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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK "GREEN BALLS" : THE ADVENTURES OF A NIGHT-BOMBER ***

"GREEN BALLS"

"GREEN BALLS"

The Adventures of a Night-Bomber

BY

PAUL BEWSHER

William Blackwood and Sons
Edinburgh and London

1919

TO

*MY FAITHFUL FRIEND,
WHO
DURING THE WAR
PROTECTED ME FROM THE ENEMY
AND A THOUSAND TIMES SAVED MY LIFE,
THE NIGHT SKY.*

PREFACE.

Lest it should appear that in this book I have worked the personal pronoun to death, I wish to explain my reasons for describing always my own feelings, my own experiences, my own thoughts. I feel that the lay public who did not fly in the war, and knew little of its excitements and monotonies, would rather hear of the experiences of one person, related by himself, than merely a journalistic record of events which had come to his notice. Therefore I have tried faithfully to describe the sensations, the strange inexplicable fears, the equally inexplicable fearlessness, of a desk-bound London youth, pitchforked in a moment into the turmoil of war, and into a hitherto unknown, untried occupation—bombing at night from the air.

Those who read this book will never see me—I will be to them but a name—so I feel that my egotism is only an apparent one, and that I am justified in slightly transgressing the service tradition of personal silence in order to give as vivid a portrayal as possible of a branch of war which, in England at any rate, influenced the general public more than any other.

The fragments of verse quoted at the beginning of each chapter are taken from the author's

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"GREEN BALLS."

I.

THE DAWN PATROL.

"Sometimes I fly at dawn above the sea,
Where, underneath, the restless waters flow,
Silver and cold and slow...."

—*The Dawn Patrol.*

Somebody shakes me by my shoulder, and I wake to the consciousness of a dark room and a determined steward.

"Four o'clock, sir!"

I get out of my warm bed, very unwillingly, and dress lightly in a white cricket shirt, grey flannel trousers, and a blue pea-jacket and a muffler, and go out of the hut to the garage. Dawn is just breaking. The sky is still bright with stars, and a moon is drowsily hanging like a golden gong in the south-west. The air is extraordinarily fresh and cold, and soon I am tearing joyfully through it on a clamorous motor-bicycle. Down the road through the marshes I rush on my mile-long ride to the sheds.

Outside the office I dismount and go inside the bare room, with its charts and its long table, and meet the sleepy-eyed duty-officer, who is wearing "gum-boots" and an overcoat over his pyjamas, and is obviously looking forward to settling down once more to sleep. The duty-pilot comes in after him, with a flying-cap on his head, and a muffler round his neck, and a pair of gloves in his hand. A welcome cup of tea is brought in by a massive bluejacket, and then I snatch up a life-belt, a pair of binoculars, the Thermos flask and Malted Milk tablets, my charts, and a few odd necessaries, and, accompanied by the pilot, I go over to the slipway, at the end of which floats the seaplane, with its wide white wings reflecting the pale light of dawn. A group of men in great rubber boots stand in the water holding the wings.

When I get to the edge of the water I climb on to the back of one, and he wades out into the water until I can stand on the float and climb up into a seat in front of the pilot.

It is an ample seat—wide enough for three people—and I sit on a soft cushion over a petrol-tank. The wireless sets, in varnished wooden boxes, are fixed in position in front of me. My machine-gun is ready to be fixed at a moment's notice, and I settle myself into the seat and put down my various impedimenta and wait for the start.

The pilot in the back seat examines his instruments, and soon there is a hissing noise as he turns on the compressed air. The propeller in front of me moves round slowly. The engine fires and begins to start with a roaring noise.

The propeller vanishes as it gathers speed, and I can see straight ahead with an uninterrupted view.

The engine is tested with men hanging on to the wings. The pilot waves his hand, the men leave go, and we begin to move out across the wide harbour with its grey battleships and lean destroyers, and merchant ships painted in strange patches.

The moon is growing paler now, and nearly all the stars have vanished before the silver of the dawn. On our right is the outline of a red-roofed harbour town, quiet and asleep. On the left are the great sheds of the station, and the low green hills beyond. We face the wind. The engine recommences its roar, and the seaplane begins to move quickly across the water with a steady noise. Faster and faster it rushes on, then begins to leap from wave-top to wave-top until we rise into the air, and move at a rushing pace just over the pale oily water.

The roar of the motor is soon registered no more by my ear, lulled by its perpetuity. I find it glorious to be winging my way into the heart of the dawn over the silver water. Above a long floating boom we pass, and turn east towards the wide misty level of the sea. Ahead of me in the haze burns a red-eyed sun, looking hot and only half awake.

Far to my left and far to my right is a faint grey coast-line as we move up the widening estuary. I bring out a little blue-covered note-book, and sharpen a pencil and prepare to record the name, nationality, and type of every ship, with a brief note of its cargo, course, and characteristics.

Through the haze suddenly appears a little group of ships anchored round a stout red lightship, with its great lantern at the top of the mast and the cheery white-painted name on its side.

My pencil is very busy as we sweep round in circles, while I make notes of the different types of ships. Neutral ships being luridly decorated with painted colours and their names in enormous white letters, are easily recorded. It is somehow very dramatic to see a great steamer loom through the mist, and to read *Jan Petersen-Norge* or *Hector-Sverige* on its black sides as it sweeps majestically under the seaplane, its churning propeller leaving a wide lane of white bubbling foam.

It gives such a splendid idea of far-flung commerce—of nation linked up with nation by these loaded ships. You realise how the forests of Scandinavia have been despoiled to fill these decks with the towering piles of clean fair wood. There is something in the passing of the great ship proclaiming its nationality and origin in such bold characters that seems like the triumphant note of an organ.

Yet these signs are the heartfelt appeal of an apprehensive and vulnerable vessel, hoping against hope that the vivid stripes of colour and the proclamation of nationality will protect it from the cruel, greedy submarine.

Then we leave the little crowd of anchored ships below and sail on into the mist to the lonelier levels of the sea. Now and then we overtake some heavily-laden freighter, low in the water, pounding outwards on its hazardous journey, its plain unlettered sides showing that it is a vessel of the Allies.

In front of me I wind a little handle. This causes the wireless set to connect with the engine, and the little motor revolves rapidly. I press the brass key, and a blue spark spits and splutters inside one of the boxes. Then I call up the seaplane station far behind me in the mist and record my position. Putting the telephone-receiver over my ears, I hear above the roar of our engines the sharp staccato signals of some warship below us on the grey sea. As I move a lever round a series of studs I hear it more clearly or more faintly as I get more or less in "tune" with it. Then I remove the receiver, having tested the wireless instruments and found them correct, and once more look over the side to the chilly sea.

We fly over three or four little trawlers steaming slowly along, dredging the waterway for mines. Then over two leaning masts of some wreck, which pierce the water like thin lances. Next we pass above a Belgian relief ship, advertising its nature by means of innumerable placards and flags and colours, which are yet not sufficient to keep it immune from the Germans and their unreliable promises. Now it is a familiar line of mud-hoppers carrying a load of dredged mud to some deep dumping-ground. Now over a couple of lean grey torpedo-boats, nosing everywhere, carefully and suspiciously, protecting the Channels.

So at times over ever-varying craft, and at times over grey wet loneliness, we travel on in our long patrol, until at last the squat red shape of a lightship appears through the haze, and we know that we have reached the limit of our outward journey. We sweep low over the isolated vessel, wave our hands to the men on board, and start to return home by a different route, and roar on over mile after mile of water glittering in the sun, which is slowly dissipating the mist of early morning.

Soon a group of ships are met steaming along towards us, and I recognise the vessels which I had seen anchored together waiting for the dawn. They are left behind us, and we regain the land from which we started. Over the sleeping seaport town we pass, and can see its red and brown roofs lit by the sun, and its empty streets. Then we sweep over the harbour, the pilot turns the machine round to face the wind, and the roar of the engine stops. We begin to glide down slowly, drawing nearer and nearer to the water. Just above the surface of the glittering waves we rush, touch it with a long splash, and slowly pull up and stop, floating once more in the harbour. The engines roar out again, and we "taxi" quickly over the little waves in long even jolts towards the slipway, where the men are waiting to help us ashore. When we are alongside they walk out to us in their waterproof thigh-boots and carry me on to the slipway.

I walk quickly through the hangars across the grass-covered lawn to the office, and sitting down at a typewriter begin to transcribe at once the notes I have written in my little blue book.

6.40. British cargo steamer, 5000 tons, steering S.W. Two patrol boats steering E.

6.45. Norwegian wood steamer *Christiania*, 3000 tons, steering W. in East Deep—

I write, and one after another I visualise the vessels as I record their positions for the benefit of the authorities.

As soon as the report is finished I give it to a messenger, who takes it down to the motor-boat which is waiting to carry it to a warship. Then I rush across the marsh on my motor-bicycle to the mess, and to a late but welcome breakfast.

The small amount of impression left by any particular flight is remarkable. If in the middle of the breakfast some one had said, "You have been fifty miles out to sea, charging through the air at sixty miles an hour, this morning!" I should almost have been surprised, and might have denied it. After your return you quickly forget the voyage you have made. I found the same in night-bombing. You are called away at dinner after beginning your soup. You go to Ostend, drop bombs, and return and carry on with the fish. By the time you are helping yourself to the vegetables you have a vague remembrance of a disturbed dinner, but little more.

You have a distant memory of innumerable searchlights waving like long weeds in an evil pool, and of the dim sweep of the Belgian coast, with the star-shells of Nieuport; but it is like the faint remembrance of a weird dream, and little more.

This brief description of a seaplane patrol is an introduction to the portrayal of a night-flier's existence, because these flights over the sea were the prelude to my flying among the stars, and I found in them the strange allurements that I found later, in an even greater degree, in my night journeys.

It is a glorious sensation to roar on, a few hundred feet above the sea, with a white clinging mist all around in a vapoury circle, knowing by instinct where you are, and looking ahead for the little chequered buoy or red lightship to appear at its due moment; to hear the pilot's shouted inquiry, and to write "The Cat" or "Deep Sands" or "King's Channel" or "Long Deep," or one of those splendid-sounding sailor's names, on a piece of paper for him; to fly low over the lonely lightship, and wave a dawn greeting to the watchmen on the deck; to see a long British submarine rise dripping, to welcome the morning, from its all-night sleep far below the restless waters; to fly like a gull, flashing white wings towards the flaming East.

I found the same delight in poring over my charts and drawing a line right out to sea and back again, as later I found in checking on the map the villages and bridges over which I passed on my way to Bruges and Ghent.

Once or twice I had a forced landing at sea. One incident is peculiarly vivid in my memory. Lightly clad, I flew on the seaplane about fifteen miles from land. There was a flaming sunset, and it was growing dark. We were about to turn when the engine began to splutter and pop. The pilot tried to cure its disease, but it was in vain. He throttled the engine back and slowly glided down. The few scattered ships and the dim line of coast slowly disappeared as we drew nearer to the surface of the water, and when we finally landed we were out of sight of any ship at all.

The pilot climbed on to the floats and tried to start the engine again by swinging the propeller, but with no success. Meanwhile it was growing darker. The red and orange splendours of the West were rapidly dying away before the creeping shadows of the East. The calm oily water reflected strangely the afterglow. As I sat on the float, the water lapped melodiously against it, and the shoals of jellyfish which passed by seemed to be jeering at me.

There were no ships in sight, and a cold night wind began to come across the quivering, shining surface of the sea, and the horizon vanished in a faint haze.

The pilot loaded his Very pistol with a cartridge and fired it. A great ball of white fire sailed through the air and dropped hissing in the water.

Meanwhile, in our scant clothes we were getting cold. Soon it would be quite dark, and we had only half a dozen signal lights left, while we were slowly drifting, we knew not whither, with the tide.

Every quarter of an hour the pilot fired a white Very's light. I found it very lonely sitting in the drifting seaplane, surrounded by a misty circle of water, with darkness creeping over the sea.

After some time we saw, far away, a red moving light. At once the pilot fired another signal. The red light moved on and drew nearer to us. Soon we could see the shape of the boat on which it was, and to our joy realised that it was a British destroyer. After a good deal of manœuvring it drew alongside us. We hailed it and shouted our explanations. A boat was lowered from the destroyer, and rowed over to us carrying a hawser. When we had fastened this to the seaplane we got into the boat, and were rowed to the waiting vessel.

The commander explained that we had landed in the midst of sandbanks, and that it had been a difficult matter to draw near to us.

Soon we were dining in the little mess, and we were very glad to get under cover again, and to have something to eat. The "skipper" was most hospitable, and afterwards, I am ashamed to say, we played "Slippery Ann," and won some money off him.

At last we arrived once more in the harbour. A motor-boat left the slipway, and we were towed ingloriously ashore at about 11 o'clock.

There is an element of uncertainty in seaplaning, as in every branch of flying. There is the case of a seaplane which landed at sea with engine trouble. A German submarine came alongside and took the two unfortunate airmen aboard, and sank the seaplane, so that shortly afterwards the two officers who had been flying through the air were under the surface of the sea.

I remember another incident that happened during the attack on Verdun, which will demonstrate how an extraordinary chain of adventures may come swiftly and unexpectedly to an airman engaged on the most normal routine work.

One day five machines were to fly from one aerodrome in France to another one about fifty miles away. Both the aerodromes were well behind the lines. The leading machine was piloted by a man who knew the country "inside out," and so the last man of the formation knew that if he were to follow his lead he would be all right. It was an extremely cloudy day, and when they had drawn near to the new aerodrome, the last pilot lost sight of the other four machines in the clouds. He flew on for a little while, and climbed up through the barrier of vapour until he was above it. Then, to his joy, he saw ahead of him the four machines, which were flying several miles away, resembling little black dots.

After a time he drew close to them, and, to his great astonishment, they dived down on him, firing their machine-guns. Suddenly he saw that they were marked with the German mark—the black cross. Realising that he was hopelessly outnumbered, as he was on a comparatively slow machine, he put his nose down and tried to get away. He was flying east towards the German lines, but he could not turn, for every time he looked back he saw these four machines just behind his tail, firing frantically at him.

At last he outdistanced them, and they turned away. He flew on under the deep blue of the sky, and over the sunlit white fields of cloudland, which lay like a tumbled carpet of cotton-wool beneath him, as far as he could see.

He looked at his watch, and saw that he had been flying east for twenty minutes, so he turned and flew due west, towards the French lines. He flew for another ten minutes to make sure of regaining his own lines, and then, throttling his engine, he glided down towards the barrier of cloud. He reached it, and flew for several minutes through damp grey vapour, and at last burst through, and saw the sunless world below.

He looked round for an aerodrome in which to land, and in a few minutes saw a line of hangars some miles distant. At once he turned towards them, and when he was a mile away, he throttled his engine and began to glide down in order to land. He sailed just over the roofs of the hangars, floated a few feet over the grass, and was just about to land when he saw that the machines lined up by the sheds were marked with the black cross. It was a German aerodrome.

Even as he started up his engine and rushed across the grass, the German mechanics climbed into the back seats of the aeroplanes and began to fire at him, while other men started up the engines. Very soon several machines were pursuing him. He dare not climb, for he would lose speed, and would not be able to escape. He flew on, due west, twenty feet or so from the ground, dodging round farms and trees, and now and then jumping over houses, while a mile behind him the German scouts followed him in this strange steeplechase.

He realised now that the wind high up had been blowing strongly due east. It had taken him a long way over the lines, and so he had not allowed himself enough time to get back before he had dived through the cloud-bank.

Again he managed to escape in the chase, and left the pursuing aeroplanes far behind. Ahead of him he could see a line of curling smoke and vapour, with here and there little white puffs of smoke in the air. He was drawing near the lines, and evidently there was an action of some kind in progress. Soon he reached the belt of desolation, of broken houses, shell-torn trees, and devastated fields. Machine-guns on the ground began to fire at him. He could hear their staccato hammering, and could see the flaming streak of the bullets passing by him.

Now he could hear, too, above the roar of the engines, the thud and crash of the shells and of the guns. Everywhere below were great spouts of smoke and earth leaping up as shell after shell burst on the ground. The air was full of the shrapnel barrage against the infantry. Once he had a sudden inspiration to pull back his control-stick. The machine shot up into the air, and he saw just beneath the smoke-burst of a shrapnel shell. If he had continued on a straight course he would have been hit by it, and probably brought down.

Below him he saw something extremely interesting. In the sunken roads and shattered fortifications near Douaumont were masses of grey-green soldiers. The Germans apparently were gathered for an attack. He noted where these men were, and flew on across the shell-torn area behind the French lines, and landed as soon as he could. The machine ran into a shell-hole and crashed. He crawled out of the wreckage and stumbled across the churned-up ground to the nearest headquarters and reported what he had seen. Immediately action was taken by the French, the counterattack was forestalled, and the whole course of the battle was changed.

Soon afterwards the airman reached the aerodrome without his machine, and found he had been reported as missing.

That such an extraordinary chain of adventures can come to a man unexpectedly shows vividly the uncertainty and the romance of flying. The night-bomber, as he leaves his aerodrome, never knows whether, when dawn comes, he will be in his bed at the camp, or in a Dutch guard-room, or hiding in a German wood.

For several months I led an agreeable placid life at the seaplane station. At dawn or at dusk I flew over the sea on my long solitary flights. During the day I wandered round the station, learning about the machines and the engines, and spending many hours in the wireless hut, with the vulcanite receivers over my ears, hearing ship after ship sending its messages in a variety of notes—some high-pitched whines; some urgent, impetuous; some tremendously loud—great cruisers thundering their unquestionable commands; some faint and remote from lonely vessels far away on distant seas.

Wireless telegraphy is a romantic thing. I remember one night walking down a path at a Naval Air Service Station in England and passing a lighted window in a little hut. Some one handed to me through the window a pair of telephone receivers attached to a twisted cord. I put the receiver over my ears and heard the regular scratch, scratch, scratch of the Morse Code.

The operator inside told me that it was a German merchant sending messages from a wireless station outside Berlin to a friend in Madrid, and in that quiet dim path in England I was overhearing their conversation.

One day I was unexpectedly summoned to the Commanding Officer of the Squadron. He handed to me a printed sheet of paper. To my surprise it ordered me to report to No. X Wing (Handley-Page Squadron).

I could hardly realise it at first. I thought that many months of this quiet dreamy life lay before me. I expected no transfer, and at any rate not to this most strange of all squadrons. In those days a Handley-Page was a freak machine that was a topic of conversation in flying circles everywhere.

A Handley-Page then seemed a grotesque giant. There had been no intermediate steps between small machines and this Colossus, which rumour had it could carry twenty-two men. It was as though a fifty-storey sky-scraper, as large as the Woolworth Building in New York, had suddenly been erected in London.

I had seen, at my training aerodrome, the first of these great machines looming in its hangar. I had clambered over it with astonishment. I had been one of a large crowd which had stood on the aerodrome, and had wondered, as the great structure moved clumsily across the grass, if it really would mount in the air. I had seen it rise and roar round the aerodrome with its deep, double throbbing note, and had gone away full of excitement, proud to have been there.

Little did I imagine that I was to be on the very first which flew to France, and that I was to be on the pioneer squadron of the gigantic night-bombers.

So when I received my orders, I packed my bags a little bemusedly, and with a sad heart left the little harbour, the rows of seaplane sheds, the mess, and my friends—taking away many a memory of quiet days in the marshes, and of almost ecstatic dawn patrols over the grey and silver levels of the North Sea.

I was going on to unknown destinies and unknown destinations. I knew the familiar sensation every man in the service going to a new place must feel so often—of leaving a certain existence and going on towards an uncertain one.

Although I did not know it, I was going to a year and a half of adventure, of travel, of war and excitement—I was going to a romantic and strangely appealing life, full of successes and disappointments, full of dreams and realities. The gods had smiled on me, and were leading me to the fantastic and fascinating work which I would have chosen above all others in the world—Night Bombing.

II.

TO FRANCE!

"The wings are stretched: the mighty engines roar;
And from this lovèd land I must depart."

—*Crossing the Channel.*

When I arrived at the Handley-Page aerodrome I realised that, for the second time in the war, I was to have the good fortune to be attached to a pioneering branch of the Air Service, and that, instead of going to a cut-and-dried task, I was to assist in operations which had been untried and were entirely experimental. I had been, as a second-class air mechanic, a balloon hand on the very first kite balloon used by the British, and had accompanied it to the Dardanelles on a tramp steamer early in 1915. Now I was to be the first observer on the huge night-bombers, which were to prove of such tremendous value to the British.

I found the squadron to be as a new-born babe, blinking at the light of day. In a couple of vast green hangars slept two gigantic machines. The skeleton of a third hangar reared its wooden lattice-work against the deep August sky, and everywhere lay heaps of material and stores.

A few officers were already there—among them the squadron commander, whom I soon learnt to know as a giant among men from a commanding point of view. He was one of those splendid leaders that are rare, but are never to be forgotten when they are met—the type of man who, by sheer personal magnetism, could make a body of men achieve almost impossible feats.

On one occasion he wished to move an enormous hangar, complete with its canvas curtains and covers, a hundred feet long and forty feet across, about four times as big as an average cottage. The whole was extremely heavy, and weighed many tons. The C.O. called a bugler, and the call *Clear Lower Deck* was sounded. When every hand, from cook to clerk, had fallen in, he distributed the men round the hangar, gave the order, "One, two, three, *Lift*," and marched the unwieldy structure across the ground to its new position in a few minutes. In this way he rearranged the whole aerodrome.

The C.O.—"*our* C.O.," as we called him—would never call on his officers or men to do work he would not be prepared to do himself. One day, in the stress of action on the Western Front, an order came to the squadron to undertake an operation which meant grave danger to the airmen taking part in it. The C.O. decided, against regulations, to pilot the leading machine himself. He never told the senior command, and he knew that he would probably never return to receive censure. However, he would not send out his officers on a dangerous task without himself taking the same risk. Fortunately, the orders were cancelled, but his heroism was not forgotten.

Quickly the station expanded. More and more officers and men arrived. More and more machines landed, and were stowed in the newly-erected hangars.

I soon had my first flight in a Handley-Page, standing on a platform in the back, looking below as though I were on a high balcony. In front of me the two little heads of the pilot and observer protruded from the nose; on either side were the two great engines between the wings; behind me was the thirty foot of tapering tail, with the great double tail-plane vibrating at the end.

One evening I went on the most beautiful flight I ever made. For the only time I can remember, I saw the world look lovely from the air. We were flying in the heart of an early autumn evening, and the west was ablaze with pale gold and decked with rose-tinted clouds. On the country beneath me lay a rich mantle of blue mist. The whole air was warm with the glowing colours of the sunset. Over the machine, over the face of the pilot, and over my hands lay a faintly luminous hue of amber-red. Below there stretched a view of field and farm, and wood and lane, enchanted by the sapphire haze. The world lay under a spell of exquisite beauty, and a tranquillity of peace which was sheer pain to see, so lovely was it. Here and there shone a light in some happy cottage, where the contented labourer sat beside the welcome fire with his wife and children. Far on the right lay the sea, dim and vast, and apprehensive of the night which was advancing with its banners of darkness from the east.

Silently we glided over the unreal world. The sunset faded slowly, and we sank into deeper and yet deeper blue. The gold crept from our faces and hands, and the solemn silence of the evening enveloped us more and more. Soon we drifted low over the trees, whose leaves quivered gently with the fragrant breeze of the twilight. The last shades of dusk turned the landscape into a sombre dream of scarce-seen hills, and the gloomy edge of a woodland. Over a field we floated gently, and ran softly over the dewy grass....

The earth has usually no beauty for the airman. Mountain peaks, valleys, ravines, and curving downs are absorbed in one flat plain, strangely patterned with dull brown and yellow and green shapes, with dark patches here and there for woods and white ribbons for roads; with black lines for railways, red blotches for villages, grey and brown stains for towns. A person who loves the beauty of nature, and has artistic sensibilities, should never fly. If he must, he should fly only at the edge of the evening, and should glide into the blue magic of the dusk.

Meanwhile, at the squadron, the days of preparation passed—days of superintending the erection of hangars, of sunny flights over the long surf-lined sands, of mushroom picking in the wind-blown grass of the rolling fields. October came, and with it the order for departure.

The great machine was prepared. Heavy tool-boxes, engine spares, tail trolleys, and a mass of material were packed into its capacious maw. The tanks were filled with petrol, oil, and water. The engines were tested again and again. The day came. A pile of luggage stood on the ground beneath the machine; farewells were said; gloves, goggles, boots, and flying caps were collected ... and it rained.

Back into its hangar went the machine. Back into the tents went the luggage. Back into the mess went the disappointed airmen.

For three or four days this happened, but at last a gentle breeze, a clear horizon, and a blue sky greeted the morning. Once again the suit-cases and trunks were packed inside the machine. I put my little tabby kitten into her basket and tied a handkerchief over the top, and lashed the whole on to the platform in the back of the aeroplane.

The six airmen dressed themselves in their sky-clothes and took their places—the C.O. at the wheel. A whistle was blown; farewells were shouted; the engines roared, and we mounted

triumphantly into the air over the countryside of Thanet. For a time we circled over England, and saw the villages shrink to red flowers on the carpet of harvest gold and brown plough and dull green meadow land, which was fringed by the yellow and white line of the curving shore. The little haycocks became mushrooms; cows looked like little dots of white and black on the green fragments of the mosaic; and more and more the sea, the wide glittering sea, dominated the landscape.

Then the machine turned S.E. towards France. Looking ahead, with the glorious wind rushing across my face, I could see the three leather-helmeted heads of the pilot, the observer, and the officer in the front cockpit, and below them the shining Channel. Looking through the slats of the platform between my feet I could still see hedgerows and plump red farms. Then we passed over the cliffs, whose summits appeared to be on the same level as the sea, and below me I saw the waves.

I was leaving England behind! I had to look back over the tail to see the white line of the cliffs and the sweep of the Isle of Thanet coast from Birchington to Ramsgate. I began to feel a lump in my throat. I was not eager to look forward to see the first glimpse of France through the sea mist. My thoughts were full of the sadness of bereavement. I knew not what lay ahead—what France and war might bring me. I knew not how long I would be from my own well-known country, or even if I would ever return. Later on, after leave in England, I found no heart-sinkings when I left Dover on a destroyer—for I had grown used to leaving England—but now my departure was potent with sorrow. I felt almost inclined to fling out my arms to the fast-fading homeland.

At last it died away behind me, and France mocked me with its twin line of cliffs and sweep of coast. I lay down on the platform and wrote letters to be posted in Paris. Between the strips of wood on which I lay I could see the grey and silver sea far below me, and here and there a tiny boat, apparently motionless, though a thin line of white foam stretched behind it.

To my horror I suddenly became conscious of the kitten sitting beside me carefully cleaning her paws, and probably supremely unconscious that she was 6000 feet in the air, half-way across the Dover Straits. Apprehensive for her safety I gave her no time to learn her position, but quickly pushed her into the basket, and, undoing my flying coat and my muffler, I took off my tie, which I tied across the top of the basket to prevent the spirited young lady from emerging once more.

Now the machine was almost over the French coast, so I put the letter away and clambered on to my feet to look over the side. Though I was far from the ground, it was easy to tell that the country was an unfamiliar one. The houses had a different tint of red, the villages looked strange, and were arranged differently. The whole country looked peculiar and un-English. It was the opening gate of a new world and a new life.

Over sand-dunes and small pine-woods we roared. Etaples slowly passed us, with its wide estuary spanned by two bridges, and its huge hospital city. Over the mouth of the Somme, near Abbeville, we flew into the brown and yellow autumn land of France—above old châteaux and their withering parks; above little ugly villages; above long straight roads, lined with trees blown half-bare by the equinoctial gales.

I soon forgot my freezing feet in the interest of reading. As I grew more and more absorbed in 'The History of Mr Polly,' the thundering pulse of the engines and the slight vibration of the machine slipped from my consciousness. The everlasting anæsthetic of literature had rendered me unconscious of being in the air nearly a mile from the ground.

Suddenly the machine began to sway, and to "bump" a little. I stood up and saw that we were passing through the outskirts of a cloud-bank. Little patches of vapour appeared to rush by, though they probably were scarcely moving. The air grew perceptibly cooler, and every now and then the ground would be hidden, as the white vapour streaked by, under the wheels, in a misty blur. Then suddenly the little houses of a village, a forest, and a curving road would appear far below, only to vanish again behind the next swift-moving edge of white.

We were near Paris. The pilot decided to go beneath the cloud-bank so as to keep on his course with greater accuracy. The noise of the motors stopped, the urgent forward motion of the craft became slower and gentler as we drifted down through the cloud-bank, being thrown up and down a little by the eddies caused by the different temperatures of the air levels.

Soon, in the distance, appeared a slender tower, hanging high above the mist. A great expanse of houses and streets, half obscured in haze, revealed itself to our left. Here and there sparkled a winding river, and under us were ragged suburbs with great factories and scattered groups of houses clustered round wide straight roads that pierced the heart of the city like white arrows.

Paris! I felt the trumpet-call of the name of a large capital, though Paris has perhaps the weakest name of all. What worthy stirring names do Vienna, Berlin, Brussels, Amsterdam, Rome, and above all, London, bear! In the very sound of them you hear the dying song of long trains gliding majestically into domed stations; you hear the roar of traffic in crowded streets; you hear the dominant throbbing of huge subterranean newspaper presses.

These giant cities with the splendid names should be entered by train. You should thunder over populated suburban roads, and clatter under iron bridges. You should see more and more gleaming rails pouring together in ever wider streams; you should have glimpses of grey old buildings, rising sublimely above a sea of smoking chimney-pots—if you wish to feel the thrill of entering a metropolis.

To approach a great city by the air is disappointing. You can see too great an expanse of it at once. I should dread to fly high over London, lest I saw the fields to the north and to the south of it at once, and realised that this great city of ours *had* limits which were comprehensible by man. It would be a disillusion which would haunt me all my life.

Fortunately it was misty over Paris, and we only saw occasional stretches of boulevard, and white and red houses, half hidden by the haze through which glittered here and there the Seine.

On one side lay the white buildings of Versailles and its wide tree-lined avenues; on the other lay the square ugly factories of the suburbs; between was a great expanse of field lined with countless sheds—Villacoublay!

With silenced engines we floated lower and lower towards the soil of France. Gently over the trees we glided; above the grass we swept a moment; the machine shook a little, and came to rest below the level of the tall hangars.

A crowd of British and French mechanics and airmen came streaming from all sides to the machine, as minnows dart and cling to a fragment of food which drops into a pool. We climbed out, gladly stretched our legs, and were soon in a car, driven by a French chauffeur in a black leather coat, on the way to Paris.

I mention the French driver and his coat because, in spite of what I have said about the disillusion of approaching a great city by air, yet aerial travelling does at least accentuate a change of country. Just as gradually approaching a city, or a new country on the ground, makes it seem more far-flung and mysterious, so does it introduce you step by step to its personality and language. If you go to France by boat you feel, even at Dover, that you are approaching a foreign country. You hear French spoken, and see French people during the crossing. At Calais you see the strange uniform of the Custom officers and policemen, and a notice in English and French greets you at the side of the quay with its warning against pickpockets. So you gradually become acclimatised to French ideas before you go ashore.

If, on the other hand, you fly to a foreign country, you are, until the moment when you land, attached by a thread to the place you have left. You dressed there, you breakfasted there, you shaved there, your sandwiches were cut there, and the hot tea in your Thermos flask was heated there—the aeroplane is merely a detached, floating piece of Margate or Broadstairs, or wherever it may be. So when you land the change is abrupt. A man in a curious dress shouts up to you—

"*Ah, Monsieur! C'était bien la-haut?*"

The thread snaps: England recedes a hundred miles in an instant. You are French, and the aeroplane becomes Villacoublay!

We spent several days in Paris. Every morning our car awaited us outside the hotel. Bills were paid; bags were packed; we inserted ourselves into the car and drove to Villacoublay. The weather would be bad, and (to our secret delight) we returned. I got very used to this life after a time. I have left so many various hotels in France, day after day, in the morning, and have returned two hours afterwards, looking foolish, that the proprietors must have thought that it was a British custom.

At last the machine started once more—unfortunately without the kitten. She was seen just before we left, but I think she had friends on the aerodrome who hid her at the critical moment. We delayed our departure while a search was made. It was in vain. We left without the kitten, and (superstitious people note!) were dogged by misfortune until six months later when we acquired a black cat at Dunkerque.

The aerodrome to which we were flying was at Luxeuil, near Belfort, in the foot-hills of the Vosges. We left Paris and flew towards the East. Slowly the character of the country changed, and the towns and villages grew different. I had a roller map, and as I lay on my chest in the back of the machine, I wound forward the map just as the living map beneath unrolled itself. On the paper would be marked a little white line, a little black blob, and a little dark-green patch. Below, in a square frame of wood, I could see a little white road, a little red village, and a little dark-green forest. Sometimes I read for a quarter of an hour and forgot my surroundings entirely, and then I would suddenly become conscious that I was in the air and would look below. There lay a curving river, and a canal beside it, across which was a grey stone bridge.

I would wind my map forwards, and would identify the river and the canal and the bridge. North of the river would be, perhaps, a forest and a railway line. I would look below me; there would be the forest and a thin black line near it, on which was a puff of white smoke coming from a railway engine. The little village which lay near the canal would be marked on the map—*Pont St Maure*, or something similar. It was to me a name. The red mark below had to me no more reality than the black mark on the map, yet at that very moment it must have been full of housewives cooking fish. Its shoemaker, and farrier, and priest, and mayor must have been busy. Maybe a marriage, the most wonderful incident of some simple country girl's life, was in progress, and as the wedding party walked in a procession they looked up to see the great bird with the shining wings which boomed overhead. To me it was only a little red patch which had appeared above the pages of 'The History of Mr Polly.' Flying is a strangely aloof business, and gives the aerial traveller at times an almost divine point of view.

Three hours slowly passed. Dusk began to creep across the land. The country below changed

more and more. Forests became frequent, and the scenery grew wilder and more interesting. Suddenly the noise of the engines died away. I quickly stood up and looked below. We were just over a quaint town with a curious church tower. I looked round and could see no aerodrome. Lower and lower we glided. The wind whistled and moaned in the wires. I could see no field in which to land. Over the tops of some trees we drifted. A great cluster of shrubs appeared ahead of us above the level of the machine. We swept over it, dropped down again, and I saw we were a few feet above the uneven ground. I shouted to the other man in the back to hold on, and got myself ready to take a shock. We touched the ground, bounced up a little, ran along, and stopped in a sloping field near a road.

I jumped out at once and ran round to the front. The pilot shouted—

"Go and 'phone to Luxeuil! Say we've had engine failure!"

On the way to the road I passed a French priest—an amazed little figure in black—who had seen this winged monster drop out of the skies to his feet. Already from the town were pouring the excited people, who had thought at first that our machine was a German one.

Before I got into the town I met a grey naval car, which was attached to the aerodrome, and had chanced to be near, and had followed us when we came down. I hurried back to the machine. It had been landed with wonderful skill by the pilot on a sloping field, into which he had side-slipped. Not a wire of it had been broken in spite of its weight and its heavy load.

The rest of the evening is a confused memory of a high tea in the little hotel—a meal of countless omelettes, grey vinegarish bread, coffee, and butter of sorts: of a long, long drive, sitting in the floor of a crowded car, rushing under the stars and the trees which hissed at us one by one for mile after mile as we whirled down the winding roads: of arriving in the dark at an apparently limitless aerodrome, strangely full of British and Canadian officers in this remote corner of France: of going to bed in the Hotel de la Pomme d'Or in the town of Luxeuil.

Next day we returned to the machine, which was surrounded by an enormous crowd of curious peasants. My pilot wished to open a tool-box, and asked the C.O. for the keys. The C.O., dreading that he might lose them, had handed them on to me. When I looked for them, I found I had lost them! My pilot, in his irritation, stood me up in front of the open-eyed French people and searched me all over. To my shame he found the keys in one of my pockets! The C.O. said to me afterwards—

"Thank Heaven, I gave them to you, or he would have searched me!"

The machine was repaired. The engines were started. I stayed on the ground and helped to keep the field clear. (French people *will* insist on running in front of an aeroplane as it gathers speed on the ground—in order to see it better!) It rose up into the air, and turned round towards Luxeuil, to which I went in a car.

Then began strange months in the wild forest country of the Haute Saône. They were days of flying over the snow-clad country, when you could see, hanging like dream-castles above the haze of the horizon, the whole panorama of the Alps from the Matterhorn to Mont Blanc—sublime summits, pure sun-kissed white against the thin blue of the November sky. They were days of long drowsy motor drives through the Vosges to the deserted city of Belfort, with its few collapsed houses to give witness of its nearness to the lines,—days in which I became an inhabitant of the historical town of Luxeuil-les-Bains.

This old town was very interesting. Some of its buildings went back to 1200 A.D. Its thermal establishments (so frequent in this part of France, where every town almost is—*les-Bains*) were full of relics of the former Roman baths.

In the old cathedral I saw one of the most crude and striking examples of modernity which I have ever met. As I sat in the tall and gloomy building at twilight one day, the verger asked me if I would like to see how he rang the Angelus. He led me to an old stone room, on one wall of which was a large shiny black switch-board, studded with copper switches and other electrical devices. He pulled down one switch—high in the belfry a bell chimed three times. He pushed the switch up and pulled it down again. Once more the bell chimed three times. He did this a third time, and then rang the bell continuously for a little while.

He seemed to have great pride in such an up-to-date affair, but to see the Angelus rung by electricity in an old church was distressing. He followed up the performance by tolling a knell for the dead. He pulled another lever, and left it down for five minutes, during which a deep bell slowly rang.

"They pay five francs for that!" he said with gusto, as he looked at his watch and pushed up the lever again.

There were no British troops within a hundred miles of the place. The officers and men of the naval flying wing were the only British there, and they must have seemed strange to the French people.

We had amusing evenings, and became quite French in our ways. We dined off frogs' legs and pike fresh taken from the tank in the yard of the restaurant. We went to organ recitals in the cathedral, and paid visits to learn French and to exchange conversations. Of course, in our turn, we introduced the custom of taking tea in the afternoon. Wherever we were in France, we

demanded, at four o'clock, tea, bread and butter, honey and cakes. It amazed the French people, but we generally got it. I do not think they understood it at all, because one evening after dinner I asked for a cup of tea instead of coffee, and it came accompanied by a plate of cakes, and, I believe, bread and honey. I had to explain that an Englishman *can* drink tea alone. It is amusing how an Englishman always takes his customs with him, and, instead of doing in Rome as the Romans do, rather makes Rome do what is done in London.

Bacon and eggs for breakfast; meat and vegetables *together* for lunch; tea and cake and bread and butter and honey for tea in the afternoon—says the Englishman. If he does not get this, he exclaims—"My hat! What a place!" as he walks indignantly out of the hotel.

Among other things, I learnt how to fly, at Luxeuil, and found it very much like learning to ride a bicycle. It has the same fascination and the same characteristics. You have the same certainty, to begin with, that you will never be able to do it; you know the same triumph of achievement when you fly ten yards alone; and when you are flying along smoothly in complete confidence that the instructor is holding the controls and is checking you the whole time, you turn round, see he is looking over the side, become overtaken with nervousness, and dive and climb, and slip and slew, in a fever of anxiety and dread.

The advantage of being able to fly yourself is that if you feel depressed and weary of the ground, and of the people on it, you can get a book, jump into an aeroplane, and shoot up into the solitude of the sky. When you have climbed three or four thousand feet you can bring out your book, and go round and round in great circles far away from the earth in utter seclusion, reading sublime verse, and dreaming of any unreality you desire.

The tranquillity of these days was ended suddenly by a rather welcome order to proceed to the advanced base at Ochey-les-Bains, near Nancy, from which raids were to be carried out at once.

Over miles of ravine and forest, over Plombières and Remirémont and Epinal, over winding river and rolling down, we flew till we approached the region of Nancy, where a few kite-balloons hanging above the haze showed us that we were near the lines. We landed on the wide French aerodrome, and once again met a crowd of English officers in a strange corner of France.

We began to prepare at once for a night raid on some blast-furnaces beyond Metz. My pilot and I had never flown before at night, and had never crossed the lines. With mingled trepidation and excitement we awaited the first voyage amidst the darkness and the stars beyond the frontier of Alsace into what was then Germany—with its unknown dangers and its unknown difficulties.

III.

THE FIRST RAID.

"Around me broods the dim mysterious Night,
Star-lit and still.
No whisper comes across the Plain."

—*The Night Raid.*

Night! Before I knew I was to fly through the darkness over the country of the enemy; night had been for me a time of soft withdrawal from the world—a time of quiet. It still held its old childhood mystery of a vague oblivion between day and day, an unusual space of time peopled by slumberous dreams in the gloom of a warm, familiar bed.

Night was a time in which busy and scattered humanity collected once more to the family hearth, and careless of the wet darkness outside, careless of the wind which howled over the roof and moaned down the chimney, sat in the sequestered comfort by the glow of the fire in a lamp-lit room. Night did not mean a mere temporary obscuring of the daytime world. One did not feel that out there in the gloom beyond the dead windows lay the countryside of day, hidden, though unchanged. One felt that for a time the real world had ended, and that as one drifted to sleep, the real house faded and melted away to ghostly regions beyond the comprehension of man.

In the days before my first raid, I used to wander away from the lighted windows of the little camp, down the long road to Toul, beneath the glittering stars, looking up into the blue immensity of the sky, thinking how I was going to move high up there—above the dim country, across the distant lines to some remote riverside factory, beyond the great fortress of Metz.

From that moment the whole meaning of night changed, and changed for ever. Night became for me a time of restless activity; the darkness became a vast theatre for mystery and drama. The midnight obscurity became a thick mantle whose friendly folds hid from the sight of its enemies the throbbing aeroplane in its long, long flights over a shadow-peopled world.

The night became my day. *Dusk is our dawn, and midnight is our noon*, is the song of the night-bombers. To them daylight is a time of preparation, a time of rest, but never a time in which they can fly upon their destructive expeditions.

The pale evening star gleams above the gold and crimson glories of the sunset. The eastern sky

becomes deeply blue. Out of the hangars come the giant machines. The night-flying airman begins to rouse himself, and with the first rustle of the twilight breeze amidst the black lace-work of the bare branches comes the awakening action of the brain, and into his head troop a thousand thoughts, a thousand problems, a thousand impulses.

Over a map I bent, day after day, looking at Metz, looking at Thionville, following the curved black mark of the lines, and pondering the round spots which represented anti-aircraft batteries—going on my first raid a thousand times in anticipation. At times fear held me—the fear of the unknown. What would happen? What would happen? We might get "there," but would we return? Would a German air patrol await us—would a fierce impassable barrage bring about our downfall? Surely, surely, we argued (my pilot and I), they would be waiting for us on our way back.

We knew nothing of night-bombing, nothing of flying across the lines. Before us lay a curtain through which we had to pass. We did not know what lay on the other side, or if we would return through the closed draperies.

At times the thrill of romance, of high star-touching adventure, stirred my imagination. I thought how I was to move undaunted and triumphant over the moonlit river, over the forests of the Vosges, with my twelve bombs ready to drop at my slightest order. I realised how I was to bring destruction to far-off blast-furnaces where the sweating Germans poured out the white blue-flamed metal to make shells and long naval guns—how I was perhaps to ride homeward down the vast avenues of the skies to the waiting aerodrome with the exhilaration of a conqueror!

Then came the third mental phase of those days of waiting for the raid—the phase of pity. I shall kill to-night! thought I. I shall kill to-night. Even now the worker eats his contented dinner with his wife and children before going on the night-shift—the night-shift which will never see day. Even now is a young man greeting his beloved whom he will never live to wed. Is it true that those plump yellow bombs with their red and green rings are destined to rip flesh and blood—to tear up people whom I have never seen, and whom I will never know that I have slain?

So through my imagination went pouring the strange processions of thought. Brighter and brighter grew the moon; clearer and clearer grew the night. Far away to the north, near Pont-à-Mousson, I could see, as I stood on the road to Toul, the luminous white star-shells which hung quivering in the air, and dropped slowly as they faded away. There in the dark road beneath the tall bare trees I would stand, a little figure, in a great solitude under the ten thousand watching stars, gazing out to the lines, wondering and wondering what lay beyond.

The days passed slowly. The possibilities of each night were doomed by the French report, "*Brume dans les vallées!*" Mist was considered a great danger to navigation, so night after night the raid was postponed.

French *Bréquets de Bombardement*, huge unwieldy machines, carrying two men and twenty or so little vicious bombs, were also operating from the aerodrome, and the French authorities had arranged a detailed and very useful system of ground lights to assist navigation.

At several places were groups of lights, each group separated by a certain number of miles, to give the airmen an opportunity to learn his speed across the ground. There were rocket positions. There were groups of flares pointing north. Here and there were emergency landing-grounds. The whole dim country was going to be twinkling with little messages, with lights and flares and friendly rockets. More and more in these days of waiting I became obsessed with the idea of the long journey I was so make through the blue vagueness of the night above the moonlit country.

Then one night the moon rose clear and clean above a mistless world. The more brilliant stars burnt steadily in the velvet of the night. A silence brooded over the rolling downs and the deep-shadowed valleys. On the aerodrome was deliberate activity and suppressed excitement. The Handley-Page, on which the C.O. intended to carry out the first raid, spread its long splendid wings under the eager hands of the mechanics, who for long days had been preparing everything—had been testing every wire and bolt, and had kept the machine on the pinnacle of efficiency. Now they swarmed round it like keen and careful ants, pinning up the wings, filling the engine tanks with hot water pumped up from a wheeled boiler, known as the "hot potato waggon," exercising machine-guns, and testing the controls.

The two engines were started up, and roared with a surging vibrant clamour for ten minutes. Then the full power was put on, and for a few minutes the noise became ear-splitting, and the waves of sound rolled across the aerodrome and came echoing back from the hangars. The wheels strained restlessly against the triangular wooden "chocks." The tail and the wings shook and quivered with repressed emotion. The exhaust-pipes of the motors grew red hot, long blue flames streamed out of them, and thousands of red sparks went whirling along through the shivering tail-planes into the darkness behind. It was an awe-inspiring sight. I asked the silent preoccupied warrant-officer engineer, a rugged naval man who knew the soul of the mighty Rolls-Royce engines, if it was all right. I could not believe that those red-hot pipes and blue flames were not a sign of an engine gone amok and hopelessly overheated. The thunder and the awful expression of power frightened me. The engineer, however, assured me that it was all correct, and explained that the engines were just the same in the daytime, though the heat and the sparks could not be seen in the light.

Near the towering bulk of the machine with its two deafening motors stood the pilot, the C.O., who was a frail-looking figure, with his youthful fair-haired face almost hidden in the wide black

fur-lined collar of his thick padded overall suit. He stood there with his flying-cap and his goggles in his hand, waiting to climb into the machine when the mechanics had finished the test of the engines.

I went over to wish him luck, feeling awestruck at his coolness. On the grass of the aerodrome shone the great flares. Above hung the heartless stars, and the blank-faced moon swung rather mockingly, it seemed to me, above the dim patterns of the wooded landscape. The little fair-haired figure stood by the hot-breathed steed which he was going to ride, and it seemed that he was too small, too frail—that any human being was too frail—to take that monster of steel and wood and canvas into the unknown dangers which lay beyond the cold glare of the star-shells on the horizon.

Then the C.O. climbed into the machine, and his head and shoulders appeared just above the blunt nose which stuck out six feet above the ground. He shouted down an order or two. The little triangular door on the floor of the machine was shut. The blocks of wood were taken away from beneath the wheels. The engines roared out, and the machine moved slowly across the grass. It turned slightly, its noise leapt up suddenly again, and with a beating throb the huge craft began to move across the aerodrome with its blue flames and showers of red sparks shooting out behind it. Faster and faster it went—every eye watching it, every mouth firm and voiceless. At last it roared up into the air, and then a curious thing happened which showed the strain and the nervousness under which we were all working that night.

In a few moments the noise of the engines died out, and beyond the slope of green over which the machine had climbed appeared a dull red glow.

"Oh! he's crashed!" almost sobbed somebody in those awful vibrant tones, full of fear and excitement, almost passionate with terror, which are so often heard when there is a swift sudden accident.

Babel broke out. "Quick! *Pyrènes!* Quick! Start up the car! It's burning! Quick, *quick!* How awful! Drive like blazes, driver!"

Round the aerodrome the loaded car jolted and bumped, going as fast as the driver could make it, glittering with the fire-extinguishers held by the agonised white-faced passengers.

Behind some hangars we rushed, and suddenly we heard the glorious sound of a *bavoom, bavoom*, overhead, as the Handley-Page swept triumphantly above us.

"Safe! Oh, good, good, good!" thought every one. Over the crest of the little swell in the ground we saw some dull red landing flares burning in a flickering line. The sudden cessation of the engine's clamour owing to a change of wind, and the sudden burning up of the flares, had brought at once to overwrought nerves the worst fears. As we rode back, pretending we were very ashamed of ourselves, we decided not to tell the C.O. what had happened when he landed. We were very fond of him....

For ten minutes or so the machine roared round and round the aerodrome. We could see its shape black against the starshine for a little while, and then we could distinguish it no longer, for to our great delight it was hidden by the darkness in spite of the moonlight. Then it turned towards the lines, was heard booming faintly for a moment, and finally its noise died right away. The aerodrome lay silent under the magic of the watching stars and the silver frozen moon.

Restless minutes passed. From mess to cabins, from cabins to the aerodrome with its dazzling acetylene flares, we moved uneasily. Had he crossed the lines now? we wondered. Had he got to Metz? What was he doing? Had he dropped his bombs yet?

An hour and a half had gone. He was due back. Still the deep immensity of the night gave no signal. The moon had climbed a little, and its tarnished face was smaller and brighter. There was no sound on the air save the sighing of the wind, the low murmur of a dynamo, and the occasional clear quiet chime of a clock in the village church tower.

Then somebody said, "Listen! Hush!" Faint but surely sounded the throb of the motors. Every moment it grew more distinct. The crowds on the aerodrome increased. The relief of a strain ended moved pleasantly through them.

Then in the air appeared a glittering ball of light which dropped in a curve and faded away. Another ball of light shot up from the ground in answer. The noise of the engines in the air stopped as the machine glided in wide circles towards the ground. Suddenly it appeared a few hundred feet in the air, brilliantly lit up by two blindingly white lights which burned fiercely below both wing-tips, and from which dropped little goutts of luminous liquid. The powerful illumination lighted up every face, every dress, every shed and pile of stones in clear detail with its quivering glare.

Now every eye was watching the machine as it drew nearer and nearer to the ground. This was the first time that a Handley-Page had been landed at night, and landing is the most difficult and uncertain problem of flying.

Lower and lower it floated, then flattened out, and drifted on just above the grass. With scarcely a bump it touched the ground, ran forwards a little, and swept round towards us.

"Good! Priceless! Thank Heaven that's done!" muttered a dozen watchers. The waiting crowd

streamed across to the machine from whose wing-tip flares, now dull and red, still dropped hot drops of liquid.

Some stooped at once under the machine to examine the brown paper which had been temporarily pasted across the bottom of the bomb-racks, as the bomb-doors had not yet been fitted. Scarcely a piece of paper remained—the bomb-racks were empty—the bombs had been dropped!

Then was a scene of excitement. The night travellers were welcomed and congratulated, and a thousand queries were rained on them. "How did the engines go? Any searchlights? Any shell-fire? Where did you drop the bombs? Did you find the way easily?" and so on in an endless stream. It had been a flight which had broken new ground—the first flight of five thousand night flights by Handley-Pages. It was the climax of an experiment. The machine had gone up into the night, and had returned with its cargo discharged.

A night or two later our turn came. The machine stood on the aerodrome: the wings were stretched and pinned up; the tanks were filled with hot water. I went to my little cabin with its rose-shaded lamp, and with a heavy heart began to prepare for the raid. I dressed myself in thick woollen socks; knee-high flying boots lined with white fleece; a sweater or two, a muffler, and the big overall suit of grey-green mackintosh lined with thick black beaver fur with a wide fur collar. On my head went my flying-cap. I strapped it under my chin and got my goggles and gloves ready. I felt very out of place, so clumsy and grotesque, like a deep-sea diver, in the little room with its bookshelf and neat white bed and soft lamplight.

I had the terrible sinking sensation which I had felt before when about to be caned, and when in the waiting-room of a dentist.

I looked at three or four photographs of well-loved friends and of grey London streets, knelt down for a moment by the bed, and went out after a last long look at the room and the unavailing invitation of the white sheets. I knew it might be the last time, and I felt quite a coward.

Towards the aerodrome I walked behind the towering line of moonlit hangars, beyond which I could hear the murmur of the engines "warming-up." Between two tall sheds I stumbled, and came on to the wide grassy expanse where stood my machine surrounded by busy mechanics.

The engines opened out with a terrifying burst of noise. I collected my map-case and my torch, and walked round to the front of the machine. I faced the two shining discs of the whirling propellers and gingerly advanced between them to the little rope-ladder which hung from the small door in the bottom of the machine. Up this ladder I climbed, and found myself in the little room behind the pilot's seat. I knelt down and shone my torch on the bomb-handle, the bomb-sight, and on the twelve fat yellow bombs that hung up inside the machine behind me. Then I walked forward till I came to the cockpit, where sat the pilot on a padded armour-plated seat, testing the engines. I let down my hinged seat beside him, and sat with my feet off the ground. I put away my pencil and note-book and chocolate, and examined the different taps and the Very light pistol, and began to adjust the petrol pressure of the engines, which was indicated by little dials in front of me.

I was about seven feet off the ground now, sitting up in the nose of the machine, feeling very small and helpless, with the two great propellers screaming on either side a foot behind me, at 1700 revolutions a minute, and I felt very much like a lamb going to the slaughter.

Minutes slowly passed. I was itching with impatience. I longed to start so that I might have something to do to occupy my attention.

The pilot blew a whistle. The pieces of wood in front of the wheels were pulled away by the mechanics. The pilot's hand went to the throttle, and we moved slowly across the aerodrome. The front engine roared out, he turned round and faced the wind, with the lights of the flares behind us.

On went the engines with a mighty throbbing beat. At once we began to roll across the ground. Faster and faster we rushed. Below streaked the flare-lit grass as we swept onward at a fearful speed. The hangars were just in front of us. I sat, feet off the ground, with my left hand on the padded edge of the cockpit, nervous and apprehensive.

Then slowly, surely, the machine left the ground and began to move upwards, and soon cleared the top of the hangars. Below lay the moonlit sweep of the dim forests, the curving hills and the deep-shadowed ravines, looking pale and unreal in the ghostly radiance.

In front of us the phosphorescent finger of the height-indicator slowly crept to 1000 feet. The speed-indicator wavered between 50 and 55 miles an hour, and the dials which recorded the petrol pressure on the engines obeyed faithfully my alterations to the little taps at the side.

Above us was the wide expanse of the starlit sky and the cold moon. We soon found that flying at night was like moving through a dimmer daytime sky. Though the airman is hidden from the ground, yet below he can see a detailed panorama, a little more limited in range than that of noonday, but not much less distinct. This is, of course, on a clear night of ample moon. On dark and misty nights the change is very much greater. As we flew on we realised that the task was not going to be so difficult as we had imagined.

For a time I felt too nervous to look over the side, as I always have felt, flying by day or night,

until the preliminary dread of a wing falling off which has ever haunted me has grown less poignant. Then I began to look over the side, and the love of experience and excitement battled and pressed down the feelings of dread.

Far away on the moon-ward horizon a luminous silver mist veiled the distant view. Below, the scenery of thin white roads, soft patchwork forests, little tightly-clustered villages, and the quaint mosaic of fields, unrolled away from me as we mounted higher on the long wings whose edges now and then gleamed in the moonlight. Here and there were the little glowing specks of candles or lamps burning in distant houses, and some of the twinkling illuminations of the French signals. Far away in the mist a star-shell gleamed watery white and slowly faded away. Beneath were the four white flares of the aerodrome and the little space of lit-up ground with an occasional gleam of light near the long line of hangars which I could see faintly below me.

Higher and higher we climbed. Every now and then I stood up and shone my torch on the two engines to read their dials, and to see if they were giving full power. Towards the north we moved, towards the gleaming Moselle and the distant star-shells of the lines. Then the French observer grew restless, and looked over the side, and down at the compass in his cockpit, and at the timing signal-lights beneath. At last, when we were eight or nine miles from the lines, he gave his verdict—the almost inevitable word *Brouillard*. He thought it was too misty. He stood up and leaned back to the pilot, and shouted his words of explanation—

"*Trop de brouillard!* No good! It will be very bad by Metz!"

We turned back disappointed, and drew nearer to the lighted rectangle of the aerodrome far below. The pilot pulled back his throttle. A sudden and almost painful silence followed the roar of the engine. In an agreeable tranquillity after the incessant clamour we had known so long, we glided downwards towards the queer world of the deep shadows. Slowly, slowly over the dazzling acetylene flares we floated. The most critical moment had come: the pilot was going to make his first night landing. I sat silent and unmoving, my left hand again subconsciously holding the edge of the machine in readiness. The ground grew imperceptibly nearer. We were below the level of the sheds. I felt a little vibration quiver through the machine, and then another. We had touched ground.

We slowed down and drew up near our hangar. I dropped out of the machine, beneath which the disappointed mechanics were gazing at the unbroken surface of the brown paper pasted below the bomb-racks, and walked over to my cabin through a little pine wood. The rose-shaded lamp still shone softly. As I took off my heavy flying kit I recalled with a feeling of foolishness my fears and dreads when I had left it, and felt how wasted my sentiment had been.

Almost the next night we started again. Once more I dressed in the heavy flying clothes, and collected my maps and impedimenta. Again I bade a sad farewell, and again sat beside the pilot, feeling weak and frail. Again we rose up in thunder across the lighted aerodrome towards the stars.

The world lay before us hard and clear. No white scarves of mist were flung over the dark woodlands. The horizon lay almost unveiled, and above was the deep immensity of the night. Here and there across the country we saw the scattered lights of cottages and the twinkling of the French guiding stations. To the north were the brilliant star-shells, and far, far away in the mist glowed dully the little red flame of some blast-furnace beyond the lines.

As we drew nearer and nearer to Pont-à-Mousson, I felt how the meaning of the lines had changed. Formerly they had come to be a barrier almost impassable even by thought. I had felt that this was *our* side, that was *theirs!* Long had the trenches lain in the same place in this area. Now it seemed wonderful to be able to see signs of occupation beyond the German war-zone. Our intended crossing seemed a sort of sacrilege, the execution of an act seemingly impossible. I felt as though I had put out my hand to the moon, and had touched a solid surface. It was hard to believe that our machine could in a flash change from the area of one great sweep of nationality and ideas and character to the other, and could pass unhindered, untouched across that frontier of death to every living thing upon the ground.

So as I grew nearer and nearer to Pont-à-Mousson and saw a few scattered lights beyond the star-shells, I began to wonder who sat beside the light—what German soldier or officer read a despatch or wrote a letter, in what sort of hut or dug-out. Then the pilot's hands would move with the wheel, and we would swing round in a circle. Again before us lay the French signal-lights, and far away the faint glow of our aerodrome.

Then we swung round again towards the north. The Frenchman's arm went up, and dropped, pointing straight ahead across the star-shells which rose here and there slowly, white blossoms of light which burst out into a white dazzling flare, and gradually drooped and faded away.

I sat with my legs dangling, and my hands crossed in my lap, feeling I had got to take what was coming unprotesting. Defenceless and frail I seemed as I sat beside my pilot, with nothing for my hands to do—with no control over the machine or over my destiny. My heart sank lower and lower ... and then we were right above the lines. In the pool of vague darkness below I saw the star-shells rising up and lighting a little circle of ground, and dying away, to be followed by small and spitting flashes of rifle fire from either side of the lines, where I knew some wretched soldier lay in No Man's Land, flat in the mud, in fear of his life.

A few minutes passed, and I began to realise that I was over German territory. The height

indicator recorded 7500 feet. The engines clamoured evenly, and the speed-indicator registered fifty miles an hour, showing that we were still climbing steadily. The pilot sat immobile on my right—his heavy boots firmly on the rudder, his fur-gloved hands on the black wooden steering-wheel, which scarcely moved as we flew steadily on. The electric bulb in the cockpit shone on his determined chin and firm mouth, but his fur-edged goggles hid those eyes which looked, now forwards to the horizon and to the dark shape of the Frenchman with his curious helmet in front, now downwards to the compass and the watch and the instruments of the dashboard. Keen eyes and ready were they, I knew well, watching everything, noting everything.

I wondered what lay in his brain, and what were his real feelings as he steered the enormous machine dead ahead into the hostile territory. My own fears had begun to leave me a little. I looked round with interest to see what was going to happen, and began to hum my invariable anthem of the night-skies, which I have chanted during every raid—the Cobbler's song from "Chu Chin Chow":—

"I sit and cobble at slippers and shoon
From the rise of sun to the set of moon ..."

Then on my left, a mile or so away, I saw four or five sharp red flashes whose spots of light died away slowly, like lightning. I felt excited. They were anti-aircraft shells. They were meant for us. We had been heard, then, and our presence was realised. I glanced at the pilot, but he had seen nothing. His face was fixed steadily forwards, so I decided not to tell him. Now I began to look all over the sky, above, below, and on either side, looking for shell fire, and trying to pierce the gloom to see enemy machines. I was on the alert, for I realised that we were heard though unseen, as we crept like thieves above the land of a people who wished us ill.

Then ahead of me I became aware of a beautiful sight, which I have never since seen near the lines—a city in full blaze. There lay a sea of twinkling, glittering lights with three triangles of arc-lamps round it. It was Metz and its three railway junctions. I stood up and looked down on the amazing scene. There lay to our view vivid evidence of German activity. I could see here and there through the jumble of lights the straight line of a brilliant boulevard. It seemed strange to think that down there moved and laughed German soldiers and civilians in the streets and cafés, all unconscious of the fur-clad airmen moving high up among the stars in their throbbing machine.

The explanation of the fearless blaze was simple. The Germans in those days had an agreement with the French that Metz should not be bombed, and therefore they realised that it would be safer if its lights were kept on, so that it might not be mistaken for any other place. Gradually, however, we passed by this city lined in glittering gems, leaving it a few miles on our right. Ahead of us the intermittent red glare of scattered blast-furnaces burst occasionally on the dim carpet of the country, blazing out for a moment and then fading slightly—to blaze out again before they died away, as the unavoidable *coulées*, or discharges of molten metal, were being made.

Still there was no apparent opposition. No searchlights moved in the skies; no shells punctured the darkness. The French observer, who was responsible for the navigation, looked carefully below and then at his map. We were evidently drawing near to the blast-furnaces of Hagendingen. Then he turned round and began to shout instructions. The pilot could not quite understand what he said, so I assisted him. It was strange to be arguing in English and French, the three of us, a mile and a half in the air, fifteen miles beyond the German lines. We became so interested in our explanations and translations that we forgot our surroundings altogether.

"Let me talk to him. Qu'est ce que vous désirez dire, monsieur? Où est Hagendingen?"

The Frenchman pointed an energetic finger downwards.

"Là! Là!"

"He says it's just ahead, Jimmy! Shall I get into the back?"

"Just a minute. Monsieur—c'est temps maintenant to drop the— What's drop, Bewsh?"

"Laisser tomber! I'll tell him. Est ce ... all right! *You* tell him, then! Look at the port pressure. I'll give it a pump!"

So went the conversation high above the earth at night in a hostile sky.

Then I lifted up my seat and crawled to the little room behind, which vibrated fiercely with the mighty revolutions of the two engines. I stood on a floor of little strips of wood, in an enclosure whose walls and roofs were of tightly stretched canvas which chattered and flapped a little with the rush of wind from the two propellers whirling scarcely a foot outside. Behind was fitted a round grey petrol-tank, underneath which hung the twelve yellow bombs.

I lay on my chest under the pilot's seat, and pushed to the right a little wooden door, which slid away from a rectangular hole in the floor through which came a swift updraught of wind. Over this space was set a bomb-sight with its sliding range-bars painted with phosphorescent paint. On my right, fixed to the side of the machine, was a wooden handle operating on a metal drum from which ran a cluster of release-wires to the bombs farther back. It was the bomb-dropping lever, by means of which I could drop all my bombs at once, or one by one, as I wished.

The edge of the door framed now a rectangular section of dark country, on which here and there glowed the intermittent flame of a blast-furnace. I could not quite identify my objective, so I climbed forwards to the cockpit and asked the French observer for further directions. He explained to me, and then suddenly I saw, some way below the machine, a quick flash, and another, and another—each sending a momentary glare of light on the machine. I crawled hurriedly back, and lay down again to get ready to drop my bombs.

Below me now I could see incessant shell-bursts, vicious and brilliant red spurts of flame. I put my head out of the hole for a moment into the biting wind, and looked down, and saw that the whole night was beflowered with these sudden sparks of fire, which appeared silently like bubbles breaking to the surface of a pond. The Germans were firing a fierce barrage from a great number of guns. They thought, fortunately for us, that we were French Bréguets, which flew much lower than we did, so their shells burst several thousand feet beneath us.

I was very excited as I lay face downwards in my heavy flying-clothes on the floor, with my right hand on the bomb-handle in that little quivering room whose canvas walls were every now and then lit up by the flash of a nearer shell. Through the quick sparks of fire I tried to watch the blast-furnace below. Just in front of me the pilot's thick flying-boots were planted on the rudder, and occasionally I would pull one or the other to guide him. The engines thundered. The floor vibrated. Below the faint glow of the bomb-sights the sweep of country seemed even darker in contrast with the swift flickering of the barrage, and here and there I could see the long beam of a searchlight moving to and fro.

Then I pressed over my lever, and heard a clatter behind. I pressed it over again and looked back. Many of the bombs had disappeared—a few remained scattered in different parts of the bomb-rack. I looked down again, and pressed over my lever twice more,—my heart thumping with tremendous excitement as I felt the terrific throbbing of power of the machine and saw the frantic furious bursting of the shells, and realised in what a thrilling midnight drama of action and force I was acting. I looked back and saw by the light of my torch that one bomb was still in the machine. I walked back to the bomb-rack, and saw the arms of the back gunlayer stretching forwards, trying to reach it. I put my foot on the top of it and stood up. It slipped suddenly through the bottom and disappeared.

In a moment I was beside the pilot.

"All gone, Jimmy! Let's be getting back, shall we?"

I leant forward and hit the French observer on the back. When he turned I asked him what luck we had had. He was encouraging, and said that the bombs had gone right across the lights of the factory. Below us now still burst the barrage of shells, whilst one or two stray ones burst near the machine. From the direction of Briey a strong searchlight swept across the sky and hesitated near us, and began to wave its cruel arm in restless search in front of the nose of the machine. As it drew nearer and nearer my hand tugged the pilot's sleeve a little, with a hint to turn. He looked down at me and smiled, and carried on. I knew that he felt no fear, and was less nervous than I was. Little did I guess when I watched, like a frightened rabbit pursued by a slow hypnotising snake, that one searchlight moving in the pool of the night skies above Briey, how I should, later on, steer the machine through a forest of moving beams over Bruges or Ghent. That solitary searchlight was bad enough, and was full of the evil cunning which makes searchlights a greater dread to the night airman than shell fire. To be searched for by searchlights is ever more demoralising. It is as though you stood in the corner of a dark room and an evil being with long arms came nearer and nearer, sweeping those arms across the velvety darkness, and you knew that there would come a time when they would touch you, and then....

Past Metz we flew onwards, and the city could no longer be seen. It lay in darkness, for our bombs had been dropped. Its lights had served to keep it safe. Now, lest it should be used as a guide, the city had died like a vision of the brain, and where had lain that filigree of sparkling diamonds was the unlit gloom.

The shell fire died away and stopped. The white beam of Briey moved vainly across the sky, darting in one swift swoop across a quarter of the heavens, and then hanging hungrily in some suspected corner before it moved onwards again.

I felt supremely confident and at home. I felt I could "dance all night." I felt that for hours I could go soaring onwards over the country of the enemy with this triumphant sense of power. Fear had left me. I was not conscious of being in the air. I sat solidly and at ease on my little padded seat beside the pilot, whose arm I had affectionately taken. I peeled the scarlet paper and the silvery wrappings from the bars of chocolate, and pushed a fragment into his unresisting mouth. We were three or four miles from the lines, but from the danger point of view we were as good as across them. I stuck a photograph behind one of the dials in the cockpit, and it kept on falling on to the floor so that I had to replace it. I fished out three or four mascots from my pocket, and stood them up inside the machine. I began to sing loudly. It was a mild reaction after the strain, which I had not been conscious of, but which had nevertheless been there.

It was a wonderful feeling to know that the job which I had dreaded was done, and that I had come through it safely. I wondered what the Germans thought of that huge load of explosives which had fallen all at once, for a Handley-Page could drop then about three times more bombs than any other machine in use on the Western Front. The Gotha, with its smaller load, had not yet come into action. The Germans must have realised that it was the beginning of a very unpleasant

time for them.

At last the white star-shells rose and fell beneath us, and we left them behind. Towards Nancy I could see a silver strip of river and a few twinkling lights. Near it lay the glare of a night landing-ground. Ahead of us rose coloured rockets from one of the guide positions. On and on we flew, and then we saw the lights of our own aerodrome far ahead. The pilot throttled the engines, and we began to glide down through the darkness to the row of flares. When we were over the rectangle of illuminated grass we circled down in wide sweeps, and landed gently in a long glide.

We stopped by the hangars, and the crowd poured round us again. This time with what delight the eager mechanics saw round the edges of the bomb-racks only small shreds of brown paper, which showed that the machine they had tended so well had done its work, and had taken destruction for them beyond the lines!

With what glow of pleasure I climbed down from the machine, and arm-in-arm with the engineer officer walked awkwardly though joyfully to our cabin! The photographs of my friends seemed to smile on me with genial thanks, and the bed seemed more than ever inviting. We talked, and talked, and talked. The raid was described a thousand times over as we drank hot coffee and munched biscuits. Looking backwards, it seems strange that we should have been so excited after a short raid like that; but it had been a new thing achieved—an adventure successfully carried through.

When at last I got back to the cabin alone I began to think of the effect of my bombs. I pictured the ambulances hurrying down the distant roads to the hospitals. I thought of the women even then learning the news of their husband's or son's death. My head was throbbing and aching with excitement. A mad procession of unending thought went pouring through it at a headlong pace. I lifted the blind and looked out of the window to the wet chill dawn. The sickly stars flickered like pale gaslamps. The dirty moon staggered towards the East, while the West wore a dingy dressing-gown of crimson and tawdry green. The scenes of the night were thronging through my imagination. I could picture it all—the white faces of the dials before us; the pulsing of the engines; the pressing of the bomb-handle; the clat clatter of the falling bombs; the waving searchlights; the impetuous flashing of the shells; the ride home across the dim country; the landing, and the release from fear.

I felt restless and unwell. Again I looked at the humid greasy dawn. Thoughts of the silly death and destruction and agony beyond Metz came to me. I got into the white sheets, but they could not cool my throbbing forehead. My frantically working brain would not let me sleep. I tossed and turned, and dozed off for a moment, only to find myself once more in the air—only to see once more the cold electric light shining on my pilot's fur-gloved hands and set mouth, only to hear the deafening thunder of the motors—and to wake up again.

So passed a sleepless night. Morning brought to my tired eyes and tight-drawn skin, to my strained nerves and slack body, no joy or happiness in life....

Thus was achieved the first raid. I felt anxious for more. I forgot the fear, and remembered the excitement, as human nature always does. I wanted to go to Friedrichshafen or Karlsruhe. Night meant at time of travel. The stars called to me to be up amid their steely glitter, thundering onwards to some far distant place.

Then came the usual sudden order. Again we had to change our aerodrome. We were told to return to Luxeuil, whence we were to fly to Dunkerque.

Farewells were said in cold grey Nancy, strange city of the Vosges with its genial populations, its jolly cafés.

Through a hailstorm we flew to the long-loved aerodrome at Luxeuil. Old friends were met again, but even in our brief absence it had changed and many familiar buildings and faces had gone.

I managed to borrow a Curtiss machine and flew alone, very badly, in order to take my ticket.

The next morning, in spite of the threatening weather, we flew to Paris. At a height of a thousand feet or less, just under the troubled grey masses of cloud, we flew on. I followed the country below with anxious eyes, relying on landmarks to show me the way. I identified each road and railway and village. I checked by the map each little patch of forest, each little lake.

Once I was carried away by the chorus of a song which made me dream a little as I sang. I looked down. There lay the straight road quite in order as I left it, but alongside appeared a forest which was not marked on the map. I became worried. I knew that once I had lost the way I would be badly adrift.

Just in time I discovered that I had passed a fork in the road as I sang to myself, and we had not turned as we should have done. Thereafter I kept my eyes on the alert, till finally we reached the outskirts of Paris.

When we were low over the roofs near Villacoublay I happened to look at the height-indicator. To my surprise it registered zero. I gave the pilot a violent nudge and pointed it out to him. Then I realised that the aerodrome at Luxeuil, on which the indicator had been adjusted, was several hundred feet above sea-level, and that, now we were over lower country, our height might be registered as nothing, when in reality we were a few hundred feet above the roofs.

If there had been a mist we might have been in a difficulty, as our height-indicator would have been useless. We would not have had the good fortune of an airman who on one occasion got overtaken by a thick mist in England and wished to land. He knew the country was flat, so he glided down into the mist very gently, and when the height-indicator was just above zero he climbed out of the machine and sat on the edge. He saw the finger of the dial actually touch the zero mark, and jumped.... So accurate was the instrument that he was not hurt. He was flung down a bank, and was badly shaken up, but was no worse for it. The amazing part of it was that the aeroplane, a very stable machine, landed itself correctly and was found in a field a little farther ahead without a wire broken.

We landed at Villacoublay, and rushed into Paris by car to spend a gay glittering evening in the capital. We were up early next day, and motored out to Villaconblay, and were soon on our way to Dunkerque.

A little past Boulogne the low-drifting clouds were left behind, and we flew into glorious April weather. On the left, to my great joy, was the sea and the surf-lined sweep of the coast. Below was the patchwork of fields and meadows, whose colours were so soft in the sunlight that the country looked like a carpet of suède leather dyed with many a rich shade of cream and brown and purple and dull green, in oblong patternings. Across this lovely mosaic ran straight roads which linked up the compact little towns. Here and there lay a canal like a bar of steel, blue and slender.

The machine moved forward with an absolute steadiness. The pilot took his hands off the wheel, glad to rest himself after the terrific bumping we had been enduring under the clouds since we left Paris. The engines droned contentedly. The burly engineer P.O. in front looked downwards with delight at the sunny plain which moved towards us with such a stately and even progress. Flying became really comfortable for once, and very monotonous.

Calais passed. Gravelines, with its starfish fortifications, moved by on our left-hand side. Dunkerque lay ahead. I began to look for the aerodrome. I had not been told exactly where it was. I knew it was between Dunkerque and Bergues, near the canal. Nearer and nearer to Dunkerque and its line of docks and its ramparts we drew. Still I could not find the aerodrome. The pilot grew impatient. Then I saw in the air ahead of us the familiar form of a twin-engined machine. It was another Handley-Page. It swept downwards in wide curves. I looked below it and saw, by a wide field, a few brown hangars in front of which stood other machines.

The noises of the engines ended. We drifted down and landed. We were met by an officer with a megaphone, who gave us very curt instructions as to where the machine was to stop. We expected to be greeted as heroic travellers, so this abrupt welcome rather surprised us. When we disembarked, however, we found that several Handley-Pages were coming back from a daylight patrol off the coast to Zeebrugge and back. I caught the edge of my pilot's eye and knew he was wondering as I was—what nasty new business was this?

We went into the mess, very tired after our long journey by air from one end of the lines to the other, and while we were sitting at the table a heavy-booted and furred observer came in with very bright eyes and said to the C.O. of the station—

"Rather good luck, sir! We saw a couple of destroyers ten miles north of Zeebrugge. Dropped our bombs on them. Direct hit on one! Seemed to be sinking when I left!"

The C.O. was delighted, and as the observer left the room I felt what a fine spirit of adventure there was in flying when a man could land out of the skies so flushed with achievement. He had sunk a destroyer in the enemy's waters. What a splendid conquest for one man! I felt near the sea again. I felt proud of my naval uniform. I felt glad I was in the Naval Air Service. A breath of the sea swept through the room, which drove away all the sad memories of rather bitter days far, far away near the Vosges.

That night I walked alone under a haggard moon down a treeless road that wound beside a canal. The wind sighed across the flat ploughed fields. Towards Ypres I saw the incessant flash and flicker of artillery fire. For a moment I stood looking to the north-east, towards the lines.

Then would it have been fitting to have seen, as a fantastic prelude to my fantastic nights, what I often saw later from Dunkerque—a glittering string of emerald green balls rise slowly up in the profundity of the night, to droop over and hang awhile in the blue velvet of the night skies before they died away.

IV.

UP THE COAST.

"Towards the silver glittering sea we go
And cross the foam-streaked coast, and leave behind
The fields...."

—*Crossing the Channel.*

In the train on the way to Dover my pilot told me, with a dismal expression over-shadowing his face, a piece of bad news.

"Do you know," he said, "while we were on leave a Handley got shot down off Zeebrugge! ---- was the pilot, and I think he was drowned. One gunlayer was saved, badly wounded. A French seaplane which picked up the other got shot down too! We were well off at Luxeuil!"

With this discouraging information, casting a gloom over the immediate outlook, we crossed the Dover Straits by destroyer, and arrived at the aerodrome to find it busy with these daylight patrols.

My pilot had no machine in action, so, though he was not wanted, I was allocated to a machine on the first patrol that took place. There was a certain amount of concern at the aerodrome in connection with the missing pilot, who was very popular, and I was glad to hear that we were to be accompanied by a patrol of triplanes. This was good news.

One of the pilots, who had been on a daylight Handley-Page patrol, had described it in his inimitable way as follows:—

"We were tooling along merrily, about ten miles off the coast, when a Hun seaplane came up from Ostend—a nasty little green blighter. A 'tripe' just turned round—just turned round, mind you, and the Hun seaplane looked at him and went down quick. When we were off Zeebrugge, Sinjy, my observer, saw some little specks off the Mole. Of course he wanted to have a look at them—he is a full-out beggar—said they were Hun torpedo-boats. We turned on and flew right towards the coast. Sinjy was full out and got ready to drop the bombs. Then he decided they were just trawlers. It was just in time, then—*woof*—about a hundred shells burst all at once just behind our tail. Every battery on the coast must have opened fire at once. They were just waiting for us to come right in and then let go. I shoved the nose down to 80 knots and shifted like smoke out to sea!"

That was very encouraging, especially the part about the triplanes, so really I felt very anxious to go, although I was frightened. I have often felt this mingled eagerness and apprehension, and I have come to the conclusion that although I do not want to do the job, I want to have *done* it, to have had so much more experience behind me. Perhaps this is the impulse behind so many deeds done against personal inclinations. You think far enough ahead to realise how pleasant your feelings will be when you have passed through some danger or some excitement.

One afternoon, after many delays, we started on a coastal patrol. The machine had a crew of five: the pilot, a tremendous fair-haired fellow, resolute and impulsive, a real Viking, who towered above me, and three gunlayers, one in the front and two behind. We carried a small load of bombs, and were under orders to bomb any vessel which was attacked by the leading machine, and were also told that no vessel this side of the Nieuport piers, the seaward end of the lines, was to be touched.

The flight was a small one, of three machines only, and the leading machine was distinguished by white streamers attached to the outside struts of the starboard and port wings.

It was a sunny day when we left the ground, and rose up in great circles over the huddled red roofs of Dunkerque, and the pink-and-white seaside suburb of Malo-les-Bains.

The leading machines started to fly down the coast towards the lines before we had gained any height at all. Our engines were running badly, and we were well below the other machines, so the pilot asked me what I thought.

"Leave it to you!" I said—one half of me whispering "Go back!" the other half whispering "Push on!"

"Well, I'll see!" he said, as he pulled back the control wheel almost as far as he dared without "stalling" the machine. The engines complained; the finger of the speed indicator wobbled undecidedly about 48 miles an hour, and the height indicator slowly moved to 4000 feet.

So we passed over La Panne, as the two leaders flew bravely along the coast soaring upwards like swallows, while we followed gamely but ignobly behind. When we could distinctly see the Nieuport piers and the Belgian Hoods stretching down towards Dixmude, the leader turned out to sea. Then to our joy he evidently realised our plight, for instead of flying on at an angle away from the coast, he swept round in a big circle to give us a chance to rise up to his level. Then he turned once more out to sea, the second machine followed him, and we, still many hundred feet below them, straggled behind.

Above us now flew, gleaming white against the blue afternoon sky, several triplanes, whose flashing wings brought us their message of protection. The outlook did not seem so bad after all. The pilot, in a red silk pirate cap with its tassel blown out by the wind, looked down at me smiling. I wore a blue silk cap and was wearing an ordinary overcoat and a muffler, and my thin walking shoes looked very silly hanging a few inches off the floor in that great machine. The sunlight came streaming into the cockpit, the sea glittered with a friendly spaciousness beneath us, and this voyage in the wind seemed a pleasant spring adventure far from the dangers of war.

We steadily drew away from the coast, whose misty outline lay some way below us to our right. When we were abreast of the Nieuport piers, and were about to cross into enemy waters, we could scarcely see more than the edge of the shore and a mile or so of country inland.

When we had flown on for a few minutes more, I heard a sudden loud crash. At once I looked to the engine to see if its indicators gave hint of trouble. They were quite normal. Then I looked back and saw, through the square framework of the tail, a cloud of smoke.

I turned quickly to the pilot and shouted, "We're being shelled!"

He looked back, and turned to me dubiously.

"What the blazes is it? It can't be the Westende guns—we're too far from the coast!"

Then I saw below me three or four shell-bursts leaping out near the water, not far from two destroyers which were lying below us, small and slim lines of black on the sparkle of the sea.

"I can't make it out!" he said. "It's very rum. Let's push on!"

Some way ahead of us rose and fell the dark outlines of the two other Handley-Pages, and we could notice that curious optical delusion of the air, the apparently slow revolution of their propellers, blade after blade appearing to go round in a jerky fashion, though in reality they were whirling invisibly at a speed of 1600 revolutions a minute, or even more. The only explanation of this spectacle, which can often be seen by an airman, is that the vibrations of his machine affect his eyes like the rapid shutters of a cinema camera, and he has continual momentary glances of the propeller in a fixed position.

Soon we were abreast of Ostend, and we could see the inland lake of its Bassin de Chasse lying beyond the edge of the coast. We passed Ostend, and far ahead of me to my right I could see the curve of the Zeebrugge Mole, very small and dim in the distant haze.

I scanned the sea with my eyes, looking in vain for submarines or destroyers or seaplanes. No mark of any kind broke the shining surface of the water. Now and then a triplane or a "D.H.4," flying on some coastwise expedition, slid up to us and dived down past us, or flew a hundred feet above our heads, showing its distinguishing letters and its red, white, and blue cockade. The pilot sat beside me, his huge body almost half out of the machine, his aquiline nose and pronounced chin driving firmly through the rush of the wind, which flapped and fluttered our silk caps; the sunlight shone with the pale gold of spring across our shoulders and arms, and though I was ten miles out to sea in a land machine off an enemy shore, I felt curiously safe, curiously unafraid. The sea seemed to be a safeguard. Little did I know that I was passing over the scene of my midnight tragedy a year later, when I was to regard the sea in a different aspect—when I was to learn by a bitter lesson its pitiless power.

The machines in front of us swung round to return. We swung round too, to give ourselves a chance of gaining height before we were passed. This was not needed, for to our amusement we saw that whereas, as was only natural, the other machines had flown up the coast with their nose well in air, climbing steadily, now they were returning homewards with their noses well down, getting out of the danger zone (and it *was* a danger zone for a slow cumbersome Handley-Page) as quickly as possible.

They passed nearly a thousand feet beneath us, and this time we followed them easily. When we were almost abreast of the Nieuport piers once more I suddenly saw a little puff of hard black smoke appear in the air in front of us. Its clean-cut outlines grew less distinct and more hazy as it spread and grew thinner. Another puff appeared near it and a little above it, and in turn began to enlarge and dissipate.

"Why! They're shelling us!" exclaimed my pilot.

I looked below. There lay the two destroyers steaming slowly in circles.

"I believe it's those confounded destroyers!" I said. "They must be British too, off here. Can't they see our marks, blame fools?"

Two or three more shells appeared between us and our two companions, who were now going round and round in circles evidently very mystified. It looked so amusing that we could not help laughing, now that the fire was not meant for us. Then the shells came over to us again. It was a curious sight. You would look out into the blue sky and the mist-bound coast, and suddenly, in absolute silence (for the roar of our engines deafened us), would appear, out of nothing, a perfectly hard outline, looking as solid as a piece of coal or a crumpled top-hat. There it would appear in a second of time and would hang in the sky—an apparent mockery of gravity. Its outline would flux and change, it would writhe and roll round into an ever larger expanse of vapour, its edge would grow soft and more ragged, and in a few minutes it would be a little cloud of haze and nothing more.

Suddenly the pilot exclaimed, "It *is* them, the swine, I saw them fire!" and impetuously threw round the wheel and pushed forward the rudder. The machine swung round at a tremendous pace, and a most curious incident occurred. Ahead of us were the two machines, some way below us, with their noses pointing downwards. Now to our amazement we saw them mount up, up, up, into the sky, with their tails down as though they were climbing furiously, and then the coast shot round and rose up into the sky as well.

In the midst of this mad inversion of the universe the pilot turned to me and calmly said—

"What the blazes has happened, Paul—it looks all wrong? What shall I do?"

"Shove her nose down, old man!" I said. "It looks mighty rum to me—but we'll get out somehow!"

The universe swept round us again, the coast fell down, the Handley-Pages dropped below us with their noses towards the sea. The pilot looked at me, I looked at him.

"What on earth was that?" he said.

"Must have been jolly nearly upside down!" I suggested, feeling a bit dazed.

The memory of that brief and mystified conversation, as we sat side by side in a machine which had assumed some incomprehensible position, has remained in my memory as one of the strangest moments I have known.

The shells still burst near us and the pilot got annoyed.

"Let's drop our stuff on them! Get in the back! They can't be British. They must be able to see our marks. We're only seven thousand."

"Well! What about the leader? We daren't do it unless he does—we'll get in a thundering row. Anyway they are just off our coast!"

The leading machines still flew round undecidedly. The destroyers below still fired their occasional shells. One burst rather near us.

"I'll bomb them and chance it—the swine!" said the pilot, "You get in the back!"

"All right, you take the responsibility!" I said, and climbed into the back of the machine and lay on the floor under his seat. I pulled open the sliding-door and a burst of wind came blowing up on my face. Below me lay a little square of sea, on which I could see no destroyer, but I could tell by the way it was racing under us that we were doing a steep turn.

Still the two little black shapes of the destroyers did not come into the frame of the picture. I put my head out below the machine and looked for them. I could not see them. If I had I was determined to drop my bombs on them whatever they were.

I hurriedly got back beside the pilot and asked him what he was doing.

"I decided not to touch them, old man! I want to bomb them—whatever they may be. Anyway the leader's gone off—we better follow."

Some way ahead of us were the two other machines flying homewards. We toiled on behind them, receiving a few parting shell-bursts as a farewell. Out to sea we flew till we were off Dunkerque, and then we turned in towards the coast. We passed over the crowded docks, and over the brown roofs of the town, gliding down with our engines throttled back, when suddenly I looked to the left and saw that one of the propellers had stopped dead. My heart jumped into my throat, and I took the pilot by the arm.

He looked round and told me to get into the back in order to try to start up the engine. I hurried into the little canvas-walled room and gripped the metal starting-handle, and tried to turn it again and again in vain. The sweat poured off my forehead, my arm ached, but I could do nothing. It would not move.

I got back to the pilot, and told him.

"All right!" he said. "I'll land her somehow!"

We were getting near the aerodrome, on which, to my great relief, a machine was "taxying" towards the hangars. It was a relief to see that the aerodrome was clear, because, with no motive-power to take us off the ground again, or to swing us round in a hurry, we should be helpless if we were to land when some other machine was in the way, and we had to land at once. So, as we faced the wind, and I saw the pilot very wisely stop the other engine, I felt rather anxious, and hoped it was going to be all right. If we "undershot," we might land on a shed or a hedge; if we "overshot," we might run into a ditch—there would be no means of preventing the calamity. The pilot must have perfect judgment, and must touch the ground at the right moment.

So I sat beside him, very tense and on the alert, longing to give my advice, but knowing it was best to keep silent, even if I thought he was wrong, lest I should confuse his judgment.

Knowing he was probably feeling the strain of responsibility, since four other lives than his own depended on his skill, I just gripped his arm and said—

"Priceless ... priceless ... we're going to do a topping landing...."

To the right we swung, and then to the left, as we did an "S" turn, to lessen our gliding distance.

"Ripping, old man! We'll just—do—it—nicely... Hardly a bump!... Well! that was some landing!"

The feat had been achieved, and we had landed with both propellers stopped.

Soon we were in the mess eating our "4½-minute" or hard-boiled eggs, drinking tea, and talking excitedly about the flight, our faces flushed with the wind, our hair dishevelled.

Then the glow of pleasure is felt, when the flight is finished, the danger is over, and you can rest, feeling that the rest is well deserved.

An evening report from a reconnaissance squadron informed us that the destroyers had been seen steaming into Ostend harbour. Our feelings can be imagined. Lost chances like that bite deep, and when I met the pilot many many months later on his return from a German prison camp, after the Armistice (for he had landed with engine failure behind the German lines), he said to me—

"Oh, how I wish we *had* bombed those two destroyers! What a chance! What a chance!"

This incident illustrates well the curious point of view of an air-bomber. If those destroyers had been British, and the pilot had ordered me to bomb them, I could have done so with equanimity. If at any time I had been sent at night to attack a British town I would have released my bombs with no feeling of horror; indeed I would not have had any feelings at all. At first sight that statement sounds brutal and incredible. Let me say that I could not stand on a beetle without a feeling of repugnance. It has made me feel sick to shoot an animal in pain. The idea of killing is repulsive to me.

The explanation is that the airman dropping bombs does not drop them on human beings. He presses a lever when the metal bar of his bomb-sight crosses a certain portion of the "map" below him. It is merely a scientific operation. You never feel that there are human beings, soft creatures of flesh and blood, below you. You are not conscious of the fear and misery, of the pain and death, you may be causing. You are entirely aloof.

I have knelt in the nose of the machine over my objective, and have pressed the bomb-handle at the critical moment without ever having seen the bombs in the machine. After a certain time I have seen in the darkness below flash after flash leap up from the dim ground. In my mind those *flashes* have been caused by the movement of my handle. I have not thought of yellow bombs dropping out of the machine, whirling through the air with an awe-inspiring scream, and exploding with a cruel force as they strike the earth. It is as though I had pressed an electric switch, and had seen a lamp glow in response in some far distant signal station.

If I had been taken to a scene of devastation, and had been shown a line of mutilated bodies, and had heard some one say, "You did this!" I should have been overcome with remorse and sickness, and would have gone away in tears of shame and loathing. Yet in the air, when the handle has been thrust home for the last time, and the bombs are actually scattering their splinters of death, I would get back to my seat and laugh and say—

"That's done, Jimmy! Let's push home!"

Once at Dunkerque I saw a street closed by a barrier, round which was a crowd of quiet people. There in the middle of it was a house which had been demolished by a German bomb during the night, and in the cellar lay thirty or forty dead or dying people. Men worked frantically at the crumbled wreckage. An ambulance drove through the barrier. Next to the driver sat an old man with the tears streaming down his cheeks. His wife lay dead in the back.

I turned away with a feeling of horror, and said to my friend—

"I never want to bomb again!"

V.

COASTWISE LIGHTS.

"The cunning searchlights haunt the midnight skies,
Where chains of emerald balls of fire rise,
To mingle with the spark of bursting shells—
High in the darkness where the bomber dwells!

We know the meaning of the sudden glare
Of dazzling light which blossoms in the air:
For us the green and scarlet rockets blaze
And whisper urgent secrets through the haze."

—*The Night Raid.*

From the aerodrome at Dunkerque five Short night-bombing machines were operating. These were large single-engined machines with a very long stretch of wings, and, apart from the Handley-Pages, were the biggest machines in use on the Western Front, and carried the heaviest weight of bombs.

While the Handley-Pages were getting ready, these Short machines, with their ten wonderfully skilled pilots and gunlayers, slipped off unostentatiously into the dark to Bruges and Zeebrugge, night after night, and would come back to the dark aerodrome and land quietly, about two and a half hours afterwards, with their bomb racks empty.

We would crowd round curiously, eager to learn what was to face us when we started raiding on the bigger machines.

The airmen said little as they removed their helmets and coats, or drank coffee in preparation for another raid the same night.

"Bruges is getting a bit hot. Good many flaming onions to-night. Seem to be more searchlights!" was the kind of comment made.

These airmen continued their raids, a little disdainful of the fuss and excitement about the Handley-Pages. They realised that they were doing the job, and that four bombs dropped are better than fourteen about to be dropped.

When the larger machines were ready to go, it was decided that they should operate from another aerodrome near the coast in order that our own aerodrome might be left clear for the Shorts.

I was not allowed to go on the first raid, as my pilot's machine was not in action, so I drove down to the aerodrome at dusk to act as an assistant ground officer. The machines were ready in a corner, and were to proceed to Ostend.

Night fell. The engines roared. One after the other the machines swept up and blotted out the stars in their passage. The noise of the engines died away, and the uneasy night was left undisturbed.

I climbed over the sand-dunes on to the beach, and stood looking north-east towards the lines. Far away I could see many a sign of the restless activity of the war-time night. Flash succeeded flash on the horizon, some dull and red, some brilliant and white. Here and there I could see the faint, almost invisible, arm of a searchlight waving evilly across the sky. Then I would see very slowly, very deliberately, a row of "green balls," like a string of luminous jade beads, rise up from the ground and climb up, up, up, into the darkness, begin to bend over like a tall overburdened flower, and vanish one by one. Another string would follow them, apparently on an irregular curve. Though fully twenty-five miles away, they had all the hard glitter of jewels, and were very luminous and beautiful.

As I stood watching this strange alluring sight, there were two deafening unexpected reports behind me—the most vicious urgent noises I have ever heard. I flung myself flat on the sand, face downwards, arms thrown out. Report after report followed, each one drawing nearer to me. I began to dig, in my desire to be as little higher than the ground as possible. I wished that I were a razor-shell. I felt convinced that the next bomb would be on my back. At last the succession of awful crashes stopped. I lay still, my mouth dry with fear, waiting for the fall of a "hang-up"—the most unreliable bomb of all.

However, no more explosions shook the ground, and the noise of the French anti-aircraft batteries broke the silence of the night instead. I stood up and ran to the aerodrome, stumbling across the sand-dunes and the tufts of dry grass. In the gloom on my right I could see the black columns of smoke which tower above the ground, recording the position of the explosions.

When I reached a deep ditch, I waited a little. I did not want to cross the flat expanse of the aerodrome without feeling sure that the danger was all over. I had the same lingering desire to remain near safety that you feel when playing "musical chairs" and you are near a vacant seat.

I saw a French marine, with the fear of death in his face, coming towards me. He had probably been in the ditch. (Lucky fellow!)

"What was it? Did you hear?" he said. "Not nice, was it?"

He was evidently delighted to see somebody. He wanted the moral support of a companion—another terrified human being. I felt the same, and was glad to see him. He looked so terrified that it made me feel I must not appear to be in the same condition.

So I replied airily—

"Oh! Not at all nice! But not very near. Not dangerous, you know!" (My heart had hardly then left my throat.) "I'm going back to the hangars!"

He walked with me. Maybe he felt that I would be some sort of cover if any more bombs were dropped. I felt the same.

Thereafter the whole night was full of hidden mysteries. In the direction of Calais, tracer shells, like curving hot coals, moved through the sky continuously. The air was full of the hum of engines. There was a talk of Zeppelins. Everything was uncertain.

Then one by one the machines returned and landed with dazzling flares blazing away beneath their wing-tips.

Before dawn we drove back to our own aerodrome, and went to bed.

Our machine was ready for the next raid, and we were detailed to go to Ghent.

In order to save repetition I will describe the first raid, and include in it other incidents which happened during subsequent night trips.

I wish to draw the contrast between the first few flights, when we made mistakes, and had to find out everything by doing it—and the later trips, when we had evolved a better scheme of attack,

and, knowing what to expect, countered each move of opposition before it came, almost as in a game of chess. So in this chapter I will give a composite description of earlier raids, and in my next chapter give a detailed account of a cold determined attack on a highly-fortified objective of whose defences we had gained experience.

The machines are lined up on the seaward aerodrome. I have my celluloid map-case with its coastwise map on one side, and on the other the more detailed map of the district round the aerodrome which we are to bomb.

I climb into my seat and sit beside the pilot. The door is slammed behind us. The pilot blows a whistle, and the chocks are pulled away from the wheels. With our engines running gently on either side we await the order to leave. Then, half a mile in front of us, we see the wide slow flash of a bomb. Another follows it a short time after, and then another. Each is nearer to us, and I can hear the crash of the explosions.

"Bombs!" I say to the pilot. "I don't like this! Bit rotten being bombed before we leave the ground!"

As the last bomb flashes in front of us we receive the order to start away. On go the engines with a roar, and we move across the grass. The nose drops down slightly as the tail leaves the ground and we begin to assume flying position. It is very unpleasant rushing across the dim aerodrome like this, not knowing when a bomb is going to burst on you or near you, and conscious of the fact that somewhere in the darkness above is a German aeroplane, perhaps waiting for you.

Suddenly there is a jerk at my head, and my invaluable fur-lined mask-goggles have vanished, being snatched away by the rush of air. This means that I shall have no goggles to wear during the whole raid.

The nose shoots up into the air, and with a vibrant beat from the engines we mount into the starbestrewn sky, and turn out over the sand-dunes towards the sea. We move away from the aerodrome at once, and the occasional red flashings of bursting bombs show us that we are wise.

Dunkerque passes on our starboard side. Its defences are very suspicious, and we are taken for a German machine. Shells begin to burst near us, though we are scarcely a thousand feet off the ground.

I load my Very's light pistol with a cartridge, and fire over the side "the colour of the night." I continue to do so until the shell-fire stops. The town lies in darkness, but I am faintly conscious of its hidden wakefulness as it lies angry and apprehensive. Below can be seen a few faint specks of light from the ships anchored, for safety's sake, off the shore.

We fly onwards along the coast, climbing steadily. We keep the pale line of the beach near enough to our starboard side to be able to follow it easily. The engines run evenly. The dials are steady. In front of us the air-speed indicator hardly wavers. It is a time, not of trouble and anxiety, but of mere waiting. The strain has not yet begun. With the near approach of the German territory the whole mental outlook of the airman changes, and every nerve automatically becomes on the alert. Now, however, there is the same sense of mild interest felt in an ordinary daytime flight over friendly territory. The country lying to our right is creditably dark. Not one gleam of light shines in the stretch of vague shadows, save where at a large coastwise munition plant a red flame leaps up for a moment and dies away.

In the far distance can be seen an occasional misty flash from the volcanic region of Ypres. A little nearer a tremulous star-shell glows white through the haze, and slowly droops and dies.

La Panne is passed, and we begin to turn out at an angle away from the coast. We are nearly six thousand feet from the ground, and are still climbing. We sweep round in three or four wide circles to gain a little more height, and then fly straight ahead.

At the end of the lines by the piers of Nieuport we are six miles or so from the coast. At Ostend I can see a vague cluster of searchlights moving restlessly and rather undecidedly across the sky, dredging the sky with their slim white arms in an evil and terrifying manner. I ask the pilot to turn out at a sharper angle, in order that he may pass Ostend quite ten miles out to sea. There is a visible menace in searchlights, and we avoid them like poison unless it is essential to go near. It requires a very strong nerve to fly right ahead to a thicket of moving beams of light. We used to allow six or seven miles margin, and would willingly add several miles to our journey on the wrong side of the lines in order to make a detour.

As we are passing Nieuport I see two small points of light suddenly appear. They rise up and swell into two bright flares—one scarlet and one emerald. These flares die away, and at once several more searchlights become active near Middelkerke. It is the German "hostile aircraft" signal. Off Middelkerke itself we see two more flares, and when Ostend, with its forest of moving beams, lies far to our right, yet another sinister group of red and green lights rises up as we are "handed" along the coast from point to point.

Below us now is the expanse of sea. Above us are a few scattered stars, which have challenged the radiance of the moon. To the right lies the dimly seen line of the coast, fringed, as far as we can see, with a line of searchlights waving outwards over the sea. At Ostend an aerial lighthouse flashes at a regular interval, giving signals of guidance to the German aircraft abroad in the darkness. Slightly behind us are the occasional star-shells, and a hurried flash gives evidence of military activity on the land.

We are almost 8000 feet up, and with the fringe of searchlights as a barrier I am not easy in my mind.

"Pull her up to nine thousand, if you can, Jimmy; it's hardly high enough yet! Try and pull her back a bit! We'll have to cross the coast in about ten minutes."

I am feeling that my scheme of going to the objective by land was by far the best one. The coastal section of Belgium had two fronts—the trench-line from Nieupoort to Ypres, and the coast-line from Zeebrugge to Nieupoort. There was a strong searchlight barrier by the sea; there was none behind the German front lines. Therefore, if you were to proceed to a land objective by the sea route you had to face two organisations of defence—first at the coast, and then at the objective. If you went by the overland route you had only the searchlights at your objective to tackle. The fewer obstacles there were to meet, the better I was pleased; and I felt that it was bad management if in an attack on an objective I was troubled by the defences of any other point.

Thereafter I used the overland route, even when attacking places on the coast, until my final accident. It was as much a question of morale as anything. If you crossed the German lines about Nieupoort there was no opposition. Your lights were extinguished. You moved into an unopposing darkness. You never felt that the people below knew that you were there. Ghisteltes on the left shot up a couple of towering lights, which moved vainly towards you. Thorout gave birth to one pale beam, which you might ignore. If, on the other hand, you moved down the mast, you saw that cruel waiting fence of white weeds stretching up into the dark pool of the night—a visible and threatening sign of hostile activity.

So, as we pass Ostend, I look along the coast-line with a feeling of fear. We are going to cross the shore between Zeebrugge and Ostend, at Blankenberghe, which is the most weakly defended spot.

Suddenly my pilot strikes my arm.

"Look! There's one of their patrol machines with a searchlight! There—*there*—to the left!"

I turn and see, moving very swiftly, half a mile in front of us, a brilliant light. The pilot shouts again.

"It's turning towards us! Get in the front, quick!"

I crawl through the small wooden door into the nose of the machine, and unstrapping the Lewis gun get it ready for action. The light sweeps round to the right, but it is going downwards, and the German airman has evidently not seen us. I wait a minute or two and examine the sky all round us, but can see nothing. With a feeling of relief I kneel on the floor and wriggle back into my seat behind.

"By *Jove*! Did you see that, Bewsh?" says the pilot. "The devil! We'll have to look out."

Ahead of us now we can see the tall powerful searchlights of Zeebrugge moving in slow sweeps over the sky. Under our right wing lies Ostend. We are off Blankenberghe, and the time has come to cross the coast. We are eight thousand five hundred feet above the sea, and are not likely to gain much more height, and, at any rate, we are anxious to get the work done and to return home.

To the right we turn and move steadily towards the waiting coast. In front of us lies the waving line of searchlights. Inland, to the left, can be seen in the distance the turmoil of Bruges. The beams of light sweep across the stars; shells burst in the sky; and now and then there float upwards strings of fantastic green balls, sparkling like gems as they bubble towards the upper levels, where they float gaily for a moment parallel to the ground before they fade away.

Below, near the coast by Blankenberghe, an aerial lighthouse flashes and flashes—*Four shorts—one long*—darkness: *four shorts—one long*—darkness. Now we are getting near to the restless weeds of light which begin to move outwards in search of us. The pilot throttles the engines slightly, for we are getting within the range of these clutching tentacles. I feel very nervous and frightened.

On either side of us now move the slow gliding beams—broad and pale shafts of light stretching high, high up above us in the darkness, blotting out the stars, and stretching far, far beneath us to a tiny spot of light on the black edge of the coast.

With these arms of light coming up to us from the ground we begin at once to have a sense of height, which normally you never have when in the air. The searchlights, running from the earth to our level and past us, join us to the ground and give us a measure of distance and an opportunity of contrast. With these tall, enormously tall, thin pillars of light near us moving to and fro in a hypnotising swing, we feel very, very high off the ground, and realise how remote from the earth we sit on our little seats in the fragile structure of linen and steel and wood.

Beneath us now lies the vast and bottomless pool of the night sky. From the blue depths there comes pouring up, like the exhalations of some sinister sea creature in the primeval ooze, bubbles of green fire. Suddenly in the darkness appears a round bead of emerald light, another one appears beneath it, and then another, and a whole necklace pours upwards as though a string of gems had been pulled out of a fold in a black velvet cloth. In simple curves they soar past us into the upper sky, where perhaps they die out on their upward rush, or turn over and

begin to drop downwards before they fade into mere red sparks falling swiftly.

Now are we towering high over the black edge of the coast in the pinnacles of the slim searchlights which challenge us in front, and move to the right and left of us. We are conscious of our hostility to those below, and rejoice to creep unseen, unnoticed, across this sentinel barrier. Around us the occasional ropes of brilliant emeralds wander upwards in regularity and silence, and for a rare moment we are conscious of being in the air at night. To our left Zeebrugge flings into the sky a dozen beams of powerful light, fortunately too remote to challenge us. To our right Ostend echoes the threat. We are just between the two danger zones, unassailable, but by a short distance only, by both of them.

I am learning the mistake of crossing the enemy's sea frontier instead of his land frontier. I am worried and harassed at the very beginning of my travel across his territory, instead of becoming settled down and used to being in an enemy sky before the visible danger of searchlights appear to challenge my passage.

We pass slowly, silently, through the suspicious beams of light. To the right and left we twist and turn as one of the swords cuts the sky near us. I draw my arms to my side to make myself smaller so that I may wriggle through the sharp edges of danger without being touched. Apart from the risk it is exciting, though very nerve-trying. When at last we are through the barrier, and regain the undefended inland region, there is a great feeling of relief.

Our engines are opened out, and we fly level again. Beneath us are the pale roads, and the dark lines of canals, and the chiaroscuro of villages and forests. Five or six miles to our left we look down into the cauldron of Bruges. It is a wonderful and awe-inspiring sight, and as it does not threaten us to-night we look at it with keen interest. The most noteworthy feature is a vicious-looking row of four searchlights, near together and spaced at even intervals, like a line of footlights at a theatre. These four beams of light move across the sky in strange and unpleasant formations. Now the two end ones stand upright while the two central ones sweep forward. Now the whole four move to and fro in a determined and formidable sweep. Now the two middle ones cross each other in a gigantic X of light, and the two outer ones sweep to and fro with the beat of a mighty metronome. We called these four lights the "Lucas Cranwell" lights, as they were like a landing light set of this name which we were experimenting with on our machines. Later on in the year, to our great relief, they were removed. The moral effect of a group of lights like that is very great. You were frightened before you approached the objective. They were a clever set of lights, too, because on one occasion they were *switched* right on to our machine and held it, without any preliminary groping in the sky.

In addition to the "Lucas Cranwell" lights are five or six other powerful searchlights standing in a circle round the town, moving to and fro in a languid and sensuous way. Ferocious little spurts of light on the ground in a dozen places indicate the position of anti-aircraft guns, and here and there in the sky appear the quick and vivid flashes of the bursting shells. To complete the picture of activity the lovely necklaces of flaming jade rise up in great curves—sometimes only five or six in a string—sometimes twenty or thirty at once.

Now comes the time when I have to begin to seek my objective. Up to the present, the coast-line and the centres of activity at Ostend, Zeebrugge, and Bruges have rendered the use of a map unnecessary. I have scarcely had need to look over the side. Now, however, I have to begin to do some work.

I know by the waving searchlights that I am about six miles south of Bruges. I look over the side and see a main road running S.S.E. I identify it on the map and see that a railway should shortly appear. Soon I distinguish, with difficulty, the thin line of a railway track, which is a difficult thing to see by night or day—the best guide being any kind of water—canals, rivers, or lakes—then a good white road, or a forest, and lastly a railway line.

We cross the railway, and I identify a branch line running away from it. We turn N.E., and at the end of seven or eight minutes I see the bold black line of a canal whose peculiar curves it is very easy to identify. The volcano of Bruges flames up into the night to our left, while beyond it we can see the aerial lighthouses of Ostend and Blankenberghe flashing regularly on the hazy horizon. Flushing sparkles cheerfully ahead of us, and along the Scheldt glitter the Dutch villages.

We turn round to the right and fly on. We are now moving on a straight course, and I identify in turn each bend in the canal, each thin road, each queer-shaped forest. The aerodrome draws near. I see in the distance the little wood near which it lies. Then I can see the pale shape of the landing-ground, which looks slightly different to the surrounding fields owing to its made-up surface. We sweep round in order to be able to face the wind and to approach it in a good line. We turn again and begin to fly straight ahead.

"I'm getting in the back now, Jimmy," I shout. "Fly straight on. If I give two greens or two reds swing her round quickly. Turn very slowly for one green or one red!"

I crawl into the back, throw myself on the floor, kick my legs out behind me, and slide to the right the door beneath the pilot's seat. A biting wind beats on to my face, making my eyes water and blowing dust all over me. I remove a safety-strap from the bomb handle to my right and look below. There lies a square of pallid moonlit country. The aerodrome is not in view yet. I push my head out, turn it sideways, and look forward.

A mile or two ahead I see the little forest. I try to calculate whether we are steering straight for it

or not. It seems to me that we are flying too much to the left. I pull myself inside the machine again, take off a glove, shine a torch on a little row of buttons on the frame of the door, and press the button on the right. A green light glows in the cockpit, and, looking at the bomb-sight, I see that the machine is swinging towards the right.

I poke my head through the bottom of the machine again and see the position of the aerodrome a good deal nearer. Now, however, we are too much to the right. Inside I pull my head and press the left-hand button. A red light glows in front of the pilot. I look down again. The small wood is in view, but even as I look the bomb-sight travels across it from the right well over to the left as the pilot swings the machine round in obedience to my signals.

Anxiously I press the button to the right again. Five or six times I press it quickly. Across the aerodrome the sight swings toward the right. Just before it crosses the middle of it I press the middle button. A white light glows before the pilot—the "straight ahead" signal. I have not given it soon enough, however: the machine is not checked on its rightward swing in time. It stops the turn with the sight well to the right of the aerodrome. I look at the luminous range-bars of the sight. We are almost over the objective. If I do not alter the direction I shall not be over the aerodrome when the time has come to drop the bombs. I flash the red light a second. The machine flies on. I press my finger on it and hold it there. Round to the left it swings. I look carefully down the range-bars of the sight. They are almost in line.

I press the central again and again, trying to judge the moment when I can check the pilot, so that the swing of the machine will stop as we come over the aerodrome. I misjudge it. The bomb-sights are in line with the aerodrome, but we are swinging rapidly to the left. I press the bomb-lever once quickly to release two bombs. If I released any more they would straggle in a line right off the objective. My hands are almost frozen, my eyes are running. I feel discouraged and unhappy. Down below I see two red flashes appear near the hangars, leaving two round moonlit clouds of smoke on the ground.

I climb up beside the pilot, but before I have time to speak he asks eagerly—

"Dropped them all, old boy? How did you do it?"

"Couldn't do it, Jimmy. I'm *awfully* sorry. It's this beastly signal light system. It isn't direct enough; I wish I could guide you better. It isn't your fault, but I can't stop you in time. I'll try again in a second if you swing her round."

In a great circle we sweep round to our old starting-point, and I get ready to make another attempt.

"I'll try very hard this time, old man. Let's get into the wind as near as we can, and you steer by some light, and I'll try to give as few changes in direction as I can. The worst is, I can't see the beastly aerodrome till we are almost on top of it, and then I can't get a decent 'run'. We must get that front cockpit position!"

I stand up and look over the front, and try to fix the exact position of the aerodrome and its surroundings in relation to the machine.

I hurry into the back and look through the trap-door again. I can hardly see, owing to my running eyes; but I wipe them dry, and look intently ahead in a horribly uncomfortable position, my head and shoulders hanging out of the bottom of the machine. Right ahead of us is the pale shape of the aerodrome. The pilot is flying magnificently. We are moving steadily forwards. As we draw nearer, I wriggle back into the machine and look down the bomb-sight. The thin direction-bar lies right across the aerodrome. I joyously press the middle button, so that the white light laughs out: "Good! Good! Good!" into the pilot's face. We begin to drift slightly to the right. I do not touch the key-board, but stand up and push my body forwards beside the pilot and shout furiously—

"Turn her very slightly to the left, Jimmy! We're doing fine! We'll get her this time! I'll press central when we're on it."

In a flash I am underneath the seat and looking at the bomb-sight. It swings slowly, slowly to the left. Just before it arrives over the aerodrome I press the white light button deliberately. The movement stops, and the bomb-sight begins to creep steadily forwards over the hangars and surface of the aerodrome. With my anxieties past I have a wonderful feeling of relaxation and happy excitement. Just before the two luminous range-bars actually touch the edge of the line of hangars, I grasp the bomb-handle and begin to press it forward slowly. I hear the sharp clatter of opening and closing of the bomb-doors behind me, and I see two plump bombs go tumbling downwards below the machine. Again, and a third and a fourth time, I press forward the bomb-handle, and can feel the little drags on it as I release bomb after bomb. I look behind, and see that they are all gone. I shine my torch through the racks to make sure, and I see the gunlayer busy with his torch also. I look below through the door, and see four or five bomb-flashes leap out across the aerodrome, while behind them lies apparently the smoke of others near the hangars. I slam the door to with a feeling of thankfulness, and get back to my seat.

"All gone, Jimmy! No 'hang-ups.' You did jolly well; they went right across the aerodrome. Let's push north-west back to the coast. I'm absolutely frozen."

I have a hurried look at my pressure-dials, to see that they are all right; and when I have adjusted them, I uncork my Thermos flask, have a comforting drink of hot tea, and eat some chocolate. I beat my gloved hands together and try to restore the circulation, and stamp my feet on the floor.

Feeling tired and cold, I sit on my seat with my head on my breast, feeling languid and limp after the subconscious strain.

Towards the distant coast-line, with its steady flickers of lights at Ostend and Blankenberghe, we move, forgetting already the place on which we have just dropped our bombs. The turmoil of Bruges has subsided—only two wary searchlights stand sentinel at either side of the town, alert and scarcely moving. Those two are enough to give us warning, however, and we sweep to the left to leave the simmering inferno well to our starboard.

Below lies the pallid moonlit country,—field and forest, chateau and canal,—clearly etched in a soft black pattern of shadows and dim light. Far, far to the south Ypres flashes and flares on the horizon, with its night-long artillery fire.

Now that our job is done, we are not so fearful of being over enemy country, partly because we are used to it by now, and partly because we are leaving the interior farther and farther behind us, minute by minute, as the coast-line draws nearer.

Unexpectedly I notice below the machine a curious white patch on the face of the country. Then I see others behind it, and realise that the coast-line is becoming swiftly blotted out under a layer of clouds.

"Jimmy! Look—clouds! We'll have to go carefully," I remark, and have a look at the compass. "Let's turn a bit more south-east, and we are bound to see Ostend."

We turn swiftly, and in a few minutes are above a white carpet of cloud, through which, to my joy, I can see very hazily the flashing light of Blankenberghe to my right. Over towards Zeebrugge rise a few parting strings of green balls as the last British machine turns out to sea.

For ten minutes we fly on by compass, which I check by the coldly glittering North Star, that shines faithfully for us high in the deep blue of the sky.

Then I see, running to and fro, and round and round, on the carpet of the clouds, little circles of light. Now and then one comes to a rift on the bank, and for a moment a beam of light shoots up into the sky, only to vanish again. The Ostend searchlights are vainly looking for us; our engines have been heard.

Now we are approaching a new formation of clouds, lovely towering masses of cumulus, pearl-white in the light of the moon. Over an unreal world of battlement and turret, of mountain summit and gloomy valley, we move in a splendid loneliness beneath the scattered stars. This billowy world of soft and silvery mountain ranges is made the more strange by the restless discs of radiance which run and swoop and circle and dance in a mad maze of movement across the curving pinnacles and ravines. Now and again a searchlight, striking into the heart of some towering summit of cloud, illuminates it with a glorious radiance, so that it seems for a moment to be woven of the fabric of light.

Suddenly the scene becomes even more fantastic, for in one place on the clouds appears a spot of vivid green. The spot of light spreads and spreads until it is a circle of emerald light, a mile or more in diameter, and from the extreme centre appears a ball of brilliantly green fire which pops out of it quickly, to be followed by another and another, until the whole chain of beads have freed themselves from the entanglements of the vapour and rush gaily upwards high over our heads, to end their brief career in a lovely splendour above the milk-white billows of the cloudy sea.

Another point of cloud glows green, there is another swiftly expanding circle of colour, and another string of these quaint gems float upwards in a swaying curve. The sight is one of such exquisite loveliness that it is difficult to describe it. It is all so beautiful—the star-scattered vault of night, gold flowers in a robe of deepest blue: the soft white wonder of the rolling clouds, mile upon mile, as far as you can see, moonlit and magic, a playground for the gambolling figures of light which, like a host of Tinker Bells, rush deliriously from side to side, climb up hills and slide down valleys, and jump excitedly from peak to peak: the expanding flowers of emerald light from whose heart rise the bizarre bubbles of scintillating brilliance, to live through a few glorious seconds of ecstatic motion before they die in the immensity of the night.

It is a scene of a strange and ever-altering beauty, and one that very few eyes have seen. It is a world beyond the borders of the unreal. Forgotten is the material country of fields and forests far below—as forgotten as it is unseen. To a paradise of vague moon-kissed cloud we have drifted, and float, dreaming, between the stars of heaven and the purgatory beneath.

Then for a moment a great rift in the barrier appears beneath us. Across the dark space with its edges of ragged white lie two hard beams of light. Then we see, far below, a chain of green balls rush up from the darkness, and as they appear they light up a great circle of the earth, and slowly there appears nearly the whole of Ostend lit up by a ghostly greenish light. I see the shining sea, the line of the shore broken by the groins, and the huddled roofs of the houses. For a moment the scene is clear and distinct, then with the upward course of the balls of light it dies away, and the two searchlights throw blinding bands across a pool of obscurity.

What we have seen, however, is a sufficient guide. We know we are above the coast. The machine swings to the left, and above the rippling spots of light we roar on westwards. Soon we leave this fantastic dancing floor behind us, and, seeing through the misty curtains a watery glow of white light blossom out into a hazy gleam and fade away, we know that we are somewhere near the lines.

Onwards we fly, watching the compass, watching the North Star, watching the pale veils of vapour beneath us. The cloud barrier grows thinner, and more and more rifts appear in it. About ten minutes after we have passed the lines, we see ahead of us a pale searchlight flash in the masses of cloud, now shooting up through a gap, now losing itself in the lighted edges of a floating wisp. It flashes three times, and stops. Again it appears, three times stabbing the sky, challenging us with the "letter of the night" in Morse code.

I load my Very's light pistol and fire it over the side. A green light drifts down and dies. The searchlight goes out; we fly on.

"That light is somewhere near Furnes, Jimmy. Let's put our navigation lights on now; I'll try and pick up some landmark below,—the coast if I can ... it's awfully thick to-night!"

Beneath in the murk I can see now and again a twinkling light, and then, to my delight, I pick up the shore. We fly on above it for a quarter of an hour. Then the pilot begins to get anxious.

"Can you see Dunkerque yet, old man? We ought to be there!" he asks.

I look below, and see sand-dunes and the unbroken coast running a little way on either side into the mist, which has now taken the place of the cloud.

"Can't quite make out, Jimmy. We had better fly on a bit. We must be past La Panne!"

For four or five minutes we fly on. Once I lose sight of the coast, and ask the pilot to turn to the right, not telling him the reason. To my relief I pick it up again before he suspects that I am lost.

"Anything in sight yet, Bewsh?" he asks. "We must be up near Dunkerque by now. We can't have passed it!"

Still the unbroken coast below.

"I'd better fire a light," I suggest.

"All right," he says. "Carry on—stop a minute, though! We *are* over the lines, aren't we?"

"We *must* be ... I think. We passed Nieuport miles back. I can't make out where we are. I'll give a white!"

I load my Very's light pistol and fire it over the side. A ball of white fire drifts below towards the mocking emptiness of the mist. I stand up and look all around. Through the haze comes no welcome gleam.

"No answer, Jimmy! What *shall* we do? If we go on we'll get miles down towards Calais! If we go back, we get over the lines. Go up and down here, and I'll try to find Dunkerque—it *must* be somewhere near!"

I fire another white light, and then another. No answer comes from the ground. No searchlights move across the sky. All we can see is a vague circle, bisected by the coast-line—one half being sea, the other half sand-dunes.

Then, in my excitement, I accidentally fire a Very's light inside the machine. The ball of blazing fire rushes frantically round our feet and up and down the floor. I hurriedly stamp it out amidst the curses of the pilot, who says later that in my eagerness I picked it up and threw it over the side.

Now I press a brass key inside the machine which operates our big headlight. R-O-C-K-E-T-S, I flash piteously; and again, *Rockets*. Another Very's light I fire, and then click and clatter the key, "*Please fire rockets*"; and again, "*Rockets—we are lost!*"

"What shall we do?" asks the pilot in a hopeless voice. "Shall we land on the beach? I am getting fed up!"

"Just a second—I'll ask Wade."

I climb into the back and flash my torch through the bomb-racks. I see the face of the gunlayer in the ray of light. Pushing my head and shoulders into the maze of framework, I shout out at the top of my voice. The gunlayer shakes his head. I go forward and ask the pilot to throttle down a little.

The noise of the engine dies away. I hurry back and shout out again.

"Can you make out where we are, Wade? I'm quite lost. Have we got to Dunkerque?"

"Don't know, sir. I don't think so! I can't make out at all!"

I climb back into my seat, and say—

"Put the engines on again! It's no good. He doesn't know either! I don't know *what* to do!"

The key taps once more the vain appeal. Again and again I fire a white light. The floor round my feet is strewn with the empty cartridge cases of brown cardboard. I feel depressed and tired and irritable. What a silly end to a raid, it seems, to lose yourself right over your own aerodrome! It is undignified. I am ashamed to have had to ask the gunlayer where we are. I feel a pretty poor observer.

Then I see in the mist a little ahead of me a white light rise up and die away.

"Look, Jimmy! A white light! Good! They've seen us at last!"

But the pilot is not so trustful, and says—

"You're quite sure it isn't the *lines*?"

"Oh no! I'm sure! Throttle down a bit and glide that way!"

As we draw nearer I suddenly see the two piers of Dunkerque and the docks materialise in the mist, and on the other side the dull glow of landing flares from an aerodrome.

"No! It's *not* Ostend! It's all right, old man! There's St Pol! I'll fire another white!"

I fire for the last time, and scarcely has my ball of light died out before the answering signal soars up from the ground.

The engines are throttled, and we drift downwards on our whistling planes over the long basins of the Dunkerque docks. When we are about a hundred feet off the ground I press a small brass stud in front of me. A white glare of light bursts out under our right wing tip and throws a quivering radiance on the dyke round the aerodrome, on the hangars, and on the landing field itself, at the end of which are two or three red lights. We sweep gently on the surface of the ground, and before we have stopped rolling forwards, a little figure runs towards us flashing a light, and we hear its voice call—

"Turn to the left soon. The ground is full of bomb-holes ... where those red lights are!"

Guided by the figure on the ground we "taxi" up to the hangars and stop our engines. In a second I am on the ground.

"Didn't you see our Very lights?" I asked almost rudely. "Didn't you see us flashing signals? I signalled Rockets—rockets—rockets—till my hand ached! We got lost. We were going to land on the beach. Why didn't you help us?"

"We *wondered* what you were doing. We saw you firing lights on the other side of Dunkerque! But, I say, things have been humming here since you left!"

I can find no admiring audience for the experiences of the raid. Every one is eager to describe the German attack.

"By Jove! you were lucky to be away to-night!" says one. "They've been bombing us ever since you left. They must have dropped a couple of hundred during the night. No damage was done. The C.O. nearly got hit. He lay flat and one burst on either side of him. All the time you were bombing them they were bombing us!"

No one wants to hear our adventures. It is human nature all over again. They want to tell us what happened to them.

"Off Ostend we saw one of their patrols. It had a whacking big——"

"But you should have heard them whistling. Bob and I were talking outside the mess, when suddenly we heard——"

"We got over the clouds coming back. You ought to have seen the——"

"You've *missed* something, ... and I reckon you're lucky! The noise was terrible!"

And so on, and so on goes the one-sided conversation of the two self-centred groups!

So ended a raid which is to my mind very unsatisfactory. I realise that we have to learn by experience, and I feel that to-night I have been taught a great deal. I am determined to have the bomb-sight and bomb-handle fitted in the front cockpit, so that with a splendid field of vision I can steer the pilot by the direct wave of my hand, by means of which I will be able to show emphasis or the reverse. The personal touch is essential. I will also be able to watch the enemy's defences and to counter them as much as possible.

In my next chapter I hope to show how this worked out in practice, and what it was like to attack a volcano such as Bruges.

VI.

BRUGES.

"Sleep on, pale Bruges, beneath the waning moon,
For I must desecrate your silence soon,
And with my bombs' fierce roar and fiercer fire
Grim terror in your tired heart inspire;
For I must wake your children in their beds
And send the sparrows fluttering on the leads."

Overhead sounds the beating of many engines, and here and there across the stars I can see moving lights. The first two or three machines are already up. The carry-on signal has been given. A machine which has just left the aerodrome passes a few hundred feet overhead with a roar and a rush. Its dark shape blots out the stars, and I can see the long blue flames pouring back from the exhaust-pipes of the engines.

I walk along the dim path and a shadowy figure meets me.

"Is that you, Dowsing?" I ask, recognising my servant.

"Yes, sir!"

"I'm just off on a raid. Fill my hot-water bottle about quarter-past nine, and put it right at the bottom of the bed. If you think the fire too hot move my pyjamas back a little."

"Good luck, sir!"

I pass on to the aerodrome. To the right is the mess, near which is the control platform where the raid officer stands all night despatching machines and "receiving" them as they return. A crowd of officers and men, wrapped in heavy overcoats, stand in groups watching the departure of the machines. In the middle of the aerodrome shine the lights of the landing T of electric-light bulbs laid across the grass. To the left are the vast hulks of the hangars, in front of which are lined up the machines yet to go.

Passing by two machines whose engines are running, I come to my own. Under its nose stand half a dozen mechanics. One hands me a piece of paper.

"Wind report, sir!"

Flashing my torch on it I see it is a report of the speed and direction of the wind at different heights up to 10,000 feet, information which has been obtained by a small meteorological balloon whose drift has been watched through an instrument on the ground.

Among the mechanics stands another figure as heavily muffled as myself.

"Are you my rear gunlayer?" I ask him.

"Yes, sir! Mr Jones told me to...."

The engine just above our heads is started up with a sudden deafening thunder. I take the gunlayer by the sleeve towards the tail to hear his message.

"Oh! Yes! You have never been on a raid. I'll tell you what to do. I warn you Bruges is pretty hot, but, touch wood" (the tail-plane is near), "if we are lucky we will come through. Mr Jones is a very good pilot, and I don't like taking any risks. Don't you get worried. It will be all right. You know all about the Lewis guns, don't you? Good! Well, if a German searchlight holds us, open fire on it at once. Only if it *holds* us, mind, not if it merely tries to find us, or the tracer bullets will give us away. If a German scout attacks us, open fire on him at once with your machine-gun. When I have dropped my bombs—you will be able to see me in the front cockpit—shine your torch on the back to see whether any have hung up. If one has stuck in the back racks near you, get him through somehow,—stand on him if necessary. If you want to say anything to me flash your torch over the top of the fuselage—you know Morse code, don't you?—and I will answer you back in Morse code. You'd better get in the back now. Don't worry! If you feel frightened, remember I am just as frightened as you—if not more!"

He walks up towards the nose of the machine, stoops under the tail to the rear of the main planes, and climbs up into his little platform in the back. I walk round the wings to the front of the machine and, facing the two propellers, walk slowly and carefully between their two whirring discs until I come to the little step-ladder under the triangular door on the floor. I walk up it, and with a certain amount of difficulty work my unwieldy body and my various impedimenta through it, assisted by the two engineers who have been starting up the engines from inside.

I suddenly remember the wind report, so I climb into the front cockpit, and, shining my torch on the bomb-sight fixed in front of the extreme nose, adjust it in accordance with the report, for I know from which height I intend to drop my bombs—that height being the greatest possible, as we are going to Bruges.

As I am turning the little milled adjusting wheels, the machine on our right moves off with a sudden roar of power. I hurry back and sit beside the pilot.

"Are you all right now, Paul?" he asks. "We are next off."

A wave of noise sweeps over to us from the middle of the aerodrome as the next ahead, gathering speed, rushes across the aerodrome. We both watch it with slowly turning heads.

Gradually the machine rises, and with a change of note roars up into the sky above the farm buildings to the left.

A series of flashes from a signalling-lamp on the control platform. It is the *next-machine-away* signal. The pilot at once opens up the engines. We move slowly across the grass, bumping and

swaying as we pass over the uneven ground. When we come to the end of the landing T, the starboard engine is put on, and we swing round to the left till the line of electric lights stretches ahead of us. The noise of the engine dies away. The pilot takes his goggles out of a wooden box, which he hands to me, and snaps them over his eyes. He straps himself in his seat with a safety-belt, and pulls on a pair of fur-covered gloves.

"You quite ready, old man?" he asks.

"Yes!"

"We'll start off now! I think it will be all right; don't you?"

"Yes!"

Soon we are off the ground. Below the wings streak the little lights of the cross-bar of the landing T. I can see the illuminated blades of grass round the bulbs. We climb up and up, and clear with ease the roofs of the farm buildings. Over the tall trees lining each side of a wide canal we pass, and beneath us lie the coruscating scarlet and white lights of a railway junction. I can see the fiery red smoke of a locomotive moving down one line of tracks.

"What a target!" says the pilot. "Have a look at the engines!"

I switch on my torch and shine it on to the two engines, to see whether the sinister white scarves of steam and water are sweeping back from the top of the radiators. Fortunately, to-night the engines are working splendidly. If either engine were to be boiling, after one or two efforts to prevent it, the pilot would land the machine at once. If not, disaster would probably follow, as it did during my last terrible raid.

For a while, as ever, I am a little nervous of looking below. I prefer to hunch myself inside the big collar of my overall suit, and to make continual adjustments of the petrol pressure, which is recorded on two little dials whose pointers move slowly forwards or backwards in accordance with my opening of the release or the pressure tap.

A thin pencil of light flashes upwards from the coast-line east of Dunkerque. Four times it flashes—long, long, short, long. It goes out, and one is conscious of the town wrinkling its forehead, listening intently, uneasy, wondering. Again the searchlight stabs the sky four times and goes out.

"Challenging some one at Dunkerque!" I remark to the pilot.

"Expect it is a Hun. We had better keep well clear of it!"

A third time the searchlight throws upwards its anxious inquiry, and this time, still receiving no answer, it is not extinguished but moves across the sky hesitatingly, nervously.

Flashes leap up from the ground at several places round the town. In a few seconds the red sharp spurts of the bursting shells appear suddenly in half a dozen places across the sky.

"Barrage!" mutters the pilot. "We'd better get clear away or we'll get bothered. Here we are! They're shelling us! Fire! *Fire!* We're only two thousand up!"

I hurriedly push a green cartridge into the Very's light pistol and pull the trigger. The explosion barks out, and a green globe of light drifts below us. The shells, which had been bursting unpleasantly near us, now, to our great relief, cease.

"Surely they can see our navigation lights! It's no good! We will have to get height somewhere else!" grumbles the pilot, turning the machine away.

We fly over to a "blind spot," and, climbing in great circles, see our height indicator record in turn, three, four, and then five thousand feet.

"Let's push off now!" says the pilot. "We're high enough!"

"Make it five thousand five hundred, old man! The wind is with us the whole way! We want to be at six before we cross the lines if we are to get up to nine by Bruges."

The patient pilot makes one more wide turn and then faces east, and flies ahead on a direct course.

On the left the line of the sand-dunes edges the misty sweep of the sea. In the north a strange sign is in the skies. Great streaks of white vapour, resembling moonlit clouds, stream from the horizon towards the zenith, spreading like the ribs of a fan. This beautiful vision of vast scarves of light, motionless and majestic, hangs over the sea with a splendid nobility, and, as we discover later, it is the sublime Aurora Borealis.

Following up the stretch of sand-dunes I see near the lines the twinkling lights in the hutments near Coxyde, and at the Nieuport piers the occasional flash of a gun and the red burst of a shell. Here and there along the floods rise and fall the tremulous star-shells. To the right Ypres flickers and flashes, stabbing the horizon with incessant daggers of flame.

When we are about seven miles from the trenches I crawl into the back and press hard forward the fusing lever, which draws the safety-pins from the bombs hanging in rows behind us. I tie up the lever with string to make sure that it will not slip, and resume my seat beside the pilot.

We approach Furnes, and, as we expect, we see a pale white beam of light leaping upwards in front of us, and vanish, and leap up again and again—as it flashes the challenging letter of the night.

"All right! I'll give them a green!" I say to the pilot as I load the Very's light pistol and fire it over the side. A green light drops, and dies. Again the thin beam of light flashes its anxious challenge towards us.

"Curse! I'm not going to fire another! Surely they can see us!" I say irritably, having been rather worried by these searchlights before.

"Go on, Bewsh! You'd better fire another—they'll start shelling us!" comments the pilot.

Meanwhile the searchlight, having received no satisfactory answer to its inquiry, apparently, remains in the sky, where it is joined by its two watery brothers who move querulously to and fro within half a mile of us.

"Go on! Fire a light!" says the pilot.

"Oh, I'm fed up with these fools! It will only give warning to the Germans. They won't find us! It's a waste of lights!"

"Fire a light—and don't talk!" orders the pilot.

I do so with an ill grace, muttering under my breath.

The searchlights do not go out, and, assisted by our green light, sweep on to the machine.

The pilot begins to get really angry.

"Hell to them! What is the matter? Look at them—right on the machine. Fire a green, and keep on firing them! They are giving away our course and position. I'll get some devil shot for this when I land ... give them another ... that's right! What is the matter with them?"

So he storms on, ablaze with a natural anger. The searchlights lose us.

We are now about three miles from the lines, so the pilot presses a switch on the dashboard, which extinguishes the wing and tail navigation lamps.

Below us the reflection of a drooping star-shell on the waters of the floods rises towards its falling counterpart, and as they meet I can almost imagine that I hear the hiss of the burning globe of light. Another star-shell rises below us throwing a brilliant radiance over a circle of flood and water-filled shell-holes and a twisted line of trench. In turn it sinks quivering to death. Two sharp red flashes leap up in the dim country beyond the German lines, and in a few seconds I see, on the ground beneath, the swift flash of the bursting shell, and another near beside it. In one place is a faint red glow where perhaps some wretched soldier tries to keep warm by a fire in some inconceivable shelter in the mud. Glad am I to be an airman, well-clad, well-fed, and warm in my sheltered aeroplane, with the thought of the welcoming fire and white sheets and hot-water bottle which will greet me when I return, to buoy me onwards through the momentary discomforts of a few hours in the air! As I see the water-filled shell-holes shining in the moonlight like strings of pearls, and picture the cold and the mud and the desolation, I realise that it is the infantryman, the man on the ground, who suffers most and has the worst time. I snuggle up in my warm furs at the very thought of the misery which is not mine.

We hang right above the lines now. Over the wings I see the faint quivering glare of light, cast upwards by some star-shell far below over the lonely floods. In front of us two sharp flashes again appear on the German side of the lines, to be later answered by the flame of two bursting shells on the ground behind us.

We turn to the right, and for a little while fly along over the lines looking for a landmark to help us onwards. Though we know the way well enough, and could travel to Bruges by instinct, we know by experience that it is best to travel along some fairly well-defined route in order to keep a close check on our position in case at any time we get lost, or fall into any trouble.

Soon we see the circular mass of poor Dixmude—shell-shattered and mutilated—lying at the landward end of the black waters. Stretching eastwards from it, into the heart of the German territory, is the thin line of a railway. We sweep to the left and fly eastwards again, leaving the lines steadily behind us.

A few minutes pass, and then we see to our left the two mighty beams of the Ghistelles lights stab upwards into the night, and move slowly and with an uncanny deliberation across the sky. There is something strangely alive about these searchlights. They appear to have a volition of their own. They seem to be seeking the hidden terror of the gloom with their own intellect. Look at them! They lean over towards one corner of the sky—keen swords of blue white steel, piercing upwards fifteen thousand feet of darkness. They have heard something: they are suspicious. In that one corner they move, sweeping, sweeping, through a small area. They wait motionless, then again they hear the faint hum of the hidden traveller; again they stalk wearily with tense eager arms, strained with the expectation of touching the evil presence for which so anxiously they grope. Suddenly one swings over a vast segment of the sky with a hurried gesture. Does some new menace approach—or is it deceived? It sweeps uncertainly for a few moments, and then darts back to join its companion who has not been faithless to his steady conviction. Look at them,

slowly rising more and more upright as the unseen machine draws more and more above their heads! You can imagine them following the object of their hate, growing ever angrier as they fail to discover it. Then—look! look! half-way up the beam there is a spot of light! They have found the elusive night-bird! The other beam leaps over to it with a vicious grip and holds it too. See the two beams crossed like a gigantic pair of scissors, and in the hinge a white speck whose quickening movement is followed, followed, followed by the inexorable tentacles.

Flash, flash ... flash. Shell upon shell bursts, sullen and angry, above, below, on either side of the blinded bird, lit up so clearly and helplessly. Spurt, spurt, spurt of flame on the ground! A few seconds pass like the ticking of a clock—flash, flash, flash—the answering shells burst into brilliance near the crossing of the two beams.

"Oh! Look, Jimmy! They've got somebody over Ghisteltes! By Jove! They *have* got him too. He is not going to escape. They are giving him hell. Look! I say ... That was a close enough one ... and another! He *is* having a rough time! Wonder who it is!... Bombs! Look—one, two, three, four! He is dropping them on the aerodrome—probably had engine failure, and wants to get back!"

Faster and faster moves the little bright spot in the searchlight as the anxious pilot pushes the wheel farther and farther forward. Still the searchlights follow it, and now lean at a wide angle over towards the lines. Then the beams of light begin to move irregularly. They have lost their prey. Still they grope towards the west, but now they sweep up and down, and to right and left, vainly trying to recapture the intended victim, which has freed itself. They can still hear him, for they lie over towards our direction, moving but slightly in their restless probing into the obscurity of the night, which, with friendly darkness, hides their home-bound enemy from their useless eyes.

With gladness I witness the fortunate escape, and once more turn to my own work. In front of us now stands a challenging sentinel—the solitary beam of Thorout.

It is but a pallid and slender blade, moving uncertainly across the dark depths of the sky, and scarcely to 10,000 feet does its menace seem to reach. It is an almost negligible threat—yet I feel uneasy. The fear of the searchlight, of being clutched by a hand of light, overcomes me.

"That's Thorout, Jimmy! Shall we push on? Let's throttle and turn!" I suggest, looking sideways at my pilot's face.

"Oh! Not yet! We will go right ahead!" he answers.

Steadily forwards we fly, and it is easy to see how, with the ever more distinct roar of our engines, the searchlight becomes more excited and more eager to find us. Nearer and nearer, with a slow beat from side to side like a pendulum, it draws towards us. I almost want to pull back my head to avoid having my nose taken off. Then the searchlight flashes on the machine for a moment, becomes tremendously excited, and leaps back again towards us.

The pilot swiftly pulls back the throttle and throws over his wheel. The thunder of the engine ceases; we turn to the left and leave him wondering.

Now the time for activity approaches. Near Ostend flashes the incessant lighthouse. To the right near Blankenberghe flashes its companion. Soon I know we will reach the wide canal running from Ostend to Bruges, which will lead me so directly to the docks that, once I have distinguished it, I will be free from any further anxiety about finding my way, and I will be able to devote my whole attention to the problems of attacking Bruges.

Six or seven minutes pass and then I see, far below me, running across the moonlit mosaic of the fields, the straight black line of a canal. Slowly we pass over it, and then I ask the pilot to turn the machine to the right. The machine sweeps round, and I stand up and, looking out over the nose so that I may see the canal, give the order to stop when we are flying parallel to it.

"Jimmy! I am going to get into the nose now. We are about seven miles away. I am going to drop the bombs down-wind. I shall drop all at once. See here—these are my signals! Right hand out—turn to right. Left hand out—to left. Hand straight up—dead ahead. One hand on my head—half-throttle the engines. Both hands on my head—throttle the engines altogether. When I have dropped I will wave my arms. I think it will be all right. I will try my best. I will adjust the pressure first!"

I look to my pressure gauge, and adjust the necessary taps. Then I collect my case and my torch, shout out "Cheero! Good luck! It will be all right!" and kneel on the floor of the machine. I unlatch the little door in front of me and crawl through it, and shut it behind me. Now I am kneeling in the cockpit, whose sides come a little above my waist. Around me is the ring of the Lewis gun mounting. I grasp this, and, lifting a lever, turn the machine-gun round till it is behind me and out of my way. I look over the nose of the machine, and shine my torch for a moment on to the bomb-sight which I adjust for our height. On my right-hand side, fixed on the floor, is the little bomb-handle, held safely by my piece of string. From this short vertical bar of wood runs a Bowden wire back under the pilot's seat to the bombs, which are some fifteen feet behind me.

A wonderful spectacle is now before my eyes. I can see the whole Belgian coast in one long sweep to Holland. On the left, and a little behind me, Ostend haunts the night with its pale restless beams of light, while near it to the east flashes the aerial lighthouse of de Haan. Along the edge of the shore is a fringe of moving beams, as far as Zeebrugge, where another thick cluster wheel and hover in the sky. There a rich chain of emeralds floats upwards to some

suspected menace, and a few shells burst in a scattered group above the distant Mole. On the left, beyond these signs of an uneasy enemy, lies the dim and unemotional sea. Ahead of us, like a sea of twinkling gems, glitters Flushing. Along its quays shines a white line of electric arc-lamps. The dull silver band of the moon-kissed Scheldt winds through the dim territories of Holland, and on either side the Dutch villages flicker with little lights. Ahead of us, unlit and waiting, lies the dark circle of Bruges with the water gleaming in its docks on the left, and a little light on the factory to the right of it. While far far away to the east over remote Ghent ghostly searchlights dance in a goblin measure.

Two problems face me as I kneel there in my little cockpit in the forefront of the machine. In the first place, I know well that there are nine hundred or a thousand Germans waiting round that black town for me. By the fourteen searchlights; by the forty or more anti-aircraft guns; by the machine-guns; by the "green-ball" batteries; by the sound-detectors, the signal positions, the controls—they are waiting—nine hundred or more trained eager men, determined to stop me taking these fourteen bombs to their docks, so crowded with destroyers and submarines, with soldiers and stores and ammunition, and all that they are most anxious to keep intact. I am equally determined to drive home my blow if I can.

That is my first problem. My second problem is a more subtle one. If we are heard, we are doomed. So clever are the searchlight operators that if one murmur comes down to them from the dark skies, their powerful beams of light will leap over to us and hold us in a grip of radiance which will dazzle us. Our only weapon is silence. The only way we can become silent is by throttling down our engines. If, however, we throttle down our engines, we begin to lose height. Therefore if we throttle down too soon, we will be so low when we arrive over the docks that we will be seen by those on the ground. The searchlights will be turned on to us, and, blinded and shelled, we will become impotent, and perhaps will be destroyed. If, on the other hand, we throttle down too late, the men on the ground will hear us before we are silent. Again the searchlights will swing over to us and will blind us. So it is necessary for me to give the order to throttle at the last possible moment I can, and I must be very careful, for a second too soon or too late may ruin all my plans. Therefore I kneel down and lean over the front, looking below intently, trying to read every sign and signal, trying to work it all out, watching my height and my speed and my distance—trying to think what the Germans are thinking almost before they think it themselves.

No light, no sign of activity, breaks the darkness below. We are as yet unexpected. I glance behind for a moment, and in a spirit of bravado throw a kiss to the pilot as he switches on the lamp which shows him the white faces of the instruments in the engine casing. For a moment the light gleams, and then is extinguished. On the pilot's face, steady and determined, the cockpit lamp shines faintly, and as I turn forwards I feel that I have behind me, to follow my advice, a strong man with whom I am safe—unto the last moment of safety.

Three miles ahead of me now lies the dim circle of the town. I look at the pallid phosphorescent figures of the height indicator. The wan line of the pointer lies over the luminous 8. I look down below, and steadily we move forwards. Now we are getting very near, and cold and wind-battered, I kneel upright with a feeling of triumph because I have drawn so close unobserved. Soon we will be able to throttle, and will glide in with no difficulty. Everything is going splendidly. I have worked it very well. I am tremendously pleased with myself. I was frightened of Bruges. Bruges! Why—I laugh to myself—it will be easy. There is nothing to be afraid of. So with a boastful sense of ease I lean against the side humming the cobbler's song from "Chu Chin Chow," my invariable night anthem.

Then suddenly, like a mighty spear, a powerful searchlight leaps up to my left, and its wide blue-white beam, with its sense of thrust, as though the light was pouring upwards, lies a few hundred yards in front of us. My heart jumps inside me. My hands grow clammy. My mouth tightens with dread. A wave of hot fire followed by an icy chill sweeps over me. Another great spear is flung upwards on the right, and the two towering shafts of dazzling light cross in front of us like a gigantic pair of scissors of gleaming steel.

At once I put one hand on my head to give the signal to throttle the engines down a little. I dare not stop them entirely as yet. We are not sufficiently near. I hear the clamour lessen and change, and immediately the two searchlights, so strong, so vividly menacing, identify our position more accurately, owing to the momentary alteration of the note of the murmur amidst the stars, and they sweep even nearer to us. I watch and wonder and hope. The white arms become undecided and move far far away from us, wheel round in a great circle, and swiftly one becomes a dull red beam across the stars, and below a dull red eye which slowly fades away. What relief—what a sense of danger past is mine then! The other ray of light in answer fades to obscurity, and once more, to my joy, we are moving in darkness, unsuspected and unsought-for.

Bruges lies below, scarce a mile and a half away. I dare not risk detection a second longer. Slowly, deliberately, I place both hands on my head and turn round, and in the moonlight I see the pilot's gloved hand go forward to the aluminium throttle which he slowly pulls right back. The noise of the engines dies swiftly, completely. The nose drops as we begin our long silent downward glide. No longer does the roar of the engines beat upon my ears, but I can hear that most wonderful of all sounds to a night-bomber—the whistle of the wind through the wires and on the planes, which tells me that we are no longer heard by those below. I begin to peer downwards, checking my aim. The direction bar swings slowly off the docks to the right. I throw out my left arm, still gazing downwards. The movement of the bar stops, and gradually it moves

to the left across the rectangles of the harbours. It swings past them as the pilot turns the machine. I now throw out my right hand, and in response the machine swings back. Flinging my arm upright before the moving bar has become central I stop in time the too rapid turn of the machine, and slowly, slowly we move straight forwards over the dark and unlit basins where shines not one little hostile light or flicker. I hurriedly gaze through the luminous range bars, fixed at right angles to the direction bar. The time has not yet come. Holding my hand upwards, I keep the machine dead ahead in a straight line. I am becoming more and more excited. The strain has become intense. I have forgotten everything—forgotten that I am two miles in the air, forgotten that my bare hands are freezing, forgotten that I am in a hostile place. My whole being is concentrated on keeping that little bar of metal laid across the two black patches below. I am not conscious of being above human beings—it is not a real countryside which lies beneath. It is an unlit map made up of lines and curves and patterns and round spots. I am entirely impersonal: I have become a surveyor at his instrument waving his hand to make corrections.

The two pale-glowing bars come in line with the edge of the nearest dark rectangle. I throw my arm upright for the last time, and then, putting my right hand behind me, I catch hold of the bomb-handle with a firm grip and push it over at a moderate speed. One, two, three, four little tugs I feel on it as the four hooks are pulled away from the four bombs fifteen feet behind me. I pull it back and push it forward the second time, scarcely looking over the front as I do it. I lean forwards over the nose, and see that the direction bar has drifted slightly. Throwing out my left hand, I see the bomb-sight move to the left, and then push forward again for the last time the bomb-handle. At once I move it to and fro, six or seven times quickly, in case I have not pushed it forwards far enough at any time, and failed to release any bombs. As soon as I have finished I turn round, crawl through the little door, twisting sideways to avoid jerking the great rudder on which rests the brown leather of the pilot's boot, stand up, and turn again and sit down, shouting breathlessly—

"All gone, Jimmy! Turn quickly! South-west—down-wind. Got a priceless line. There'll be hell to pay now! Keep throttled—whatever happens."

I stand up and look down at the dim pattern of the docks. This is the most exciting moment of the raid. I know the fourteen bombs are going down—the Germans do not know it, and I know they do not know it. For the moment the men in the air are triumphant. There we move in silence and unseen above the very heart of the enemy's stronghold. The fourteen bombs are whirling at a terrifying speed towards the docks, and the valuable material which they contain. No one below expects the sudden disaster which inexorably draws nearer and nearer. What use are the waiting watchmen a thousand strong? What use are your plans, O ye cunning enemy,—what use your well-oiled guns, the clear-polished lenses of your great searchlights—the long belts loaded with your green-tipped pom-pom shells? We have come, we have struck home! Down, down below with intent eyes I gaze, waiting to see the bursting of the missiles. Hours seem to pass. I wonder if the bombs have failed to explode; I wonder if they have dropped. In a fever of expectancy I peer to the gloomy bottom of the great pool of night. Then a great flash leaps out of the earth and slowly fades, leaving by the dim strip of water a pale moonlight cloud of smoke. Another and yet another leap up in the basin itself. Then another and yet two more burst on ahead in a line. "Ah! good! good!" I mutter to myself. Seven bombs clearly I see explode, and then I can scarce see the ground at all, for with the bursting of these first bombs the whole fourteen searchlights are flung into the sky like a handful of white ribbons of light, and begin at once to move to and fro in a slow determined motion. Above us, below us, to right of us and to left of us, behind us and in front of us, move these brilliant bands of up-pouring light. So bright are they that some, though they are seventy or eighty feet away, throw a white radiance over the machine. The dim country is slashed and cut across by these almost dazzling beams which wheel and hesitate and cross each other in gigantic patterns. Against the stars over our heads move their long pale arms, which slowly fade as height destroys the power of their thrust.

A few seconds after the appearance of this company of searchlights there rise from three or four points in the neighbourhood of the docks long chains of vivid green balls, which cast an unearthly gleam upon the water of the basins, and light up with their fantastic glow a circle of vaguely-seen country. Right in front of us they pass, passing upwards in an orderly hurry and giving a greenish tinge to my hands, the pilot's face, and to the planes on either side. They bend over slowly in the upper sky, and one by one fade away to red sparks dropping swiftly. Through the thin trails of vertical smoke left by their passage we pass, and I am reminded of the magic beanstalk of the fairy tale, rising up into unimagined heights and joining the world of reality to a world of dreams.

Then breaks into action the third weapon of this opposition—of this turbulent maelstrom to which I gave birth when I pressed over the wooden lever in the cockpit. Four little red flashes break the darkness below, and then two more a mile away, then four others to the west, and yet four more ... as anti-aircraft battery after anti-aircraft battery comes into action against the machine. Four or five seconds pass, then, a few hundred feet away, appears a swiftly-vanishing flame. Another appears to the left, and dotted at random here and there they leap out and vanish in quick succession, shell-burst after shell-burst. Round puffs of white moonlit smoke whirl by us as we go gliding onwards in silence, and untouched, through this turmoil of flame and radiance.

On all sides move the long blue-white swords of dazzling light—thirty feet wide they lie right before us, barring our way. To our right and our left they follow us, trying, trying to touch us. Behind our tail they dog us relentlessly, yet seemingly in vain. Below they lie across the vast depths of the sky, blinding our eyes and hiding the country from our sight. Above they move, pale beams, across the ten thousand watching stars. Here and there among their white anger move

the jealous ropes of glowing jade, which pass upwards in swaying curves and mingle their green brilliancy with the searchlights' glare, which is clearly reflected on our great wings. Shell after shell, red, vicious, and sharp, bursts and bursts above us and around us—protesting with its storm of temper at the vain groping of the searchlight—the useless beauty of the green balls. Lastly, the swift-moving streaks of the fiery tracer bullets from the machine-guns cut across the sky in a dozen directions.

Wherever we may look we see this boiling volcano of shell and bullet, searchlight and green ball. White, green, and red play the colours over our hands and faces. The chorus of the bursting explosive clamours around us, and above its sound we hear the splendid noise of the fourteen bombs, the sound of whose detonation has at length risen to us from the earth far below. When we hear that welcome sound we realise that our duty has been done, and we have driven the blow home. We are exhilarated by the thought, exhilarated by this ferment of opposition. Its very power only seems to show us that the enemy must value what he is defending so fiercely. I almost want to sing with delirious joy. What matter the blazing rays of light—what matter the crashing shells and the chains of emerald balls? We are inviolable, and we will continue our enchanted immunity from danger.

Then I become suddenly conscious of a glare upon the machine. I look down to the left, and at once I see a great dazzling eye of light, so brilliant and strong that it shimmers and wheels and boils as I gaze into it. We have been caught by a searchlight, and held. In a swift moment I see the long arms in the sky about us move with a common impulse towards the machine, until wherever I look I see eyes, eyes, eyes in a vast circle around us.

"Oh, Jimmy! They've got us! *They've got us!*" I cry out. "Shove on the engines, and push her down to ninety! Keep straight on—quick! *quick!* Push her down to ninety!"

No need is there now to be silent. We are by chance discovered, and are in the pitiless grip of fourteen powerful arms of radiance. Wherever I look there is light, light. I cannot see the ground below; I cannot see the stars above. We swim in a sea of brilliance. I am as blinded as when at times I have met upon a dark country road at night some car with huge head-lights, whose white glare has dazzled me and pinned me to the side of the road in fear. Each of these searchlights upturned against me now are many times more brilliant than the acetylene lamps of a car, and there are fourteen of them.

I am tense and quick-breathed. I feel stripped, naked, and ashamed. I am most tremendously conscious of my visibility to those below, and know that one and all they hate me. I put my hand across my eyes. I crouch lower inside the machine. *Crash, crash ... crash!* Ah! Now the shells, no longer scattered in an idle barrage, begin to explode near the machine, which, like a white bird, at the apex of a gigantic pyramid of light, so slowly crawls through the sky.

"Jimmy! They're shelling us! Shove the nose down—shove the nose down! Make it a hundred!"

Red flash the shells through the white haze of light in which we move. Green pour the bubbles of light in upward progress by the machine. Over the wings and over my pilot's grim-fixed face play the three colours, scarlet, emerald, and brightest white, in an unending, ever-changing ripple of colour. Now sounds the staccato and unexpectedly loud thunder of the machine-gun behind us as the gunlayer begins to direct downwards to one of the searchlights a stream of fiery tracer bullets. What use are they, I wonder? If one searchlight is destroyed there are yet thirteen to hold us in their grasp.

My heart is jumping wildly inside me. I make my hands adjust the brass taps at my side so that the fingers of the white-faced dials keep to the needful figure, but I know any second there may be a rending crash, and we may spin swiftly down and down.... Still we are held. Still the dazzle of light lies round us—still the blue-white eyes of fire stare at us with their hypnotising whirl and boil of brilliancy which makes them look so huge although so distant. Still the whole machine is clear-cut to the smallest wire in their all-exposing luminance.

I grip the pilot's arm in my fear and shout to him—

"Oh, Jimmy! Keep her going! Keep her going! Make it a hundred! We'll soon be free!"

"But we're only four thousand! We can't go any lower!" he answers.

"Push on! Speed is what matters! Keep her to a hundred, and we'll get through if we can!"

Now do I feel my mascots in my pockets and think for a swift sad moment of those I love best. Will it never end, I wonder? For hours the shells seem to have flashed and crashed round us. For hours the searchlights seem to have revealed us white in the black night. Then I become somehow conscious that the light on the machine is a little less. Looking behind me I see one or two beams moving erratically across the sky. They are *beams*, and not eyes! At last, then, we are getting beyond the range of the defences! One by one the searchlights slide away from the machine and swing up and down, pale shafts now, above or to the side of it. The shell-fire dies away. A string of green balls pours upwards half a mile away to our left. Two searchlights alone hold us, then they lose us, and to our almost indescribable relief we are moving in the darkness, whose friendliness never before have I so loved, whose protection never before have I so vividly realised.

My forehead is wet with perspiration. My hands shake, my knees feel weak. The ending of the strain has left me feeble, and the reaction for a time is almost painful. The physical feeling of

sinking inside me remains for a little while, but soon I begin to feel normal.

"Oh, Jimmy! Jimmy! Aren't you glad that is all over? It put the wind up me! I don't think we got hit, though. Look at Bruges—she is mad!"

Over the weary city still glide and hover the thin beams of light, vainly regretting their lost prey. A few useless shells leap into red brilliance here and there among the stars, while the last lovely chain of green balls rises upward through the night. To the dim north, by the docks, glows the dull glare of a fire, where some bomb has gone home.

To the west we fly onwards in the moonshine over the pale pattern of the fields. Far ahead glimmer the white flames of the star-shells in the mist along the floods.

The sense of duty well done, of dangers faced and conquered, gives an exhilaration which has made the whole night of terror worth the while. The moments of dread through which we have lived have been so vivid, so intense, that they have left us cool-headed and tranquil, and now we know that we are on the way home, and that we go to rest and forgetfulness.

Minutes pass, and below us gleams the fading loveliness of a star-shell. To the left flickers Ypres. On the right at Nieupoort one shell bursts out along the coast, beyond which lies the vast expanse of the quiet sea.

Minutes pass, and below us shines the little T of lights at Coudekerque. Down drifts our light—up drifts the welcome answer. Softly we sink towards the world, which slowly, slowly grows real from out a map.... Gladly I drop through the little door when we have at last drawn up beside the mighty hangars. Gladly I stretch my cramped legs and walk for a while unfamiliarly upon the grass. Gladly at last I switch off the light in my bedroom, and curl up in the sheets with my feet upon the hot-water bottle. On the ceiling gleams the fire-light. Voices sound more rarely in the cabins. Suddenly I remember something, and call out—

"Who was it getting hell over Ghisteltes?"

"Bob!" comes an answer from some near-by cabin.

"I say, Bob! Did you have a bad time?"

"Twenty-five holes in the machine! Jack shoved the bombs right across the aerodrome, though—he's not a bad observer!"

"Shut up, Bob!"

"Good-night, Jack! Good-night, Bob! Good-night, Bill! Good-night, Shoey!"

"Good-night, Paul!"

"Good-night, Jimmy—it wasn't so bad, was it?"

"No! Good-night, Paul!"

Soon I drift to sleep and the well-loved world of dreams.

VII.

DAWN TO DAWN.

"When in the East the evening stars burn clear,
We know our time of toil is drawing near;
For as the evening deepens in the West,
It brings an ending to our day-long rest.

One after one we slip into the gloom,
And through the dusk like great cockchafers boom;
High in the stars you hear our mournful cry,
As we sail onward through the sapphire sky."

—*The Night Bombers.*

I suddenly wake, and sit up in bed with strained ears. I have a dim recollection of a noise. Then I hear three or four dull explosions like distant gunfire, and out wails the piteous appeal of "Mournful Mary" at the Dunkerque docks.

Zoop-zoop ... bo-o-o-o-m!

The last is a tremendous explosion.

I wonder what is happening.

"Did you hear that? Any one awake?" I call out softly.

"That you, Paul—what can it be?" answers a voice in the darkness from some near-by cabin.

"I'll go and see."

I step out of bed and walk to the door at the end of the hut. In bare feet and thin pyjamas I look straight out to the east, but faintly lighter than the dark skies above in which the stars still shine undimmed. The night is very cold and silent. On the left of Dunkerque a few pale searchlights move slowly across the sky. I see a few flashes and then hear the sharp reports of the guns. It must be an air-raid.

I hurry into bed again and call out: "Can't see much! must be a raid!" and then begin to drop off to sleep, when again I hear the wail of the hooter, followed by the dull reverberating crash.

Sleep comes with difficulty. Again and again I become conscious of tumult in the real world beyond my dreams. Again and again I hear the distant thunders. When I next wake it is getting light, so I walk to the door of the hut. Outside I now can see the flat countryside, desolate in the greyness of early morning. To the left are the towers and chimneys of Dunkerque, and on the little road running past the aerodrome are a few rough carts, piled high with bundles and shawled women, leaving the town.

Zoop-zoop wails the syren. Out leaps the sudden roar of an explosion, and suddenly I see towering high above the roofs a tall column of dust and smoke, from which little black fragments are dropping back in a shower.

"Bob! Bob!" I call out.

A sleepy "Hullo!" answers me behind my back.

"They're shelling Dunkerque! It must be a fifteen-inch gun!"

The pitiful column of refugees, of women taking their children and a few precious bundles of clothes, or articles of furniture, away to some place of safety, rapidly increases.

As far as you can see the road is dotted with the little groups. Some of the poor people are riding; some follow a cart; some push perambulators.

Again the syren wails; again the tall plume of black smoke shoots up near the town; again the shower of wreckage drops from it.

Sleep is impossible. I get up and dress, and go to the mess for breakfast. We now know that the shells are bursting every seven minutes, and when six minutes have passed we talk less, and listen, and wait. There is the sudden crash, and through the window can be seen the earth shooting up in a field a little to our side of the town. The next shell is only a few fields away. I hurriedly finish the meal, and walk out of the mess to go to a hangar at the other end of the aerodrome, whose erection I am supervising.

I have just left the camp behind me, and am beginning to walk across the great field, when, in the very middle of it, some two hundred and fifty feet away, appears a solid black fountain of smoke and earth, quite seventy feet high. I stand transfixed with amazement and excitement as the roar of sound sweeps by me, and a few seconds later I hear the remote boom of the gun, twenty-eight miles away, near Ostend. The earth drops down again, the smoke clears, and I run panting across the ground to the low heap of earth which I can see in the distance, above the grass.

When I get there I find there is a huge crater some thirty-five feet across and twelve or fifteen feet deep. At the edge are two pilots, who shout breathlessly—

"We've got the base-plug! Look here! Don't touch it—it is almost red hot!"

There in the yellow loam lies the drum of clean white steel marked with the symbols M 38 and a crown. I touch it with a wettened finger and hear a quick hiss. The metal is unbearably hot still, and it is small wonder when it is realised that it has travelled twenty-eight miles, and risen and dropped thirty-three thousand feet in a little over a minute. Though it is only the base-plug, it is some twelve inches across, and later, when cold, requires removal in a wheelbarrow into which two men can scarcely lift it.

Meanwhile I search eagerly for fragments. I find half-hidden a twisted piece of metal, and am just about to lift it when the syren in the docks gives warning of the approach of the next shell. Taking advice from the axiom that a shell never falls twice in the same place, we slide down into the crater and wait, a little nervously. We hear the dull boom of the explosion, and scrambling to the top, see to the south of the hangars a cloud of smoke rapidly disappearing. The wind is evidently causing the shells to deviate, as they are falling farther and farther away from the town. The German spotting machines have been driven away by the British scouts, and so the gunlayers at Leugenboom (descriptive name!) are trusting to luck, as their early shells were so successful. One of the first, indeed, struck the Casino at Malo clean in the middle, and cut a slice out of it as with a knife. Only the previous night a divisional headquarters staff had moved into it, and thought it a rare billet after weary days behind the lines in the French sectors further south. Dawn brought to many of them a swift and unexpected death.

Carrying my hot lump of steel in my handkerchief I hurry over to the skeleton of the semi-erected hangar. The men, only naturally, seem little inclined to work. For five minutes they stand to their duty, and then, as the hooter blows, I give the order to take cover, and they go down the sides of the canal until the crash of the explosion shows that the menace has passed.

The French have very quickly organised the hooter system. Some one says that a look-out at the lines, on seeing the flash of the gun, presses a button which rings a bell in Dunkerque. The signal is sent on to the man in the light-ship at the docks, and he pulls the string of his syren. The complete operation only takes some ten or twelve seconds, and as the shell is travelling for well over a minute it gave ample warning. As a matter of fact, such a system, if it does exist, is not necessary, as the shells are falling at an exact interval of just over seven minutes.

The order is now given by the C.O. for work to be abandoned, and for the men to take cover. With one of the pilots I make a tour of the neighbourhood, examining the shell-holes in the surrounding fields. The columns of earth and smoke shoot up at regular intervals some half a mile away, and we do not trouble much about them.

I return to the aerodrome and, meeting another friend, walk back across the field. A whistle is blown.

"That's old Charlie!" he says. "He's sitting in the canal with a stop-watch and a whistle. The C.O. put him on to it. Let's sit down till it has gone off!"

I suggest going on, as we are just as safe anywhere. He sits down on the edge of a small patch of growing corn; I sit beside him. Suddenly, while we are arguing whether we should go on or not, I seem to see something through the back of my head. I look quickly round, and there, towering some eighty or ninety feet high, only a few yards from us, is a tall fountain of black earth and uprising smoke, like the great genie which whirled upwards from the bottle in the fairy story.

"A shell—lie down!" I yell, and throw myself face forwards on the ground with my hands over the back of my head. In the moments of waiting before anything happens, I realise that I cannot be killed by the actual explosion of this shell although it is so near, as I have lived to see it, and then ... thump, thump, on my arms, my back, and my legs the pieces of earth begin to beat. They are heavy and, since they are dropping from some fifty feet or more, are very painful. The dust and stones rain down all over me and all round. I can hear the returning earth thundering on the ground. Faster and faster come the blows upon me; it is very much like being caned, and I know that at any moment a heavy piece of metal may drop and crush my skull. I cannot get up and run; I am in some way hypnotised. Beside me I am conscious of my friend cowering close against the ground as well. For seeming hours the hail of missiles continues, and I receive some very severe blows. At last it ceases. We scramble to our feet and begin to run away through the smoke, and then the eternal instinct grips us. We turn, and run back to get souvenirs from the crater. The size of it staggers us. It is almost big enough to put a motor omnibus in ... and the place where we were sitting is only a few feet away from the edge of the hole.

"By Jove, Milly! We are lucky! It's a good thing it's a fifteen-inch shell. If it had been a small bomb the splinters would have killed us!"

We slither and slide to the bottom of the pit and gather fragments of steel. The shell seems a very personal one to my mind, as it has fallen within five feet of me when it was fired twenty-eight miles away. As I turn over a piece of hot metal with my foot it is difficult to believe that that piece of metal ten minutes ago was near Ostend, and now it is here at Dunkerque. I seem to see the portly German sergeant-major in his grey-green uniform pressing the lever on the great gun to cause the mighty explosion which hurled that shell, which is as tall as me and weighed a ton, nearly thirty miles. Even now the coatless gunners sweat at the loading of the next shell into the grooved and shining breech.

We have decided that the canal bank is safer, and we hurry in that direction. It is lined with mechanics and officers, sitting low down near the edge of the water. My pilot greets me with mingled reproof and joy. He had seen me stagger out of the smoke of the shell rubbing the more bruised portions of my body, and thinking I was wounded he had sent off for the ambulance.

It is rather amusing in the canal. At the end of five minutes some of us become restive, and climb up to the top and walk about. "Charlie," dapper as usual, with his monocle screwed in his eye, sits looking at his watch.

"Six minutes!" He says, "Now then, some of you blighters, do you want to get killed?" He lifts the whistle and blows. Leisurely, but not too slowly, we walk down the side of the bank and make ourselves comfortable. We look at our watches. Six minutes and a half have passed since the last explosion. Now comes the uneasy time. We know the gigantic shell will explode somewhere near us in thirty seconds. There will be no warning whistle or sound of any kind. We will simply have to wait. Such precautions and nervousness in regard to shell-fire on active service may sound strange, but it must be remembered that we are twenty-two miles behind the lines, and so have been far, far beyond the range of shell-fire. We have had no previous experience, and there are no dug-outs of any real use for our protection.

The seconds slowly pass. People cease talking. Then, somewhere—its position cannot be located by the ear—there is a dull thud. That is the shell actually striking the ground. It has a delay fuse of a fraction of a second. Then the roar leaps out and dies. We rush up to the top of the bank and see the column of smoke just on the other side of the mess. A few seconds later the stones and earth come rattling down on to the roofs of the hangars and huts.

So passes the morning. As soon as a shell bursts the C.O. despatches an officer on a motor-bicycle to its position, if it is near any farm buildings, to see if he can render any assistance. This is a very good scheme, for on the left we can see thin red flames, flickering palely in the sunlight,

rising from a farmhouse. Another big barn on our right later receives a direct hit, and when we visit it we find the labourers frantically throwing aside great bales of hay, under which is buried an unhurt cow.

At last the shelling stops, and in a little while work is resumed. In half an hour or so the syren wails out again, and it is thought that Leugenboom has once more fired. This is not the case, however, for against the pale blue of the sky we see the tiny white puffs of shrapnel smoke. The noise of the anti-aircraft batteries grows louder and nearer. More and more white puffs appear in the sky, but we cannot see the machine. At last some one shouts, "There it is!" A little, almost transparent, white shape crawls infinitely high over our heads. The shells are nowhere near it, and it is hard to keep it in sight. It is some four miles high, and is a photographic machine which has been sent over to make records of the damage done by the shelling.

As with craned necks we watch this little bird-shape, so far from its own friends, it is strange to think of the two little muffled figures high up there, probably very frightened, but going on to do their work. I, at any rate, have a secret hope they will get back. On and on the aeroplane moves away from its lines. The guns around us crash and bark, the seconds pass, and one, two, three, the white shrapnel puffs leap into existence and rapidly enlarge into thin vapoury clouds. There is a continuous roar of the engines of the scout machines which, with their tails well down, are climbing upwards as fast as they can, to attack the machine above.

The pallid bird turns slightly and passes over our heads, photographing the vicinity of our aerodrome. The shrapnel comes tinkling on to the roofs of the camp, and now and then, with a long, rapidly growing whistle, a "dud" shell or large fragment of steel drops near us.

After a leisurely quarter of an hour the German machine turns to the east and rapidly increases its speed noticeably, with its nose down and the wind driving it homewards. Soon we can see nothing but the distant shrapnel puffs. The machine has gone, with the precious plates in its camera, to a remote aerodrome near Ostend.

"Bob" comes to me and says he is going to test his machine, and offers to let me take control. Soon we are three thousand feet over Dunkerque, and I can see dotted around the fields the great craters of the shell-holes and smoke rising here and there from fires in the town itself. After a while he says—

"Like to fly her now? I'll get right into the wind. Slip into my seat quickly when I get out!"

He carefully turns the machine till it is facing the wind, takes his hand off the wheel to test the stability, alters direction slightly, and feeling satisfied pulls back the throttle. The noise of the engines dies away as the machine begins to glide downward. He stands up on the rudder and I crawl in behind him and sit on his seat. He moves his body to the left so that I can grasp the wheel, and as soon as he takes his feet from the rudder I place mine firmly on the foot-rests of ribbed rubber. With my hands and feet on the controls, I sit in the huge machine as we glide downwards singing. The speed indicator creeps back to thirty-eight miles an hour.

"Shove her nose down—keep it at fifty, you fool!" the pilot yells.

Forward goes the wheel, and the fingers of the height indicator creep up to fifty-five. I find I can easily steer the machine, and it is no more difficult than the little Curtiss's of old days at Luxeuil.

"Shove on the engines now,—slowly!" orders the pilot.

I catch hold of the aluminium throttle and push it slowly forward. The engine wakes to energetic life. I am conscious of the new forward impulse given to the machine, and the rudder begins to vibrate frantically beneath my feet. The country in front of my eyes begins to sway to the right. I am slipping. I try to remember which to turn to the right in order to convert it—the wheel or the rudder. I move the wrong one, and the country sways to the right still more and more. I get excited and push the nose down and turn the wheel over, and at last, amidst the curses of the pilot, regain a more or less even balance.

I then try to make a turn. I push the rudder to the right, and it goes hard over. As a result the machine slips violently, and the little bubble in the "slip tube" rushes from the centre and tries to creep out of one end. I fling over the wheel to reduce the slip, and the machine banks terrifically, but a little more accurately, for the reluctant bubble returns towards the middle of the tube. The pilot curses more and more luridly, but I have learnt the lesson that the rudder has to be allowed to go over a little way, instead of being pushed over, as it has a natural tendency to go hard forward on one side or the other. For a while I fly the machine fairly decently, to my great joy, and then I change places with the pilot, who, to instruct me, does some steep banks, but so accurately that not only does the bubble remain motionless in the middle of its tube, but a little wooden rabbit-mascot, which I stand on a shelf inside the machine, does not fall over, though we are at an angle of some sixty-five or seventy degrees to the ground.

We glide gloriously down through the sunlight and land on the aerodrome, avoiding carefully the three deep craters.

There is an interesting interlude before lunch which gives a momentary agony to many of us. An American flies over to the aerodrome and begins to carry out the wildest acrobatics with his fast "Spad" machine. He dives downwards till he is moving at a hundred and fifty miles an hour, flies at that speed a few feet over the ground between two lines of hangars, and shoots vertically upwards and rolls the machine over and over in every possible way. For five minutes or more he

does this, growing ever and ever more reckless and daring. Then he climbs up, up, and up, and over the middle of the aerodrome stops still and dives downwards in a steep spiral. Faster and faster drops the machine till it is spinning like a leaf. Lower and lower it drops in a terrible mad whirl ... and vanishes behind the hangar without changing its direction or coming under apparent control. There is a groan from those who have seen the tragedy. Every face grows white—every heart grows heavy. We have been behind the hangars and luckily have not seen the end.

"I'm not going to see. It's no good. It will only turn me up!" I say, and walk to the edge of the hangars. There in the middle of the aerodrome is a scarcely discernible pile of broken wreckage—just a crumpled heap a few feet higher than the ground. Towards it from all points of the compass are streaming crowds of mechanics. I stand watching. I will not go over. I can do no good, and the sight will unnerve me for days. It is a fatal mistake for those who fly to see those who have died while flying.

Then I see standing by the machine a little figure. I wonder who it can be so quickly on the scene. The little figure seems to take something of its head, and to unwind a muffler from its neck. I begin to run over toward the wreckage, a wild hope surging through me. It is—it is the airman. He is alive and seemingly not hurt. His face is yellow with bruises and is red with blood. It is a terrible sight, but he is laughing gaily, perhaps a little hysterically.

"Oh! I am all right! I'm all right! I got into a spin and couldn't get out in time!"

An ambulance comes up, and he gets into the back and drives off, waving his hand cheerfully. Amazing fellow! It appears that just before he struck the ground he pulled the machine out of the spin into a steep bank and struck the ground with one wing when he must have been flying at nearly two hundred miles an hour.

I may say that never once during the war did I see a crash happen in which a man got killed—nor did I ever see a dead man; and I may also say that the first fatal accident which happened to anybody in any of the squadrons to which I was attached, from October 1915 to April 1918, occurred in my last flight when my pilot was drowned and, owing to my injuries, I left the squadron. Night flying in those days was, so it appeared to me, a safe though exciting occupation. At any rate (and I touch wood as I say it!) not only did I lead a charmed life, but wherever I went trouble seemed to fly away. There were no accidents of any serious nature, or any damage caused by enemy attacks at any place to which I was attached. Two months after my crash eight hundred bombs were dropped in two nights on Condekerque aerodrome, and it was so badly damaged that it was abandoned. There were also many casualties. This is, however, by the way.

When we have examined the wreckage curiously, and all the inevitable photographs have been taken, we proceed to the mess for lunch, and during coffee I suggest to a friend of mine, an eighteen-year-old baby with fair hair, that we have a look at the war and visit the lines in a car.

"All right," he says, "if you tackle Charlie!"

Charlie is the transport officer. He is not far from sixty, but by shaving twice daily and wearing waisted coats he preserves an air of perennial youth. He has been, and done, everything in his life—from ringmaster to pageant manager, from running flying meetings to the caring for Kings at royal performances. He is one of those wonderful young "old stagers" in the war who really were fearless. He would go over the lines every night if he could, and indeed had been low over the German trenches in the daytime—"shooting up the blighters" for fun. He was the raid officer, and, as such, stood to his post on the "band-stand" all night, despatching machines and seeing them back. In his hands were the responsibility of our life or death. He loved us all, and would do anything for us. When the man beside him was killed in the big raid, he carried on his work, smoking his cigarette, with his eyeglass in his eye. His favourite expression, if we did not raid owing to weather, was—

"Gor perishin' blimy with pink spots! If you put wings on my old band-stand I'd fly her through Hell backwards! Why don't you go on a raid to-night—you blighters never do any work?"

So having given him a whisky-and-soda, I take him into a corner and unveil the plot.

"All right! Tell Dimmock to give you a tender. Mind you draw that cartoon of me or you'll never leave the perishing aerodrome again!" he says.

In a few minutes we are on the Nieuport road, and for half an hour we rush in the tender beside a canal, past various kinds of French and British transport waggons. No one challenges us, and even as we pass the frontier the French and Belgian guards look at us with scant curiosity.

"*Aviation Navale Anglaise!*" we chant as we pass. Well they know the Royal Naval Air Service whose cars have haunted the roads now for many years. Well they know whose are the fighting scouts that rise up towards the skies above Dunkerque.

Through La Panne we clatter, and then the feeling in the air begins somehow to change. We sense now that the lines are nearer, and indeed they are only eight miles away. We pass through an area full of hutments and dumps and depots of various descriptions. The increasing number of notices and signs give unmistakable evidence of our proximity to the zone of action. The roads are now packed with lorries and cars through which we can hardly pass. On the left all the time is the unbroken line of the grass-covered sand-dunes hiding the not-far-distant sea from our eyes. Then suddenly the traffic thins and vanishes. We turn a corner and face a stretch of empty road, and know that now we are really near the front. Half-way down the road we pass a look-out tower

built up among the trees, and near by is a warning notice.

The road is absolutely empty, and we begin to feel a little nervous. We come to another corner by which is a wrecked house, in a corner of which, however, the inhabitants are still dwelling. All round are shell craters filled with suspiciously fresh yellow clay. Here and there broken trees lean sadly against their neighbours. I see an officer in khaki near by and I hail him.

"Is it far to the lines?"

"Straight up the road—I wouldn't take your car any farther than the end of the trees, though, and if I were you I should leave this corner. The Huns are rather fond of it, as we have got a battery here. They fired a hundred and fifty shells, mostly six-inch, after tea yesterday!"

"Push on, driver!"

Down the road we move swiftly between the splintered trees of a little wood. On the left are tattered canvas screens on frames. In some places great holes have been torn in them by shell-fire and the ragged fabric trails downward towards the ground. A whistling sound steals faintly on to our ears; it grows louder and deeper, with a sense of progression, and it ends in a heavy crash somewhere to our left. Again and again we hear the shrill whine deepen to a roar, and end in a burst—as large shells sail over to some hidden mark near the coast.

We are beginning to feel a little nervous, but are very keen to go on. It is a weird drive in this still deserted road, with its roughly-filled shell-holes and its broken leaning trees on either side. The wood ends on the outskirts of the town, which lies in front of us, a queer panorama of wrecked buildings of pink brick whose bared and half-broken roof rafters lie against the sky like some dismal and gigantic snake, while the whole has the unreal aspect of stage scenery.

Here we leave the car, and tell the driver to drive away from trouble should the German shells begin to fall near him. We walk into the shattered town with its tawdry shabby appearance of the back of an exhibition. Along the road the canvas screens flap slightly in the wind, above them appear the crumbled tops of ruined buildings, while every now and then we hear a bang, bang, bang, from the direction of the German trenches, and this noise has all the hollow artificiality of imitated gun-fire at a show or a circus. A few seconds pass, and crash! crash! crash! sound three slightly better imitations of shells bursting. The whole thing seems unreal: the buildings are so pink and villaesque: chocolate and motor tyre advertisements are painted on them: their doorways and walls are decorated with ugly porcelain ware and coloured tiles. It is as though a great battle was waging through the prim little lanes of the most innocent-looking villa town on the English coast,—it indeed is what is happening on the Belgian coast, except that here the buildings are still even more ugly and modern. There is no feeling of real danger—in spite of the deserted streets, and the occasional sound of a door being loudly shut, which is some not far distant shell exploding behind the strange screens.

We turn to the left and enter the town. Here is evident a little more animation. Soldiers saunter up and down, as though on the promenade listening to the band, the straw hat of English summer being substituted by the yellow-painted shrapnel helmet. Shells are now whistling in the town, and give a slightly more credible impression of artillery fire as the hollow bang of the explosion is followed in each case, a few seconds later, by the clatter and tinkle of the roofs and walls of Nieuport returning in pieces to ground level.

We ask the officer the way to the front lines, as if asking the way to the pier at Margate.

"First to the left—across a canal—turn right—and across the Yser!" he says obligingly; and adds, "You better get gas-masks and shrapnel helmets at the Salvage Dump over there!" ("Towels and bathing costumes at the little hut on the left," he might be saying!)

We enter the salvage dump—an empty front room littered with all kinds of implements, and ask for the apparently necessary gas-mask and helmet, which are carefully dusted by a whistling sergeant. Carrying these helmets in one hand and the masks slung over our necks, we proceed towards the front. Now here for one moment we realise that we really are near a real war, for round the corner walk a couple of nonchalant Tommies carrying a stretcher, covered with a blanket, from beneath which protrude two heavy boots, toes towards the ground.

We hurry on and turn to the left and come out into the open, across which we move erratically, for, at the whistle of each shell, we sit in a crater until the noise of its explosion encourages us to proceed.

"I feel sure we should not be out here!" says my friend. I feel inclined to agree with him.

We reach a bank in which soldiers are hiding like rabbits in a warren. In little square holes the stolid, cheerful-looking men sit; here one smokes, there one cooks bacon, in another place one reads. Outside some of the cave doors a pair of socks or a shirt hangs out to dry. The existence seems to them the normal one, and returning to the life of the remote past they seem to have found a rough contentment.

At last we enter a trench and wander along it for five or six minutes, till through a turning on the left we see a narrow ditch leading to a wide muddy canal. We turn down this side trench and walk to the side of the water, over which is slung a narrow suspension-bridge about four feet wide, made of boards laid side by side.

We walk across this, and half-way over to the other side we meet an officer, and ask where the front is.

He laughs, and inquires who we are, and offers to take us to the mess, and suggests that we should wear the shrapnel helmet instead of our soft naval caps. We cross the bridge and walk down another trench to a farmhouse, covered with little white boards with D.A.Q.M.G.'s and D.A.D.O.'s, and other incomprehensible mysteries of staff hieroglyphics. I do not know quite what I have expected a staff mess to be like, but I know when I descend a damp ladder to a dim cellar lit by candles, and see a cheerful crowd of officers eating bread and butter and tea at a broken-down table, I am very surprised. I realise rapidly that a sub-lieutenant in the Air Service has a better time of it, as far as mere material comfort goes, than a colonel on his Majesty's staff.

"Found these two lads crossing the bridge with their shrapnel helmets swinging from their hands; may I introduce you to Major Smith and Captain So-and-so...." We are introduced all round and are given tea. No one questions our right to be there at all. Our story of being curious airmen from Dunkerque is believed. They are amused to hear of our big shell experiences. They have heard the shells passing overhead like express trains, although we had no indication of their approach at all. After we have received some friendly blame for keeping them awake at night with our engines when we pass over the Nieuport floods, the colonel who met us details an officer to take us to an observation post. We move down more trenches—Nose Alley, Nasal Avenue, Nostril Road, and others—till we reach a little broken-down building, inside which we penetrate through a small door. A pair of rickety staircases lead us up to a loft where an officer and a sergeant gaze through a narrow slit towards the east. On the ledge before them lies a map. They are keeping a particular sector of German trench under constant observation for the benefit of their own particular battalion.

Taking a pair of binoculars, I look and see the three British barricades of sandbags, for the ground here is too wet to permit of the digging of trenches. Men are seen sitting down or walking up and down behind these breastworks, and beyond can be seen the spiky curls and haphazard pegs of the barbed-wire entanglements. In the centre, a grey huddle of stone indicates the site of Lombartsyde Church. Now and again a cloud of smoke from a shell rises up behind the German trench. On the left are the sand-dunes on which the tall, red, broken houses of Westende stand desolate and fantastically suburban against the sky. I can see through the glasses the great painted advertisements on them, and notice here and there the missing roof, the shattered wall; but on the whole, save for the blank square of the glassless windows, they look untouched enough. It seems strange to think that the bare lifeless buildings of that watering town are full of an unseen life, that up in those roofs Germans are watching us only a few hundred yards away, as we are watching them. It is strange and uncanny. This, then, is the line—bleak, dead, full of a sense of ever-menacing danger, haunted by the hovering phantom of Death. We take a last look and start back to the car. The farther we go, the easier grows my heart. When at last we turn the corner of the town and see the old grey tender with its driver smoking beside it, I want to hail it as a welcome friend. Gladly we hear its engine throb—gladly we feel the thrill of movement—gladly we move down the eerie desolate road, by the canvas screens, the broken trees, where sounds the wail and bang of the shells, like doors in a great frightening empty house being shut and shut by some unseen and terrifying phantom hand.

Swiftly we leave the desolate loneliness of war behind, and welcome is the thought of the trim camp at the aerodrome with its flower-decked mess and fire-lit cabins. When at last we sweep across the little white bridge over the canal and stop beside the lawns of the quarter-deck, over which flaps the White Ensign, I realise keenly the comfort and the tranquillity of my life.

Now it is the twilight of dusk. Though day still reigns supreme in untarnished brightness, there is a feeling in the air that the end is coming, and night surely must vanquish soon. Out from the aerodrome are being wheeled the Handley-Page machines, and I hurry through my task of synchronising the watches. To-night I raid not, and from the beginning my feelings are mixed. I am glad I am not going, and I am bitterly sorry too, because I know when, in the late hours of starlight, one by one the huge machines glide whistling to earth, and into the mess the furred and helmeted airmen tramp on great fleece-lined boots, I will envy the glorious sense of achievement, of well-earned rest, which will then be theirs.

Now I am told to take over the task of the duty officer who is going on a raid. At once I proceed to the monotonous job of censoring letters, because it has to be done, and it had better be finished early. How weary a job it is, and how full of temptation! When you sit alone in a little room with the pile of two or three hundred letters in front of you, how easy it is to read but one in ten. It is then that a conscience is a really great disadvantage. The letters are all the same, and as they are read through it is very apparent what a race of bad letter-writers we are. Seventy-five per cent read like this:—

DEAR MUM,—Tell Alf that Sid has got my blue sweater; if he gives it to Joe he will bring it over to his squadron and Stan can bring it here. Give Em and Gert my love; I met Bob yesterday, he says Tom and Jack are fine....

The one splendid line in all is the splendid prayer written beneath the signature:—

Roll on, Blighty, or Roll on, three months, with all the passion of loneliness and nostalgia throbbing in it.

It must be confessed that the description of a typical sailor's letter is not far from the truth.

Dear Mother, How are you? So am I. Fags. George.

Letter after letter is read through and initialled, and I get no nearer to the soul of such of the writers as I know personally. Then I hear a bugle blow the Rum call, and I proceed to the Ship's Steward's office to superintend the issue of Rum. When the representative of each mess has been served, it is the duty of the officer of the Watch to witness the pouring out of the rum upon the ground, a proceeding watched with grief by any casual spectators.

The preservation of the naval traditions in the Royal Naval Air Service was of real value, and welded the service into a very loyal and proud body. To some it may seem ridiculous that, even at air stations in the heart of France, hundreds of miles from the sea, the "liberty men paraded on the quarter-deck to go ashore in the liberty boat," when they proceeded to Nancy by lorry. No one concerned, however, treated it as anything but a matter of course, which is one of the greatest assets of any tradition. The "ship's company" would be summoned from the "mess decks" to hear the "orders of the day" read by the "First Lieutenant," and "the starboard watch had a make and mend." The whole service was "navy" and felt "navy." Naturally the sea-going navy looked on it with a little contempt and a great deal of scorn, but I doubt if it realised with what pride and admiration we of the new service looked up to our big brothers on the high seas. We watched them as a new boy at school watches the *blasé* young gentleman of two years' scholastic experience, and furtively draws his hands out of his pockets if he finds that such an attitude is not considered correct.

With the formation of the Royal Air Force, the naval branch of the air service, at any rate, lost a possession so cherished and so sacred that it scarcely dared talk about it. It was like being made to change a religion and to throw up in a moment the faith and the ceremonial habits of a lifetime. Underneath the khaki and the pale blue, to an officer and a man, we wore, and still wear, the dark blue and gold buttons of those splendid days.

Meanwhile the rum has been doled out in the mess with care and argument, and I return to my letters. From the east now marches night with swift advance, while the west shines scarlet and orange over the chimneys of the huts of Dunkerque. The first primrose star of the evening burns with a lucent glory in the forehead of the sunset, and the whole evening is pregnant with coming events. Too beautiful is the hour for work, and as I walk alone over the rose-tinted aerodrome I can hear in the tranquil night the muffled beating of innumerable engines, and I can see the lustrous flares dropping from the skies as on the ground a thousand signals glow, a thousand lights are born and die. To the darkening east I look, and I can picture thirty, forty, fifty miles away the anti-aircraft guns, whose tarpaulin sheets are even now being removed. I can picture the lean-nosed shells in their numbered racks—the great glass lenses of the searchlights, the "green-ball" machines loaded with long belts of cartridges. I look to my right at the waiting machines, and it seems strange to think that those heavy structures of steel and wood are destined in scarcely two hours to set in furious action those silent lifeless weapons so far away across the shadowy fields. The noise of an engine under trial sweeps over the ground in surging waves of sound and dies away. The giants are awakening, are stretching themselves, and are eagerly meditating the time to come.

Soon I am dining in the lamp-lit mess, where at flower-decked tables the laughing pilots sit, and I feel sorry I am not going onward with them to the hidden dangers and exhilarations of flight in the darkness beyond the lines; yet I feel glad also that my to-morrow is certain, but feel a hanger-on among heroes, a useless camp-follower of legioned gods.

One after one the cheerful youths glance casually at their watches and leave the mess for their cabins in order to prepare for the cold heights to which they will soon climb. Heavily muffled and coated I go out on to the dark aerodrome. Out roar the engines of the first machine as it sweeps across the grass, and I have one momentary glance of the resolute, preoccupied faces of the pilot and observer who are going to ride through the flaming avenues of Bruges and Ostend on their swift lean charger of steel and wood.

Machine after machine leaves, and, as ground officer, I shout instructions upwards to the pilots through the clamour of the engines, and as the pilot waves his hand as a sign of his imminent departure, I cry—

"Cheero, Jack! Good luck!"

"Cheero, Paul!" comes the answer, and the engine leaps out into deafening thunder, and with a beating throb the machine slips by, going ever faster into the night.

Soon the last machine has left, and for a time we see the red and green lights moving above us through the stars, and we hear the murmur of the engines, and then at length silence reigns in the quiet uneasy night!

To the side of the canal I walk and peer out across the silent plain to the dim east. A pallid star-shell gleams, and quivers, and sinks: a gun flashes to the south near Ypres: then remote, remote, yet glittering clearly, rises a tiny chain of green balls which climbs up, up, up into the night. Near it can just be seen the pale arms of moving searchlights, seeming scarce lighter than the darkness. Already the great night-birds have pierced the frontiers of the enemy: already has the battle of the night skies begun.

Then with an unexpected suddenness wails the panic-stricken appealing cry of "Mournful Mary" at Dunkerque docks. Again and again it wails, and its dying echo is taken up by a chorus of shrill

and undignified hooters and syrens in the district. What a sense of utter terror there is in the sound! The town seems to have a corporate existence, and seems to be screaming piteously, like some animal faced with a terrible and unavoidable death. Again moans the chilling sound of the great voice of Dunkerque, and down the coast the blue-white beams of the French searchlights begin to wave nervously in an uncertain sweep. Three or four anti-aircraft guns sound dully in the distance, and a few red and futile shells burst high up in the star-strewn sky.

More and more searchlights come into action; nearer and louder guns bark out their stupid blind anger. There is little movement in the crowd of watchers on the aerodrome. Every one listens. Faintly yet surely can be heard now the menacing chant of the enemy—*bavoom, bavoom, bavoom*—steady, unaltering, ever progressing forwards.

"Huh! That's old Oberleutnant Finkelbaum from Ghistelles. He's always first!" says a wit. "Come on, Finky ... you won't be found. That's right—keep up the coast. You're after the docks, I suppose. Look out; throttle, man—throttle, or you will get caught!"

Bavoom—bavoom, throb the two engines of the bold attacker, and our sympathies and interest somehow seem to be with him.

"Turn in now, old man, turn in! Stop your engine—that's good—glide and keep throttled—you'll be all right!"

Suddenly the droning above ceases, and the silence is more threatening and sinister than the clamour. We do not feel quite so assured about the unseen enemy, since we can no longer locate his position by sound. However, we know that he is almost certain to be attacking the docks, which lie some two miles away, so we do not altogether lose the sense of being spectators.

A long minute passes slowly, then a wide fan-shaped flash of red light appears beyond the town, whose roofs are for a moment silhouetted black against its glare. It dies slowly, and another leaps up near it.

Some one begins to count—

"One, two, three ..."

Then rises up with an awful splendour and a strange deliberation a tall, coiling column of fire, which, like a swiftly-growing tree, opens and expands until it is nearly five hundred feet high—a huge fountain of flame. Some oil dump has been struck. It is an amazing sight. Every face, with open mouth and wondering eye, is lit for a moment in its red light, and then it slowly fades and dies away, leaving a steady glow behind the dark houses to show that a great conflagration is now in progress.

"Nine ... ten ... eleven ... twelve!" ends the count.

Then crash after crash of ear-splitting noise sounds on our ears as the noise of the twelve bursting bombs comes to our ears. The anti-aircraft guns bark and crash stupidly round us, and among the stars appear the quick and random spurts of the bursting shells. Aimless searchlights, pale and puerile, move irregularly over the sky. Still there is no sound above us.

"Keep throttled, Finkelbaum! Jolly good shooting. You push off to dinner at Ghistelles; you've done your bit to-night," comments the wit.

Bavoom—bavoom—suddenly sounds the engine right above us, as the machine opens out its engines as it escapes southwards from the Dunkerque defences. Some of us stroll over towards the edge of the canal. Of course there is no danger—he has dropped all his bombs—yet there may be a "hang-up," and the back gunlayer may only just now be finding it out.

Crack, crack—crack, crack, crack, clamours the machine-gun over by our mess. Up rush the red sparks of the tracer-bullets.

"There he is—there—*there*—to the left of those two searchlights. Open fire!" calls the C.O.

With a flash and a roar the little three-inch gun speaks out, and the clatter of the falling shell-case can be heard above the scream of the whining projectile. More machine-guns start their staccato tumult. Tracer-bullets rush upward from a dozen places. The gun roars again. The aerodrome is now thoroughly enjoying itself. Pale in the moonlight a little bird-like shape on the dim blue tapestry of the night sky, I can see the German machine moving swiftly eastwards to the lines. The guns and machine-guns in a radius of five miles fire frantically and erratically towards it, and in the midst of this discord is heard a fast whistle which quickly develops into a scream. I slide down the side of the canal in a cloud of pebbles and dust. The sound of a very near explosion crashes on to my ear. I crawl up the canal and see a cloud of black smoke not many yards away in the ploughed field beyond the canal. The "hang-up" has been dropped. "Finkelbaum" has had his subtle revenge.

One after one now the twin-engined machines come roaring up the coast. One after one they lay across the docks their deadly line of bombs. Fire after fire is started, and in many places beyond the roofs can be seen the red glow of the flames. Each attacker in turn is greeted with the useless activity of the searchlights and the erratic flashes of scattered shells. "Mournful Mary" wails and wails in miserable and unavailing fear. One after one the great bombers, lightened of their loads, sail lightly homewards to rest in the distant aerodromes of Ghistelles or Mariaalter, followed, to be frank, with our congratulations on their success, for we have too much a fellow-feeling with

them to wish them ill on their dangerous journeys.

It may seem strange, but if it was reported that eight Gothas had been lost on a raid in England, the instinctive feeling was—

"Rotten! Poor devils! This job is getting dangerous!"

If all returned safely, however, we felt—

"Good! Good! Things are not so bad after all! The job looks like staying pretty safe!"

Now some one reports that he can see the lights of a machine far away near the coast. A renewed activity moves through the quiet band of watchers.

"White light, sir!" chants the look-out.

Through the silver skies falls slowly a ball of glittering white fire. There is a short report, and from the upturned pistol of the raid officer a white light shoots upwards and falls in a graceful curve. Louder and louder grows the sound of the motors of the returning Handley-Page. The red and green lights on its wings can be clearly seen. Then the throbbing sound dies, the lights turn and vanish, and for a time the sky is silent and empty. A faint hissing is heard, the lights reappear, and then a dazzling glare breaks out in the sky, lighting up the underside of the Wing to which it is attached. Lower and lower floats the machine. Every eye is fixed intently on it as it draws nearer and nearer the aerodrome. An excited officer, whose invariable habit it is to land mentally each machine, begins to utter his hurried words of advice.

"Now then, Andy!" he says, "shove your engines on, boy! Shove your engines on! That's right! Pull her back! Hold her! Over the telegraph wires! Throttle! Throttle...! *Throttle!* That's right! Hold her back! Hold ... her ... back! Gently! Gently! You're really on the ground, boy! Take care—you're all right! Gently! On the ground! Thank God you're safe!"

With a triumphant roar from the engines, the machine sweeps round and rolls up to the hangar.

We crowd round the nose and greet the furred and helmeted airmen as they climb down from the bottom of the great machine.

"Yes! Dropped on Zeebrugge! Hell of a time! Caught three times! Yes! Lots of Archie! Green balls nearly hit my tail! Yes! Ten on the mole! Coming into the mess, Bill?"

So one by one these adventurers of the night skies, their eyes bright with excitement, stamp proudly into the mess, and I feel jealous of the glorious joy of life which is theirs, the sense of safety after passing through so many great dangers.

The last German machine has long since landed in his distant aerodrome. Two alone of our machines are to return. I walk casually up and down a ditch near the "band-stand," throwing stones at shadowy rats playing in the darkness, when suddenly I hear a voice say—

"There are two lights low down right over there ... yes! I can hear the engine. He's getting very low! My God! Did you hear that! *He's crashed!*"

At once a mad wave of activity sweeps over everybody. Being duty officer I at once rush to the garage.

"Ambulance away at once! Send two tenders with Pyrenes at once! Take axes and saws—get lanterns—go across the fields!"

Car after car starts up and thunders across the little wooden bridge. Over the fields hurry the men with saws and axes and fire-extinguishers. Their lanterns sway and flicker for a while like fireflies, and then disappear. The cold heartless beam of the aerodrome searchlight lies parallel to the ground, splitting the darkness in the surmised direction of the disaster. Somewhere out there in the gloom of the empty fields lies the wrecked machine. Even as we walk up and down in restless vain excitement they may be dead, or mangled and dying, these friends of ours. We do not know who it is. Our one desire is to save, save, save.

"My God! I wonder who it is! Thank Heaven, there is no fire yet! Can you see flames, look-out? No? Thank Heaven!"

A terrible and bitter silence lies around. We have no news. Minute after minute passes with awful slowness. The black night holds a secret which almost distracts us. Nobody returns. There is nothing we can do. We must wait, wait. Half an hour passes, and at last we see the headlights of a car which comes slowly up the road, crosses the bridge, and moves up to the mess. Carefully from the back seat are assisted two men. One has his head bandaged with a white linen band. The other, wearing only a tunic and a shirt, runs into the C.O.'s office on slim white legs.

"No one badly hurt," is the report. "Machine absolute crash. Darley's head was under one of the engines, which pressed it more and more into the ground. He was pretty lucky not to be killed! The Wing Commander's head was under the other engine. It took twenty men to lift it off, and he was afraid we would lift it before we had enough men. He did not want it dropped back again! He had petrol pouring over his face, and was quite drunk when we found him. He was singing! Lucky the machine didn't catch fire. If it had ... well!"

"The man in the back wasn't hurt.... Yes! They got lost in the mist and flew right into the ground

—nearly a mile away! It was on the other side of the canal. Two mechanics swam across—one stark naked, in spite of the cold—plucky devils!" A great reaction follows the strain. Every one is gay and chatters excitedly, until we remark that there is still a machine missing.

"Who is it? Booth? His second trip, isn't it? Hope he is all right. Is he overdue? Been gone three hours. Yes, he was to go to Ghent! I expect he will be all right!" goes the low murmur of conversation.

Half an hour passes and the anxiety increases. There are more people standing on the aerodrome looking towards the east in silence. Watches are consulted rather furtively. Nobody wants to voice his doubt. Forced laughter sounds here and there. To add to the uneasiness a white mist begins to creep over the aerodrome. The searchlight is turned on, and its thin white beam, slanting upward, only penetrates a little way into the whirling vapour.

"White rocket!" cries the raid officer.

With a rush of noise the rocket passes upward and bursts into a cluster of liquid-white stars. The searchlight splutters and hisses. The mist lies cold and white and damp around us. Again and again the rocket rushes upward with a dying noise, until its very sound makes us surly and irritable.

Another half-hour passes, and then another. Still the raid officer stands silent and waiting on his platform, the moisture of the mist shining in little white drops on his heavy blanket coat. Still the searchlight hisses. Still the rockets rush and burst. Every heart is heavy. Every voice is silent. One by one the watchers move wearily to bed.

Hope of return is now long past. The white beam of the searchlight is cut off. The rockets no longer drop their white and lovely stars of useless welcome through the night. I walk tired and miserable across the aerodrome as in the east slowly spreads the first rosy flush of dawn, and across my dragging boots the wet blades of grass throw their sympathetic tears of dew.

VIII.

THE LONG TRAIL.

"Above the hostile lands I fly,
And know, O Lord, that Thou art nigh,
And with Thy ever-loving care
Dost bear me safely through the air.

Thou madest the twinkling Polar Star,
Which guides me homewards from afar;
And Thou hast made my greatest boon,
The radiant visage of the moon."

—*A Night Hymn*. Written sixty miles
beyond the German lines.

Early in the war it became necessary to destroy a railway bridge some way behind the German lines. This structure was an important link in the enemy's lines of communication, and its destruction was of vital importance. The work was given to one of the very early squadrons to accomplish, and it was carried out in rather an unusual way.

From the moonlit aerodrome there rose into the quiet night a little two-seater B.E. 2C. machine, with a pilot and an observer as the crew. Soon this hummingbird of the darkness was winging its steady way across the German front lines, and met as opposition only the scattered and inaccurate firing of machine-gunners and rifle-men on the ground.

The observer closely compared his lamp-lit chart, and the pale map of the moonlit country below him. With unerring certainty the airmen moved across field and forest, farm and village, till they saw some distance ahead of them the gleam of a silver streak of water. As they drew nearer they saw the shining curves of a river, across which, at one point, lay a straight black line. It was their bridge.

At once the noise of the engine ceased and the machine began to sink gently on softly singing wires towards the ground. Bigger grew the woods, wider the thin white roads, deeper the soft and velvety shadows. Over the tops of some trees they floated. The rolling expanse of a field rose up to them. The machine quivered and jerked, and soon was rolling softly along the grass. Before it had stopped the observer had jumped out, and he hurriedly lifted a bulky package from his cockpit. He waved to the pilot. He heard the sudden roar of the engine, and the machine slipped faster and faster across the field and rose up towards the stars, leaving him alone on the ground in the midst of his enemies, many long miles from his own lines.

Quickly he ran to the edge of a wood, and he was soon creeping silently through the dim lattice-work of moonlight and rippling shadows. In a little while he heard the soft murmur of rapid waters, and he came to the edge of the river. He followed its course for a time, threading his way

through the trees near the bank. When he could see the bridge some two hundred yards away he slipped into the river, and wading waist-high in the water, with his precious packet held well above the surface, he moved slowly and silently toward the moonlit arches of stone.

Above him he could now hear the hum of his machine, and he saw it sweep overhead quite low down. It turned rapidly and dived down straight towards the bridge, and he heard the *pok, pok, pok* of its machine-gun. With a great rush of sound it roared upwards again and banked steeply almost above him. Now he could hear the noise of an approaching train, and he saw the restless machine, whose pilot was deliberately distracting the attention of the sentries by his acrobatics and the noise of his engine, dive towards it. There was a sudden flash of light and a very loud detonation. The pilot had released one of his bombs. Then once more sounded the metallic hammering of his machine-gun.

Meanwhile the observer had reached the base of one of the stone piers which supported the bridge. The excited sentries had not noticed his presence, and now he was safely hidden in the gloom of the arch. With the water swirling round his waist he worked feverishly to remove one of the stones. At last it was loosened sufficiently to be withdrawn. In its place he put his precious packet, which was a charge of high explosive. This he secured firmly in position, and then, having set the fuse, he began to return, through the water, to his starting place. Another swift flash illuminated the leaves of the riverside bushes. It was followed by a second thundering explosion, as another bomb burst near the crowded troop train which still had not crossed the bridge.

In a few minutes he clambered up the bank and hurried through the magic beauty of the moonlit wood. He reached the edge of the field where he had landed, and stood waiting. He looked at the luminous face of his watch. The pilot was going to allow him fifteen minutes. Fourteen had passed. He knew his friend would not fail him whatever happened, so though he stood, soaking wet and alone, surrounded by the now angry enemy, he did not feel at all alarmed.

Overhead he heard the drone of the engine, which suddenly stopped, to be followed by the faint, scarcely-heard hiss of the wires as the machine began to glide downwards to the ground. Soon a shadowy shape moved swiftly across the ground and stopped. The observer ran over to it and climbed quickly into his seat. He shouted to the pilot of the success of his operation, and then with a roar and rush was borne upwards, and to his relief found himself flying swiftly once more through the friendly air.

Even as they turned to start on their long homeward journey a great sullen roar rose to them from below, and they saw that no more across the silver streak of the river lay a black line, for now it was obscured by a cloud of smoke, which slowly dissipated and revealed a great gap in the bridge, near which was the red glow of the locomotive that no longer could take forward its carriages loaded with troops destined for a now impossible railhead.

That happened in the early days of the war. Swiftly developed the powerful arm of the air. Great were the changes in thought. Mighty the new weapons of destruction....

"C.O. wants to see you at once in the Mapping Office."

It is four o'clock on September 29, 1917.

I hurry to the little hut by the mess and pass through the door. Over the long desk leans the grave-faced squadron commander, the great pioneer of night-bombing. With a pencil and a ruler he carefully studies a map.

"Is that you, Bewsher?" he says. "Look here, I want you to go to Namur to-night; do you think you can do it?"

"I think so, sir."

"Well! Look! It is a hundred and twenty miles the other side of the lines. There is a big railway bridge there—the Luxembourg bridge—here—see! That is the only railway bridge for a hundred miles of the river. If it is put out of action the German lines of communication are badly broken. The Army H.Q. are very keen on it. It is a great chance for the squadron—and a great chance for you. Brackley will be the pilot. You had better go to see him. How are you going to find the way?"

"Know the way up to Ghent, sir; shall go by landmarks after that!"

"Hum! Take my advice and fly by the compass, and only use landmarks as a check! Well, you will see!"

Now ensues three frantic hours of activity. I hurry off to see Brackley, who has just returned from leave, and at twelve o'clock was in Dover. The time of preparation is one series of kaleidoscopic pictures—of crawling inside a machine unfamiliar to either of us: of being taught the operation of a new petrol pressure system: of watching the loading of the four huge 250-lb. bombs, fat and yellow, which I have never before had the opportunity of dropping: of drawing a line from Dunkerque to Ghent, from Ghent to Namur, across the long green-and-brown map: of pondering the patches of the forests, the blue veins of the river, and thinking how in a few hours they will appear for me in reality, lying below in the moonlight, etched in dim shades of black and dull silver: of a strange dinner in the mess when semi-seriously, semi-facetiously I write out my will,

leaving to one friend my books, to another friend my pictures: of having the document properly witnessed, and rushing out amidst cries of good luck: of the lonely dressing in leather and fur in my little hut: of the roar of the engines as we rise up at latest twilight towards the glittering companies of the stars.

It is a quarter to eight. Eight thousand feet above the coast near Dunkerque we move. My pilot is a senior officer, and I have never flown with him before, so I sit quietly and do not talk, as I watch carefully the dials of my petrol instruments, and also keep a careful eye on the country below. The pilot looks at the engines with a satisfied glance, and the machine swings round and points east.

Soon the dim pattern of the Dixmude floods lie below, reflecting the gleam of a quivering star-shell. In the sky above Thorout appears a dazzling Very's light which drifts and dies—German machines are abroad in the darkness also. Far below now lies Thorout, and for a minute or two its pale beam waves vainly and impotent in the moonlit sky, its strength so dissipated that it is useless. Soon south of Ghent we move, and see to our right the landing lights of the huge Gotha aerodrome of Gontrode.

I stand up and look across the pilot, and count the lights.

"Eight on each side—two red at the west!" I say.

"I make it more," he comments. "Count again!"

I make sure of my accuracy, and draw in my note-book a detailed sketch of the landing arrangements.

"Look!" cries suddenly the pilot. "We've been heard!"

I peer down once more and see only the two red lights glowing on the ground. The two lines of white electric lamps have been switched off, for the drone of our engines has been heard high above the aerodrome.

Suddenly I realise that we will be heard through the whole of our long journey. The absence of searchlights and shell fire in these undefended regions makes one forget that from town to town, from village to village, the report of our progress is sent to a thousand military centres in a vast radius. Already our passage into virgin territory (for not for years has country east of Ghent been bombed at night) must be causing a sensation. Brussels must be apprehensive: Aix-la-Chapelle is feeling anxiety: Cologne is uneasy.

Now ahead of us I can see what never before have I seen—the lights of villages shining clearly in scintillating groups here and there across the pale moonlit country. With my map on my knees I pick up and check every railway and crossroad and forest below me in turn, and manage to keep the machine exactly over the line marked on the map.

"We're all right, sir!" I say to the pilot. "See this straight road on the map. There it is—there—see! See that forest crossing it—well—there it is! I am quite sure of our position. We come to a river soon ... look! look! do you see it—that silver streak over there?"

The pilot nods, looks at my map, and turns on the bright engine lights in order to examine the dials. To my slight discomfort he leaves them on as he flies ahead, evidently feeling confident of our safety.

Far ahead I can see a light flashing and flashing in a regular code. I presume it to be near Brussels, and point it out to the pilot. In a few minutes through the slight haze of the distance appears a great number of twinkling lights, and soon to our left I see a vast sea of glittering, shimmering gems, with lines of lights radiating outwards from it like the tentacles of an octopus. I suddenly realise that it is Brussels, and with a cry of utter delight stand up to look down more clearly at it. It is a wonderful spectacle. There, in one wide sweep before my eyes, lies the whole city, triumphantly blazing out into the night. I can see the long lines of the boulevards stretching through the mass of lights, on the outskirts of which glitter little villages, from which also radiate the lines of street lamps, as though illuminated starfish lay here and there across the country. *Brussels—Brussels*, beats through my brain as I see the Belgian capital, feeling safe in its remoteness from the lines flaming bravely in the darkness. I live through one of those rare moments of divinity which come to men when they see before them for the first time some sublime spectacle which perhaps has never been seen before.

In the middle of the town there flashes an aerial lighthouse. This is rather puzzling, as the German night-bombing aerodromes are many miles to the west, near the coast at Ghent and Bruges. I wonder for whom this light flashes and blinks. Then I suddenly realise that perhaps one of the infrequent Zeppelin raids is being carried out against England on this wonderfully clear night.

Brussels passes. Road and forest and village flow beneath us in a regular and expected stream. Slowly the minutes go by. Ten minutes to ten says the watch. For over two hours we have been in the air, and our engines show no signs of wavering. On them alone now depend our chances of return. Soon I see far ahead of me the silver ribbon of the Meuse shining in the haze of the horizon, and then the lights of Namur, cold and sparkling, appear by the side of the river. I examine every tiny landmark on the ground below, and check it with my map. There is no doubt. There lie the lights of the town—there lies the forest on its outskirts—there lie the two bridges,

from one of which the thin black line of the railway trails off into the distance.

"Namur!" I say to the pilot.

He looks down and flies round in a wide circle in order to examine every point, and to ensure for himself that no doubt whatever exists as to the identity of the place. He is quite satisfied, and turns the machine towards the south-east. We cross the river south of the town as I explain to him my intentions. I want him to turn north-west, against wind, and to throttle the engines. We will glide down parallel to the railway line, which will help me to get a good line. We will reach the bridge at a low altitude, and I will drop my bombs. We will turn quickly down wind to escape.

Before I crawl into the back I point out to him some very bright lights in the direction of the Namur Zeppelin sheds, which seem to confirm my supposition of the activity of German airships to-night. Then, with a final word of explanation, I stoop through the door behind my seat and lie on the floor of the machine. I slide open the little trap-door beneath the pilot's seat, and see a small square picture of moonlit country. Ahead there is just visible the curve of the river, and the black line of the bridge across it. Beneath me runs the railway track which is to be my guide. To my joy I can see, at one place upon this thin dark line, the intermittent red glowing of an engine's fire-box. In a swift moment I realise the actuality of the country below. For a second it ceases to be a map and becomes peopled with busy human beings. Oh, Namur (think I), ablaze with lights, you enjoy this moonlight night of late September, far, far from the turmoil of war, little conscious that overhead this very moment lies a fur-clad airman peering down at you, preparing to drop his terrific missiles, packed with fierce explosive! Laugh on in your cafés, you exquisitely-clad German ambusqués! For me this moment is rich and ecstatic. Then the difficulty of the task absorbs my mind. The noise of the engines has ceased. Through the machine sounds the faint rush of wind hissing and sighing round the tight-strung wires and planes as we sink lower and lower. My bomb-sight draws nearer and nearer to the bridge. Pressing the buttons of the direction indicator I steer the machine to right and left, as green or red glow the lights before the eyes of the pilot. The direction bar touches the bridge and drifts off to the left. I swing the machine round quickly, again the bar crosses the bridge, again it drifts off. We are flying slightly side to wind, and I can scarce keep the head of the machine on a straight course. The pale-glowing range-bars draw nearer and nearer, with a slow progression, to the black edge of the silver river. Again I press the right button; again a green light glows; again the machine swings towards the bridge. The range-bars cross the base of it. I press over the bomb handle quickly, ... and again. Clatter—click—clatter—click—click—clatter sound the opening and closing bomb doors behind me as bomb after bomb slides out into the moonlight depths below. For a moment I see the fat yellow shapes, clear-lit in the pale light beneath me, go tumbling down and down towards the dim face of the country.

I hurry back to my seat beside the pilot.

"Half dropped, sir. 'Fraid they will not get it. Oh! I am sorry, sir! I am sorry! We drifted!"

One, two, three red flashes leap up in the water of the river some hundred yards to the south of the bridge. One, two more flashes, more rapid and brilliant, leap up on the moonlight embankment, leaving large white clouds of smoke.

"Jolly good! You didn't miss by much!" he says encouragingly.

Boom—boom—BOOM—boom—BOOM! sound the five explosions as we turn. It is strange to look at Namur—still sparkling beautifully with a wealth of light under the stars—still unchanged, though we know that the thundering clamour of these five unexpected explosions must have stirred up the placid life of the little tranquil town till it is seething like an ant-hill upset by the wayside. In the squares and streets must run the alarmed population, rushing to and fro aimlessly, utterly terrified. In the military headquarters the telephones and telegraphs must have burst into a sudden activity. The vibrant roar of the explosions must have been heard for a great distance. Even in remote Aix-la-Chapelle the strolling Germans must have wondered at the far-away sound drifting to them under the stars.

Again we fly to the south: again we turn and start on our second "run" over the target: again I crawl into the back, steeled this time by a great anxiety and a great determination, for I realise the enormous responsibility which is mine. With the five remaining bombs behind me I have, if possible, to destroy the great railway bridge, which to me will appear only a small black match laid across the silver ribbon of the river. If the bridge is destroyed or damaged the German communications will be vitally interfered with, the moving of their troops will be interrupted, the pressure on the British lines will be relieved. If I fail, that much-desired relief will not take place, and therefore many more British soldiers may be killed. That is not all, however—for failure means that this expensive raid is wasted; the reputation of the squadron is tarnished; the official approval of Handley-Pages as long-distance night-bombers is reversely affected; and, least of all, though of great importance to myself, my splendid opportunity for a great achievement is lost. With this sense of responsibility weighing heavily on me I lie down, peering through the little square hole. My face is wet with the perspiration of anxiety in spite of the intense cold of the biting wind: my hands shake with excitement. I decide to take the machine to the river along the railway line, and slightly to the east of it, and then to judge the wind drift so that the machine is turned by it to the left, when I will press the starboard signal button and swing the machine at an angle across the bridge, and then drop my bombs. It is a great risk, and unless I judge exactly I will not succeed.

In a fever of apprehension, and with my whole being concentrated on the relation of the fine wires and bars of my bomb-sight with the black thread of the railway far below me, I lie on the varnished strips of wood on the floor of the machine, my legs flung wide apart behind me, my bare hands and face frozen with the icy blast of wind, my uncovered eyes running with water. Nearer and nearer to the bridge draw the two range-bars. Gently and rarely do I touch the starboard signal button, to swing the machine again and again to the right as the wind drifts it to the left. We are near the bridge—we are almost over it. I press the starboard button determinedly, and I see the glow of green light illuminate the dashboard. To the right swings the machine. White glows a light as I press the central button. I look below quivering with anxiety. The machine ceases its leftward drift and swings to the right, and the two luminous range-bars are in line with the bridge. I grasp the bomb-handle and once, twice, press it over. I look behind—the bombs are all gone. It is all over! The irrevocable deed has been done! The failure or success of the long raid is sealed. I climb clumsily to my feet and look through the door beside the pilot.

"All gone, sir, I ... Oh! look, *look!*"

Upon the thin black line of the bridge leap out two great flashes, leaving a cloud of moonlit smoke which entirely obscures one end of it.

"Oh—damn good—damn good!" yells out the pilot excitedly. "Hit it! *Hit it!* You've hit it! Oh—priceless—priceless!"

"Good—oh, sir! I am glad. It is hit, isn't it, sir? Two of them. I *am* bucked!"

Almost crying with joy we shake hands, and he thumps me cheerfully on the back.

"Something for you for this when we get back!" he says. "Oh! damn good—damn good, Paul. Priceless—priceless!"

I look round, and in the back of the machine I see a sight which left the clearest image of this raid in my mind. There stands the moonlit figure of the tall good-humoured gunlayer, and with a characteristic gesture I see him put out his arms with the thumbs pointing upwards—the most sincere expression of congratulation he can deliver. My heart goes out in gratitude to this solitary man who already, for nearly three hours, has stood alone on a thin platform in the back of the machine, watching and eager, knowing that he has no control over his destiny, that his life lies in the hands of the little figure whose black head he can see so far away from him in the nose of the machine.

Now we turn at once and start on our long homeward trail. Exhilarated with a glorious feeling of success, so contented and glowing with joy that I am not affected by the fact of being over a hundred miles from friendly territory, I sit on my seat with legs gaily swinging, and read Dickens, write letters and verses, drink tea and eat sandwiches, and chatter incessantly to the pilot, who, in his satisfaction, does not mind.

"You'll get something for this—if we cross the lines all right!" he says with his usual restrained optimism.

Charleroi sparkles on our left. Near it at La Louvière flashes an aerial lighthouse, whose presence I record on my note-book. Having found our way to Namur by map, we seem to return by a curious kind of homing instinct. We know where we are as if by second nature. Indeed so little do I trouble that I mistake Courtrai for Roulers, but it makes but little difference. Such confidence have I in our safety, so lovely is the moon-drenched night, so friendly are the undefended skies, that we fly on and on as in a stupor of utter bliss. We know that if we return we are famous, and we know we will return. Song and laughter, and rich thoughts of far-distant London and its proffered glories when next comes leave, fill my drowsy brain. I hug the pilot's arm affectionately. At twelve o'clock he was at Dover, now scarcely eleven hours after he is coming back from Namur. How wonderful it is—how wonderful he is!

Ypres flickers to the left with its ever uneasy artillery fire. In our ease we do not even trouble to cross the lines as soon as possible, but fly on parallel to them, some five miles on the German side. At last we turn and cross slowly over the white blossoms of the ever-rising, ever-drooping star-shells.

Back towards Dunkerque we fly, and the pilot says over again to me—

"You did jolly well, old man. You'll get something for this—if we land safely!"

I wonder what his conditional clause will be when we are on the ground—"if you live to get it"—probably!

Soon the welcome landing T glows far below us. We fire our white light: at once the white light rises from below. "Charlie," the raid officer, is faithfully on the watch, as he must have been now for long hours, awaiting our return.

We glide downwards, and in a moment of exultation the pilot, to my everlasting regard for him, sweeps a few feet over the aerodrome, yelling with me in utter excitement—

"*Hurray! Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!*"

I lean far over the side screaming out my joy in this mad whirling rush over the grass. On roar the engines: we sweep swiftly upwards again, and turn, and land.

As soon as the machine has stopped crowds press round us. A Ford car is waiting to take us over to the headquarters.

"Oh! Damn good," says the pilot. "We hit it—but I take no credit for it. It was this child's show—he did it!"

"Bilge! You were great, sir. I never saw such steering!"

In the jolting little car we whirl across a bridge, alongside the canal, and across a second bridge to my beloved camp, and our beloved C.O.

His words of congratulation at the news would be reward for a hundred such trips.

"Well!" he says at last, "I suppose you did it by compass!"

"No, sir! By landmarks!"

When at last I walk back alone, under the starlit sky, to my cabin, it seems utterly impossible to believe that I *have* been actually to Namur—that I have actually travelled over three hundred miles since I last walked along that path a few hours ago. It seems incredible that my soft right hand has actually this night caused damage and brought death to that far, far remote place, which even now is in a state of confusion. Vividly I realise the amazing wonder of flying; vividly I feel the strange fascination of night-bombing, with its long journeys and sense of domination—its sense of being almost divine.

Five weeks later, to the mapping office comes the intelligence report—

"A Rapatrié reports:—On the night of September 29th Allied aircraft successfully attacked the Luxembourg bridge at Namur, which was badly damaged. 17 German civilians were killed."

IX.

TRAGEDY.

"No gold of poetry will deck this tale,
This gloomy record of an awful night;
With pleasant words my fear I will not veil,
Or hide the horrors of the fatal flight.

So all seemed peace to us as we flew on,
When suddenly the hand of heartless fate
Passed lightly over us, and then was gone,
But it had left a legacy of hate."

—*The Ordeal.*

"To-night an attempt is going to be made to sink blocking vessels, filled with cement, in the harbour mouths at Ostend and Zeebrugge. It is intended, as a distraction, to land specially trained men on the Mole, where they are going to burn down and destroy everything they can.

"The whole plan has been under consideration for weeks, and has been carefully worked out. We have been given the task of lending assistance by two methods—by desultory bombing, and by dropping flares. I have here a number of cards—one for each machine. On these cards are given the exact details of the duty given to that machine. If you follow them exactly the aerial operations will work without a hitch. Roughly, the idea is like this: From 10 o'clock till 1 A.M. machines will be bombing Zeebrugge Mole and Batteries incessantly—as one machine finishes, another will carry on. Then, beginning from one o'clock—when the bombing parties will be attacking the Mole—you will begin to drop parachute flares to help the people on the ground to see what they are doing. A great flare will be lit on a vessel twenty miles north-west of Ostend to show that up to then operations are proceeding satisfactorily, and also as a final check for time.

"This is a great opportunity for the Squadron. The work given to us, if carried out satisfactorily, will be of enormous value to the Naval units. I know I can rely on you to do what is required. Now this is the list of the machines: First machine—Pilot J. R. Allan, Observer P. Bewsher—bombs Zeebrugge Mole from 10.30 to 11.30—drops flares at 1 o'clock...."

The Wing Commander reads on his orders in the crowded mapping office. When the long and detailed list is completed, we pour out into the twilight, wildly excited. Long had the secret been kept: no one knew much of the plans.

The first thought which came to my mind was that of the marines and sailors, somewhere out there in the chilly North Sea, who were in a few hours to steam into an absolute inferno of death. I felt how terrible would be my feelings if I had been one of them—and they were volunteers. Then comes as a light relief the thought of the solitary German sentry at the tip of the Mole, and the rude shock he was going to have. Then the pilot to whom I was allotted claimed my attention.

He was a freckled, red-headed youth, brave, fearless, capable—easily the most popular man in

the squadron—a pilot with a wonderful reputation as a night-bomber; he had behind him the record of innumerable successful raids, when, in spite of all difficulty, he had successfully driven home the attack. He was a Canadian from Montreal, and the finest man I had met in the services. I was proud to have been given the opportunity to act as his observer.

He joined me with my own pilot "Jimmy," now acting as Squadron Commander, and so, to his chagrin, unable to take part in this raid.

"Here's Paul! Well, what do you think of it?"

"Hum! I've never been to Zeebrugge. An hour over the Mole sounds pretty beastly. What I don't like though is that wait—eleven-thirty to one,—that sounds pretty foul to me!"

"Jimmy!" he says, turning to my pilot, "I have got the wind up! I don't know why! I don't like the idea somehow. I tell you frankly I'm windy about it!"

"That's funny!" I remark. "I nearly always have the wind up—you ask Jimmy—but I haven't to-night. I am rather looking forward to it. Of course I have the usual cold feet, like I do before every raid, but nothing bad. I reckon I'll be all right with *you!*"

Only a week ago I was in a convalescent home at Peebles in remote Scotland, amidst the fir-clad hills, and now in the wide shadowy plains of Northern France I prepare to start for a fierce night of midnight attack and hostile defence over Zeebrugge.

To-night we are to fire no "carry-on" light, for whatever the weather may be the raid must be carried out to assist the naval attack from the sea.

A mist lies over the sea and land, and scarcely in the darkness can we see the black line of the shore. A red and a green light glows in the mist at Nieuport and fades. It is the first "hostile aircraft" signal of the night, which little the Germans know is going to be such a frenzied one and so devoid of rest. Again at Ostend glow the lurid signals in the mist, and again near Blankenberghe. It is only ten. Not yet can we fly on to Zeebrugge. We decide to fly right out to sea past the Dutch frontier, to turn in over the border, and come back to Zeebrugge a few miles inland from the coast.

At Zeebrugge glow red and green flares. We have been heard far out to sea. Two searchlights shoot up into the sky, and stand slim sentinels of blue-white light, undecided in the mist. The pilot throttles slightly, and turns the machine out to sea. It is not intended that too early in the evening should Zeebrugge be excited. Looking behind, I see that the two searchlights have been extinguished. The suspicions which we aroused have been allayed. Ten minutes past ten now. We turn to the right and begin to fly in towards the Belgo-Dutch frontier. At twenty minutes past ten we are nearly over the land, and I can just see the little creek which marks the boundary line. We make a few wide circles in order to pass away the time, and then, at twenty-three minutes past ten we turn west and begin to fly towards Zeebrugge over the land.

Upwards stabs a searchlight, and then another and another. Eight or more of them move across the sky before us. I cannot see the coast. The sea and the land is welded into one dim whole by the dark mist. This makes my task difficult, for one searchlight seems to be stationed much too far to the right to be on the coast, and I wonder whether it is on the tip of the Mole or on some patrol-boat.

The pilot throttles the engines, and we begin to glide downwards. I am not anxious about the poor visibility, because I know well that to-night the importance of our bomb-dropping lies not so much in its destructive value as in its moral effect. Keeping my eye on two powerful searchlights close together, which I feel sure are at the base of the Mole, I peer through the door in the bottom of the machine and steer the pilot with the signal-buttons. Never have I been to Zeebrugge before, and the prospect has ever seemed so alarming that now in actuality I am not as afraid as I expected. Nearer and nearer to the wide moving beams of white light we move. I hear the scarcely-revolving engines clanking slightly to either side of me, and I can feel the gentle rise and fall of the machine in a long slow glide. A string of vivid green balls suddenly rises up from the ground and lights up an expanse of sea and the shadowy line of the sand-dunes. In front of us they rise, for which I am grateful, as they give me a guide to my position.

Now the bases of the two swinging pillars of light which I have taken as my mark lie beneath my bomb-sight. I press the bomb-handle forward slightly, and climb up leisurely beside the pilot.

We glide sedate and silent between these tall blades of light which only move slightly. We can scarcely be heard, and so they do not know quite what to do. Far below flashes our first bomb. Each searchlight jerks into sudden movement. A long string of green balls climbs dutifully up to our left, and falls gracefully over and expires. I lean lazily and singularly unafraid, in my seat, watching the vast scene of midnight activity with a languid interest.

We cross the coast-line again near the Dutch frontier, and turn over the sea towards Zeebrugge. Then begins a wild hour. Somehow to-night we feel that nothing can touch us. We feel that we can in safety take any risks. Again and again we fly into Zeebrugge. Through the mist the great white beams stagger and wheel and swoop and wait. For once they do not terrify me. In the haze I see the quick flashes of the guns, and shell after shell bursts in a barrage over the Mole. In the ghostly light of the incessant green balls I see the round puffs of the shell-bursts, actually touching each other in a long line, so closely together are they placed as a barrier.

We drop two bombs over the Mole at a low height, and, pursued by the malignant searchlights and the rapid ineffectual flashes of the shells, swing out to sea, turn in once more, and drop another bomb. Again and again we do this, and so madly excited and conscious of safety do I feel that I fire a bright light after each attack to show my contempt of the defences. As the red or green light drifts down I see the searchlights leap over towards it, and far below, above the shining waters, appears a great white star-shell which the nervous and uneasy Germans have fired over the sea, evidently feeling that to-night there may be some unexpected trouble from below as well as from above.

In one of these quick tip-and-run attacks I lie gazing happily through the square trap-door, and see a string of green balls rise towards me from the centre of the Mole. As they rise they light up the whole of its dim curve, and I see that, instead of the usual boom of four anchored barges at its tip, to-night there are eight.

In a second I am beside the pilot.

"Roy! You know those four barges—off the tip of the Mole? Well, there are eight to-night! Don't you think we should go back at once and have it 'wirelessed' to the fleet so that the block ships know? We could be back in time for our flare stunt!"

He shakes his head.

"No! We better carry on now. It would probably be too late; and anyway, maybe they know!"

So I return to my scene of operations on the floor, and drop my last two bombs near the Mole. Our work over for the time being, we turn out to sea. As we move away, we see the shape of another great Handley-Page pass exactly over us as it flies on to attack Zeebrugge Mole for another hour. Our place is taken at once. The attack is being carried out, as arranged, in exact detail.

Now, some ten miles from the unseen land we fly up and down on a two-mile beat or so, waiting for the laggard minutes to pass. A few wan stars shine sparsely through the mirk, which ever grows thicker and thicker around us. Now and again I see a misty chain of green balls rise up in the distance, gleaming palely in the haze. Here and there, too, move the weak beams of the searchlights. At last it is one o'clock, and towards the north our steadfast gaze is turned as we await the great flare which should record in a moment of dazzling light the imminence of the terrific conflict that so soon is to take place. Far, far below in that dim waste of sea, unseen yet somehow felt, the great fleet of vessels must be drawing nearer and nearer, and these brave men must be standing on the decks ready to die. A few minutes pass, and then suddenly the pilot utters a cry.

"Look! The starboard engine's boiling!"

At once the clamour of the engine ceases, and I look quickly to the radiator on the right, from the top of which is blown backwards a thin streak of white water and steam. As the engine cools through inaction, the ill-boding wisp of spray lessens and dies. Carefully, slowly, and with an evident anxiety, the pilot pushes forward the throttle, and the engines open out with a growing roar. On the little cap of the starboard radiator our eyes are fixed. Slowly the slender white scarf appears again, and grows wider and more evident in the darkness. It is the pale finger of doom....

"We better go back at once!" he says, and turns the machine towards the west.

With engines partly throttled we begin to glide slowly downwards. I stand up and peer below into the murk in an effort to distinguish the distant coast-line. The night is too thick, however, and I can see nothing.

The long slow glide continues. For a little while no anxiety ruffles the calm of my brain. I look vaguely at the compass, an instrument whose red and blue face has long been unfamiliar to me. I look at the height indicator, at the watch, and then gaze unperturbed below me to the black emptiness of mist. Suddenly I realise we are only four thousand feet above the sea, and are ignorant of our position. At that moment we sink into an enveloping haze, half cloud, half mist. Below, above, to right and left, we can see nothing—no stars, no light, no dim dark line of land. We steer towards the west, and anxiously I watch the height indicator. For ten uneasy minutes we move through this vapoury blackness, and then break through it. Two thousand five hundred feet, says the height indicator.

"I say, Roy, what shall we do? I can't see anything below. I don't know where we are at all!"

"Drop a flare, Paul," he replies very calmly.

I crawl into the back, and, pushing forward a small metal lever fixed to the side of the machine, I hurry forwards to my seat and look below. Suddenly a light bursts into brilliancy beneath us, and I can see a ball of white fire hanging below a frail white parachute. By this quivering illumination is lit up a circle of cold oily water. We are still over the sea.

"Sea, Roy! What shall we do? I can see no lights. I don't know where we are!"

Two thousand feet records the height indicator.

"Drop another flare ... we will be all right, old man!" says the splendid pilot.

Again I crawl into the back and push forward a lever. Again bursts out a light beneath a little

parachute. Again I see below a dim circle of cruel, cold, waiting sea. All round us lies the damp empty mist. Far, far away I can see the white beam of a searchlight, but whether it be on land or on a boat I cannot tell. All I know is that it is too far distant to allow us to reach it.

Again, at fifteen hundred feet, I drop a parachute flare. An icy fear is creeping over my body now. Below, in the light of the third flare, still lies the sea. We must glide down helplessly into the water, in the darkness, and die....

"Oh, Roy!... Look! A boat!"

"Yes! I see it! I am going to land near it."

"But supposing it is a block-ship going into Ostend?"

"Fire white lights as quick as you can!" is his order.

For a moment we have seen in the pallid light of one of the hanging flares the wide shape of a boat moving slowly through the sea, leaving a broad white wake behind it. Near it, from one or more points, long, thin, smaller wreaths of white vapour lie across the water, and are evidently a smoke-screen.

Feverishly I begin to load my Very's light pistol, and fire it—load and fire—and white ball of light after white ball drops and dies, drops and dies. Just over the top of the masts of the huge ship we sweep, and below I can see its decks, with all the orderly complication of a boat's fittings, clear in the light of one of the flares.

"*Help! Help! Help! Help!...*" I scream with every ounce of my strength in a long unending succession of pleading cries, leaning far over the side.

"We will be all right! Cheer up, old man!" says the pilot, smiling at me. "We will be all right! Drop all the flares...."

I rush into the back, and push over quickly all the little levers by the side of the machine. I climb forwards into my seat, and see that we are only twenty feet or so from the water, which lies swelling and heaving with an oily heartless calm all round us, lit up by the wavering light of the parachute flares. For a moment I see the sides of a ship on the right sweep past us and vanish. Then I realise we are just above the sea, which now streaks below us: I see the two whirling discs of the propeller on either side; I put one foot on my seat ... ready....

CRASH! Crack—splinter—hiss—there is a sudden, swift, tremendous noise and splash of water, and I feel myself whirling over and over, spread-eagle-wise, through the air. I hit the water with a terrible impact ... there is a white jagged flash of fire in my brain, I feel the sudden agony of a fearful blow ... and sensation ends.

I become conscious of an utter fear. In sodden flying clothes, now terribly heavy, I find myself being dragged under the water as though some sea-monster were gripping my ankles and pulling me under the water. My head sinks beneath the surface, and, inspired by an absolute terror, I frantically beat out my hands. I realise in a swift vivid second that I am going to die—that this is the end. As my head rises again I become conscious of the oil-glittering surface of the sea, shining strangely in the light of the three flickering parachute flares which hang above me like three altar-lamps of death. Here, in the irresistible weight of these soaked clothes, only semi-conscious and quite hysterical, I begin a ceaseless, piteous wail. "Help! Help!..."

In my weakness I sink again below the water, and thrust out my arms wildly to keep myself up, panting furiously, and crying for help.

Some twenty feet or so away the top wing of the machine lies out of the water at an angle, a dark high wall a hundred feet along. Inspired into frantic energy by my sheer dread of dying, I begin to fling myself along the surface of the water with the insane strength of despair. I kick out my heavy legs, so cumbered with the great leather flying boots and huge fur-lined overalls. Frenziedly I beat my arms. Again and again I sink. Nearer and nearer grows the shining surface of the tight fabric.

"Oh! Help! Help!"

Under the water goes my agony-twisted mouth. Again I rise and resume the unending cry to the empty night.

At last I reach the wing and begin to beat vainly upon its smooth steep surface with my sodden leather gloves. There is nothing on which I can grip, and with an ever-growing weakness I drag my hands down, down, down its wet slope like a drowning dog at the edge of a quay. It seems awful to die so near some kind of help. Kicking my legs out, I manage to move along the wing and at last come to the hinge, where the wing is folded back when not in use, and there I find a small square opening into which I can thrust my hand.

With a feeling of immense relief I let my body sink down into the water. One hand and my head are above the surface. So weak am I, and so heavy my water-soaked flying clothes, that I can scarce hold up my weight. Across my battered face is plastered the fur of my flying-cap. My strength is so rapidly ebbing away that I know that in but a few minutes I will have to leave go and drown unless I am helped. So once again I send my sad wail across the cruel shining waters. Now and again I hear a deep dull boom sound across the sea, and I presume that somewhere a

monitor is shelling the German coast.

Now I suddenly see sitting astride the top of the plane, some nine or ten feet above me, a muffled figure. I think at once that my pilot is saved and begin to shout out—

"Hello! Roy! I can't hang on! Oh! I can't hang on! What shall I do? Is any one coming? Is there any chance?... I'm drowning, I'm drowning!"

"Hang on if you can!" comes the encouraging answer. "There is a boat coming!"

My strength, however, has almost gone, and it is an effort even to hold up my head above the water.

Now does reason whisper to me to leave go. You have got to die one day, it says, and if you sink down now and drown you will suffer scarcely at all. Since you have suffered such agony already, why not drift away easily to dim sleep and the awakening dreams of the new life. Leave go, it whispers, leave go. Tempted, I listen to the voice, and agree with it. Shall I leave go, I ask myself; and then instinct, the never absent impulse of life, cries out, "*No! Hang on!*" and I hang on with renewed strength inspired by the dread of approaching death.

"Hang on, hang on! The boat is coming up!" shouts the man above me.

"Oh! what are they doing? I can't hang on any longer!"

"They're lowering a boat—hang on—they'll be here soon!" encourages the watcher on the wing.

Changing hands I turn round quickly, and vaguely see in the darkness a motor-launch or some such boat, twenty feet or so away.

"Hurry, hurry, *hurry!*" I yell, dreading that my strength may give out in these last moments of waiting. It seems utterly wonderful that I may be saved. I realise how fortunate it is that the machine is floating. If it were to sink but a foot or two, and the little hole through which my hand is thrust were to go under the water with it, then I should not be able to hold myself up, and would soon die. Still sounds the roar of near-by explosions: still shines the smooth cruel sea around me: still float the quivering flares above; then I hear the glorious sound of a voice crying—

"Where are you? Give us a hail so that we can find you!"

"Here—*here!* Hanging on the wing! Do come quickly—*do* come—I can't hang on any longer."

I hear the splash of oars, and then two strong arms slip under my armpits, and I am dragged up to the edge of the boat. I am utterly weak and can use no muscle at all, so for a moment or two they struggle with me, and then I fall over the side on to the floor, where I lie, a sodden, streaming, half-dead thing.

"Save my pal! Save my pal!" I cry.

Down the wing slides the other man, and suddenly I see it is not the pilot at all, but the back gunlayer.

"Where's Roy? *Where's Roy?*" I shout in a sudden dread.

"He never came up!" is the terrible answer.

"Oh! Save my pilot! Save my pilot!" I call out, bursting into sobs, partly with hysteria at the ending of the strain, partly with utter grief. "He was a wonderful chap ... one of the best ... one of the best. Save him! Oh! Do save him! He can't be dead! *Roy! Roy!* He was the best chap there—ever—was."

It is too late. We are lucky to be picked up at all, for it is against regulations. The row-boat goes back to the little grey motor-launch which is protecting the monitor with a smoke-screen, and must go on at once. We are pulled on board. An anxious-eyed and evidently very busy naval officer comes to me.

"Are you wounded or anything?" he asks. "No? Good! I am so sorry we cannot wait to look for the other man. Go down to our cabin and get into blankets. I will send some whisky down! That noise? No! It's not the monitor. It is fifteen-inch shrapnel shell being fired at us from Ostend!"

"Where are you going—anywhere near Dunkerque?" I ask.

"Yes! Going back now with the monitor! The stunt's washed out—bad weather!"

"*Washed out!* All wasted, all wasted. Oh! Roy! Roy!"

I crawl down a ladder and slowly, painfully, take off my heavy flying clothes. In a pool of water they lie on the floor, a sodden heap of leather and fur. Looking in the glass, I see an unfamiliar distorted face with a great enormous cheek, and wet hair plastered about the forehead.

Luckily the other man is not touched or damaged, and has been scarcely even wet, so he lies more or less at ease in his bunk. This is his first raid. He seems to assume that this terrible calamity is more or less a normal occurrence. Soon I am lying in blankets with a glass of whisky inside me. The mad panorama of the night goes rushing through my brain in ever-changing vivid scenes.

"Purvis! Are you awake?" I call to the bunk on the opposite side.

"Yes!"

"I say, you know—we are very very lucky. We have escaped every kind of death in a few seconds. If I were you I would say a prayer or two!"

"I have, old man!"

"Say one for Roy too, won't you. Poor Roy—he was great! He never said a word of fear to the last. He never lost his head or anything!"

So in pain of body and mind I toss and turn in the little cabin with its swinging light, and hear the throb of the motor start and stop, increase and lessen, through long hours, till, for a while, I drift into an uneasy sleep....

Zoop! Zoop! Suddenly sounds the old familiar sound of Mournful Mary bellowing with fear. *Boom!* sounds a loud explosion.

I sit up in my blankets and shout across to the other bunk. "Mournful Mary! We must be back."

"I say, old man! Hear that? It's Leugenboom firing! I can't stand 15-inch shells on the docks this morning—let's get up and dress!"

After a while we borrow an assorted collection of naval garments, and at last climb on to the deck. It is a glorious sunny morning, and we lie in the middle of a little flotilla of neat grey-painted motor-launches lying side by side up to the tall stone wall of one of the docks. I can find no naval officer to thank, so walk from boat to boat till we reach the little iron ladder set in the quay-side, which we crawl up with difficulty till we are on the hot stone above. We start walking into Dunkerque, the back gunlayer in socked feet; myself with bare head, hair over my eyes, and back stooped in pain.

It is a strange walk. We are amidst civilisation, as it were, and people look curiously at us. I stop a naval car. The driver pulls up with evident reluctance.

"We are two naval flying officers—have just come down out to sea off Ostend—we are not well—can you give us a lift?"

"No, sir! Ration car!" In goes the clutch, away moves the car and its smart, rather contemptuous driver.

I stop another car. Again in an unfamiliar voice I begin my recitation—

"We are two naval flying officers—have just ..."

"Sorry, sir—got to fetch the mails!"

No one will help us. No car will give us assistance, though we are obviously in trouble. Too far away from these people is war for them to realise that from war's greatest menace we have just escaped.

We go into the French police office at the docks. There by the kindly uniformed officials we are courteously treated. They, at least, make an attempt to telephone through to our squadron.

Tired at the delay, feeling I must move and move through this unreal city of sunshine and order, which lies so strangely about the dim shadows of my soul, I go on, and, stopping a car, order the driver to take me to the Wing Headquarters. The car is full of chairs, which are being taken to some concert hall, and perhaps the driver realises vaguely that the service does eventually touch reality, that there is some remote possibility of accident, some remote chance of calamity, up there, "towards the lines."

Through the dirty but splendidly familiar streets of Dunkerque we drive, out through the fortification to the pink-and-white villas of Malo. I am driving to the Wing Headquarters first, because I feel that a report should be made at once to the Wing Commander.

We turn at last through a great stone gate, and circling round a drive, stop at the bottom of a flight of steps, up which I slowly climb. By the door stands an orderly.

"Where's the—Wing Commander—Mr—Fowler—I—want—anybody?"

"In the breakfast-room, sir—just down on the left," he says.

I walk down the passage with a strange feeling of fear. Now I have returned to some definite place, to an organisation which can comprehend me, the ending of the strain is bringing a strange dizziness.

I open the tall door and enter.

Two officers at their breakfast table look at me, and then slowly stand up in utter amazement with opening mouths and wide eyes. In a second of time I see the broken egg-shell on the plate, the carelessly folded napkins, a half-empty toast-rack.

"Bewsher! Paul! Why—why—where have you been?"

"Haven't you heard? Hasn't—didn't the Monitor tell you?" I asked dully.

"No. This is the first we have seen of you. Oh! I am glad you are all right. Where's Roy?"

"Roy! Roy! Oh! He's dead, dead—dead—in the sea—drowned in the wreck...." And throwing myself on a seat, I drop my face on to my arms on the table and burst into sobs, which shake my weary frame to the bones as the scalding tears well from my tired bruised eyes.

Follows in my memory picture after picture—of lying for a few hours in my little bed in the familiar cabin at the aerodrome, and of Jimmy bending over me with his face drawn with anxiety, telling me of the tragedy of the night, of Bob and Jack missing, of machines crashing: of the Friends Hospital at Dunkerque in a little wood where we awoke at dawn to hear the thunder of the 15-inch shells bursting on the docks: of the Red Cross city at Étaples: of yet another hospital in the green silence of Eton Square: of convalescence in the dream-garden of a great house in Buckinghamshire.

One night I rode into Paddington and found Jack Hudson awaiting me. Three months was it since I had dined with him on the tragic night of April 10. He told me how, an hour after my accident, he had landed with a shell-shattered engine in Holland; he had struck a canal at 75 miles an hour, and had been upside down under water with his feet fixed on the wreckage, and his machine had caught fire on top of him, and how by burrowing down into the mud he had managed to free himself and to escape. Unchanged by our experiences which we related as interesting stories, we wandered happily along the twilight streets.

Infinitely remote, like a scarce-remembered dream, is the war to me to-day. I seem ever to have been a civilian, ever to have strolled at ease down sunlit terraces of London through the drowsy hours of an English spring—but every night with the slow approach of azure twilight I feel a strange stirring in my heart. As the first primrose star blooms in the east, I seem to hear the roar of starting engines, and when, in cold and sublime beauty, a silver moon rides high in the vast immensity of the night, I yearn with an almost unbearable pain to be once more sitting far above a magic moonlit world, to be moving ever onwards through the dim sky, where here and there the white waiting arms of the searchlights swoop and linger amidst the stars; where, beautiful and enchanted, there rises in the distance a long curving chain of green twinkling balls.

*Dusk is our dawn, and midnight is our noon!
And for the sun we have the radiant moon.
We love the darkness, and we hate the light,
For we are wedded to the gloomy night.*

X.

WITH A KITE BALLOON AT THE DARDANELLES.

"Show a leg! Show a leg! Rise up and shine! Lash up and stow! The sun's burning your bloomin' eyes out!"

So bellows the Master at Arms down the hammock flat, and I awake to see above, outlined by the edges of the hold, a square panel of burnt blue Asiatic sky.

Across my hammock strikes a scorching beam of sunlight, and in a few moments I have pulled over my bare skin a washed-out overall suit and have put my naked feet into a heavy pair of boots, and I am dressed for the day. The hammock is lashed up, unhooked, and stowed, and at the shrill whistle of "Fall in," I hurry up the companion to the blinding heat of the aft deck of H.M. Kite Balloon Ship *Manica*, which a few months before was a small tramp steamer. Being but a second-class air mechanic (general), and so, therefore, in the lowest category, I stand in the rear line of parti-coloured men,—some in khaki shorts and white shirts, some in khaki jackets, some in blue naval coats.

"Parade. 'Shun. Answer to your names.... All present, sir. Parade, stand at ease!"

The duty officer, in white flannel trousers and trim blue-and-gold coat, calls us again to attention, and tells the master-at-arms to send us to balloon stations at once.

"Parade—balloon stations—carry on!"

At once we break off, and hurry down the dim crooked gangway connecting the aft deck with the balloon deck forward. Soon we break once more into the sunlight, with the tall canvas wind screen on the left, and on the right the clumsy orange bulk of the kite balloon lying along the wide wooden deck, on which it is held by rows of canvas bags filled with sand, which are hooked in clusters, like ripe fruit, to its netting.

My position is No. 1 starboard, so I hurry at once to the forward end of the deck and stand by to remove the bags. The whistle is blown, and we lift the bags up, and remove the hooks from the netting, and hang them lower down. As bag after bag is moved the great bulk of the balloon begins to rise up, until beneath its body can be seen the men working on the opposite side of the deck. Now the network is out of reach, and therefore we hang clusters of bags round the splicing of the ropes. Then the balloon, its loose underside flapping slightly in the wind, is allowed to rise

sufficiently to permit the basket party to carry the willow-woven basket to its position in the centre of the deck. As soon as the basket is fixed to its rigging the balloon is dragged down again by the men at the ropes, the sandbags are removed, and the balloon is let up till the basket is just resting on the deck. The two observers, with their charts and binoculars, climb aboard, and then the order is given, "Let her up gently!"

We allow the balloon to rise until at last the ropes leave our hands and hang rippling in the air above us. With a sudden hiss of steam and clatter of machinery the winch in the corner begins to work, and slowly the shining cable unwinds from the drum as the quaint orange shape rises up, up, up, into the pale Wedgwood blue of the sky. At last the whine of the winch ceases, and far above us the yellow balloon hangs like a strange fruit, faintly swinging from side to side.

We fall in once more on parade, and I am detailed to the "Spud party," and "carry on peeling potatoes." Outside the little galley I sit on an upturned bucket, peeling rather clumsily the great potatoes, which, Argus-like, have a thousand eyes. As at ease I carry on this domestic operation, I see in front of me, like a theatrical panorama, war in full blast. Rising from the deep indigo-blue of the sparkling Ægean Sea lies a long line of brown and yellow hills, dappled with the dull green of scrub. The height of Achi Baba is a darker mass, with a flat top reminiscent of Table Mountain. To the right the country slopes down to Cape Helles, which is a biscuit-coloured point of land covered with a crowded huddle of camps and hospitals, of white rows of tents, of horses moving in long black lines, of transport waggons rolling up paths leaving clouds of dust, of batteries of guns which every now and then flash faintly in the hot sunlight, and from whose muzzles leap little clouds of yellow smoke. Over this packed scene of activity occasionally appear the white puffs of shrapnel smoke, which dissipate and vanish, while here and there a great spurt of yellow smoke and black earth shoots up as some high explosive shell bursts among the crowded depots and stores. The air is full of noise—the buzz of aeroplanes; the clatter of rifle fire; the staccato hammering of machine-guns; the heavy boom of guns firing; the dull crash of bursting shells; the buzz of flies on deck; the plop of peeled potatoes falling in a bucket.... So, sitting at ease in the shade of the deck, we watch War casually, as though it were a side-show arranged for our benefit, and indeed we are entirely aloof. It seems incredible that there, a few miles away, on the sun-baked hills, men are dying—that the leaping upward of that smoke over on that hill records the scene of tragedy to perhaps a score of people....

Suddenly a very loud explosion roars out near us. I nearly fall off my bucket with the momentary shock, and then walk to the railings. To our right lies a lean grey cruiser, from whose foremost guns are rising a great cloud of smoke. Evidently it has begun to fire on some distant objective, guided by the observations from our balloon. Two swift lances of flame leap out from the long muzzles, two sharp detonations thunder past our ears, and we hear the long dying roar of the shell screaming through the air across the peninsula. Again and again the six-inch guns crash out, till at the end of half an hour the clamour ceases, and we hear a whistle sound "balloon stations."

At once we hurry down to the deck, and stand at our posts waiting for the descent of the balloon. For a time we sit in the shade, idly talking, when suddenly some one says, "Hello! Look! It's a German!"

High over us, in the pale blue of the zenith, moves a little white bird-like shape, whose turned-back wing-tips reveal it to be an enemy. At once we look to the men standing by the two anti-aircraft maxim guns on the bridge. They have not realised the danger.

"Hi!" we shout. "Look! Up there! He's right above us!"

Zoop—zooop—zooop suddenly wails the ship's siren, sounding the hostile aircraft signal.

"Take cover!" shouts the master-at-arms, and as the men start running down the sides of the deck to the gangways, the little twelve-pounder on the poop crashes out with its first shell; and one of the machine-guns begins a furious clatter as, with muzzle pointed vertically upward, it opens a useless fire against the small shape of the aeroplane almost exactly above us.

Now it is my rather unenviable duty to stand on the deck holding a little flag with which to signal to the men on the winch, which is in furious action as it strives to bring the balloon down as quickly as possible. Owing to the noise of the steam-engine, the men will be able to hear no shout of command, so it is my task to transmit orders to them with my flag. The deck is deserted now, save for the few officers and petty officers. Again and again the anti-aircraft gun on the poop roars out, the rising shell hurries upwards with an ever fainter scream, until at last a little white puff of smoke appears in the thin blue sky far to the right or left of the evil shape which moves forward so relentlessly, and is now almost over us.

I realise the bombs may even now be dropping. I know that in a few moments I may be dead. I feel terribly frightened, but glad that I have something to do. The hand holding the flag shakes a little. I begin to sing one of the Indian love lyrics:—

"When I am dying
Lean over me, tenderly, softly...."

Crash—*pok—pok—pok—pok* ... sound the guns. Then with a loud boom a great column of water, smoke, and steam, nearly ten feet across, rises up to the right of us near the ship. *Pok—pok—pok* sounds the maxim. I wonder if there is another bomb coming.

"Stoop, as the yellow roses droop,
In the wind from the ..."

Boom—the second bomb bursts some eighty feet away to the left. Both have missed; the menace is passed.

With a feeling of relief I say a short prayer, and watch with an easier interest the little white puffs of smoke which trail across the sky behind the rapidly-fading aeroplane, like flowers scattered in the path of a passing deity. The machine-guns above me at last cease their clamour. The grey barrel of the gun on the forecastle spits out its flame and smoke for the last time. The winch ceases its clatter and is reversed in order to allow the balloon to rise again; for, the danger being past, it is required to work with the *Queen Elizabeth*.

Now the whistle sounds for breakfast, and soon we sit at our narrow wooden tables in the afterhold, eating moist bread and terribly yellow salmon, and drinking washy tea. We talk of food, food, food incessantly, picturing the glories of past meals in London, the exquisite repasts which will be ours when we return; we dream of white tablecloths, of flower vases, of toast-racks, and white china, and bacon, hot, sizzling, curling.... We are a strange crowd—artists, stokers, solicitors, clerks, blue-jackets, soldiers, architects, chauffeurs,—all are mixed together. The better educated men are A.B.'s; the P.O.'s are telephone operators or old service men. It is as strange a company as any in the war.

The meal is over, and I climb up on deck, and see that between us and the long mottled hills of Gallipoli lies the huge but graceful shape of the *Queen Elizabeth*. Her fifteen-inch guns are tilted at a high angle, and are turned towards the coast. It seems evident that she is about to bombard some position, and that our balloon is going to "spot" for her. I walk down the gangway to the balloon deck and stand near the little telephone cabin, where the operator sits at a table with the receivers strapped over his ears, in direct communication with the bridge and the balloon observer high above. I look through a little glass window, and become a witness of a stupendous feat which illustrates vividly the amazing power of destruction of modern artillery.

The pencil in the operator's hand writes—

"9.10. Balloon to *Q.E.* Transport 16,000 tons in narrows M17 x2 steaming slowly
N.W. Can you open fire?

"9.12. *Q.E.* to Balloon. Am about to open fire.

"9.13. Balloon to *Q.E.* Transport now M17 x3. *Q.E.* fired ..."

There is a sudden deafening noise and I hear the roar of a shell screaming at a terrible speed through the air. The roar slowly lessens, and suddenly its tone drops about six notes as it passes over the coast and moves above land instead of water. For nearly a minute I can hear the ever low whine of the shell, which dies away in a faint thud.

"9.14. Balloon to *Q.E.* O 500. R 200," writes the pencil.

The shell has fallen five hundred yards over its target, and two hundred feet to the right.

"9.15. *Q.E.* fired ..." writes the pencil.

Again the tumult breaks out, again the shell roars, and changes its note, and dies away in a little remote explosion.

"9.16. Balloon to *Q.E.* O 200 ..." writes the pencil.

The watchers in the balloon have seen a white column of water leap up just beyond the little black shape in the ribbon of the narrows twelve miles on the other side of the hills.

"9.18. *Q.E.* fired ..." continues the record.

This time the slow dying wail of the shell ends in a long tremulous explosion.

"9.19. O.K...." writes the pencil.

The vessel has been struck. Then with an uncanny precision the writing continues:—

"9.21. Vessel sinking. Forepart under water.

"9.23. Vessel submerged to forward funnel.

"9.25. Stern only visible above water.

"9.26. Vessel entirely submerged."

It seems incredible. The whole drama has been enacted with the same orderly speed as the movement of the pencil. The great grey battleship has, with three shots, sunk a large transport packed with a thousand men and a considerable cargo of supplies, which lay some fifteen miles away out of sight on the other side of a high range of hills. The blind sailors have loaded their guns and have fired according to the instructions given by the little figures swinging high in the blue morning sky in a creaking basket hung from a drowsy yellow balloon.... Standing here by the little cabin I have been a witness of a wonderful feat, and an awe-inspiring example of the scope of modern weapons.

This kite balloon of ours is the first ever used by the British, and this magnificent achievement which I have just seen recorded is the biggest triumph it has accomplished. It is naval history in the making. I walk away across the hot raised balloon deck feeling strangely small, strangely unimportant in an age of huge strength and mighty possibilities.

Now the whine and clatter of the winch recommences, and the balloon begins to descend slowly. When it is some five hundred feet above the deck the whistle is blown to call us to "balloon stations," and we hurry along to our appointed positions beside the tall wind-screens. Nearer and nearer comes the balloon; larger and more ungainly grows its yellow bulk, and soon the handling ropes are within reach. Catching hold of the ends, we quickly thread them through ring-bolts and pull them steadily till at last the balloon reaches deck, and the two observers climb out of their baskets.

We are evidently proceeding to some new position where the balloon is going to be used again, for it is not bagged completely down, but is merely temporarily weighted by clusters of sandbags in the rigging, and we stand by the ropes which are lashed to the side. After half an hour or so we receive orders to prepare to let the balloon up again. The two observers return with their binoculars and charts, and once more the balloon rises upwards. I am now told off to oil the gas-pipe which leads from the gas-cylinders aft to the balloon deck. This is a job which I like, because I can look over the side and see what is happening. So, with my can of yellow oil and my handful of cotton-waste, I watch a half-hour or so of fierce battle. We lie some five miles off the land near Achi Baba, where the lines run into the sea, and it is soon evident that an attempt is being made to advance. Between us and the shore lie several destroyers and a cruiser, and in a few minutes they start firing rapidly. I hear the sharp sound of the guns, and then a few minutes later the thud, thud of the exploding shells, and from the cliff leaps up one, two, three shrubs of yellow coiling smoke, which quickly enlarge into trees, and at length fade away in tall masses of vapour. Soon the edge of the cliff is a maelstrom of smoke and flame. Yellow, white, and black burst the shells, and as fast as the smoke of one salvo thins out, the fan-shaped puffs leap out again in the middle, and add more turbulence to the volcano. Just over the ground appear white puffs of shrapnel smoke. Again and again, in the same place, they appear like magic flowers in the air, and grow bigger, and frailer, and fade. The air is rent and torn with the sound of the explosions, some incredibly loud and vivid, some distant and dull, while to this chorus of tumult lies as a background the delicate wooden click and clatter of remote rifle and machine-gun fire, sounding like the fingers of a child beating a tattoo on a kitchen table.

Now and again a great shell bursts half-way down a ravine in the side of the cliffs, and fills it for a time with a coiling cloud of yellow smoke. Little figures can be seen moving along the skyline, and here and there flash bayonets and equipment. As I watch, I mechanically rub my oily rag up and down the pipe, up and down. It seems hard to realise that the tragic climax of war is being enacted out there before my eyes. That men are dying, are screaming in agony with terrible wounds, are whispering their last messages for their beloved ones in England to some comrade bending over them. For me it is merely a wonderful scene, a spectacle as in a play.

Then suddenly a whistling sound strikes a swift chill into my heart. Louder and louder grows the noise with all its sense of hostile approach, and ends at its summit with a dull explosion. Fifty feet away a column of water and steam hangs above the blue placid sea, and slowly fades, leaving a creamy-white disc on the water to show where the shell has burst. Another whistle sounds and another, and both end in the noise of an explosion, but from my present position I cannot see where the shells have fallen. Another one sounds, however, and grows so loud that I run instinctively into the nearest cabin, though it is no real shelter. I hear a loud explosion, and returning cautiously to the rail, see, some way down along the side of the boat, a white circle of foam, whose edge actually touches our hull, so close is it.

Below in the engine-room I hear the clang of the telegraph, and the growing mutter of the engines as we start to draw away from the coast. The whistle sounds for balloon stations, and I hurry along the deck and down a ladder to my place. The winch is pulling the balloon down as fast as it can, and every now and then above its tumult we hear the long whine and burst of a shell, whose explosion we cannot see owing to the high canvas screens which shut us off from a view of the sea. It is a most unpleasant experience, for the boat is only a small 4000-ton tramp steamer, with the thinnest of decks, and it is loaded with cylinders of compressed gas, with petrol, and with shells, and there is a "muse" balloon full of gas in the hold beneath the forward deck as well. The effect of a shell-burst on the boat will be at least pyrotechnical, and probably very fatal. At last the balloon is down on the deck, the basket is released, the "bagging down" operation is completed, and the ship steams full speed out of range of the hostile artillery.

Now for a time we lie off the long golden beaches of Suvla Bay with the dark orchards behind it, beyond which the slim white minarets rise from among the hills. It is the hot drowsy hour of noon. Four or five transports lie near us, while the inevitable trawlers in couples, with noses cocked perkily in the air, sweep the water slowly for mines. Behind us lies the grey shadow of Imbros in the distance. From the mainland comes the occasional dull sound of shell fire, while the crackle of musketry rises and falls as though on a gusty wind.

We sit on the poop under an awning to obtain a little protection from the fierce heat of the sun. Around us lies the calm deep blue water. A few people talk; now and again the daylight signalling-lamp clatters on the bridge: it is an hour of absolute peace.

Suddenly a great tension sweeps over the crowd of men on the deck. Every face changes its expression from utter tranquillity to absolute amazement and apprehension.

"Look!" says some one.

There, lying terribly clear on the rich blue of the sea, is a thin creamy ribbon of foam running from a point a mile or so away right to the middle of the ship. For a second I realise that it is the track of a torpedo, and I stiffen myself to receive the explosion. Nothing happens. I realise at once that the danger is past, though it seems incredible that we have not been struck. The gun on the forecastle barks out twice, and looking over to the other side of the ship I see two columns of spray leap out of the water near a round patch of white foam, from which a thin white ribbon also runs to the side of the ship. We suddenly understand what has taken place. A submarine has fired a torpedo at us, point-blank, from scarcely twenty yards away; it has passed right under the engine-room, and gone on another mile or so till its face is extended. The first ribbon we saw was the track of the torpedo going *away* from us.

At once the hooter wails out the signal, "abandon ship stations," and the "attacked by submarine" flag is hoisted at the mast. The engine-room telegraph sounds frantically. The ship begins to move forward, and slowly passes the long white spear of death which struck into us, and yet left us miraculously untouched. I can hardly take my amazed eye away from it. So uncanny and awe-inspiring is it, laid across the dark and placid blue of the sea, which sparkles innocently under the cloudless sky of an Ægean June.

The sound of our hooter and the sight of our flag, however, has wakened the drowsy fleet to a furious activity. As I begin to adjust the life-belt round my shoulders, in obedience to the "abandon ship stations" orders, I see the transports gather speed as they make for Mudros Bay in great zigzags. The admiral's yacht does not trouble about twisting or turning to avoid the hidden menace, but ploughs at top speed in a straight line for safety. The destroyers rush round in frantic circles, the other balloon ship, the *Hector*, begins to steam rapidly, while its balloon is still in the air, and it can be seen with what speed the yellow gas-bag is being jerked down by the straining winch. The sea is now a scene of furious energy. The white streak of foam across the water has broken the drowsy moontide spell; in front of every bow is a feather of spray, behind each stern a white zigzag wake. Every ship is pointed one way—towards the welcoming boom of Imbros.

Suddenly I hear a brief exclamation.

"Look at that boat! Yes! By Gaba Tepe! It's been hit. It's the *Triumph*, isn't it? It looks like it!"

Over towards the dark olive groves of Gaba Tepe—those olive groves which so long sheltered a great gun whose position could not be discovered—lies the grey outline of a battleship. It can be seen that it is slightly out of the perpendicular, and a little puff of vapour comes from it as the steam-pressure in the boiler is released to avoid explosion. Slowly it tilts over till it is at an angle of forty-five degrees to the water. Every now and then a gun flashes on it as the gunners fire at the submarine which has attacked it. The dark shapes of destroyers draw nearer and nearer to it. It lies stationary at a deep angle for a little while, and then begins to turn over at a slow deliberate speed; lower and lower it falls, until for a moment it lies flat on the surface, and then ... all we can see between us and Gaba Tepe is the blue water on which move the little destroyers, evidently picking up survivors. The most splendid sight is to see the little flashes on board as the gunners, true to their traditions, keep their guns in action to the last.

We watch the tragedy in silence: it seems difficult to realise that in the last few minutes we have seen the destruction of a powerful vessel, with a crew of eight or nine hundred men on board. A solemn feeling pervades the ship, and there is no laughter among us.

We pass a transport steaming out of Mudros Bay and signal to it. Quickly it sweeps around, and returns to the little island, moving at full speed in great zigzags. The menace of the sea has rendered the blue sparkling water of the Ægean a dangerous home for any boat. No longer can we lie at ease day after day off the sun-baked hills of Gallipoli. We must needs live a tip-and-run life,—do our work, and return to safety behind submarine defences.

So, with the grey shadow of sublime Samothrace hanging above the sea to our right, we sail into the peace of Mudros Bay, round which the thyme-scented hills of Imbros lie sleeping in the afternoon sun.

THE END.

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Transcriber's note:

Inconsistent hyphenation and accents have been left as written.

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