binocular, shouted that he saw, on a headland far to the left, what appeared to be a native village. Smith instantly steered towards it. It was the first evidence of human habitation they had as yet come across, and even at the risk of losing his bearings he must examine it. He could now afford to go at full speed, and a few minutes brought him above the village, which was a collection of rude huts perched on a steep headland overlooking the sea, and defended on its inland and less precipitous side by barriers of stakes. The noise made by the engine as the aeroplane swept down towards the village first drew all the inhabitants from their huts into the open enclosure, and then sent them scampering back with shrieks of alarm as they saw the strange object in the air. A glance sufficed to assure Smith, as he wheeled round the village, that it contained no white men, unless they had been taken inside the huts, which was unlikely. Without loss of time he steered as nearly as he could towards the point at which he had diverged from his settled course, and returned to the camp, pausing once to examine a small tract where the trees were somewhat thinner, allowing him to see the ground beneath.

Once more he started, steering now in a more westerly direction. There were several clear spaces along this radius, and Smith flew over them slowly, more than once wheeling about to make sure that his eyes had missed nothing. But at these times he saw no human beings, nothing but the wild animals of the forest, huge pigs being diminished to the size of rabbits, and dingoes to the size of mice. These scurried away when they heard the noise of the engine, and Smith hovered around for a time to see if the flight of the animals attracted the attention of men, but in vain.

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Having again covered ten miles, as nearly as he could judge, he swung round to the southwest. A minute or two later he came to the largest open space he had yet seen, clear of undergrowth as well as of trees. There were no huts upon it, and at first he saw no sign of men; but all at once Rodier cried that there was a ladder against one of the trees on the farther side of the clearing. Flying towards it, and descending until the aeroplane was level with the tree-top, Smith was amazed to see a brown woman, with a brown baby under her arm, scuttling down the ladder towards the ground. At the same time he became aware that there were ladders against many of the trees in the neighbourhood, and women and children were descending by them, showing all the marks of terror. He had come upon a collection of the curious tree-houses, sixty or seventy feet from the ground, which some of the islanders inhabit. The terrified people when they reached the ground fled into the forest. There was no man among them, which led Smith to suspect that the men were either hunting for food, or were perhaps fighting with the castaways. Instead of returning directly to the camp, therefore, he pursued his flight across the forest in the same direction in which the startled natives had run. Now for the first time he wished that he could have had a silent engine, for then his ears might have given the information which failed his eyes. Though he flew to and fro for some time in the vicinity of the tree-houses, he discovered no other break in the forest; and the impossibility of knowing what was going on beneath that vast screen of foliage began to affect him with hopelessness of success.

He wished it were possible to descend in the clearing, and continue his search on the ground. The appearance of the aeroplane was so terrifying to the islanders that he need fear no opposition to his landing. But the idea occurred to him only to be at once dismissed. When once among the trees, away from the aeroplane, he would be no longer sacrosanct. Those islanders who had actually witnessed his descent might fear him as a denizen of the sky; but any others that met him in the forest would not be restrained by superstitious fear from treating him as an enemy. Further, having once involved himself in the obscure and pathless depths of the forest, he might wander for hours, or even days, without finding the aeroplane. It was an impossible course of action. Hopeless as he was becoming, he felt that he could do nothing better than persevere as he had begun; after all, he had as yet covered only a small wedge of the segment he had proposed to himself.

But he now found himself in a difficulty. In the excitement of his recent discovery he had neglected to keep a watch upon the compass, and he was now at a loss to know the precise direction in which to steer. He must certainly go to the east, but he could not tell whether he was north or south of the camp. It occurred to him that by rising to a greater height he might probably be able to descry the camp, so he planed upwards until he attained an altitude of nearly two thousand feet, Rodier searching the country seawards through his binocular.

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"I see it!" he cried at length, adding, as Smith began to steer towards it, "Wait a minute, mister; I see all the country better here; I can pick out the clearings, though they are only dark blots; but yet I can do it."

He swept the country for miles around. Beyond the forest, far to the west, there were stretches of rugged uplands, bare of vegetation. It was not at all likely that the Englishmen had gone so far from their camp, whether willingly or unwillingly. To the east and south-east stretched the sea, and Rodier declared that he saw, an immense way off, the smoke of a steamer, no doubt the gunboat. Lowering the glass to scan the nearer prospect, he suddenly gave a lusty shout.

"I see smoke, mister; a quite little smoke, as of a cigarette."

"Where?" asked Smith eagerly.

"South-east of us, in the forest, about five or six miles off."

"We'll go and see what it comes from."

Smith scarcely dared to hope that the discovery of the smoke would be of any assistance to him. But it was the first indication of a camp within the forest, whether of the islanders or of his friends, and he could not neglect to investigate it. The aeroplane flew along at the speed of a swallow. In little more than three minutes it reached the twine of smoke. Checking the engine, Smith wheeled the aeroplane round until it passed slowly over an extensive gap in the forest. He looked down. The smoke rose from a fire in the midst of the clearing. At a little distance from it there was a throng of islanders, gazing up awe-struck at the strange apparition whose approach had been heralded from afar, and which now circled above them, making terrifying noises.

But Smith was not interested in the islanders. He peered among them and around for white men. He felt a shock of bitter disappointment; all the upturned faces were brown. But the movement of the aeroplane brought him to the verge of the forest, and then Rodier gave a shout of delight.

"There they are! There they are, mister!" he cried, pointing obliquely downwards.

Smith looked over. In the shade at the foot of the trees he saw a number of men bound each to a trunk. Their faces, directed upwards, were too darkly shadowed for him to distinguish their race; but they were clothed. Beyond doubt they were the castaways.

In a moment he determined what to do. While the aeroplane circled slowly above their heads the islanders would feel no more than awe and wonder. They huddled together like a flock of sheep in a thunderstorm, probably not as yet connecting the aerial visitant with their prisoners. What was required was to scatter them, suddenly, in a way that

would smite them with terror, and cause them to flee without thought of the captives helpless against the trees.

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Smith sailed away eastward, disappearing from their sight. He had made a quick mental calculation of the extent of the clearing. Rising to the height of about three hundred feet above the ground, while still out of sight he suddenly stopped the engine and warped the planes for a dive. The aeroplane descended rapidly, grazed the tops of the trees, and then, more slowly, swept, silently, in a gentle curve towards the throng of men, who were chattering about the mysterious sky visitor. When they caught sight of it they were struck dumb, and for a few moments seemed to be fixed to the ground with amazement. Then, as it came directly towards them, and Smith set the noisy propellers in motion, they uttered shrieks of dismay and terror, and fled like hares into the forest.

Some of them started too late. Smith, being now near the ground, set the engine going at low speed, overtook a group of the islanders before they reached shelter, and with a touch of the aeroplane flung them violently on their faces. He then wheeled round, and rose once more into the air in order to effect a complete descent. The prostrate natives lay for some time in a paralysis of fear; but finding that they were unhurt, and that the monster had withdrawn from them, they picked themselves up, and ran to overtake their friends, leaving the space clear.

In another minute Smith had brought the aeroplane safely to the ground. Rodier and he sprang out and ran towards the bound figures.

"It's Charley!" called a voice, in tones wherein surprise and joy were blended.

And then the sailormen, famished and feeble as they were, broke forth in hoarse cheers and incoherent shouts, which died away in sobs.

CHAPTER XIV

SIR MATTHEW IMPROVES THE OCCASION

To cut the bonds of the prisoners was the work of only a few moments. The sailors, the instant they were free, made a rush upon the villagers' cooking-pots, their passion for food overcoming curiosity, gratitude, and all other sentiments. Dr. Smith gripped his son's hand, his emotion being too great for words. Tom slapped his brother on the back. Lieutenant Underhill was divided between his eagerness to learn all the circumstances of this strange intervention and his anxiety to prevent his men from getting out of hand. But a glance at them as they made free with the natives' provisions relieved him on this score, and when Smith explained that he had on board the aeroplane certain delectables in the shape of chicken patties (becoming rather stale), doughnuts, plumcake, a bottle of Australian burgundy, and sundry other remnants of the provisions furnished by the hospitable folk of Palmerston, he voted an immediate adjournment for lunch, and the officers, with the Smiths, were soon satisfying their clamant hunger.

“How in the world did you know about us?” asked Tom.

“By cable from Brisbane.”

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"Then our boat did not go down?" said Underhill.

"No; your men lost their sail and rudder, and drifted until they came into the current along the south coast of New Guinea. They were picked up by a barque bound for Brisbane, and carried there."

He gave them a rapid summary of his flight across the world. The sudden change in their fortunes induced a readiness to find amusement in the most trifling incident, and they laughed loud and long as he retailed the little mishaps and the comic episodes of his journey. Then Underhill in his turn related all that had happened since the wreck, and all became grave again as he told of the capture in the early morning after their night march, the wild orgy in which their captors had indulged, the elaborate preparations they had made under the direction of their sorcerer for the sacrificial rite to which their captives were destined. But for the appearance of the aeroplane he had no doubt that within a few short hours they would have been massacred, and their skulls hung up at the entrance of the huts as signal marks of the villagers' prowess.

"The poor wretches hate all white men," said Underhill, "and it can hardly be wondered at. They are recruited to labour in our plantations, and come back with ailments unknown to them until they met the white man. They do not distinguish, and a geologist like Dr. Smith—"

"Ah!" said the doctor anxiously; "my specimens!"

"They are safe, Father," replied Charley. "I saw them in your fort. The fact that the place had not been looted gave me some hope that you were still alive. I wonder that the islanders have not made hay of everything."

"No doubt they deferred the performance until they had disposed of us," said Underhill. "But now, how do we stand? You have saved us, but you can't take us all off in your aeroplane."

"A gunboat is on her way here; I passed her; she will arrive soon."

"Hurray!" shouted the men.

"Your men are on her, Mr. Underhill," continued Smith. "She will probably arrive by the time we get back to the fort."

"That is a difficulty. We must be at least seven or eight miles from it, and the whole country is forest in which the natives may waylay us. They have left our rifles, but practically all our ammunition is gone."

"I have rifles and ammunition, as you see. But the savages have had such a fright that I think they will keep out of the way of the aeroplane. If I fly as low as possible over the

trees they will hear the humming and run away, and you can steer your course by the same sound.”

“A good idea. We’ll burn their huts and weapons, as a warning to behave better in future, and then we’ll go.”

This was done, Smith and Rodier appropriating as trophies several spears and bows and arrows, and also some of the fetish charms hung at the entrance to the huts. The crew, having satisfied their hunger, hunted through the village for loot, and grumbled when they found nothing that they considered worthy the consideration of British sailormen. Then Rodier took the aeroplane aloft, Smith having decided to walk with the rest, and the party set off towards the coast, marching by the guidance of the sound that descended from the tree-tops, dulled by its passage through thick layers of foliage.

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The scare had proved effectual. Never a sign of the natives was seen during the three hours' march to the fort. When they reached it, Dr. Smith hastened at once to assure himself that his specimens and note-books were safe. Tired out, the whole party lay down to rest.

"We'll go and meet the gunboat, Roddy," said Smith, when the aeroplane alighted. "Captain Warren will be glad to hear that all is well."

They set off, flew down the coast, and in a few minutes descried the gunboat, apparently about fifteen miles off.

"All well, sir," shouted Smith, as he met the vessel. "I'll pilot you to the place."

"You have put my nose out of joint," replied the captain, "and done my men out of a fight, too. Well, I'm glad Underhill is safe. How far have we to go?"

"An hour will do it, sir. I'll keep you company; a jog-trot will be a pleasant change after my scamper."

"Diable, mister," said Rodier; "that will waste an immense quantity of petrol, and we have none to spare."

"You're right, Roddy. I daresay we have used in the last few hours enough to carry us to Samoa."

He explained to Captain Warren the necessity he was under of economizing fuel, and promised to fire a rifle as a guide to him when the gunboat came abreast of the fort. Then he returned at full speed, brought the aeroplane to the ground within the enclosure, and having arranged with his brother to give the signal when the gunboat came in sight, lay down beside Rodier and was fast asleep in an instant.

He was wakened by a roar of cheering when Captain Warren, with some of his men, the four members of the crew of the *Albatross*, and a corpulent little civilian about fifty years old, marched into the camp, bringing a load of provisions. A huge bonfire was kindled in the centre of the enclosure, and round it the whole company gathered to enjoy a royal feast. Darkness had sunk over the land; the flames cast ruddy reflections upon their features; and no one observing their cheerful expression, or listening to their merry chat, would have suspected that, a few hours before, half of the party had been face to face with a terrible death. Smith was the hero of the day. Lieutenant Underhill got up and proposed his health; the toast was drunk in wine, beer, and water, and some wild dogs that had been allured from the forest by the glare fled howling when the mariners raised their lusty voices to the tune of "For he's a jolly good fellow." Nor was Rodier forgotten. Tom Smith called for the honours for him also; he was acclaimed in shouts of "Good old Frenchie!" "Well done, matey," and sundry other boisterous tokens of applause.

Nothing would content the party but that Smith should tell the story of his flight. They listened spell-bound as he related his experiences at the various stopping-places, and his adventures at sea. When the story was finished, the cheers broke out again, and the stout little man who accompanied Captain Warren's party, and whose spectacles gleamed with good humour, rose to his feet and cleared his throat.

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“Pray, gentlemen, silence for Sir Matthew Menhinick,” said Captain Warren, with twinkling eyes. Sir Matthew was an ex-prime minister of Queensland, known to his intimates as Merry Matt, and to the whole continent as a jolly good fellow. Being at Brisbane when the news of the wreck came, he instantly decided to join Captain Warren’s rescue party. If he had a weakness for hearing his own voice, what could be expected in a man whose speeches filled volumes of legislative reports, but who was now in his retirement, deprived of these daily opportunities of addressing his fellow men?

“Gentlemen,” he said, beaming on the company; “officers and gentlemen, and able seamen of His Majesty’s Navy, I am a plain, blunt chap, I am, as you all know, and I can’t dress up what I’ve got to say in fine language like the Governor-General, but I can’t let this occasion pass without saying a word or two about the great, the wonderful, the stupendous achievement of our friend, Mr. Thesiger Smith. (Loud cheers.) This is a proud moment in my life. I remember when I was a nipper in London, before any of you were born except our friend the doctor, I saw in a place called Cremorne Gardens a silly fellow of a Frenchman—present company excepted—try to fly with wings strapped to his arms. Of course he came a cropper and broke his back. I remember my dear old mother shaking her head and telling over to me that fine bit of poetry:

Cows and horses walk on four legs,
Little children walk on two legs;
Fishes swim in water clear,
Birds fly high into the air;

and impressing on me that boys mustn’t be little beasts, nor try to be fishes, or birds, or anything else they wasn’t meant to be. But now, gentlemen, in this wonderful twentieth century, them old doctrines are as dead as Queen Anne. We’ve got submarines diving and roving along in the depths of the sea; we’ve got aeroplanes that fly up into the air; and we’ve got men, gentlemen, men of grit and backbone, men of courage and determination, that ‘fear no foe in shining armour,’ men like our friend Mr. Smith (roars of applause), who brave the perils of the deep and the chance of the empyrean, who take their lives in their hands and think nothing of it. Some croakers will tell you the Old Country is going to the dogs. Don’t you believe it. (“We won’t.”) I don’t believe she ever will go to the dogs while she’s got left a man of the old, honourable, and respected name of Smith. (Laughter and cheers.)

“Mr. Underhill just now referred in feeling terms to the personal results of Mr. Smith’s enterprise. But for him, some of our number would by this time have crossed the bourne whence no traveller returns. I need not speak of the joy and pride that must have filled a father’s and a brother’s breast—” (Here the speaker blew his nose and wiped a mist from his spectacles. Then he resumed.) “As I was saying, our friend has accomplished a wonderful feat, gentlemen. He has

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come twelve thousand miles in three days and a half. That's a thing to be proud of. He tells me he's going to get back in another three days and a half. I am sure I speak for you all when I say 'good luck to him!' ("hear! hear!") Think what it means, gentlemen. It means going round the world in a week. When I was last in England I met a man at a hotel who kept me up till three in the morning proving to me that the earth is flat. I'll give Mr. Smith his address, and when he gets home he can go and prove to him that *he's* a flat. (Laughter.) You remember in a play of Shakespeare there's a little chap that says he'll put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes. His name was Puck, gentlemen. Mr. Smith won't do it quite so quick—not this journey, at any rate—but who knows what these young scientific fellows will be a-doing of next? Mr. Smith's aeroplane hasn't got a name, I believe, but he'd better christen it Puck, which is the same as the Indian word *pukka*, and means 'jolly good.'"

"Now I'm not going to make a speech, so I'll just conclude these few remarks by wishing Mr. Smith a safe journey home, quick promotion, and a seat in the House of Lords. He's used to going up, and that's about as far up as he can go."

When the cheering had ceased, the company crowded about the aeroplane, and gazed at it as if by sheer hard staring they might discover the secret of its speed.

While Rodier explained its working to some of them, Smith sat with the officers, his father and brother, and Sir Matthew, discussing the immediate future.

"You must be very tired," said his father. "Don't you think you have better give up the idea of returning at once, and come with us? The Admiralty will stretch a point if we cable an explanation."

"On no account, father," replied Smith. "I am going back. I had the good luck to get here in time. That's all right so far. But after coming through the air I couldn't stand a slow voyage back; it would be like riding in a growler after a taxi. Besides, I confess I am out to make a record. I can't make a name in geology, but why shouldn't I go down to posterity as the first man to fly round the world?"

"In seven days, as Sir Matthew remarked," added Tom. "It will be rather a feather in your cap, old fellow, if you can do it."

"Oh, I'll do it, if only my engine holds out. By the way, Roddy ought to be cleaning up in preparation for starting. I hope he won't be demoralized by this ovation. Roddy," he called, "it's time to clean up."

"All right, mister," replied the French man. "I'll take the shine out of her."

“Roddy’s English is not perfectly accurate,” said Smith, laughing; “but he’s exactness itself in his work.” He pulled out his watch. “It’s exactly eighty-one hours since I left London; I’ve got eighty-seven to get back in.”

“How will you go?” asked Underhill.

“First to Samoa, then Honolulu, then ’Frisco, and straight across the States.”

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"You'll have to beware of interviewers," said Tom. "You may be sure the newspaper men have got wind of you by this time."

"I don't know. Barracombe wouldn't say anything; I don't think Johnson in Constantinople would, and—"

"My dear fellow, don't make any mistake," said Captain Warren. "Nobody ever does say anything, but the newspaper men somehow or other know what you think about when you're abed and asleep."

"They must all be Irishmen, then."

"Or Americans. I wouldn't mind betting that they are getting up a reception for you at 'Frisco—"

"But they don't know I'm going there."

"No matter; the word has gone out to keep a watch for you, and every town in the States will be on the *qui vive*. I'm rather sorry for you when you come down for petrol; you won't get off so easily as you did on the way out."

"Of course you won't," said Tom. "I suppose you'll wire ahead for petrol to be held ready for you? That will give you away."

"No, I shall chance it. I can get petrol in any town in the States, and I won't risk delay by announcing myself."

"You had better have a good sleep before you start," said Underhill. "What time do you want to go?"

"Not later than midnight."

"Well, you've got nearly four hours. Your man had better sleep, too. I'll see to the engine."

"Roddy won't allow that. I see that he has got help. He'll be finished in half-an-hour. By all means put him to bed then, if you'll promise to wake us both in good time."

"I'll do that. I won't spoil sport. Go to the further end of the camp, and I'll tuck you up in the tarpaulin, put some food on board, and see that everything is shipshape."

Smith was glad enough to avail himself of the opportunity of three or four hours' continuous sleep on land. Rodier showed more reluctance, declaring that he was as fit as a fiddle; but Captain Warren bore him away from the crowd of admirers, and stood over him until he, like his master, was sleeping soundly.



A quarter of an hour before midnight the two airmen were awakened. Farewells were said, hands were shaken all round, every one wish them good luck, and precisely at twelve they took their seats and set forth on the two thousand miles flight to Samoa.

CHAPTER XV

HERR SCHWANKMACHER'S CABBAGES

A little before twelve on Monday, Herr Rudolph Schwankmacher, one of the most respected residents of Apia, capital of Samoa, was reclining under the shade of a plantain in his garden beyond the promontory of Mulinuu, enjoying the conversation of a friend and the refreshing bitterness of a bottle of light lager beer. The garden rose a few feet above the level of the ground in front of it, and afforded an excellent view over the sea. Hither Herr Schwankmacher was wont to retire for a brief spell of rest and meditation in the heat of the day, and on this occasion he had been accompanied by a compatriot newly arrived from Germany, to whom he was expatiating on the pleasures of colonial life in general, and in particular on the delights of rearing cabbages in so rich and prolific a soil.

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"Yes," he said, "you will find no cabbages like these in Germany. You see them. They are grown from seed. It is not a month since I put the seed in the ground, and the plants are already flourishing. They will soon be full-grown, and then I shall pickle them, and have for every day in the year a dish that will remind me as I eat it of the days of my youth in the dear Homeland. Ach! the Homeland; it is very dear. I love it, although I would not return to it for the world. This is the happy land, my friend. It is a fairland. It is a beautiful land for copra, flowers, and cabbages. I am content."

He tossed off a glass of beer and lay back on the green sward, puffing at a pipe and gazing benignly up into the broad-leaved canopy that sheltered him from the midday sun. For some time he reclined thus, dropping a word now and then to his companion, answering his questions, but always returning to the cabbages.

As they lay in this placidity and ease they were suddenly aware of a slight buzzing in the air. Herr Schwankmacher raised himself on his elbow, and looked around for the insect that had dared to intrude into this peaceful cabbage-patch. There was no insect in sight of such a size as to account for the deep-toned hum, which was growing louder moment by moment.

"This is strange," he said. "I never heard such a noise before."

"I have heard it," said his friend. "I have heard it very close. The last time was when Count Zeppelin's airship came down in the Teutoberger Wald. I was there."

"So; but Count Zeppelin would not be here in Samoa. We have no airships here. The newspapers say that there is much activity in Europe, especially among the French and English, in this new pastime, but I dare say the greater part of what they say is lies. But really, the noise is becoming very great; I am unable to explain it."

Both men were now sitting erect, looking to right, to left, seawards, landwards, towards the hills. All at once the sound ceased, a shadow was cast upon them, and before they could realize the situation a strange, uncouth object glided from behind them over the plantains, and came to rest in the centre of the cabbage-patch.

Herr Schwankmacher sprang to his feet with a nimbleness surprising in a man of his size, and rushed forward, snorting with rage and indignation. His friend followed, neither indignant nor enraged, but very much interested in the occurrence. His intelligent eyes gleamed behind his glasses; he had himself experienced aerial adventures.

It chanced that Rodier was the first to step out of the machine. As the burly, bearded, white-clad figure of Herr Schwankmacher cantered heavily toward him, he lifted his cap, and with that sunny smile which had accompanied him through life, he said—

“Monsieur, je vous fais mille excuses. Voudriez-vous bien me dire ou l’on puisse obtenir de la petrole.”

“Sapperment!” cried the infuriated German. “Es ist ein kriechender Franzose!”

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It was well that Rodier did not understand him, or, never having been called a sneaking Frenchman before, he would certainly have fallen tooth and nail on the offender, though in respect of bulk the German would have made two of him. Fortunately for the keeping of peace, he was quite ignorant of the German tongue, and when Herr Schwankmacher proceeded to shake his pipe at him, and deliver his opinion of trespassers in general and French trespassers in particular, with intermittent allusions to cabbages, Rodier only listened with the same gentle smile and deprecating movements of his grimy hands.

Smith, joining him, addressed Herr Schwankmacher in English, but his intervention seemed only to add fuel to the flames. The German knew no English; neither Smith nor Rodier knew German; and the affair promised to come to a deadlock. But here a peacemaker stepped in. Herr Schwankmacher's friend, who appeared to be greatly amused, stepped forward with a noticeable limp.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, zis is not business. Permit me, sir," he said to Smith.

He took Herr Schwankmacher by the arm, and spoke a few words to him; upon which the German consented to be silent and in dudgeon resumed his pipe.

"My friend, sir," the second man went on, "is vat you call chippy because you come plomp into his bed of cabbage, very fine vegetable, vich remind him of his youthful days in ze ever-to-beloved Homeland."

"Oh, well," said Smith, "assure him that I am very sorry. I didn't mean to hurt his cabbages, and I'll pay for any damage that I've done."

"Was sagt er?" said Herr Schwankmacher suspiciously.

His friend translated Smith's words. Schwankmacher grunted.

"The fact is," continued Smith, "we've run short of petrol, and I had to come down. I hoped to make Apia; that is it, yonder, I suppose?"

"Zat is so. You vant petrol. Zen I introduce you to excellent firma vat supply ze Commandant. It is good petrol; I know it, for ze firma receive large consignments of it from ze highly respectable firma I haf ze honour to represent—Schlagintwert Gesellschaft of Duesseldorf. Sir, viz compliments."

He took from a capacious pocket a bulky book in a red paper wrapper.

"Zis is our price list, sir, revise and correct. Ve can supply anyzink vatefer, and I shall esteem it great favour to haf ze opportunity to quote for petrol, machine oil, planes, stays, plugs, propellers, levers, air-bags, goggles, overalls, accumulators—"



"Thanks, but at present I want nothing but petrol and machine oil, and I must have them at once, as I have to start for Honolulu without delay."

"For Honolulu, sir?"

"Yes."

"Across ze sea?"

"There's no other way, is there?"

"Sree sousand miles?"

"Rather less, isn't it?"

"Ach! zis knocks me into a—vat you call it?—into a billycock."

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He turned to Herr Schwankmacher, who had just refilled his pipe, and repeated to him the astounding announcement. The German scoffed. Seeing that there was no help for it if he wished to get away in a reasonable time, Smith explained that he was halfway on a voyage round the world, and had not a minute to spare.

“Ach! business are business. Zat is vat take me round ze world. Permit me, sir.”

He handed Smith a large business card, inscribed with the name “Hildebrand Schwab,” and the address of his firm in Duesseldorf.

“Ve shall lose no time, sir,” he added. “Zis is ze most amazing zink zat efer haf I heard, and I esteem it great honour to haf ze opportunity to introduce you to ze excellent firma vat supply you viz petrol for your so vonderful machine. Vun minute until I tell Herr Schwankmacher, zen ve go doublequick.”

Herr Schwankmacher’s vexation and incredulity vanished together when his friend told him the facts of the case. He was a good fellow at bottom, and now that he knew that the aeroplane’s descent in his garden was purely accidental, he was ready to do all in his power to speed the parting guest. In a few minutes Smith was hurrying along the shore road with a German on either side, at his left the surf roaring on the fringe of coral reef, at his right a screen of tufted palms and plantations running up the lower slopes of the mountains. He soon came to a collection of drinking-bars and stores, all bearing German names. Herr Schwankmacher, now transformed into a cordial host, invited him to drink a bottle of lager with him at one of the bars, but he excused himself and followed Schwab into a large store where every sort of requisite for machines was kept in stock.

The purchase of petrol proved to be a lengthy transaction, for Schwab was impelled to tell the story to the store-keeper, he repeated it to his clerks, they ran out to tell the neighbours, and the place was soon thronged with Germans—merchants, clerks, sailors, stokers—all eager to see the airman who was flying round the world. The store was filled with smoke and gutturals. The purchase being at last concluded, the cans were rolled to a motor lorry which lumbered along in the direction of Mulinnu like a triumphal car at the head of a procession. First came Smith with Schwankmacher on his right and Schwab on his left; then a crowd of the German population, in which wealthy merchants found themselves neighbours to grimy stokers, and youthful clerks to the inevitable uniforms; the tail was formed of swarthy Samoans, men and women, skipping boys and laughing girls with flowers in their hair.

Rodier had cleaned the engine, and was eating his dinner among the cabbages. He favoured the crowd with a pleasant smile, although some were Germans, and because others were pretty.

The petrol was placed on board and the tank filled, Smith, with long-suffering patience, replying to the questions of the English-speaking spectators. All was at last ready for the start; Schwab, who alone of the company had knowledge of the conditions, made himself useful in clearing the course; and Schwankmacher positively declined to accept payment for the plants which had been crushed under the aeroplane, and those which were trampled by the spectators' feet.

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When the airmen were in their places, Schwab limped up.

“Permit me to shake hands viz ze first circumnavigator of ze sky,” he said with effusion, “and to remind you zat my firma Schlagintwert vill be most happy to supply you viz anyzink vatefer zat you need, and in vatefer region of ze globe you may be, on receipt of postcard, telegram, cable, or Marconigram. Hoch!”

His cheer was taken up by the crowd. The machine moved forward. Herr Schwankmacher, stepping back, fell into the arms of a grinning stoker, and a little native boy, shrieking with fright, ran head-first into the corpulent frame of a merchant who was more stable in his copra business than in his legs. The aeroplane flew up; the crowd watched its ascension like adoring worshippers of some sky deity; and in three minutes it was a mere speck in the cloudless blue.

CHAPTER XVI

A STOP-PRESS MESSAGE

Mr. John McMurtrie, editor of the *Toronto Sphere*, a capable journalist and a man of many friends, strolled into his office about three o'clock one Wednesday afternoon. His first extra edition was due at four, and it may seem that he had allowed himself a very short time for dealing with fresh items of news that had come to hand since noon; but he had an excellent assistant, who took a real interest in his work, so that there was no need for the editor to hurry his luncheon or the ensuing cigar.

“Well, Daniels,” he said genially, as he entered his assistant’s room. He sat across a corner of the table, exhibiting a well-developed calf neatly covered with golfing hose. “Is there anything fresh and frothy on the tape?”

“Not much. A wire from 'Frisco about those flying men.”

“You don’t say so?”

“Here it is.”

He handed the slip to his chief, who ran his eye over the message. The words employed were few, but a journalist of McMurtrie’s experience instinctively covered the bare bones with a respectable integument, and clothed this with a quite picturesque raiment by force of the more ornamental parts of speech.

The substance of what he read was as follows: A cable message had reached San Francisco from Honolulu in the afternoon of the previous day, announcing that an aeroplane had alighted there about three o'clock that morning, the owner, a Lieutenant Thistleton (so it was corrupted) Smith declaring that he had come from Samoa in

sixteen hours, and was proceeding to San Francisco. He had left three hours later, having waited only to take in a stock of petrol. On receipt of this message the editor of every newspaper in the city had arranged for a relay of reporters to be up all night and watch for the arrival of this extraordinary machine. Shortly after midnight the hum of the propellers was heard over Golden Gate, and a light in the sky indicating the course of the aeroplane, a dozen journalists, in motor-cars, rushed

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after it, but were hopelessly out-distanced. They discovered it on the outskirts of the city. The airmen had already landed. The reporter who was first in the race seized upon Lieutenant Smith, and learning that he had only alighted to obtain more petrol, rushed him back to the city in his car. His comrades and competitors, on arriving, sought to interview the second man, whose name they had not been able to ascertain; but he was very uncommunicative, being occupied in cleaning the engine. Lieutenant Smith was back with petrol in twenty minutes; in half-an-hour he was again on his way. This extreme haste caused great disappointment to the airmen and civic dignitaries of the city, they having risen from their beds on hearing of his arrival to honour Lieutenant Smith with a reception. When they reached the spot where he had descended, he had been gone some ten minutes. In the race to meet him, one of the motor-cars collided with an electric-light standard and was overturned, its occupant, Mr. Aeneas T. Muckleridge, being carried to hospital in a critical condition. Several San Francisco newspapers had published interviews with Lieutenant Smith, one of them ten columns long.

Mr. McMurtrie chuckled as he read this dispatch in the shorthand of the news agency.

"Bedad, 'tis worth a special editorial, Daniels. But why didn't we get it before, man? It ought to have been in time for the morning papers."

"You remember, sir, there's been something wrong with the line to-day through the storm."

"So there has, indeed. Well, take out that stuff about the new British tariff, and send Davis in to me."

He went into his room, sat back in his chair, pushed up his golfing cap, and smiled as he meditated the periods of his editorial. In a few moments a thin, ragged-headed youth entered with an air of haste and terror. He carried a paper-block, which he set on his knee, looking anxiously at the editor. Mr. McMurtrie began to dictate, the stenographer's pencil flying over the paper as he sought to overtake the rapid utterance of his chief. The article, as it appeared on the second page of the *Sphere* an hour later, ran as follows:

HOCUS POCUS

A hoax, or as our merry ancestors would have called it, a flam, is usually the most ephemeral and evanescent of human devices. Like a boy's soap bubble, it glitters for a brief moment in iridescent rotundity, then ceases to be even a film of air. It is unsubstantial as the tail of Halley's comet. On rare occasions, it is true, its existence is prolonged; many worthy people are beguiled; and some enthusiasts are so effectually

hoodwinked as to persist in their delusion, and even to form societies for its propagation. But mankind at large is sufficiently sane to avoid a fall into this abyss of the absurd, and, having paid its tribute of laughter, goes its way without being a cent the worse. San Francisco appears to be the latest

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victim of The Great Aviation Hoax, and we shall watch the progressive stages of its disillusionment with sympathetic interest, or the development of its newest cult with sincere commiseration. Like many other phenomena, good and bad, this gigantic flam, it will be remembered, took its rise in the east. Its genesis was reported in Constantinople nearly a week ago: then at intervals we learnt that these mysterious airmen, one of whom with artful artlessness had adopted the plain, respectable, and specious name of Smith, had manifested themselves at Karachi, Penang, and Port Darwin successively. The curtain then dropped, and the world waited with suspense for the opening of the next act, though there were some who suspected that the performers had slipped away with the cash-box during the interval, and would never be heard of again. However, the curtain has at last rung up at the golden city of the west, and it is certainly a mark of the ingenuity of the concocters of the hoax that they allowed at least twenty-four hours for the passage of the Pacific. In another column we give an account of a visit to San Francisco, in the small hours of this morning, from which it will be seen that the city fathers narrowly escaped making themselves ridiculous, the flying men having wisely disappeared before the municipal deputation, hastily summoned from their beds, had time to make the indispensable changes in their attire. It need scarcely be hinted that there are many accomplished aviators in San Francisco who would take a jovial pleasure in lending themselves to this amusing hoax, if only for the chance of seeing their most reverend seniors in pyjamas. A glance at the itinerary of the alleged world tourists, coupled with a comparison of dates, will show how impossible it is for them to have covered the stages of their tour in the time claimed. Indeed, it is almost an insult to our readers' intelligence even to suggest this comparison. The record put up by Blakeney in his New York-Chicago flight was 102 miles per hour for six consecutive hours. If the flying men who are now asserted to have touched at San Francisco are the same as were reported by the Constantinople correspondent of the London *Times* on Friday last, a simple calculation will show that they must have flown for many days at a time at twice Blakeney's speed, with the briefest intervals for food and rest. It is not yet claimed that the alleged Smith and his anonymous companion have discovered a means of dispensing with sleep, or that they are content, like the fabulous chameleon, to live on air. Our children may live to witness such developments in the science of aviation as may render possible an aerial journey of this length and celerity; but so sudden an augmentation of the speed and endurance of the aeroplane, to say nothing of the more delicate mechanism of the human frame, demands a more authentic confirmation of the midnight impressions of the San Francisco journalists than

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has yet come to hand. In short, we do not believe a word of it, and our speculation at the moment is, what brand of soap or tinned meat, what new machine oil, or panacea for human ills, these ingeniously arranged manifestations are intended to boom.

“What do you think of that, Davis?” asked Mr. McMurtrie at the end of six minutes’ rapid dictation. It was his pardonable weakness to claim the admiration of his subordinates.

“Bully, sir,” replied the shorthand-writer timidly. As a matter of fact, he thought nothing at all, his whole attention having been so completely absorbed by his task of making dots and curves and dashes as to leave no portion of his brain available for receiving mental impressions. But the editor was satisfied. Telling the youth to transcribe his notes and send the flimsies page by page as completed to the printer, he took up his golf sticks, passed through the outer office, instructing his assistant to read the proof, and departed to his recreation.

There is an excellent golf course on the Scarborough Bluffs, the rugged, seamed, and fissured cliffs that form the northern shore of Lake Ontario, near Toronto. Boarding a trolley-car, Mr. McMurtrie soon reached the club-house, where he found his friend Harry Cleave already awaiting him.

“Hullo, Mac. Day’s work done?” was Mr. Cleave’s salutation.

“Indeed it is. The best day’s work I have done for a good while.”

“Then you are pitching into somebody or something, that’s certain. What is it this time?”

“Bubbles, my boy. Those flying-men are after spinning again. Some of the ‘Frisco men will have a pain within side of ‘em when they read how I have touched ‘em up. Now then, Cleave, we’ve got the course to ourselves. I’m sure I can give you half a stroke and a beating. ‘Tis your honour.”

The consciousness of having touched up the ‘Frisco men seemed to have a salutary influence on Mr. McMurtrie’s play. He was in the top of form, won the first two holes, and was in the act of lifting his club to drive off from the tee of number three, when a faint buzzing sound from the direction of the lake caused him to suspend the stroke and glance over the placid blue water. Far away in the sky he saw a dark speck about the size of a swallow, which, however, grew with extraordinary rapidity, and in a few moments declared itself to be an aeroplane containing two men.

“Be jabbers!” quoth Mr. McMurtrie, resting his club on the ground and watching the flying machine with eyes in which might have been discerned a shade of misgiving.

It was, perhaps, thirty seconds from the time when he first caught sight of it that the aeroplane came perpendicularly above his head, the whirring ceased, and the machine

descended with graceful swoop upon the well-cropt turf within fifty yards of the spot where the two golfers stood. As soon as it alighted, Mr. McMurtrie handed his sticks to the caddie, and, as one released from a spell, hurried to meet the man who had just stepped out of the car.

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"That's Toronto over yonder?" said Smith without ceremony.

"Indeed it is," replied McMurtrie, taking stock of the dirty dishevelled figure. "Your name's not Smith?"

"Indeed it is!"

"Holy Moses!" ejaculated McMurtrie, and, to Smith's amazement, he turned his back and sprinted at the speed of a race-horse towards the club-house a few hundred yards away. He rushed to the telephone box, rang up his office, and, catching at his breath, waited with feverish eagerness for the answer to his call.

"You there, Daniels? I'm McMurtrie. For any sake stop press, cancel that leader, put back the tariff, votes for women, anything, only stop it.... What!... Edition off the machine!... Don't let a copy leave the office.... What!... First deliveries made!... Recall 'em, or the paper's ruined. Smith's here!... No, This-something Smith ... no, you ass, the naval lieutenant, he flying man: don't you understand!... understand!... are you there?... Get out a special edition at once.... Where's Davis? Bring him to the 'phone to take a note.... That you, Davis? Take this down.... 'As we go to press we have the best of evidence for the statement that the marvellous world-flight of that intrepid young airman, Lieutenant Thistledown Smith, of the British Navy, is a sober fact, and not, as our sceptical wiseacres have asserted, an ingeniously concocted hoax. Lieutenant Smith descended at 3:50 this afternoon on the Scarborough Bluffs, having accomplished the enormous distance from San Francisco without a stop, in the marvellous time of twelve hours, twenty-one minutes, and fourteen seconds. In our final edition, which will be accelerated, we shall publish an interview with Lieutenant Smith, with exclusive particulars of his remarkable voyage and his romantic career."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Smith dryly. He had entered with Mr. Cleave, and heard the frenzied editor's concluding sentences. "To begin with, I stopped at St. Paul, and was lucky enough to escape without attracting any attention. I shouldn't have been here but for the storm."

"For goodness' sake, Lieutenant, don't tell anybody that. A little stop at St. Paul isn't worth making a fuss about. You'll come along into the city with me, and we will get a few of the boys together and give you a topping dinner."

"I'd rather be hanged," said Smith. "The fact is, I only came down to get enough petrol on board to take me across the Atlantic. You can tell me where to get what I want?"

"Indeed I can. I tell you what. I'll 'phone for the petrol—how much do you want?—and get it out here in no time. You won't mind me ringing up a few particular friends, and inviting them out to see you?"

“Please don’t do anything of the kind. I’m very tired; I’m not presentable; and I’ve no time to spare.”

“Sure you wouldn’t be after declining to answer a question or two—to be worked up into an interview, you know?”

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“Really, I’ve nothing to tell. You appear to know a good deal about me already, and I’m sure your imagination can supply the rest.”

“But there’s a gap, lieutenant. We can’t account for you between Port Darwin and Honolulu.”

“We’re wasting time,” said Smith despairingly. “Be so good as to order up the petrol; then I’ll give you a few headings.”

McMurtrie was delighted. He gave the order to a firm in the city, requesting that the petrol should be sent out by motor at once. Then he took Smith and Cleave into the luncheon-room, which they had to themselves, ordered a meal for Smith, and drinks for Cleave and himself, and while Smith was eating, filled his note-book with jottings, which he foretold would sell out two editions of his paper like winking.

Rodier, meanwhile, was cleaning the engine.

To execute an order smartly is one of the first of business virtues. Smith was satisfied that the virtue was appreciated in Toronto: the petrol arrived, as McMurtrie assured him, in the shortest possible time. Unluckily the Toronto men of business had their share of humanity’s common failing—if it is a failing—curiosity. McMurtrie, with Smith at his elbow, had scrupulously refrained from explaining what the petrol was wanted for; his assistant, Daniels, had been too busy seeing the special edition to press to run about gossiping; and Davis, the shorthand-writer, the third in the secret, had become so mechanical that nothing stirred emotion within him; he wrote of murders, assassinations, political convulsions, Rooseveltian exploits, diplomatic indiscretions, everything but football matches, with the same pencil and the same cold, inhuman precision. But it happened that one of the compositors in the *Sphere* printing office, who took a lively interest in the affairs of his fellow mortals, had a bet with a friend in the plumbing line about this very matter of the mysterious flying men. No sooner had he set up his portion of the editor’s note than he begged leave of absence for half-an-hour from the overseer, whipped off his apron, and rushed off to demand his winnings before the loser had time to spend them in the *Blue Lion* on the way home from work. They repaired, nevertheless, to the *Blue Lion* to settle their account; they told the news to the barman, who passed it to the landlord; a publisher’s clerk heard it, and repeated it to the manager; the manager acquainted the head of the firm as he went out to tea; the publisher mentioned it in an off-hand way to the man next him at the cafe; and—to roll the snowball no further—half Toronto was in possession of the news before the *Sphere* appeared on the streets.

The result was a general exodus in the direction of the Scarborough Bluffs. On foot, on bicycles, in cabs, motor-cars, trolley-cars, drays, and all kinds of vehicles, every one who had a tincture of sporting spirit set off to see two men and a structure of metal and canvas—quite ordinary persons and things, but representing a Deed and an Idea.

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Thus it happened that close behind the dray conveying the petrol came a long procession, the sound of whose coming announced it from afar.

"'Tis the way of us in Toronto," said McMurtrie soothingly, when Smith vented his annoyance.

The crowd invaded the club-grounds, to the horror of the green-keepers, and rolled past the club-house to the aeroplane, where Rodier, having finished cleaning, was regaling himself with an excellent repast sent out to him by Mr. McMurtrie. Cheers for Lieutenant Smith arose; Rodier smiled and bowed, not ceasing to ply his knife and fork until a daring youth put his foot upon the aeroplane. Then Rodier dropped knife and fork, and rushed like a cat at the intruder. The Frenchness of his language apprised the spectators that they were on the wrong scent, and they demanded to know where Lieutenant Smith was. Knowing Smith's dislike of demonstrations, Rodier was about to point lugubriously to the edge of the cliff, when some one shouted "Here he is!" and the mob flocked towards the club-house, from which Smith had just emerged. Rodier seized the opportunity to finish his meal, and direct the operations of the men who had brought the petrol.

Smith had not found himself in so large a crowd of English-speaking people since he had left London. The early morning enthusiasm of the San Francisco journalists was hard to bear, but the afternoon enthusiasm of Toronto was terrible. Hundreds of young fellows wanted to hoist him to their shoulders; dozens of opulent citizens perspired to carry him to the city in their cars; some very young ladies panted to kiss him; and a score of journalists buzzed about him, but upon them McMurtrie smiled with a look of conscious superiority. Smith whispered to him. The editor nodded.

"Gentlemen!" he shouted, holding up his hand.

"Silence!... Hear, hear!... S-s-sh!... Don't make such a row!... Same to you!... Let's hear what Jack McMurtrie has got to say."

Thus the babel was roared down.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said McMurtrie; "Mr. Smith—"

"Three cheers for Smith!" shouted some one; horns blurted; from the edge of the crowd the first notes of "For he's a jolly good fellow" were heard, and they sang it through twice, so that those who had missed the beginning should not be hurt in their feelings.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began McMurtrie again, when he could make his voice heard, "Mr. Smith, who is rather hoarse from constant exposure to the night air, asks me to thank you for the warmth of your reception. He has been good enough to give me full particulars of his wonderful journey, which you will find in the final edition of the *Sphere*.

As I've no doubt at all that you are anxious to have the chance of seeing Mr. Smith performing the evolutions which up to this time have been witnessed by next to nobody but the stars and the flying fishes, he has consented, at my request, to give a demonstration, provided that you'll allow him a clear run, and don't be accessory to your own manslaughter."

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This announcement was greeted with loud cheers. The crowd fell back, allowing Smith a free course to the aeroplane.

“Bedad,” said McMurtrie; “I wouldn’t wonder but they tear me to pieces before I get safe home. But I’ll skip into a motor-car as soon as you are started. Now, is there anything I can do for you before you go?”

“Only send two cables for me; one to my sister: here’s the address; say simply ‘All well.’ The other to Barracombe, 532 Mincing Lane, London, asking him to meet me at home at eleven p.m., to-morrow. You won’t forget?”

“I will not. But you’re a cool hand, to be sure.”

A space was cleared; the aeroplane ran off, soared aloft, and for a few seconds circled over the heads of the spectators. Then a voice came to them from the air, not so much like Longfellow’s falling star as an emission from a gramophone.

“Good-bye, friends. Thanks for your kind reception. Sorry I can’t stay any longer; but I’ve got to be in Portsmouth, England within twenty-four hours. Good-bye.”

The aeroplane wheeled eastward, and shot forward at a speed that made the onlookers gasp. When it had disappeared, they became suddenly alive to the suspicion that Jack McMurtrie had practised a ruse on them. They gave a yell and looked round for him. A motor-car was making at forty miles an hour for Toronto.

CHAPTER XVII

A MIDNIGHT VIGIL

Mr. William Barracombe was the most punctual of men. He entered his office in Mincing Lane precisely at ten o’clock on Thursday morning. His letters had already been sorted and arranged in two neat piles on his desk. Topmost on one of them was a cablegram from Toronto: “Meet me home eleven p.m. Smith.” He never admitted that anything would surprise him, and in fact he showed no sign of excitement, but looked through his correspondence methodically, distributing the papers among several baskets to be dealt with by respective members of his staff, or by himself. This done, he rang for the office boy, ordered him to remove the baskets, and then took up the cablegram again.

“By Jove!” he said to himself.

He reached down his A B C and looked out a train for Cosham.

“I may as well go down to dinner,” he thought.

His next proceeding was to telephone to his chambers instructing his man to meet him at Waterloo with his suit-case. Then he wrote a telegram to Mrs. Smith announcing that he would dine with her that evening. Thereupon he was ready to tackle the business problems which would absorb his attention until five o'clock.

On arriving at Cosham Park he was taken to the study, where Kate Smith was awaiting him.

"You have heard from Charley?" she said anxiously, after shaking hands.

"Yes. Have you?"

"He wired 'All well.' He is very economical. All his messages have been just those two words, except yesterday's from Honolulu. That was 'Father safe.'"

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"That's magnificent. He didn't tell me that, the rascal. Like you, I have nothing before but 'All well.'"

"Do tell me what he wired you this time. I was afraid when we got your telegram that something had happened."

"Not a bit of it. He expects to be here at eleven."

"How delightful! I am quite proud of him, really. You can come and see Mother now. I wanted to speak to you first because she knows nothing about Charley's journey. I thought it best to keep it from her until I knew about Father, and having kept it so long I decided to leave it for Charley to tell himself. I don't know whether I can manage it. I'm so excited I could scream."

"Don't mind me. Ah! How d'ye do, Mrs. Smith?" The lady had just entered. "You'll forgive my presumption?"

"Not at all—that is, an old friend like you doesn't presume, Mr. Barracombe. Have you heard from Charley lately?"

"A word or two. He's coming home to-night. He asked me to meet him here."

"How vexing! I mean, I wish I had known before; I can tell you what I couldn't tell a stranger: we've fish for only three. But I am glad the dear boy will have a few hours at home before he rejoins his ship. It was very annoying that his leave should be spoilt. I am sure his captain works him too hard."

"I don't fancy he'll consider his leave spoilt. But don't be concerned about the fish; he won't be home till eleven."

"My bed-time is ten; I haven't made an exception for years; but I shall certainly sit up for him; if you'll play cribbage with me to keep me awake. We dine at eight. You know your room?"

A servant entered.

"Please, m'm, there's a man asking for Mr. Charley."

"Who is he, Betts?"

"A stranger to me, m'm. His name is Barton, and he's a farmer sort of man."

"Did you tell him that Mr. Charley is not at home?"

"Yes, m'm. He said he'd wait."

"Tell him that Mr. Charley will not be in till eleven. He had better call again."

The servant returned in a minute or two.

"Please, m'm, the man says he don't mind waiting. He has come miles special to see Mr. Charley, and he says he won't be put off. He seems a bit put out, m'm."

"I'll go and see him, Mother," said Kate. "It may be important."

"Perhaps Mr. Barracombe will go with you, my dear. The man may be intoxicated."

Kate and Mr. Barracombe proceeded to the hall, where stood a man in rough country garments, his calves encased in brown leather leggings.

"You wish to see my brother?" said Kate.

"I do so, if Mr. Charles Thusidger Smith, R.N., be your brother, miss. He give me this card wi's name prented on it, and vowed and declared he'd send me a cheque as soon as he got my bill for the damage he done. 'Tis a week come Saturday since I sent my bill, and daze me if I've got a cheque or even had any answer. That's not fair dealing; it bean't proper; that's what I say."

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Mr. Barracombe's eyes twinkled. He glanced at Kate, and said—

“Your name is B-B—”

“Barton, sir; Firtop Farm, Mottisfont.”

“What is this b-b-bill for d-d-damages you speak of?”

“Why, sir, 'twas like this. Last Thursday night as was, I was just a-strippin' off my coat to go to bed when I heard a randy of a noise out-along, and my dogs set up a-barkin', and goin' to look, there was a airyplane had shoved hisself into my hayrick, and a young feller a-splutterin' and hollerin', and usin' all manner of heathen language to my dog. He cooled down arter a bit, when I'd spoke to him pretty straight, axin' who'd pay for the mess he'd made, and he went down-along to village, sayin' he'd take a bed there for hisself and his man, and pay me what was fair. Drown me if he wasn't back in half-an-hour, all of a heat, tellin' me in a commandin' way—being an officer by what he said—to pull down my fence and help him hoist that airyplane on to the road. I wouldn't stir a finger till he'd promised faithful to pay, not me; then we worked me and some labourin' men he brought, till we was all of a sweat, and we got the dratted thing out, and off she went, whizzin' and buzzin' in a way I never did see. Come mornin' I took a look at things, and there was half my hay not worth a cuss for horse or ass, and thirty feet of fence fit for nowt but firewood. 'Send in your bill,' says he, and send it I did, and neither song nor sixpence have I got for it. Thinks I, I'll go and see if he give me a right name and address, and a mighty moil 'twas to find the place, and no train back till mornin', and my wife don't know where I be.”

“Very annoying. What's the amount of your b-b-bill?”

“Here it be. Cast your eye on it, sir. I ain't overcharged a penny.”

He handed Mr. Barracombe a soiled paper folded many times—“To damage to hay, repairing fence, and cleaning up, L4 2_s_ 4-1/2_d_.”

“What's the ha'penny?” asked Mr. Barracombe.

“I never thowt there'd be any question of a ha'penny, drown me if I did. The ha'penny be for the ball of twine we used to get fence straight. I didn't want it set up all crissmacross, mind 'ee, and you have to draw a line same as when you're plantin' 'taties.”

“Well, Mr. B-B-Barton, I'm sorry Mr. Smith isn't at home, but the f-fact is he's been for a voyage round the world, and won't be home till eleven.”

“That's a good 'un. Round the world! Why, I tell 'ee this was only a se'nnight ago. I seed him myself. He couldn't get a half nor a quarter round the world in the time. My



son Jock be a sailor, and he don't do it under six months. That won't wash with Isaac Barton. No, no, if he'll be home at eleven he hain't been round the world. Anyway, I'll bide till he comes. I dussn't show my face to home without L4 2_s._ 4-1/2_d._, railway fare extry."

"If that's the case I'd b-better p-p-pay you myself. Mr. Smith will settle with me. Here's a f-f-five-pound note: that will pay your b-b-bill and your f-fare, and leave something over for a b-bed in the village if you can't get home to-night."

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“Well now, that’s handsome, be dazed if it hain’t.”

“Just receipt your bill, w-will you? By the b-bye, Mr. Smith didn’t pay you anything on account?”

“I won’t tell a lie. He did. He give me a pound, but that don’t come in the reckonin’. Hay was L3, wood fifteen shillin’, men’s time L1, beer two shillin’, odds and ends five shillin’, nails four-pence, twine a ha’penny, makin’ L5, 2_s._ 4-1/2_d._ I’ve a-took off L1, leavin’ L4 2_s._ 4-1/2_d._”

“Very well. Here’s a s-stamp.”

The farmer receipted the bill.

“Thank’ee, sir.” He cleared his throat, “If I med make so bold, sir, meanin’ no offence—”

“What n-now?”

“Why, sir, speakin’ in my simple common way, I never hears a body stutter in his talk but I think of my brother Sam and how he cured hissself. He was a terrible bad stutterer in his young days, he was, nearly bustin’ hissself tryin’ to get it out, poor soul. But a clever parson chap learned him how to cure hissself, and if I med make so bold, I’ll tell ’ee how ’twas done.”

“I shall be d-delighted.”

“Well, this parson chap—ah! he was a clever feller, everywhere except in the pulpit—he said to my brother, ‘Sam,’ says he—he always talked in that homely way—‘Sam, poor feller, I’ll tell ’ee what the bishop told me when I stuttered so bad I couldn’t say ‘Dearly beloved brethren’ without bub—bub—bubbing awful. ‘Say the bub—bub—bub inside yerself,’ says he, ‘and then you can stutter as long as you like without a soul knowin’ it. My brother Sam thowt ’a med as well give it a trial, and he did, and bless ’ee, in a week he could talk as straightforward as the Prime Minister, and no one ’ud ever know what a terrible lot of b’s and m’s and other plaguey letters he swallowed. Try it, sir; say ‘Baby mustn’t bother mummy’ that way ten times every morning afore breakfast, and ‘Pepper-pots and mustard plasters’ afore goin’ to bed, and I lay you’ll get over it as quick as my brother Sam. Good-night, sir and miss, and thank ’ee.”

“Why *do* you pretend so?” said Kate, laughing, when the door was shut.

“My dear Kate, I have stuttered for pleasure and profit ever since I discovered the efficacy of it at school. When I didn’t know my lesson one day I put on a stammer, and my bub—bub—bubbing, as the farmer calls it, made the master so uncomfortable that, ever afterwards, at the first sign of it he passed me over. That’s why I’m such a fool to-day.”

“You’re incorrigible. Come, it’s time to dress for dinner.”

The time between dinner and eleven passed all too slowly. Mrs. Smith and Barracombe played cribbage; Kate was restless, opening a book, laying it down, touching the piano, going to the window and peering out into the dark.

“Why are you so restless to-night, Kate?” asked her mother. “One would think that Charley had been away for months instead of a week.”

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"Ah, but you see, Mother, he hasn't—"

"Hasn't what—Fifteen two, fifteen four—Well, Kate?"

"Has never been quite so late home on his last night of leave, has he, Mother?"

"That is true—one for his nob. I really think they ought to make him a captain, for he seems to be an exceedingly useful officer. He went away last Thursday, as I understood, on some business connected with a wreck. I do hope none of the poor men were drowned. I often think of my husband, Mr. Barracombe, on the other side of the world, going about among those dreadful coral reefs, and I wish he would retire and live safely at home. I could never understand what he finds interesting in bits of stone and things of that sort, but of course he is a very distinguished man."

So the good lady prattled on, placidly unconscious of her nearness to the border-line between comedy and tragedy.

The clock struck eleven.

"Thank you, Mr. Barracombe; I have enjoyed the game," said Mrs. Smith. "Charley will soon be here."

"Let us go to the door," said Kate. "Perhaps we shall hear him."

"Mr. Barracombe will go with you, Kate; I am a little afraid of the night air. Wrap yourself up."

The two went to the conservatory door, overlooking the park. The sky was clear, the air was still; not a sound was to be heard. Every now and then a broad flash of light fleetingly illuminated the sky; it was no doubt the searchlight at Spithead.

"I wish he would come," said Kate. "It would be terrible if anything went wrong at the very last. How far is it across the Atlantic?"

"It's three thousand five hundred miles to Liverpool from New York, and rather more from Toronto; a ticklish journey, with no chance of landing till he gets to Ireland."

"It makes me shudder to think of him crossing the sea in that frail machine."

"People shuddered at the first railway train, speed ten miles an hour; now we grumble at fifty. In a few years we shall have an aerial Marathon, with the circumference of the globe for the course."

"Hark! What is that?"

“The rumble of a train,” said Barracombe, after a moment’s silence. “Shall we walk down to the sheds? There’s a clear view from there, without trees; we could see the aeroplane a long way off, though probably we should hear it first.”

They went on, remained at the sheds for some minutes, scanning the sky, then retraced their steps. A quarter-past eleven struck. Kate grew more and more anxious, and Barracombe found it more and more difficult to talk unconcernedly. They returned to the house, and entering through the conservatory, discovered Mrs. Smith asleep in her chair. Barracombe noiselessly put some coal on the fire, and they stole out again.

Half-past eleven.

“Don’t you think you had better go to bed, Kate?”

“I couldn’t sleep if I did, Billy. I couldn’t even lie still. Oh, how helpless one feels! Charley may be drowning, and we don’t know it, and can’t do anything to help.”

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"Pull yourself together, Kate. I am sure he is all right. He probably started later than he intended. You may be sure he wouldn't start unless the engine was in thorough good order. Let us go in and play patience."

"No, no; I must move. Let us walk down the road."

Barracombe was more perturbed than he would admit. It was unlike Smith to miscalculate. His telegram was probably sent off at the moment of starting, or even after he had started, from Toronto. If the engine had worked at all, it would work at full speed, so that the loss of time on the journey implied either contrary winds, a mistaken course, or a serious mishap. Kate was so little in the mood for talking that Barracombe in responsive silence could toss the various probabilities about in his mind until he felt a nervous excitability that annoyed him.

They walked up and down the silent road. The church clock struck a quarter to twelve. The minutes dragged until it was again heard. A little after twelve they stopped short at the same moment; Kate grasped Barracombe's arm.

"Listen!" she said.

A faint sound, like the murmur of the wind, but becoming louder with extraordinary rapidity.

"Oh, Billy!" cried the girl. "Run; he'll be at the sheds first."

She caught his hand and tugged him towards the park gate, a hundred yards distant.

"My dear Kate!" he protested; "I'm not so young as I was. *Let* him be there first, confound him!"

But he ran all the same. The engine was roaring overhead, *fortissimo*; looking up, the two panting runners saw the flashlight. A sudden silence, as when the word *tacet* in an orchestral score hushes to silence bassoons and horns, drums and cymbals, all the instruments that but a moment before were convulsing the air with myriad waves of sound.

"He's gliding!" cried Kate, standing breathless at the door of the shed. The machine descended silently and rested on the smooth level sward. Kate darted forward.

"Oh, Charley!" she cried; "you've come!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAST LAP

“Rather late, ain’t you!” said Barracombe, as Smith jumped from the aeroplane.

“Hallo, Sis. Hallo, old man!” cried Smith. “We’ve done it; seven days, to the minute!”

Kate flew into his arms: only next day did she discover the ruin of her dress.

“I’ve a voice like a corncake,” said Smith, disengaging himself. “Glad to see you, Billy.”

“You’re a wonder! But, God bless me! you look awfully done up. You look positively ill. Come up to the house at once; we don’t want you crocked.”

“Come on, Roddy,” said Smith hoarsely. “You’ll stay with us to-night. Leave the machine for once. You see, Billy, I have to rejoin at nine to-morrow—to-morrow, I say; I mean this morning. That gives me nine hours, and as I haven’t been to bed for a week I want seven good solid hours sleep.”

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"But really, Charley, you don't look fit to rejoin," said Kate. "Your cheeks are dreadfully thin, and your voice is nearly gone."

"Well, of course, I'm dead tired; feel all to pieces, in fact. But all I want is sleep."

"And a medical certificate," put in Barracombe. "I've known a fellow get two months' leave for what he called a strained heart. Strained it to some purpose, for he got married before his leave was up. We'll get you a certificate—a doctor's, not a parson's."

"I don't mind if you do, after I've rejoined; but I must show up without fail at nine a.m. I'm later than I meant to be. Got snowed up at St. John's."

"You didn't come straight from Toronto, then!"

"No. Didn't care to risk it. Besides, it would have meant eighteen hours in the air at a stretch. I don't think Roddy and I could have stood that. I took St. John's—in Newfoundland, Kate—on the way."

"But I thought Newfoundland was near the North Pole."

"A common mistake. St. John's is considerably southward of our latitude. But they've had a cold snap there lately, and we came down in a snowdrift and had to be dug out. We had an easy flight across the Atlantic; the engine has behaved splendidly all through, thanks to Roddy. But I'm glad to be home; by Jove, I am!"

This conversation passed as they walked up to the house. Mrs. Smith had been wakened by the noise of the engine, and stood just within the door to welcome her son. She, too, was struck by his haggard appearance, and declared she must send for the doctor.

"Why, Mother, you're not going to coddle me at my age," he said. "You ought to be in bed. Off you go: I shall be all right in the morning. I shall have something to tell you then. Breakfast at eight sharp, by the way; or I shan't get to Portsmouth in time."

"Very well, my dear. Simmons is up, keeping some food warm for you. I will tell him. Goodnight."

"I've such loads to tell you," said Smith, when she had gone; "but I'm afraid it must wait. By the way, Kate, I suppose nothing of importance has come for me?"

"A few letters, mostly from the people you disappointed, I suspect. I'll fetch them."

When she returned, Smith immediately noticed a long official envelope in the bundle. He tore it open.

“Great Scott!” he cried. “An order to rejoin on Wednesday without fail. That’s a nasty whack.”

“Any explanation?” asked Barracombe.

“Not a word. Some sudden whimsy of the admiral’s, I suppose. Have you got yesterday’s paper, Kate?”

“I remember now,” cried Kate. “How silly of me to forget it! The *Implacable* broke down, and your ship was ordered to replace her.”

“Just my luck!” exclaimed Smith gloomily. “Last time I was late the ship was going shooting. Now I shall miss her altogether when she’s at manoeuvres. Captain Bolitho will put me down as a hopeless rotter.”



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"What nonsense, Charley! You had seven days left, and you're not bound to be within call at a moment's notice. I'm very glad the ship has left Portsmouth, for now you can't rejoin, and you'll have time to rest."

"I'm not so sure, Kate," he cried, suddenly sitting up, and scanning the paper she had brought. "Where's the fleet? Ah! Irish coast. I'll rejoin, as sure as I'm alive. You see, I'm due at nine. I'm not physically incapable, and in the aeroplane I can easily do it if I can find the squadron. The *Implacable* was with the Blue fleet, operating from Bear Haven, I see. It's worth trying, anyhow."

"Magnificent, but absurd," said Barracombe. "You won't find them, either."

"A fiver that I will."

"No, thanks. By the way, you owe me a fiver."

"How's that?"

"Look at this."

He handed Smith Farmer Barton's receipted bill, and related what had happened in the evening.

Smith laughed.

"I'd forgotten him; but his bill is no doubt among this batch. To come back to the point. I am serious. I mean to rejoin my ship at nine. To give myself plenty of time I'll start at six. It's now past twelve; I'll set my alarm clock for six. I'm sorry for Roddy, I'm afraid, he must clean the engine. D'you mind finding him?—Ah! here he is, and Simmons with soup. Thank you, Simmons. Sorry to keep you up so late."

"I'm glad to see you back safe and sound, sir," said the man respectfully.

Smith shot a glance at Rodier, but the look of surprise on the Frenchman's face showed that he, at any rate, had not been talking. Kate's expression proved that she was equally surprised.

"And I hope the Master and Mr. Tom are as well as could be expected, sir," added Simmons.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, I knew the Master had met with a accident—"

"But I cut the paragraph out of the paper," cried Kate.

“Yes, miss, that’s what made me go and buy one. I assure you I haven’t said a word to a soul, miss, guessing as you wanted it kep’ from the Mistress, and you can’t trust female maids.”

“But how did you know I had gone out to the Solomons?” asked Smith.

“’Twas a bit in the *Times* first put me on the scent, sir, about a sensation in Constantinople about two daring and intrepid airmen that came down there sudden-like and went away in a jiff. No names were named, sir, but I guessed it was you and Mr. Rodier.”

“Johnson had discretion, at any rate,” murmured Smith. “Well!”

“Next day there was a bit about two airmen coming down at some place in India, sir. Putting two and two together—”

“I see. No names again?”

“No, sir, not till to-night.”

“To-night, eh?”

“Yes, sir. There’s a bit in the *Evening News* to-night, not strictly true, sir. I’ve got it here.”

He drew the paper from his pocket, and pointed to the following paragraph—

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The mysterious airmen whose doings have been reported at intervals during the last few days have now appeared at San Francisco. One of them is said to be a Lieutenant Thistleton Smith, who, according to our correspondent, explained that he has a bet of L10,000 with a well-known sporting nobleman that he will circle the globe in a fortnight. The general opinion in San Francisco is that these sporadic appearances of airmen in far-distant spots are part of a cleverly devised scheme of world-wide advertisement, engineered by a Chicago pork-packing firm who have more than once displayed considerable ingenuity in pushing their products.

There was general laughter when Smith read this paragraph aloud. Rodier alone was solemn.

"They think we boom pigs!" he cried indignantly. "Pigs themselves."

"Well, Roddy, truth will out," said Smith. "I'm sorry to keep you up, by the way, but I shall have to leave at six o'clock. Would you mind running down to the shed and—cleaning the engine?"

"Mon Dieu! I do nothing for a week but clean the engine."

"Yes, poor chap, but you shall have a rest after this. Go to bed when you've got things shipshape; I shall go alone; only about four hundred miles this time."

"You really mean it, then?" said Barracombe.

"Decidedly. If you knew Captain Bolitho you would see that there's no help for it."

"Well, then, the sooner you eat your supper and get between the sheets the better. I'll tuck you up."

"Tuck in and tuck up. Very well."

"Your bath shall be ready at six, sir," said Simmons.

A few minutes after six o'clock, Smith made his ascent, his departure being witnessed by his sister and Barracombe and the whole domestic staff. He flew rapidly over Hampshire, Dorset, Devon; crossed the Bristol Channel, and made a bee-line for Bear Haven at the entrance to Bantry Bay. Soon after eight he descried a number of dull grey specks strung like beads on the western horizon. They must be one or other of the opposing fleets, either the Reds or the Blues; but which? He must go and see. Altering his course a point or two, in a few minutes he was running down the line of warships, which were steaming line ahead, apparently in the direction of Bear Haven. At a glance he recognized the *Thunderbolt*, notoriously the lame duck of the Reds, lagging three or four miles behind the rest. Smith slowed down to quarter speed as he passed the leading ships, and a few blank shots were fired at him for form's sake, for the guns were

incapable of an inclination that would be dangerous to him at his height of 3,000 feet, even if they were throwing live shell.

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He drew clear of the squadron, and was about to put his engine at full speed again when an aeroplane shot up from the deck of the flagship and started in pursuit, followed at a short interval by a second aeroplane from a vessel some distance down the line. Smith smiled to himself. From what he knew of the service aeroplanes, the *Puck*, as he had now named his vessel, was in no danger of being overtaken; but if the airmen of the Red fleet wanted a run, he was not the man to baulk them. In a few minutes the pursuers began to close in; he increased the speed to eighty miles; still they gained on him. Another notch in the regulator increased his speed to a hundred miles an hour, at which he felt that he should be able to hold his own. He found, however, that one of the aeroplanes was still gaining, and it was not until he had increased his speed another twenty miles that the *Puck* began to draw away.

"Now to business," Smith said to himself.

Paying no more attention to the pursuers, except by a glance to assure himself that, though hopelessly outstripped, they were still following him, he searched the horizon ahead for signs of the Blue fleet. The rugged coast of Cork county had been for some time in sight, and as Smith was well acquainted with it from experience in former manoeuvres, he was able to steer straight for Bear Haven as soon as the landmarks were distinguishable. It was more than half-an-hour after sighting the Red fleet when he flew over Bantry Bay to the harbour. Except for a number of colliers it was empty.

Smith had already decided on his course of action if he should find that the fleet had put to sea. He would adopt the tactics that had succeeded so well in Ysabel Island, searching, not the land this time, but the sea, fanwise, while his fuel lasted. The position of the colliers seemed to indicate that they had only recently been engaged in coaling, so that in all probability the fleet had left that morning and was not far away. Probably, too, it was in the open Atlantic, and not sheltering in any of the innumerable inlets of the western coast. He steered due west, noticing as he did so that the pursuers were still doggedly on his trail, and had gained considerably while he had been investigating the harbour.

He looked at his watch. It was twenty-five minutes to nine. He would reach his ship in time if it were not more than eighty-five miles distant, supposing that it was going in the same direction, or perhaps a hundred and ten if it were coming towards him. Rising to the height of 4,000 feet, he searched the sea in all directions through his binocular. He noticed with amusement that one of the pursuing aeroplanes had come down on Mizzen Head; the other was still labouring after him. There were fishing smacks here and there near the coast, looking like moths. Far to the left he saw a liner pouring its black smoke into the air; it might have been a cockroach in widow's weeds. And there,

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far in the west, what is that? Smoke, or a cloud? In two minutes there is no longer any doubt; in three minutes the shapes of a squadron of battleships can be clearly seen; in five minutes Smith's practised eyes, now that he has descended, can distinguish the *Imperturbable*, flying the admiral's flag, among what to a landsman would appear to be a dozen exactly similar vessels. Glancing back, he sees that the Red Scout has changed her course, and is already only a speck in the southern sky.

It was precisely ten minutes to nine by Smith's watch when the *Puck*, literally received with open arms by two-score sturdy tars, alighted on the deck of the *Imperturbable*.

"Come aboard, sir," said Smith cheerfully to his captain.

"So I see," was the laconic reply.

"Sorry I was away, sir, when your recall arrived—in the South Pacific."

"In the—what?"

"The South Pacific, sir, or thereabouts."

"Don't you think, Mr. Smith, you are going a little too far?" said the captain sternly.

"Well, sir," replied Smith naively, "it was a goodish distance. But I have managed to get back within my leave. Ten minutes to spare, sir."

Captain Bolitho gasped.

"Do you mean to tell me, seriously, you have been to the South Pacific?"

"Certainly, sir. I left home about midnight last Thursday, and got back not quite nine hours ago. Went to the Solomon Islands *via* Penang and Port Darwin, and come home *via* Samoa and 'Frisco."

"But—but—then you have been *round the world*, sir—in *how* long?"

"Seven days, sir. My leave expires at nine this morning."

Mechanically, like a man in a dream, the captain took out his watch.

"Twenty-five minutes past eight," he said. "You needn't have hurried yourself. You've another half-hour by Irish time. Perhaps you'd like to fill it up by a trip round Ireland," he added dryly.

Smith smiled. The first lieutenant broke in—

“Look-out reports, sir, another aeroplane was sighted behind Mr. Smith’s.”

The admiral, who had been an amused auditor of the colloquy between Captain Bolitho and his lieutenant, was a man of intuitions.

“There are no aeroplanes on this coast except the two with the Reds,” he said. “Mr. Smith, you have now reported yourself for duty. Our single aeroplane has broken down; we must impress yours for public service. I will not ask you what you have seen; but you will at once follow the strange aeroplane, and endeavour to find out the position and course of the enemy’s fleet.”

In less than a minute Smith was in the air; in ten minutes he had overtaken the Red aeroplane, flying high as he approached, and hovering over his late pursuer, who made vain efforts to rise above him. The immense engine power of the *Puck* gave her as great an advantage over her rival in soaring as in horizontal speed. By the rules of the manoeuvres the Red aeroplane was out of action as soon as the *Puck* rose vertically above her. Wasting no further time, Smith continued his course, and in half-an-hour sighted the Red squadron, noted its strength and course, and in another half-hour was back on the deck of the *Imperturbable*.

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"I found the enemy, sir, about ninety miles S.S.E., eight battleships and about a dozen scouts. Their course was west."

The admiral made a rapid calculation.

"By Jove!" he said, "they will catch Pomeroy before we join him. But there's time yet. We can warn Pomeroy to meet us twenty miles north-east of the spot previously arranged. I think, Captain Bolitho, we may perhaps overlook Mr. Smith's little irregularity in joining if he gives us a full account of his—er—experiences, after dinner to-night."

"And the Reds, sir?"

"Before dinner, one or the other of us will be out of action. Whether Reds or Blues, we shall have leisure to hear how Mr. Smith went round the world in seven days."

POSTSCRIPT

The following extracts from the Press, neatly pasted in Kate Smith's scrap book, have a certain historical and romantic interest for the persons concerned, directly or indirectly, in the incidents of the foregoing narrative.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

CONSTANTINOPLE, Friday.

The appearance of an aeroplane this morning caused a considerable sensation. It descended in the old archery ground of the Sultans, to the terror of the juvenile population that now uses the Ok Meidan as a common playground. It contained two passengers, and though no authentic information is obtainable, it is rumored that the daring and intrepid airmen have made a rapid flight from Berlin, and are proceeding to Persia on a secret mission connected with the Bagdad railway.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

BOMBAY, Monday.

The natives of the Mekran coast are again showing signs of insubordination. The gunboat *Penguin* has just come into harbour, and her commander, Captain Durward, reports that on Saturday he discovered a crowd of Baluchis in the act of smuggling arms into an apparently innocent fishing-village. He landed a party of bluejackets half a mile east of the village, and swooped upon it simultaneously with an attack from the sea. The villagers scattered in all directions, but the ring-leaders were captured, together

with a large number of rifles and ammunition. The coup reflects the greatest credit on this able and energetic officer.

Later.

The craze for aviation has at last broken out in India. Two airmen made a sudden appearance at Karachi on Saturday, and departed after a brief stay for the interior. They are said to be in the employment of the Nizam of Hyderabad, who is spending vast sums on his latest hobby.

BRISBANE, Monday.

News has just arrived by wireless from the gunboat *Frobisher*, off Ysabel Island, that the crew of the survey-vessel *Albatross*, which was wrecked there a fortnight ago, are safe. The party, it will be remembered, includes the famous geologist, Dr. Thesiger Smith. The message is very brief, and a reference it makes to an aeroplane is thought to be an error.—REUTER.

SINGAPORE, Wednesday.

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The Penang correspondent of the *Free Press* telegraphs—"The barque *Elizabeth* put in to-day in tow of a steamtug of this port, and reported an extraordinary incident in mid-ocean. She was dismasted a fortnight ago in a cyclone south of the Andamans, and while drifting, fire broke out in the forehold, and was kept under with the greatest difficulty. Her plight was discovered and reported here by the driver of an aeroplane who was making a flight in the neighbourhood, and the tug was immediately sent to her assistance. Conflicting rumours are prevalent as to the identity of the aviator in question; Captain Bunce, of the *Elizabeth*, insists that the airman's name was Smith, but his account is rather confused, and the most generally accepted opinion is that he is an officer of the German navy, which has recently adopted the aeroplane for scouting purposes. On no other supposition can his presence so far from land be accounted for. Owing to the facts that he arrived in the night of Sunday and departed immediately, no trustworthy information is obtainable."—REUTER.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

TORONTO, Wednesday.

The later editions of the *Sphere* contain a detailed account of the extraordinary world-flight accomplished by Lieutenant Thesiger Smith of the British navy, which sets at rest the rumours and speculations of the past week. Lieutenant Smith left London last Friday at 12.30 a.m. (Greenwich time), and arrived here this afternoon, descending on the golf links on Scarborough Bluffs. I will wire full particulars later.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

PARIS, Monday.

The Cross of the Legion of Honour was to-day presented by the President of the Republic to M. Laurent Rodier, who accompanied your Lieutenant Thesiger Smith last month on his adventurous flight around the world. It is understood that the French Government has taken up the remarkable invention due to M. Rodier and his English confrere, and has offered M. Rodier the headship of a new State aeronautical department.

THE NEGLECT OF GENIUS.

To the Editor of the *Spectator*.

SIR,—The paragraph in the *Times* of Monday relating to the honour awarded to M. Rodier, suggests sad reflections to a patriotic Englishman. We have not as yet heard that Lieutenant Smith's wonderful achievement has been in any way recognized by our government. Abroad, genius is fostered: here, it is slighted. How long shall such things be?—I am, Sir, etc.,



PRO BONO PUBLICO.

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[We have repeatedly declared our hatred of Protection in every shape and form, so that we shall not be misunderstood when we say that we cordially endorse our correspondent's complaint. If the present Government, which in general has our hearty support, devoted as much energy to the cultivation of British Genius as it now devotes to the spoon-feeding of British Industry, we should have less reason to fear the growing menace of Socialism.—ED. *Spectator*.]

The King has been pleased to confer the honour of a knighthood on Lieutenant Charles Thesiger Smith, R.N.

THESIGER-SMITH—BUNCE.—On July 12th, at St. George's, Hanover Square, by the Rev. Canon Montague, uncle of the bridegroom, Sir Charles Thesiger Smith, Captain R.N., elder son of Dr. Thesiger Smith, M.A., F.R.S., to Margaret, only daughter of the late John Bunce, master mariner.

AN AIRMAN'S WEDDING.

An interesting announcement in another column recalls a romance of the air and sea. Sir Charles Thesiger Smith, whose famous flight round the world last year has not yet been repeated, was yesterday married to Miss Margaret Bunce, the lady whom he rescued in mid-ocean from a burning vessel, and carried with him to safety. Many notable people attended to witness the ceremony, and the presents include a gold scarf-pin in the shape of an aeroplane, the gift of the King.