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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ZEPPELIN DESTROYER: BEING SOME CHAPTERS OF SECRET HISTORY ***

William Le Queux

"The Zeppelin Destroyer"

"Being some Chapters of Secret History"

Chapter One.

Over a "Gasper."

"To-morrow? To-morrow, my dear Claude! Why, there may not be a to-morrow for you—or for me, when it comes to that—eh?"

"Yes. You're quite right, old son," was my cheerful reply. "I'm quite aware that these experiments are confoundingly dangerous—and, besides, there are nasty wind-pockets about just now. I got into a deadly one yesterday afternoon, just across the line at Mill Hill."

"I saw you," replied my friend Teddy Ashton, a fellow-aviator and chum at Hendon. "It gave me a nasty moment. You had engine-trouble at the same time."

"Yes," I replied. "I was up over eight thousand feet when, without a second's warning, I found myself in a pocket spinning over. Phew! If ever I nearly came to grief, it was at that moment!"

"I was on the lawn, having tea with Betty, and we were watching you. I quite expected to see you come plumb down," Teddy said. "You righted your old bus splendidly."

"She'll have to have a new dope, I think," was my reply, endeavouring to turn the conversation into another channel, for I did not care to discuss my narrow escape from death over the mishap which was certainly my own fault.

I was standing with Teddy in one of the long work-sheds of the Barwick Aeroplane Factory at Hendon on that bright morning early in October, 1915. The wind was light, the barometer high, and both of us had been up, as we had been testing our monoplanes.

As he stood leaning against a half-finished machine idly smoking a "gasper"—a cigarette in the airman jargon—he presented a fine picture of the clean-limbed young Englishman in his wind-proof aviation suit, with leather cap and ear-pieces, while his goggles had been pushed upon his brow.

Both of us, "as quirks," had learned to fly at the same school at Brooklands before the outbreak of war, and both of us were enthusiastic airmen.

In introducing myself to the reader of this chronicle of fact I suppose I ought—at the risk of using the first person singular a little too much—to explain that I, Claude Munro, aged twenty-five, am son of Sir Reginald Munro, a man well-known as a physician, a prominent prescriber of pills and powders in Wimpole Street.

On coming down from Cambridge I had read for the bar a short time, but finding that my inclination was more in the direction of electricity and mechanics, my indulgent father allowed me to take a course of study at a Wireless School, where I was not long in learning most of the recent discoveries in the field of radio-telegraphy.

One Saturday afternoon, about two years before, my father had taken me in his car to Hendon to see the passenger-flights at two guineas a head, and the excellent Verrier had taken me up with him. Immediately I became "bitten" with aviation, and instantly decided to adopt it as a profession.

At first the governor—as all governors do—set his face firmly against such a risky business, but at last I persuaded him to plank down the fees, and thereupon I began a course of tuition in flying, with the result that I now owned my own big monoplane upon which I was conducting certain important experiments, in association with Teddy Ashton.

“See that in the paper this morning about the new German Fokker monoplane?” I asked him as we both smoked and rested, our machines standing side by side outside.

“Of course, my dear old Claude,” was his reply.

“It would be one of the jokes of the war if it wasn’t such a grim jest. Remember what they said recently in Parliament—that we held the supremacy of the air, and that it is maintained.”

“All humbug,” I declared bluntly. “Sad though it is to admit it.”

“Of course it is!” cried Teddy very emphatically.

“The fact is that the public haven’t yet realised that the joke is against our Government ‘experts’ who now see all their science set at naught by a rule-of-the-thumb Dutchman who, by the simple process of putting a big engine into a copy of an obsolete French monoplane, has given his own country’s chief enemy the freedom of the air.”

I agreed with him; and his words, I confess, set me thinking. The papers had been full of the Fokker aeroplane, of its great superiority over anything we possessed, and of it as a real peril to our pilots in Flanders.

“The real fact is,” declared Teddy, in the intervals of a deal of hammering, “that there’s nothing extraordinary about the Fokker except that it is built sensibly for a definite job and does it, while our own ‘experts’ have tangled themselves and the British aircraft industry in a web of pseudo-science and political scheming which has resulted in our lack of the proper machines and engines to fight the Zeppelins.”

“Yes,” I answered with a sigh. “You’re quite right, Teddy. But something *must* be done. We must find some means by which to fight the enemy’s dirigibles. We have a few good aeroplanes, I admit, but, as you say, those are not the product of the Government factories, but have been produced by private firms. Why? Because airmen have been so badly let down by their experts.”

At that moment a shadow was cast before the door of the shed, and a bright musical feminine voice cried:

“Hulloa, Claude! I followed you hard, right from Hertford.”

It was Roseye—“Rosie” of the aerodrome! Roseye Lethmere, daughter of Sir Herbert Lethmere, was my own well-beloved, whom I had taught to fly, and who was at that moment perhaps the most notable airwoman in England.

“Really,” I exclaimed, as I advanced to meet her.

“Why, I hadn’t any idea you were here. Nobody told me.”

“Miss Lethmere is always elusive,” Teddy laughed, bowing to her. “Have you been up on your own bus, or on Eastwell’s?”

“On Mr Eastwell’s. My engine did not run well, so Barnes, his mechanic, lent me his machine,” was her reply. Then, turning to me, she said: “I went up only five minutes after you. I wonder you didn’t look back when you banked over the railway line at Wheathampstead. I was just behind you then, though I could not overtake you, as my engine seemed a little sluggish.”

“That doesn’t occur very often in Eastwell’s bus,” remarked Teddy. “I flew it last Thursday, and found the 150 Gnome ran perfectly.”

“Well, Claude, you outdistanced me altogether,” declared my well-beloved. “From Hertford, with the wind behind you, you absolutely shot back. I thought that Mr Eastwell’s machine would outmatch yours, but, though I put every ounce into the engine, I was hopelessly out of it. It hadn’t been tuned up well.”

“That’s curious, Roseye,” I replied. “I had no idea that my bus was any match for his! I thought that his Mertonville machine was much faster than mine—or than yours as a matter of fact.”

“To-day mine is out of the running,” she laughed. To you, my reader, I suppose I ought to describe my own beloved Roseye. Well, I am not good at describing women. As the only son of a blunt, white-haired physician who having made expert study of all the thousand-and-one ailments of the eternal feminine, including that affection called “nerves”—mostly the result of the drug habit, I had heard, from my youth upwards, many disparaging remarks upon the follies and the unbalance of the mind of the gentler sex.

This, however, did not prevent me from loving Roseye Lethmere, daughter of Sir Herbert, who had come into my life quite unexpectedly a year ago.

As she stood there chatting with us, attired in her airwoman’s clothes, her appearance was certainly workwomanlike. She was dressed in a wool-lined leather coat, and overall trousers, with a knitted Balaclava helmet, and over that again a leather skull-cap, the whole tied down tightly beneath the chin. A huge khaki woollen muffler was around her throat, while a pair of unsightly goggles hanging around her neck completed the picture. She had followed my advice, I noted, and tied her muffler very securely around her chin.

How very different she looked at that moment to when I took her—as I so frequently did—to a play, and afterwards to

supper at the Carlton, the Savoy, or Ciro's. She was a girl who, on the outbreak of war, had decided to play her part in the national crisis, and she certainly had done so.

Three times had she flown across the Channel with me, and three times had we returned in safety to Hendon.

Indeed, only a week before, she had flown by herself on a British-built Duperdussin with 100 horse-power Anzani engines from Brooklands across to France, descending a mile outside Abbeville. She had had lunch at the old Tête de Boeuf hotel in that town, and returned, landing safely at Hendon—a feat that no woman had ever before accomplished.

Roseye Lethmere certainly possessed a character that was all her own.

In her ordinary costume, as a London girl, she was inexpressibly dainty and extremely well dressed. Her curiously soft blue eyes, almost child-like in their purity of expression, were admired everywhere. Whenever, however, her picture appeared in the papers it was always in her flying costume.

Most women, when they take up any outdoor exercise, be it hunting, golfing, strenuous tennis, or sport of any kind, usually acquire a certain indescribable hardness of feature, a sign by which, when they sit in the stalls of a theatre, the mere man at once knows them.

But the beauty of Miss Rosie—as she was known at Hendon—in spite of her many exciting and perilous exploits in the air, was still soft and sweet, as it should be with any fresh healthy girl of twenty-two.

The workmen started hammering again, fitting a new propeller to a machine in course of hurried completion for the front, so we all three went outside, where our own machines stood close together.

Theed, my mechanic—who had been the governor's chauffeur before I took up flying—was busily testing my engine, and I could hear it missing a little.

"Hulloa!" I cried, looking up at a big monoplane at that moment passing over us. "Why, Eastwell's up in Thorold's new bus!"

"Yes," answered Roseye. "I passed quite close to him behind St. Albans."

The October morning was bright and sunny, with a blue, cloudless sky, just the morning for trial flights and stunts, and, in consequence, two pupils were out on the aerodrome with their instructors, preparing for their lesson.

Roseye noticed this, and smiled across at me. She remembered, probably, how carefully I used to strap her into the seat, and how, more than once, she had gasped when we made a nose-dive, or volplaned for an undesired landing. Yet, even in those days, she had betrayed no fear in the air for, apparently, she reposed entire faith in my judgment and my capabilities at the joy-stick.

We stood watching Eastwell as he banked first on one side, then on the other, until at last he made a graceful tour of the aerodrome and, swooping down suddenly, landed quite close to us.

"Morning!" he cried cheerily, as he slowly unstrapped himself and climbed out of his seat. "Morning, Miss Lethmere," he added, saluting. "Well, how does my bus go? You had a little engine-trouble, hadn't you?"

"Yes. I couldn't overtake Mr Munro," she replied, laughing. "Were you watching me?"

"Yes. I've just come back from Cambridge. I left here this morning as soon as it was light—" Eastwell, in his aviator's leather jacket, fur helmet and goggles, presented a tall, gaunt, rather uncouth figure. Yet, in his ordinary clothes, he was something of a dandy, with light brown hair, a carefully-trained moustache, and a pair of shrewd grey eyes.

Roseye had been acquainted with him for over two years, and it was she who had first introduced us.

They had met at Wiesbaden, where her father, Sir Herbert, had been taking his annual "cure." Eastwell had been at the Kaiserhof Hotel where they had also been staying and, being a young Englishman of means and leisure, an acquaintanceship had sprung up between them.

Lionel Eastwell was a great lover of music, and for that reason had been at Wiesbaden, where, in the Kursaal, the programme in the pre-war days was always excellent.

On their return to London Eastwell called at Cadogan Gardens, and Sir Herbert had then ascertained that the pleasant young man—who for two years had taken such a great interest in aviation—was possessed of a very comfortable income, was a member of the aero club, and lived in a very snug set of chambers half-way up Albemarle Street.

At the Royal Automobile Club he was also a well-known figure in the select circle of rather go-ahead airmen who made that institution their nightly rendezvous.

As a result of hearing Lionel Eastwell speak of the pleasures and exhilaration of the air, and after watching his flights at Hendon, Roseye had at last determined to seek the new sensation of aerial navigation, and in taking her lessons she and I had met.

Airmen and airwomen form a very select coterie practically unknown to the world outside the aerodrome. They fly; they risk their lives; they make their daily experiments with their new engines, new wings, new airscrews, new strainers, new magnetos, and all sorts of newly-invented etceteras, all the time risking their lives in a bad nose-dive,

or with a buckled wing.

Our quartette, all of us enthusiasts, and all holding our own views regarding the British supremacy of aerial navigation in the war, stood chatting for ten minutes, or more, until turning to Roseye, I said:

“Well, I’m going over to see what Theed is up to.” Then, together, we left Eastwell to go back to his own machine.

Yet, in that second, a strange thing occurred. Perhaps I may have been unduly suspicious—if so, I regret it and offer apology—but I felt certain somehow that I saw in Roseye’s face a look of displeasure that I should have taken her from the man whose sudden appearance had caused her countenance to brighten.

And, at the same time, as I glanced surreptitiously at Lionel Eastwell, while in the act of offering him a “gasper” from my case, I most certainly saw a strange and distinctly sinister expression—one that caused me through the next hour to reflect very deeply, and ponder over its cause.

Chapter Two.

The Murder-Machines.

An hour later I made another flight in order to try my new gyroscopic stabiliser, which—for the benefit of those unversed in aerial navigation—I may say is an invention which incorporates a horizontal reference plane of accuracy and integrity to which all angles can be referred.

I flew across to the Thames, and followed the winding silvery streak with dotted blotches of houses up to Windsor and back, finding that the invention rendered my machine a platform which was not only steady, but was also held in constant relation to the horizontal.

That morning was ideal for flying and, on my return, I was not surprised to find that both Teddy Ashton and Roseye were up again. Indeed, as I brought my machine to earth I saw Roseye flying at a great height coming in from the south.

Two or three of the school-buses were up, circling the aerodrome, including an unwieldy one that always reminded us of poor Cody’s “cathedral.”

As soon as I landed, Eastwell came across again, eager to inquire how the new gyroscope arrangement had worked, for, like myself, he was a great enthusiast over all new notions, however wild they might be. Indeed, I believe he had tried every newfangled idea produced during the past couple of years.

I having pronounced it good, he begged me to let him try it, and a few moments later he was in the pilot’s seat. Then after Theed had spun the propeller, our friend rose quickly, and went out to meet my well-beloved on her return.

Roseye, seeing my bus, thought I was flying it, but as she circled gracefully down she realised at last that it was Eastwell, and both machines, after making several fine circuits of the aerodrome, came to earth almost at the same moment.

I had been watching Roseye. For a woman, she was certainly a most intrepid flyer. Crossing to her, I glanced at her self-registering altimeter and saw that she had been up over eight thousand feet.

“I’ve been across to Dorking,” she laughed gaily, as she sprang out of her seat, raised her goggles and pulled off her heavy leather gloves. “I followed the railway from Dorking along to Guildford and met two men up from Farnborough. At Guildford I kept over the South Western line to Surbiton, and then steered back by compass.”

She also inquired how my stabiliser had worked, and I told her that Lionel had been trying it.

Later, Eastwell was full of most glowing praise of the new invention, after which I put my machine back into the hangar and, taking Roseye with me in my two-seater, deposited her at home in Cadogan Gardens in time for lunch.

Then, as was my habit, I went on to the Royal Automobile Club in Pall Mall, and, after my meal, sat in the window of the big smoking-room chatting with three of the boys—airmen all of them.

George Selwyn, a well-known expert on aircraft and editor of an aircraft journal, had been discussing an article in that morning’s paper on the future of the airship.

“I contend,” he said firmly, “that big airships are quite as necessary to us as they are to Germany. We should have ships of the Zeppelin and Schutte-Lanz class. The value of big airships as weapons of defence cannot be underestimated. If we had big airships it is certain that Zeppelin raids—more of which are expected, it seems—would not be unopposed, and, further, we should be able to retaliate. We’ve got the men, but we haven’t got the airships—worse luck! The Invisible Hand of Germany has deceived us finely!”

“That’s so,” I chimed in. “The Germans can always soothe their own people by saying that, however dear food is and all that, yet they can’t be strafed from above—as we unfortunately are.”

“I quite agree,” declared Charlie Digby, a well-known pilot, and holder of a height-record. A tall, clean-shaven, clean-limbed fellow he was lying back in the deep leather armchair with his coffee at his side. “But is it not equally true that, if we had aeroplanes of the right construction and enough of them, we could give the night-raiders in Zeppelins a very uncomfortable time?”

"Quite so. I'm all in favour of suitable aeroplanes," Selwyn admitted. "We must upset this Zeppelin menace by some means or other. Here we are—the greatest and most powerful nation the world has ever seen, worried three times a month by the threat of these German gas-bags! It is quite possible to obtain such aeroplanes as would enable us to fight the Zepps. As somebody wrote in the paper the other day regarding the future range of the naval big guns, it is useless to send up half-trained quirks on soggy seaplanes accompanied by still less trained spotting officers equipped with short-range wireless which cannot receive. The gun-spotter in a Fleet action should be a fully trained and experienced gunnery-jack, seated in a comfortable observation-car where charts and navigating instruments can be used with accuracy. Therefore, if we can't get the proper aeroplanes, we must have airships for the purpose, as they are at present the only apparent vehicle for scientific gunnery in a Fleet action."

With this we all agreed.

"Another point," I said, "was advanced by a clever writer in the *Aeroplane* the other day. It was pointed out that in the matter of fighting Zeppelins, however good aeroplane patrols may be, they must depend on their eyes to find enemy airships. One may silence engines, but one cannot silence air, and, though one may shut off and glide slowly, yet there will always be enough whistling of wind round wires and struts to wash out any noise of airship engines, gears, and propellers, unless they are very close indeed. An airship, on the other hand, can shut off and float. There may be some creaking of the girders, and stays, but there will be no continuous whistling. Therefore an airship makes a perfect listening-post for enemy aircraft of all kinds."

"I'm quite sure of that," declared Charlie Digby from the depths of his chair. "If we are to win the war we must fight the Zeppelin. We want a real good man at the head of affairs and we should allow him a free hand, and put a stop to the endless committees and conferences and confabulations which have been the curse of this country in every department since war began—and before. Let that man have the advice of all the specialists he may require, and let him encourage people with ideas to offer their advice, instead of turning them down, as is the custom of most people in commanding positions."

Those same sentiments I had read in one of the papers that very day.

I said nothing more. It was time for me to be off, so I rose and left, having an appointment with Teddy Ashton.

As I passed through the big hall of the club I reflected how true were Digby's words. If we were to win the war we must fight the Zeppelins effectively.

But how?

That same question had occupied the minds of both Teddy and myself for many months, long indeed before the first Zeppelin had crossed the North Sea. Both of us had realised the deadly peril of those huge murder-machines against which we would be utterly powerless.

During the first year of war the public had laughed at the idea of Zeppelins coming over to drop bombs on undefended towns, or making an air raid upon London. The popular reply to anyone who ventured to express fear of such a thing as had been openly threatened in the German Press was: "Bah! they haven't come yet!"

But at last they had come, and they had dropped bombs upon inoffensive citizens. There were some writers already crying, "Never mind the Zeppelins!" In the sluggish apathy which refused to worry as to the state of our air-defences they discovered a sort of heroism! "Surely," they exclaimed, "civilians, including women and children, ought to be really glad and proud to share the risks of their sons or brothers in the trenches."

A poor argument surely! The unarmed people of London and the provinces, when summoned to confront the hail of fire and death, had showed an imperturbable coolness worthy to compare with the valour of the soldiers in the field. On that point, testimony was unanimous. The people had been splendid. But they expected something more than passive heroism. It was so very easy to shut one's eyes to the ghastly record of suffering a hundred miles off, easy, as somebody had said, to doze under the hillside with Simple, Sloth and Presumption.

Long ago I had agreed with Teddy that some means must be found to fight effectively the German airships now that anti-aircraft guns had proved unreliable for inflicting much damage, except in a haphazard way. In conjunction, therefore, we had been actively conducting certain secret experiments in order to devise some plan which might successfully combat the terror of the night.

Zeppelins had flown over the coast towns and hurled bombs upon its defenceless inhabitants. Each raid had been more and more audacious in its range, and in its general scheme. London and the cities of the Midlands had been, more than once in sight of the enemy's airships. Yet a certain section of the Press were still pooh-poohing the real significance of the attempt to demoralise us at home.

Out in St. James's Square—on the cab-rank which the Club had taken for its own—I jumped into my car and drove away down to Gunnersbury, beyond Chiswick, where, in a market-garden, I rented a long shed of corrugated iron, a place wherein, with Teddy, I conducted the experiments which we were making into the scientific and only way by which Zeppelins could be destroyed.

While the world had been wondering, we had worked, and in our work Roseye constantly assisted us. It was hard and secret work, entailing long and patient study, many experiments, and sometimes flights necessitating much personal risk.

Failures? Oh! yes, we had many! Our failures were, indeed, of daily occurrence. More than once, when we thought ourselves within an ace of success, we found that we were faced with the usual failure.

Many, alas! were the disappointments. Yet we all three had one goal in view, keeping it ever before us—the fighting of the Zeppelin.

Little did we dream of the strange, dramatic events which were to result from our secret scientific investigations, undertaken in all our enthusiasm.

Could we but have foreseen what the future held for us—or the power put forth against us by the Invisible Hand!

Chapter Three.

The Brown Deal Box.

Six days had gone by.

The weather having continued bright and fine, with a high and steady barometer, all of us at Hendon, quirks and pilots alike, had been up on many occasions.

In secret, I had placed upon my machine—a Breguet monoplane with a 200 horse-power Salmson—another new invention which, with Teddy's aid, I had devised, and was testing. We were keeping the affair a profound secret. Nobody knew of the contrivance evolved out of my knowledge of wireless, save we two, Roseye and my mechanic Harry Theed.

Carefully concealed from the eye it was carried in a large locked box, while, as further precaution, after testing it each time, I put it on my car and took it away to my chambers with me, for we were not at all anxious for any of the mixed crowd at the aerodrome to pry into what we were doing, or to ascertain the true direction of our constant experiments.

One afternoon down at Gunnersbury Teddy, in mechanic's brown overalls, was busily engaged repairing a portion of the apparatus which I had broken that morning owing to an unfortunately bad landing.

To the uninitiated the long shed with its two lathes, its tangle of electric wires across the floor, the great induction coils—some of them capable of giving a fourteen-inch spark—the small dynamo with its petrol engine, and other electrical appliances, would no doubt have been puzzling.

Upon the benches stood some strange-looking wireless condensers, radiometers, detectors and other objects which we had constructed. Also dressed in overalls, as was my chum and fellow-experimenter, I was engaged in assisting him to adjust a small vacuum tube within that heavy, mysterious-looking wooden box which I daily carried aloft with me in the fuselage of my aeroplane.

We smoked "gaspers" and chatted merrily, as we worked on, until at last we had completed the job.

"Now let's put a test on it again—eh, Claude?" my friend suggested.

"Right ho!" I acquiesced.

It was already dusk, for the repair had taken us nearly four hours, and during the past half-hour we had worked beneath the electric light.

The shed was on one side of the large market-garden, at a considerable distance from any house. Indeed, as one stood at the door there spread northward several flat market-gardens and orchards, almost as far as the eye could reach.

Presently, when we had adjusted the many heavily-insulated wires, I started the dynamo, and on turning on the current a bright blue blinding flash shot, with a sharp fierce crackling, across the place.

"Gad! that's bad!" gasped Teddy, pale in alarm. "Something's wrong!"

"Yes, and confoundedly dangerous to ourselves and to the petrol—eh?" I cried, shutting off the dynamo instantly.

"Phew! It was a real narrow shave!" remarked Teddy. "One of the narrowest we've ever had!"

"Yes, my dear fellow, but it tells us something," I said. "We've made an accidental discovery—that spark shows that we can increase our power a thousandfold, when we like."

"It has, no doubt, given the wireless operators at the Admiralty, at Marconi House, and elsewhere a very nasty jar," laughed Teddy. "They'll wonder what's up, won't they?"

"Well, we can't help their troubles." I laughed.

"I expect we've jammed them badly," Teddy said. "Look the aerial is connected up!"

"By Jove! so it is?" I said.

I saw what I had not noticed before, that the network of phosphor-bronze aerial wires strung beneath the roof of the shed had remained connected up with the coils from an experiment we had conducted on the previous afternoon.

"I'll pump Treeton about it to-morrow. He'll be certain to have heard if there has been any unusual signals at Marconi

House," I said. "They'll no doubt believe that spark to be signals from some new Zeppelin!"

"No doubt. But we may thank our stars that we're safe. Both of us could very easily have been either struck down, or blown up by the petrol-tank. We'll have to exercise far more caution in the future," declared Teddy.

Caution! Why, Teddy had risked his life in the air a hundred times in the past four months, flying by day and also by night, and experimenting with that apparatus of ours by which we hoped to defy the Zeppelin.

Those were no days for personal caution. The long dark shadow of the Zeppelin had been over London. Women and babes in arms had been blown to pieces in East Anglia, on the north-east coast, and every one knew, from the threats of the Huns, that worse was intended to follow.

Our searchlights and aerial guns had been proved of little use. London, the greatest capital of the civilised history, the hub of the whole world, seemed to lie at the mercy of the bespectacled night-pirate who came and went as he pleased.

As is usual, the public were "saying things"—but were not acting. Both Teddy and I had foreseen this long ago, for both of us had realised to the full the deadly nature of the Zeppelin menace. It was all very well for a Cabinet Minister to assure us on March 17, 1915, that "Any hostile aircraft, airships, or aeroplanes which reached our coast during the coming year would be promptly attacked in superior force by a swarm of very formidable hornets."

Events had shown that the British authorities at that time did not allow sufficiently for the great height at which Zeppelins could travel, or for the fact that, while the airship could operate successfully at night-time, darkness was the least suitable time for aeroplanes in the stage of development which they had reached, on account of the difficulties of starting and of landing in the dark, as well as of seeing or hearing the airship from a machine flying aloft.

The German Government and the German people had thrown their fullest energies into the development of aircraft for war. Unfortunately we had not, and it is not too much to say that, during the first few months of the war, the responsible authorities in this country did not take the aerial menace seriously.

We, as practical airmen, had taken it up seriously—very seriously, and, as result, had devoted all our time and all our limited private means—for my governor was not too generous in the matter of an allowance—towards combating the rapidly increasing peril of air attack.

The first German attempt had been on Christmas Day in the previous year. As I happened to witness it, it had fired me with determination.

Shall I ever forget the excitement of that day. I had gone down the Thames to spend Christmas with my old friend, Jack Watson, of the Naval Flying Corps, when, under cover of a light fog, a German airman suddenly appeared.

We first saw him over the Estuary, slightly to the south of us, flying at a height that we estimated at about 9,000 feet. There was great excitement. Anti-aircraft guns at once opened on him, but they failed to hit him. Lost to our view in a mist, he was not seen again until well up the river, and from the reports afterwards published it seems that fire was once more opened on him from our guns. Rising higher to escape our shells, he made a complete half-circle. By now, several British aeroplanes were in pursuit, and the German, seeing that it was hopeless to attempt to go farther, turned back. Thousands of people had a good view of this—the first real air-battle on the British coast. Shells were bursting in the air apparently all round the German. Time after time it seemed that he had been hit, yet time after time he escaped. Men could not fail to admire the skill with which he handled his machine. At one point a sudden dip of the aeroplane seemed to show that a shot had got home. Still, however, according to what I heard afterwards, he kept on, circling, dodging, twisting, climbing and diving with almost incredible swiftness to escape his pursuers. He made straight for the sea—and escaped. Weeks afterwards a rumour was received that some fishermen had found a body away out in the sea which was believed to be that of the German airman, but no satisfactory confirmation was ever published.

It was that incident which first set me thinking of how to combat hostile aircraft. At once I thought of aeroplane versus aeroplane, but when three weeks later, two Zeppelins came over to the east coast to reconnoitre, and dropped nine bombs, blowing to pieces two old people, then my attention was turned towards the Zeppelin, and in Teddy Ashton I found a ready and enthusiastic assistant.

This raid, and those which followed on points on the north-east coast, small as their immediate results were, yet demonstrated one thing. The German Press proclaimed that German genius had at last ended the legend that England was invulnerable owing to her insularity. An English writer had pointed out that it was certainly proved that the seas no longer protected England from attack. She was no longer an island. Should she hope to keep her shores inviolate, and to allow her people to live in the safety that they had enjoyed for so many centuries, she must be prepared to meet invaders from the sky, as well as on the water. Both Teddy and myself saw that the coming of the German airship was the beginning of a new chapter in the history of this country.

The real German defence was summed up in a semi-official message published, which read: "The German nation has been forced by England to fight for her existence, and cannot be forced to forego legitimate self-defence, and will not do so, relying upon her good right."

Her good right! Had Germany a right to drop bombs blindly on open villages, and kill our women and babes at night?

That had fired us both, and the result had been that long shed, and the great mass of electrical apparatus it contained.

Sometimes, when I begged more money from my father for the purposes of those experiments, he had grumbled, yet always when I pointed out what Teddy and I were actually doing, he was ready again to sign a further cheque.

Teddy was, of course, richer than myself. His father had been a cotton-weaver who had lived in Burnley, and had died leaving his whole fortune to his only son. Therefore my friend was possessed of considerable means, and had it not been so, I fear that we should never have been able to establish such an extensive plant, or go to the big expenses which we had so often to incur.

The secrets of that shed of ours had to be well guarded. Our night-watchman was a retired police-sergeant, John the father of my faithful mechanic, Harry Theed, and in him we reposed the utmost confidence.

"If anyone ever wants to get into this 'ere place, sir," old Theed often said to me, "then they'll have to put my lights out first—I can assure you."

"Well," Teddy exclaimed presently, as he slowly lit a fresh cigarette. "Let's adjust things a bit better, and we'll then try how she goes—away out on the pole. It's getting quite dark enough to see—especially with your glasses."

"Right you are," I said, and then, after another ten minutes of manipulation with the wires, during which I "cut out" the aerial and several big glass-and-tin-foil condensers, all was ready for the experiment.

Teddy had drawn a heavy wooden bench in front of the door, and upon it I placed the big box of brown-stained deal which contained our mysterious apparatus from which we both expected such great things. Indeed, that curious machine, had just escaped bringing upon us instant death.

Yet that mishap to which we had been accidentally so near had revealed several things to me, causing me to reflect upon certain crucial and technical points which, hitherto, I had not considered.

In that square, heavy box, connected up by its high-tension wires to three of the big induction coils upon the table was, we believed, stored a power by which the Zeppelins could be successfully destroyed and brought to earth.

It was nearly dark when I opened the door of the shed situated opposite to where I had placed the box, and looked out to ascertain if anyone was about, as we wished for no prying eyes to witness our experiment.

I walked out, and around the building, but nobody was near. Then, when I returned to the door, I stood for a moment gazing away across the wide area of market-gardens to where, perhaps half a mile distant, stood a high flag-pole which had been erected for me a couple of years before, and which had, before the war, borne my wireless aerial.

The little white hut near by I had built, and until the outbreak of war, when Post Office engineers had come and seized my private station, I had spent many hours there each evening reading and transmitting messages.

The pole, in three sections, which in the falling darkness could only just be discerned, was about eighty feet in height and stayed by eight steel guys, each of which was in three sections connected together by green-glazed porcelain insulators, so that any leakage of electrical current could not go to earth. Affixed to the pole and protruding some two feet above it was a copper lightning-conductor with four points, an accessory which I had had put up recently for experimental purposes.

"Nobody's about," I said to Teddy when I returned. "Will you run the dynamo, if all is in order?"

Then, after a final examination of the various electrical connexions, he started the engine and the dynamo began to hum again.

I drew over a switch at the side of the box, when a loud crackling was heard within—a quenched-spark of enormous power. Afterwards, I quickly seized my binoculars and going out through the open door, taking great care not to pass before the lens,—where in the place of glass was a disc of steel—something like that of a big camera, forming the end of the box, I focussed my glasses eagerly upon the flagstaff.

"Hurrah! Teddy!" I cried in glee. "It works—Gad! come and look! At last! *We have it at last!*"

Next moment, my friend was eagerly at my side, while at the same instant we heard a light footstep and Roseye, in her big motor-coat, stood unexpectedly before us.

"It works! Roseye! It works, darling! Mind! Don't pass in front of the box. Do be careful!" I cried in warning, while at the same time Teddy Ashton, with the binoculars at his eyes, gasped:

"By Jove, Claude! It's wonderful. Yes! You're right! *We have success at last!*"

Chapter Four.

Concerns the Secret.

In our eagerness, Roseye and I set out to walk towards the pole, leaving Teddy in charge of the apparatus.

To approach the spot, we had to leave the market-garden and take a road lined by meagre cottages, then at last, skirting two orchards and yet another market-garden, we came out upon a second road, which we crossed, and at last found ourselves at the disused wireless-hut.

There a strange spectacle greeted our eyes for, the darkness having by that time become complete, we saw, around

the lightning-conductor on the pole and over the steel stays, blue electric sparks scintillating.

"Look, darling!" I cried. "See what we have at last produced by the unseen directive current!"

"Yes," replied my well-beloved. "Look at the sparks! How pretty they are! Why—they seem to be jumping across the insulators from one stretch of wire-rope to the other!"

"That effect is exactly what Teddy and I have for so long laboured to produce," was my answer, as I stood there fascinated by the sparks and the slight crackling which reached our ears where we stood.

The fact was that though our apparatus was half a mile away, yet upon those steel strands, as well as upon the copper lightning-conductor, the electric waves which we were discharging—a new development of the discovery of Heinrich Hertz—was such as to spark over all the intervening gaps, even though the space where the insulators were inserted was quite three inches.

It was a phenomenon such as had never before been witnessed by any experimenter in electricity. The theories I had formed and so often discussed with Teddy were now proved to be quite sound, for they had resulted in the construction of that apparatus which must, I knew, be most deadly to any Zeppelin.

The sparks, as we watched them, suddenly ceased.

For a moment I stood surprised, yet next instant realised that Teddy had, no doubt, some very good reason for stopping the engine. Somebody might have come upon the scene, and we were always extremely cautious that nobody should know in what we were engaged. The neighbours knew us as airmen, and believed we were engaged in making some kind of new propellers.

What I had seen in those few minutes, the flashing crackling sparks running over the surface of those porcelain insulators and, indeed, over part of the wooden pole—for it happened to have been raining until an hour before, and all the surfaces were damp—was, to me, sufficient to cause me to hold my breath in excitement.

"We have made a great and most important discovery to-day, Roseye," I said as calmly as I could, as together we walked back to the shed. "This discovery is undreamed of by Germany. It will give us power over any Zeppelin which dares to come to our shores, providing that we can approach sufficiently near."

"Ah! if you can," replied the girl at my side. "No doubt we shall increase the range," I replied. "We have, this evening, established the one most important fact that our apparatus is really capable of directing the rays, and that between metal and metal we can now, as Hertz endeavoured to, set up an electric spark from a distance."

"You certainly have done that—but I don't yet see the trend of your argument, Claude. I know I'm only a woman and unversed in technicalities, so please forgive me, won't you?"

"Well," I said as we walked, my arm linked in hers. "First, as you know, a Zeppelin is constructed mostly of aluminium, its stays and practically all its rigid parts are of that metal except some of light steel. It consists of a number of ballonets filled with highly inflammable gas, and around those ballonets are ribs of aluminium and steel. There must be joints in these ribs, and over those joints we have now proved that we can create sparks from a considerable distance. From the ballonets there is a constant leakage of gas, therefore if we charge the aluminium and steel so that they spark wherever there is the slightest gap we shall ignite that escaping gas and cause the whole airship to explode with terrific force. Do I explain it clearly?"

"Quite, Claude," was her slow, thoughtful reply. "I see now in what direction all these wonderful and patient experiments have been made. To-night you have certainly produced sparks."

"And ere long I hope we shall increase our range, and be able to do without half the current and all its consequent paraphernalia," was my confident reply. "I'm certain," I said, "as certain as we are walking here together, that we have at last established a sound means of protecting Great Britain against Zeppelin raids."

"I hope you have, dear," Roseye replied. "Oh! what a great thing it will be for the country. You and Teddy will deserve monuments—if you really can succeed."

"We *shall* succeed, darling—with your assistance. I'm confident of that!"

"I—how can I help?"

"In many ways. You've already assisted us enormously," I said. "Teddy was only saying so to-day," and I gripped her arm more tightly, as we turned the corner and approached the shed where Ashton was, we knew, awaiting us.

"Splendid, my dear fellow!" I cried as we re-entered. "Sparking beautifully, all over—like fireworks!"

"Pretty dangerous fireworks!" my friend remarked. "I cut off the current just now."

"Yes," I said. "Why?"

"Well, do you know, old chap, I thought I heard somebody about!" he replied. "Even with the dynamo running I fancied I overheard voices. Therefore I cut off at once, and went outside to see. Strangers seemed to be somewhere at the back."

"Did you find anyone?" Roseye asked.

"Nobody—yet I'm quite certain I heard voices," he insisted.

"Some of the men from the market-garden perhaps," I remarked.

"I don't think so," was Teddy's reply.

"Why not?" I demanded in surprise.

"Well—because what I heard—and I tell you, Claude, I heard it quite distinctly—was a sudden exclamation of surprise."

"Surprise!"

"Yes. As though somebody had made an unexpected discovery," Teddy said. "I had just been watching the effect on the pole through your glasses, and had returned inside when I heard an exclamation, followed by some quick words of surprise that I could not catch. It was a man's voice."

"Surely there could not be anybody else watching the sparking upon the pole!" I exclaimed in quick apprehension.

"That's just what I believe has happened," Ashton replied seriously. "We've been watched—as I suspected we were."

"You've said so all along, I know."

"And now I'm quite convinced of it. And whoever has watched us making our experiments now knows that to-night our efforts have been crowned with success."

"Well," I remarked after a pause. "If what you say is true, Teddy, we shall have to be very wary in future. I know there are a great many unscrupulous persons who would be ready to go to any length in order to learn this secret discovery of ours which, when fully developed, will, I feel convinced, mean the buckling-up of the Zeppelin menace."

"That's quite true, Claude," Roseye declared. "At Hendon and elsewhere there are, I know, a number of men intensely jealous of your success, and of the one or two ideas which you have patented, and which are now adopted in the construction of our military aeroplanes."

"It's really astonishing how many enemies one makes quite unintentionally!" declared Teddy, leaning against the bench. "Claude has more than I have, I believe—and I never disguise from myself that I've got a really fine crop."

"Only the other day, when Lionel dined with us, he was speaking to dad about spies," Roseye said. "He told us that he felt sure that we had men in our air-service who sent every new development and idea to Germany. Do you think that's really a fact?"

"A fact!" I echoed. "Why, dearest, of course it is! We've seen the result of it many times. As soon as we had that integral propeller the Germans knew, and copied us; the secret of Jack Pardon's new dope was known in a few days, and the enemy are using it on every one of their machines to-day. Nothing is secret from those brutes."

"But who does all this?" asked Roseye.

"Why, what I call the Invisible Hand," was my reply. "The Invisible Hand was established in our midst in about 1906, when the Kaiser sat down and craftily prepared for war. He saw himself faced by the problem of the great British power and patriotism, and knew that the Briton would fight every inch for his liberty. Therefore the All-Highest Hun—the man who will be held up to universal damnation for all time—proceeded to adopt towards us the principle of dry-rot in wood. He started a system of sending slowly, but very surely, his insect-sycophants to burrow into the beam of good British oak which had hitherto supported our nation. That beam, to-day, is riddled by these Teutonic worms—insects which, like the book-worm, are never seen, yet, directed by the Invisible Hand, are only known by their works."

"Then you think there really are spies at Hendon?"

"Of that I'm quite certain," was my reply. "We all know that there are spies at every aerodrome—while in the higher ranks those who control our air-services, though patriotic enough, seem to suffer by reason of the still higher control which divides responsibility."

"Have any spies been lurking about here to-night?" asked Roseye very anxiously.

"That is my firm conviction," was Teddy's reply to her. "I believe that there have been two strangers here. One was, perhaps, gazing through his glasses at the pole and, seeing in the darkness the sparking over the insulators set in the steel guys, ejaculated the natural expression of surprise that I overheard. But they got away noiselessly, and all my search failed to discover them."

"Well—we must be very wary, my dear Teddy," I repeated. "They must not get at this secret of ours, otherwise from the gondola of a Zeppelin they will be able to use the invisible force against any of our aeroplanes in a stronger and greater degree than we could ever hope to do it. Then we ourselves would be destroyed by the secret power we have invented."

"They shall never know the secret from me," was my friend's fierce reply. "Only we three know it—while Theed has, of course, learnt something. That could, not be helped."

"We must not forget the words I read out to you the other day from the *Berliner Tageblatt*," I replied. "That paper

said: 'The fires and devastation caused by our Zeppelin squadron in England represented a victory greater and more important than could be achieved in a single battle.' That," I added, "is the triumphant boast of Major Moraht, Germany's most prominent military critic."

"Yes, and it went further," exclaimed Teddy, turning to Roseye. "The paper declared that if the Germans were as brutal as they were accused of being, their naval airship squadron could long ago, in memory of the Baralong, have set London afire at all four of her corners."

"That's just what we intend to prevent," I declared very emphatically. "That is what, notwithstanding the efforts of prowling strangers who are seeking to know in what direction our experiments are being conducted, we intend to achieve. To-night, Roseye, we have made one great and astounding discovery—a discovery which has placed within our hands a power which Germany, with all her science and investigation, little dreams. We now know the true secret which will eventually prove the undoing of the Kaiser and his barbarous hordes."

"Yes, dear," was my well-beloved's reply. "At all hazards, no spy of Germany must be allowed to wrest this secret from us."

"But they are clever—devilishly cunning and entirely unscrupulous. The Invisible Hand, well provided with money, lurks everywhere, ready to grasp what it can in the interest of our octopus enemies," I declared warningly. "Therefore let us be ever on the alert—ever watchful and mindful, in order to avert the relentless talons with which this unknown and Invisible Hand is furnished."

Chapter Five.

The Raid on London.

It was the night of the fourteenth of October, in the year 1915.

Sir Herbert and Lady Lethmere, with Roseye—who looked charming in pink—were dining *en famille* in Cadogan Gardens. The only two guests were Lionel Eastwell and myself.

"Terrible—is it not?" Lady Lethmere remarked to me, as I sat on her right. "We were at the Lyric Theatre when the Zeppelins came last night. We heard the guns firing. It was most alarming. They must have caused damage in London somewhere. Isn't it too awful?"

"And at other places, I fear," remarked Sir Herbert, a fine outspoken, grey-haired, rather portly man, who had crowned his career as a Sheffield steel manufacturer by receiving a knighthood. He spoke with the pleasant burr of the north country.

"Well, the noise of the guns was terrific," his wife went on. "Fortunately there was no panic whatever in the theatre. The people were splendid. The manager at once came on the stage and urged us all to keep our seats—and most people did so. But it was most alarming—wasn't it, Herbert?"

"Yes, dear, it really was," replied her husband, who, turning to me, asked: "What were you doing at that time, Munro?"

"Well, Sir Herbert, to tell the truth I happened to be out at Hendon with my friend Ashton, preparing for a flight this morning. I got hold of a military biplane which had just been finished and had only had its last tests that afternoon, but as I had no bombs, and not even a rifle, I was unable to go up."

"And if you had gone?" Eastwell chimed in. "I fear, Claude, that you would never have reached them in time. They flew far too high, and were, I understand, moving off before our men could get up. Our Flying Corps fellows were splendid, but the airships were at too great an altitude. They rose very high as they approached London—according to all reports."

"And the reports are pretty meagre," I remarked. "I only know that I was anxious and eager to go up, but as I had not the necessary defensive missiles it was utterly useless to make the attempt."

"Nevertheless, I believe our anti-aircraft guns drove them off very quickly, didn't they?" Lionel asked.

"Not before they'd done quite enough damage and killed innocent old persons and non-combatants. Then they went away, and bombed other defenceless towns as they passed—the brutes!" said Lady Lethmere.

"And writers in to-day's papers declare that all this is really of no military significance," remarked Sir Herbert, glancing fiercely across the table, a stout, red-faced man, full of fiery fight.

"Military significance is an extremely wide term," I ventured to remark. "London heard the bombs last night. To-day we are no longer outside the war-zone. We used, in the good old Victorian days, to sing confidently of our 'tight little island.' But it is no longer tight. It seems to me that it is very leaky—and its leakage is towards those across the North Sea who have for so long declared themselves our friends. Friends! I remember, and not so very long ago, standing on the Embankment and watching the All-Highest Kaiser coming from the Mansion House with a huge London crowd cheering him as their friend."

"Friend!" snorted Sir Herbert. "He has been far too clever for us. He has tricked us in every department of the State. Good King Edward knew; and Lord Roberts knew, but alas! our people were lulled to sleep by the Kaiser's pretty speeches to his brave Brandenburgers and all the rest, and his pious protests that his only weapon was the olive

branch of peace.”

“Yet Krupp’s and Ehrhardt’s worked on night and day,” I said. “Food, metals, money and war-materials were being collected each month and stored in order to prepare for the big blow for which the Emperor had been so long scheming and plotting.”

“Yes, truly the menace of the Zeppelin is most sinister,” said Roseye across the table. “How can we possibly fight it? We seem to be powerless! Our lawyers are busy making laws and fining people for not creeping about in the darkness at night, and asking us to save so as to pay ex-ministers their big pensions, but what can we do?”

“Rather ask whom can we trust?” I suggested.

“But, surely, Claude, there must arise very soon some real live man who will show us the way to win the war?” asked Roseye.

I drew a long breath. She knew our secret—the secret of that long dark shed out at Gunnersbury which was watched over at night by the sturdy old Theed, father of my mechanic, he being armed with a short length of solid rubber tyre from the wheel of an old disused brougham—about the best weapon of personal defence that could ever be adopted. A blow from that bit of flexible rubber would lay out a man senseless, far better than any iron bar.

“Well,” said Sir Herbert, re-entering our discussion. “The Zeppelin peril must be grappled with—but who can enter the lists? You airmen don’t seem to be able to combat it at all! Are aeroplanes too slow—or what?”

“No, Sir Herbert,” I replied. “That’s not the point. There are many weaknesses in the aeroplane, which do not exist in the big airship—the cruiser of the air. We are only the butterflies—or perhaps hornets, as the Cabinet Minister once termed us—but I fear we have not yet shown much sting.”

“We may, Claude!” interrupted Roseye with a gay laugh.

“Let’s hope we can,” I said. “But all these new by-laws are, surely, useless. Let’s hit the Hun in his home. That’s my point of view. We can do it—if only we are allowed.”

“I’m quite sure of that, Claude,” Roseye declared. “There are lots of flying-men who, if given bombs to-morrow, would go up and cross to the enemy aircraft centres in Belgium or Schleswig and drop them—even at risk of being shot down.”

“Well, Sir Herbert,” I ventured, laughing, “the situation is not without its humour. I don’t know whether it has ever occurred to you that, in order not to unduly alarm the public, we may yet have certain regulations posted upon our hoardings that may prohibit Zeppelin commanders from cruising over England without licences; that they must have red rear-lights; they must put silencers upon their engines, and must not throw orange peel, paper bags, bottle or other refuse within the meaning of the Act into the streets in such a manner as to cause any danger to foot-passengers or create litter such as would come beneath the powers relegated to inspectors of nuisances of Boroughs. Such regulations might, perhaps, make it a penal offence if Zeppelins did not keep to the left in traffic; if bombs were dropped in places other than those properly and purposely illuminated for the purpose, or if they did not travel at a rate faster than the British aircraft.”

“Really, Claude, that’s an awfully humorous idea,” remarked Sir Herbert as all at table laughed.

“In addition, it might be suggested that the heads of all dogs, ducks, cats, parrots, and the horns of gramophones might be encased in cotton-wool to conceal their whereabouts, that no smoking be permitted, and no artificial light between one hour before sunset and one hour after sunrise.”

“Exactly,” I laughed. “And an inter-departmental committee of the red-tabbed might be charged with the due execution of the regulations—all offenders to be shot at sunrise following the day whereon any breach of the Defence of the Zeppelin Act were committed.”

“Really you’re too bad!” declared Eastwell, laughing heartily as he held his glass poised in his hand.

“Well,” I protested. “Here we’ve had Zeppelins killing people. Surely something must be done! Either regulate the Zeppelin traffic, or else fight them.”

“I’m all for the latter,” declared Roseye.

“So am I,” was my remark.

“And I also,” declared Eastwell. “*But how?*—that’s the question!”

Roseye exchanged glances with me, and I wondered whether he noticed them.

Somehow I had just a faint suspicion that he did, for I detected a curious expression upon his lips—a look such as I had never seen there before.

He made no remark, but busied himself with the excellently-cooked snipe before him.

Fortunately Lionel Eastwell was not aware of our secret—the secret of that brown deal box which we were so rapidly perfecting.

Only on the previous day Roseye had been up in the air with me across Hampstead, Highgate, and out as far as

Hatfield and home to the aerodrome, making a further test of the potent but unseen power which we had been able to create, and which must, if further developed, be our strong arm by which to strike a very deadly blow against enemy airships.

"Personally," declared Sir Herbert, in his bluff, matter-of-fact way, "I think the whole idea of air-defence from below is utterly futile. A gun can never hit with accuracy a moving object so high in the air and in the dark. What target is there?"

"Exactly," exclaimed Eastwell. "That has always been my argument. I've been interested in aviation for years, and I know the enormous difficulties which face the efforts of those who man our anti-aircraft guns. Searchlights and guns I contend are inadequate."

"They've hardly been tried, have they?" queried Lady Lethmere. "And, moreover, I seem to recollect reading that both have done some excellent work on the French front."

"But London is not the French front," Eastwell protested. "The conditions are so very different."

"Then what do you suggest as a really reliable air-defence?" Sir Herbert inquired.

"Fight them with fast aeroplanes and bombs," Eastwell said.

"But you've just told Munro that had he gone up last night from Hendon his flight would have been quite useless, as he would never have been able to mount sufficiently high in the time."

"Quite so. But we ought to have efficient air-patrols at night," was his reply.

"Combined with properly illuminated landing-places," Roseye added. "Otherwise more than half the airmen and observers must kill themselves through landing in the dark without any knowledge of the direction of the wind."

"That could all be arranged—as it no doubt will be in due course," I said. "The Government are not such fools as some people seem inclined to believe. I'm not one of those who blame the whole Government for a few mistakes of its subordinate departments, and the incompetency of men pitchforked, in the hurry of an unexpected war, into places for which they are entirely unfitted. We all know of glaring cases of that sort. No. Let's take heart, and look on the best side of things. Britain is not vanquished yet, and the heart of the true Briton beats quicker and is fiercer than ever in its patriotism over the base enemy outrage of the kind that was committed upon innocent Londoners last night."

"Only yesterday I was reading a popular book called *Can Germany Win?* written by an anonymous American," remarked Sir Herbert. "The writer gaily informs the public that even well-directed rifle-fire can bring the vaunted Zeppelins down, and to secure any accuracy of aim themselves, the airships must descend to an altitude which brings them well within the range of modern guns."

"I know!" I laughed. "The rubbish written about Zeppelins is simply ludicrous. I've read that book, which has no doubt been read by thousands of patriotic Britons. I remember quite well that, in it, we are gravely informed that as far as Zeppelins were concerned the British public may sleep comfortably in their beds. The great thing is, we are urged, to discount as far as possible, by reason supported by scepticism, the terrorising tales of the Zeppelin's worth and doughty prowess which are so brilliantly 'press-agented' in Germany. The writer has further told us that talk never broke any bones, and the Germans are doing a good deal of talk at the present moment to hide the defects in their monster pets which have been detected as useless by the test of War. The Zeppelins, the writer told us, are comparatively negligible quantities. Last night's raid is the commentary."

"Yes," said Roseye, "something must really be done to prevent such raids."

"But how?" queried Lionel Eastwell across the table in that slow refined voice of his. "It's all very well to talk like that—but you must *act*."

Roseye and I again exchanged glances. She knew well what was passing in my mind.

And I remained silent.

Chapter Six.

Theed's Strange Story.

The following morning while I was writing letters in my room Theed entered, saying that his father had called and wished to see me.

A moment later the sturdy old ex-police-sergeant came in, his felt hat in his hand, and when I had sat him beside the fire I saw an unusual expression upon his grey, furrowed countenance.

"I've come up, sir," he said, "because something curious 'appened at the shed lars' night."

"Happened—what's happened?" I asked, staring at him.

"Well—something I can't quite make out, sir. But I thought I ought to report at once."

"Tell me, by all means, Theed," I said, instantly interested.

"Well, sir. There were strangers about lars' night."

"Strangers! Who?" I asked, recollecting Teddy's allegations on the night of our successful test.

"Well—it was like this, Mr Munro," the old fellow began. "I went on at nine o'clock as usual, and met Harry there. We talked together about half an hour, and then he left. I 'ad a pipe in front o' the stove and sat readin' the war news—as I always do. I expect I must 'ave dozed for a bit, but I woke up at eleven, 'ad another pipe and read a bit more of my paper. I heard Chiswick church-clock strike twelve, and then, after makin' up the stove again, I 'ad another doze, as I generally do. Of a sudden I was woke up by hearin' low whisperin'. My lamp was out—it 'ad gone out because I 'adn't much oil. But I was on the alert in a moment, for I saw the light of an electric torch a movin' about at the other end of the shed, and two figures were a gropin' about and whisperin'. I'll swear one was a woman!"

"A woman!" I gasped. "What did you do?"

"I took up my bit o' rubber tyre, bent down, and crept noiselessly along. It seemed as if they were examining those three electric coils, and were perhaps a tryin' to find the box what—"

"Happily, I took the precaution to bring it away yesterday afternoon, and have it here, in the next room," I interrupted.

"Good. Excellent, sir! My idea is that they were after that there box. I'm dead certain of it," old Theed said. "Well, I bent well below the benches and nearly got up to 'em in order to flash my lamp, an' so take 'em by surprise, when, of a sudden, somebody clipped me hard over the 'ead, and I knew nothing more till I awoke at daylight, and found this!" he added, pointing to a spot on the back of his head upon which was a big lump and a large piece of black sticking-plaster.

"Then there must have been a third person present—eh?"

"There must! He'd evidently been a watchin' me, and struck me down, just as I was a comin' up to the pair with the torch."

"You say you saw a woman. Did you also see the man's face?"

"No, I didn't. And I only knew that there was a woman there by the black fur she wore around her throat. I was right at the opposite end of the shed, remember, and I only saw 'er just for a second—a biggish woman's white face and the black fur."

"You didn't see the person who knocked you down?"

"No, I didn't—the cursed blackguard," was old Theed's quick reply. "Had I seen him, I'd 'ave given 'im a taste of my bit o' rubber—I tell yer. He wouldn't 'ave been sensible yet—you bet!"

"But how did they get in?" I asked, amazed at his story.

"Get in? Why, they seem to 'ave 'ad a latch-key. At any rate they opened the door with a duplicate key that they'd got from somewhere. There's no sign of 'em having broken in."

For a few moments I stood in silence, then Theed's son having called a taxi, I got in and took our faithful night-watchman down to Gunnersbury.

There, on the spot, he explained to me exactly what had occurred in the night, giving a dramatic demonstration of how he had crept up to the intruders, and pointing out the spot where he had fallen, and where, indeed, there were some palpable blood-spots from the wound in his head.

"While I lay 'ere, sir," he added, "the three of 'em, of course, just pried into everything they wanted to see, and then went out, closin' the door after them. It was just after eight this morning when I came to, and I tell you I felt quite dazed, and horrible bad!"

"What time do you think all this happened?" I inquired.

"In the middle of the night—between two and three o'clock—I should say."

Careful investigation which I made of the whole apparatus disclosed that nothing whatever had been interfered with—except one thing. Two wires connecting the big induction coils had evidently been disconnected, for they had been wrongly connected up, thus showing that the strangers, whoever they had been, might have made certain experiments with our plant.

Happily, however, that big brown deal box had not been there, and I smiled within myself at the bitter disappointment which must have been theirs. In any case, our great secret was still safe.

"Well," I said. "You certainly had a most exciting adventure, Theed. We'll have to set a trap for these gentry in future. Just think out something, will you, and Mr Ashton and I will help you. If they come again we might put in a little electric 'juice' which will effectively stop them from meddling with our things in future. They might get a very nasty jar," I added, laughing.

"But 'ow do you think they got hold of that duplicate key, sir?" asked the grey-haired old pensioner.

I hesitated. The whole affair was a most complete mystery, and only went to bear out Teddy's declaration that, on

the night of our test, somebody must have been about and expressed sudden surprise at its astounding result.

From the telephone call-box inside Hammersmith Broadway station I rang up Teddy at Hendon, and asked him to meet me there after lunch.

This he did, and as together we walked away from the hangars, so as not to be overheard, I related to him the strange story, as told by old Theed.

He stood astounded.

"Somebody knows, my dear Claude! Who *can* it be?"

"Who knows? Only ourselves, Roseye and the Theeds. Nobody else," was my quick reply.

Then, suddenly, he said: "I suppose Roseye couldn't have dropped any hint to her father? If so, the latter might have spoken to Eastwell—or somebody else!"

"Roseye made to me a solemn promise of secrecy, and I trust her, Teddy," I said very quietly.

"So do I, my dear fellow. So do I," he assured me.

"Well—I can't fathom the mystery at all. Evidently they were on some desperate errand—or they wouldn't have knocked poor old Theed senseless—eh? And the woman! Who could she have been?"

"Who knows?" I asked. "Nevertheless, we must make it our business to find out, my dear chap," I added in earnestness. "We've got secret enemies somewhere—probably around us here. Indeed, that has been my firm conviction for some time."

"And mine also. So let us keep open eyes everywhere. Where's Roseye? Is she coming over this afternoon?"

"I expect her every minute. She'll be astounded and excited."

"You won't tell her—shall you? It will only alarm her, Claude—and I never advocate alarming a woman."

I paused. Instantly I realised the weight of such an argument, for Roseye was, after all, a dainty and highly-strung little person, who might worry herself over the mystery far too much.

"Yes, Teddy," I said somewhat reluctantly. "I quite agree. At present we'd best leave matters as they are, and keep our own counsel."

Hardly were those words out of my mouth when we saw my well-beloved, with face flushed in glad welcome, coming across to us. She had evidently arrived in her car, and already put on her air-kit, for, it being a fine afternoon, she intended to make a flight.

The Zeppelin raid upon London had set the whole aircraft world agog. Every one at Hendon and Brooklands was full of it, most men criticising the air-services, of course, and declaring vaguely that "something must really be done."

It was so very easy to make such a declaration. Old men in their easy-chairs in the London club-windows were saying that very same thing, but nobody could, with truth, point out any real effective remedy against what certain Hide-the-Truth newspapers described as "the German gas-bags."

A lot of people were about the aerodrome that afternoon, and Teddy went off to test his engine, while Roseye, drawing on her thick gloves, mounted into her machine which her mechanic had brought out for her.

"I shall run over to Aylesbury and back," she told me. "I know the railway line. Shall you go up?"

"Probably," I replied, as I stood beside her Duperdussin watching her man adjusting one of the stays which he seemed to think was not quite tight enough. Then, a few moments later, she shot from me with a fierce blast of the exhaust, and in a few seconds had left the ground, rapidly rising in the air.

I watched her for some minutes as she skimmed over the tree-tops and rose higher and higher, then satisfying myself that her engine was running well. I turned and crossed to the shed wherein stood my own bus, with the ever-patient Theed awaiting me.

The Breguet was brought out, and with a few idlers standing about me, as they always do at Hendon, I climbed into the pilot's seat and began to test my big engine. It roared and spluttered at first, but gradually, with Theed's aid—and he was a splendid mechanic by the way—I got it to run with perfect evenness and precision.

Why, I don't know, but my bus usually attracted some onlookers. About the aerodrome we always have a number of idle persons with a sprinkling of the eternal feminine silk-stockinged hangers-on to the pilots and pupils who, not being able to fly, do the next best thing, become friends of flying-men. In that little knot of people gathered about my machine—probably on account of the Zeppelin sensation—I noted, in particular, one podgy fat-faced little man.

As I strapped myself into the pilot's seat, after examining my altimeter, compass, etc, and adjusting my self-registering thermometer, I chanced to glance at the people around, and had noticed the man in question. His strange-looking bead-like eyes fascinated me. Upon his round white face was a look of intense interest, yet those eyes, rather narrowly set, struck me as queer-looking and uncanny—eyes such as I had never seen before.

Suddenly I wondered if their gaze upon me was some evil omen.

Next second I laughed within myself at such an absurd thought. It was the first time in all my life that such an idea had ever crossed my mind, therefore I at once dismissed it. Such thought was most foolish and utterly ridiculous.

Yet, again, I glanced at him, unable to withdraw my gaze entirely. Those dark, beady eyes of his, set slightly askew, were certainly most uncanny. Their gaze seemed cold and relentless, and yet at the same time exulting.

Sight of them sent through me a strange creepy feeling, but, with resolution, I turned away, busying myself in my preparations for starting.

Perhaps it was knowledge that strangers had been prying into our experimental plant out at Gunnersbury that had somewhat upset me, yet, after all, though they had cruelly assaulted poor old Theed, no very great success had been theirs.

Who were they? That was the vital question.

Just as I was on the point of starting I saw Lionel Eastwell coming from the hangar, walking behind his own machine, which was being pushed out by his man Barnes and two others.

I waved to him from my seat, and he waved a merry greeting back to me.

Then, all being ready, I motioned to Theed to let her go, and with a deafening rush I shot forward, leaving behind a pungent blue trail from the big exhaust.

I rose quickly and had begun the ascent, the engine running beautifully, when of a sudden, before I was aware of it, something went wrong.

A sharp crack, a harsh tearing sound, and one of my wings collapsed. Across the back I was struck a most violent blow just as she took a nose-dive, and then, next instant, all knowledge of what had happened became blotted out by a dark night of unconsciousness.

Chapter Seven.

Reveals a Plot.

The next that I recollect is, with my brain awhirl, I tried to open my eyes, but so painful were they, that I was compelled to close them again in fearful agony.

Somebody whispered close to me, but my mind was too muddled to understand what was said.

My eyes burned in their sockets; my brain seemed unbalanced and aflame. I tried to think, but alas! could not. When I tried to recollect, all remembrance of the past seemed as though it were wrapped up in cotton-wool.

How long I remained in that comatose state I have no idea.

Some unknown hand forced between my teeth a few drops of liquid, which with difficulty I swallowed. This revived me, I know, for slowly—very slowly—the frightful pain across my brow decreased, and my burning eyes became easier until, at last, blinking, I managed to open them just a little.

All was dead white before me—the white wall of a hospital-ward I eventually discovered it to be—and as I gazed slowly around, still dazed and wondering, I saw a man in black, a doctor, with two nurses standing anxiously beside my bed.

“Hulloa, Mr Munro,” he exclaimed softly. “You’re better now, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” I whispered. “But—but where am I?”

“Never mind where you are. Just go to sleep again for a bit,” the doctor urged. “You’re all right—and you’ll very soon be up again, which is the one thing that matters,” I heard him say.

“But, tell me—” I articulated with great difficulty.

“I shan’t tell you anything, just yet,” said the man in black firmly. “Just go to sleep again, and don’t worry. Here. Take this,” and he placed a little medicine-glass to my parched lips.

The effect of the drug was sleep—a long sleep it must have been—for when I again awoke it was night, and I saw a stout, middle-aged night-nurse seated at my side, reading beneath a green-shaded lamp.

As soon as she noticed me moving she gave me another draught, and then, thoroughly revived, I inquired of her what had actually happened.

I saw her motion to some one behind her, and next moment found Roseye bending over me, pale-faced and anxious.

“Oh! I’m so glad, dear,” she whispered eagerly into my ear. “Once we thought you would never recover, and—I’ve been watching and waiting all the time. They wouldn’t let me see you until to-night. Teddy has been here constantly, and he only left at midnight.”

“But—darling—but what has happened?” I managed to ask, looking up into those dear eyes of hers utterly amazed.

"May I tell him, nurse?" she inquired, turning to the buxom woman beside her.

The nurse nodded assent, whereupon she said:

"Well—you've had a nasty spill! One of your wings suddenly buckled—and you fell. It's a perfect miracle that you were not killed. I saw the accident just as I was going up in a spiral, and came down again as fast as ever I could. When I reached you, I found you pinned beneath the engine, and everybody believed you to be stone-dead. But, happily, they got you out—and brought you here."

"What is this place?" I asked, gazing around in wonderment. "Where am I?"

"The Hendon Cottage Hospital," was her reply.

"How long have I been here?"

"Four days. The papers have had a lot about your accident."

"The papers make a lot of ado about nothing," I replied, smiling. "To them, every airman who happens to have a nose-dive is a hero. But how did it happen?"

"Nobody knows. You seemed to be ascending all right, when suddenly I saw your right-hand plane collapse, and you came down plumb," she said. "As you may imagine, darling, I rushed back, fearing the worst, and through these four awful days I have dreaded that you might never speak to me again."

"What does Theed say?"

"What can he say? He has declared that before you started everything was perfectly in order."

"Has Teddy examined the bus?"

"I think so, but he's entirely mystified—just as we all are," said my well-beloved. "Dad and mother are dreadfully worried about you."

"Thanks," I replied. "I'll be all right soon—but I'm stiff—jolly stiff, I can tell you!"

"That doesn't matter," said the nurse cheerily. "No bones are broken, and Doctor Walford has said that you'll be up again very soon."

"Well—thanks for that," I replied with a smile. "My chief desire at the present moment is to know why my machine failed. Yet I suppose I ought to be thankful to Providence that I wasn't killed—eh?"

"Yes, Claude, you ought. Your smash was a very bad one indeed."

"Has the guv'nor been here?"

"Every day. But of course you've been under Doctor Walford, and he's not allowed anyone to see you."

"I suppose the guv'nor has been saying to everybody, 'I told you so,'" I remarked. "He had always said I'd kill myself, sooner or later. My reply was that I'd either fly, or kill myself in the attempt. Have there been any more Zeppelin raids while I've been lying here?"

"No raids, but gossip has it that Zeppelins have been as far as the coast and were afterwards driven off by our anti-aircraft guns."

"Good. When will Teddy be here?" I asked, raising myself with considerable difficulty.

"In the morning," was my love's response, as she took my hand in hers, stroking it softly, after which I raised her slim fingers to my lips.

Seeing this, the nurse discreetly left us, strolling to the other end of the ward, in which there were about twenty beds, while Roseye, bending down to me, whispered in my ear:

"You can't tell how I feel, dear Claude, now that God, in His great goodness, has given you back to me," and she cried quietly, while again and again I pressed her soft little hand to my hot, fevered lips.

Teddy Ashton, bright and cheery at news of my recovery, stood by my bed at about nine o'clock next morning. The doctor had seen me and cheered me by saying that I would soon be out. My first questions of Teddy were technical ones as to how the accident happened.

"I really can't tell, old chap," was his reply. "I've had the bus put into the hangar and locked up for you to see it just as it is."

"Is it utterly wrecked?" I inquired anxiously, for I feared the guv'nor's wrath and his future disinclination to sign any more cheques.

"No. Not so much as we expected. One plane is smashed—the one that buckled. But, somehow, you seemed to first make a nose-dive, then recover, and glide down to a bad landing."

"But how could it possibly have happened?" I demanded. "All was right when I went up, I'm certain. Theed would

never have let me go without being perfectly satisfied. That I know.”

“No, he wouldn’t,” Teddy agreed. “But the affair has caused a terrible sensation at Hendon, I can tell you.”

In an instant the recollection of that podgy man, with those black eyes set askew, crossed my mind.

Yes. After all, sight of him had been an omen of evil. Hitherto I had scorned any such idea, but now I certainly had positive proof that one might have a precursor of misfortune. I deeply regretted the accident to my Breguet for, not knowing the true extent of the damage, I began to despair of bringing our secret experiments to a satisfactory issue.

“Look here, Claude,” Teddy said at last, bending over me and speaking in a low tone. “Has it struck you as rather peculiar that the appearance of those strangers at Gunnersbury should have been followed so quickly by this accident of yours?”

“By Jove! no!” I gasped, as the true import of his words became instantly impressed upon me.

“We have enemies, Teddy—you and I—without a doubt. We’ve made a discovery which is destined to upset the enemy’s plans—therefore they want to wipe us, and all our knowledge, out of existence. That’s what you mean—isn’t it?”

My chum nodded in the affirmative.

“That’s exactly what I do mean,” he said in a hard, meaning tone.

“Then my accident was due to treachery!” I cried angrily. “We must discover how it was all arranged.”

“Yes. Somebody, no doubt, tampered with your machine,” Teddy declared very gravely. “Because I believe this, I’ve left it just as it was, and locked it up safely with a man to look after it. We’ll examine it together later on, when you’re fit to run over.”

Well, to cut a long story short, we did examine it about a week later. With Harry Theed, Teddy and Roseye, we made a very complete survey of every strainer, wing-flap hinge, nut-bolt, taper-pin, eye-bolt, in fact every part of the machine, save the engine—which was quite in order and practically undamaged.

For a whole day we worked away, failing to discover anything, but late in the afternoon I noticed one of the bolts missing, and called the attention of both my companions.

“By Jove!” exclaimed Teddy. “Why, that’s the weak spot where the plane must have buckled!” Then, bending closer to the hole in which the missing steel bolt should have been, he cried: “Look! What do you make of this—eh, Claude?”

I bent eagerly to where he indicated, and there saw something which caused me to hold my breath.

In the hole where the steel bolt should have been was a plug of broken wood!

Wood! The truth became, in that instant, quite plain. The tested steel bolt, which was most important to secure the rigidity of the aeroplane, had been withdrawn, and in its socket a plug of wood had been placed by some dastardly and unknown enemy!

The Invisible Hand, of which I had spoken so many times, had very narrowly sent me to my death!

Who could have tampered with my machine?

All four of us stood gazing at each other, aghast at the discovery of that wicked plot against my life. My escape had been miraculous. I had risen easily from the ground, the wooden bolt holding the plane in position, but as soon as I had attempted to turn, strain had, of course, been placed upon the machine, and instantly the wood had snapped, so that I had come down to earth like a log.

“If there is a desperate plot against me, Roseye,” I said, looking straight at her, “then there is, surely, a similar one against you, and also against Teddy. Our enemies are desperate, and they know a good deal—that’s certain. Perhaps they have somehow learnt that we four possess the secret of how the Zeppelin menace can be combated. No secret however is safe from the owner of the Invisible Hand. Hence, if an attempt is made to send me to my death—attempts will also be made against you both.”

“Well—that seems quite feasible—at any rate,” remarked Teddy. “I don’t think Roseye should go up again—just for the present.”

“Certainly not,” I said. “There’s some deep-laid and desperate scheme against us. Of that, I’m now convinced. Our enemies do not mean to allow us to conduct any further experiments—if they can help it.”

“But they don’t know the truth, Claude,” chimed in Roseye.

“No. They are working most strenuously to get at it. That’s quite clear.”

“But who can they be?” asked my well-beloved.

“Ah! That’s a mystery—at least it is at the present. It is a very serious problem which we must seek to solve.”

“But we shall do so, sooner or later, never fear,” Teddy exclaimed confidently. “We hold the secret, and our enemies,

whoever they may be, shall never learn it.”

A silence fell between us for several moments.

At last I said:

“I wonder who that woman was that old Theed declares he saw on that night out at Gunnersbury?”

“Ah! if we knew that, my dear chap, we might make some progress in our inquiries. But we don’t,” Teddy said. “Her identity is just as much of a mystery as that of the owner of the Invisible Hand—that hand that took out the steel bolt and replaced it with one of wood.”

“But I mean to discover the author of this infernal attempt upon me!” I exclaimed fiercely. “Whoever did it intended that I should be killed.”

“Never mind. You’ve cheated them finely, Claude,” Teddy laughed. “Get quite well, old man, and we’ll set to work to fathom this mystery, and give whoever is responsible his just deserts.”

“That we will,” I said resolutely. “It’s the dirty work of somebody who is jealous of us.”

“Yes. And I think that Miss Lethmere ought to exercise the very greatest care,” he remarked. “As they failed in their attempt upon you, they may very probably make one upon her.”

“By Jove! I never thought of that!” I gasped, staring at my friend. “And they might form a plot against you also—remember that, Teddy.”

“Quite likely,” said my chum airily. “I’ll keep wide awake, never fear. What about getting old Theed to suggest some good private detective?”

“No,” was my prompt reply. “We’ll be our own detectives. We’ll watch and wait.”

Chapter Eight.

Some Suspicions.

We waited, and we watched. And what we were able to discover was certainly astounding.

During my convalescence many of my flying friends called at my rooms in Shaftesbury Avenue to congratulate me upon my narrow escape.

I had been shaken very considerably, but actually I was not much the worse for it. I felt quite fit and eager, but the doctor would not hear of me going out, except for a run in a closed car.

The real cause of my accident was kept a profound secret from every one.

The governor thought it was due to clumsiness or recklessness, and I was, of course, compelled to allow him to think so. Sir Herbert and Lady Lethmere, who called one afternoon, appeared to hold the same opinion, for the red-faced old steel manufacturer said:

“You must really be more careful, in future, my dear boy—far more careful. Accidents so quickly happen in aeroplanes.”

“Yes, accidents do,” I admitted. It was on the tip of my tongue to explain to him how some devilish plotter had attempted to take my life.

I was constantly haunted by the remembrance of a face—the face of that man in the crowd with the eyes askew. As I sat alone at my fireside, often reading the papers through, even to the advertisements, and out of patience with everything and everybody, those narrow beady eyes would rise before me. I would recognise that face with the curious exultant expression anywhere.

After long debate within myself I had come to the conclusion, however, that the man with the eyes askew was not actually the person who had substituted in my machine a wooden bolt for a steel one.

I recollect the expression upon that hard, furrowed countenance even now—a wildly exultant expression as though he were gloating over the death-trap so cunningly prepared for me. Yet, when I reflected during my convalescence, I knew that no lunatic’s hand was responsible for such crafty contrivance, and further, the person who had withdrawn the steel bolt would certainly not come forth so boldly to peer into my face as that podgy little stranger had done.

No. The man with the eyes askew might, perhaps, have gained secret knowledge of the dastardly plot, and come there to watch me rise to my death. But I was confident that his was not the Invisible Hand that had been raised against me.

From everybody—even from Lionel Eastwell and the insurance people—we concealed the truth. Lionel, who lived in Albemarle Street, not far away often came in to cheer me up, sitting with me, consuming cigarettes, expressing wonder at the reason of my accident, and gossiping technicalities, as airmen will always gossip. Indeed, at the Royal Automobile Club the air “boys” are the biggest gossips in that institution—which, not so long ago, Prince Henry of Prussia so completely “nobbled.”

Reminiscences of the "Prince Henry Motor Tour" through England have not been exactly popular since August 1914—and any member mentioning His Imperial Highness's name had become at once taboo. The remembrance of that tour through the heat and dust of the Moselle valley, and afterwards from south to north of England, is still with me. My pilot in Germany was a certain Uhlan captain, who afterwards distinguished himself as responsible for the atrocities committed upon the poor inoffensive Belgians in Dinant, on the Meuse. The lives of seven hundred of those poor victims, men, women and children butchered in cold blood in the Grand Place outside the church with the bulgy spire cries out for vengeance upon that fair-haired spick-and-span Prussian who sat beside me for many days chatting so amiably in English, and assuring me that Germany would ever be Great Britain's firmest friend and ally.

Ah! How cleverly were we all bamboozled! Whenever I entered the portals of the club I remembered, as many of my fellow-members did, how completely we were gulled and blinded by that horde of German secret agents who came to us as friends and fellow-motorists, and partook of our hospitality while actively plotting for our undoing.

Lionel Eastwell sat discussing this with me one dark rainy afternoon.

"There's no doubt that the Germans held out the hand of friendship and laughed up their sleeves," he said, blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke upwards from his lips. "Now that one remembers, one grows furious at it all. I confess that I liked Germany and the Germans. My people went to Germany each summer, for the mater was a bit of a musician, and we usually drifted to Dresden. I suppose I inherited from her my love of music, and that's why I was sent to Dresden for a couple of years' tuition."

"And did you never suspect?" I asked. "Remember what Lord Roberts and many others told us. Recollect how we were warned by men who had travelled, and who knew."

"Of course I read all those speeches and writings, but I confess, Claude, that I laughed at them. I never dreamed that war would come—not for another twenty years or more. I was lulled into a sense of false security, just as our Government and people were lulled."

"True, Germany told us fables—pretty land, sea and air fables—and we were childish enough to believe them. If peace had been the Kaiser's object, why did Krupp's and Ehrhardt's work night and day and Count Zeppelin carry on his frantic work of building giant airships?" I queried. "The greatest block head in a village school, with the true facts before him, could have done nothing else than suspect. But we are such a smug and unsuspecting people. We never like to hear an unpleasant truth."

"True, we're aroused now. This Zeppelin raid on London has inflamed the public mind. The people are clamouring loudly for something to be done. What can be done?" he asked. "How can we possibly fight those enemy airships—eh?" And he looked me straight in the face with those calm blue-grey eyes of his.

I paused.

I would have greatly liked to tell him of our secret discovery, for, after all, he was our most intimate friend. Yet I had given a promise to Roseye and to Teddy and, therefore, could not break it.

That Lionel Eastwell was a real stolid John Bull patriot had been proved times without number. We all liked him, for he was ever courteous to Roseye, and always wholehearted and easy-going with both Teddy and myself.

"You ask a question which I can't answer, Lionel," I replied at last.

"I thought, perhaps, you had some scheme," he laughed airily. "You're always so very inventive."

Those words, when I remembered them in the light of after events, sounded somewhat curious.

"Inventive!" I laughed. "How can I put forward any scheme by which to fight an airship, except that of fast aeroplanes capable of mounting above the airship and dropping bombs? And, surely, that's one which our Aircraft Factory have considered long ago."

Lionel shook his head in reply.

"No. There must be some other mode than that—if we could only discover it. That poor women and children are being blown to pieces while in their beds is too terrible to contemplate," he declared. "To-day Great Britain seems inadequately defended. But somebody will, of course, devise something. We can't remain defenceless much longer. Whenever an arm of war has been invented, ever since the dark ages, somebody has always invented something to combat it. It will be so in the case of the Zeppelin—never fear," he added confidently.

"Let's hope so," I replied, yet, truth to tell, it seemed to me very much as though he were trying to pump me regarding the secrets of that brown deal box which was reposing in a locked cupboard in the adjoining room. Perhaps, of course, mine was an entirely ungrounded suspicion. But there it was. I hesitated—and wondered.

At that moment Theed—who acted as my mechanic, valet, and man-of-all-work—rapped at the door and, entering, announced:

"Miss Lethmere, sir."

Next instant Roseye, merry and radiant in a new fur motor-coat and close-fitting black hat, burst into the room.

She drew back on seeing Lionel, and then, recovering herself in an instant, exclaimed:

"Oh, Claude, I—thought you were alone! How are you to-day? I've brought you some flowers."

"Thanks, dear," I replied. "I'm feeling much better to-day. Teddy was in this morning, and he told me that you'd made a flight soon after breakfast. How far did you go? I thought you intended to rest for a bit?"

"I went to Chelmsford," she replied. "I had a little engine-trouble before I got back, and had to come down in somebody's park. I think it was somewhere near Watford. But I was able to put it right and get home, if a trifle lamely."

"So Bertie Maynard told me," remarked Lionel. "I saw him in the club just before lunch, and he said that you'd had engine-trouble."

"Oh, it wasn't very much really. Only, after Claude's smash, I'm rather careful," she said.

"One should always take every precaution," declared Lionel seriously, as he rose and gave her his chair opposite me. "A lot of the boys are far too daring nowadays. They've followed Pegoud, and take needless risks long before they are qualified to do so. It's easy enough to make the sensational loop if you are a practised hand. But when half-trained pupils try and attempt it—well, they're bound to make a mess of it."

Roseye glanced at me for a moment, and I knew that she was annoyed at Lionel's presence. He was a good enough fellow in his place as a friend of her family, and a gossip who entertained her father so constantly, but she had no desire that he should be present at what she had intended should be a cosy *tête-à-tête* over our tea and muffins.

"Well. Have you seen the papers to-day?" I asked, in order to change the subject. "They are still full of the want of an efficient air-defence."

"That will come all right, my dear Claude, I'm sure," replied Lionel who, leaning back against the corner of my writing-table, had lit a fresh cigarette.

"I sincerely hope so," returned Roseye. "What we sadly need is a Man who will be really responsible for air-defence—and air-defence alone—one who can make the most of the weapons that are now in our hands, and who has the wit, courage and initiative to use our own splendid airmen as they themselves desire to be employed—namely, to fight the enemy."

"Quite so," I agreed. "We also want arrangements for warning the towns and cities that air-raids are probable, so that people may take cover against both bombs and splinters of shell from anti-aircraft guns."

"All that will come in due course," Lionel assured us.

"No doubt," I hastened to say. "Please understand that I'm not criticising any department of our defences. On the contrary, I only argue from the point of the man who may be desirous of protecting his home. Perhaps, as you say, some efficient means will at last be found by which to deal successfully with the enemy aircraft. If so, the whole country will eagerly welcome it."

"What we don't like is attacks without any timely warning," said Roseye.

Lionel smiled—with a touch of sarcasm I thought.

"There won't be any more raids for a bit, I feel positive, Miss Lethmere," was his assurance. "Our friends across the North Sea are not yet fully prepared with their machinery. The raid on the thirteenth was but a mere rehearsal of what they hope to do. And, as you argue, we should certainly be prepared."

"You speak almost as though you know," I remarked, not without some surprise at his words.

"I only speak after surveying the matter calmly and logically," was his slow reply. "The German newspapers have—ever since the early days of the war—threatened to bombard London from the air. This last raid has shown that they are capable of doing so."

"They're capable of anything!" I cried. "Remember Scarborough!"

"And Belgium," chimed in Roseye.

"Well," said Lionel to me. "You make all sorts of experiments on your new propellers and things down at Gunnersbury. Why don't you try and devise some plan by which we can destroy Zeppelins? You're always so intensely ingenious, Claude."

"So you've just said. But far better men than myself have tried—and failed," was my diplomatic response.

"But surely some means can be devised!" he cried. "Our flying-boys are splendid, as you know—and—"

"Except when they come to grief, as I did the other day," I interrupted with a hard laugh.

"Well, you surely can't complain," was his answer.

"You've had the very devil's luck ever since you took your certificate."

"Admitted. But that doesn't help me to fight Zeppelins," I replied.

"It only wants somebody to do something, to find out some new invention or other, and the boys will tumble over each other in their eagerness to go up after enemy airships. Of that, I'm positive," declared Eastwell. "You've got a lot of plant down at Gunnersbury, haven't you? If so, you ought to turn your serious attention to this matter which is

at the present moment of the very highest importance to the country.”

Roseye glanced at me, and I saw that my visitor’s words and bearing puzzled her.

“What do you make of Lionel’s questions?” I asked her ten minutes later, when Eastwell had risen and left, having taken the gentle hint that I wished to be alone with Roseye over the tea and muffins.

“I don’t know what to make of them, dear,” replied the girl, seating herself again in the big chair.

“Well, I’ve been watching him for some days,” I said slowly. “And, do you know that, strictly between ourselves, I believe that he has some suspicion of the direction of our experiments, and is pumping us to see what he can glean!”

“How can he possibly know? He is, of course, well aware that you’ve been devising new propellers, but he can know nothing of our real work. Neither Teddy nor Theed would ever let drop a single word, and, as you know, I’ve never breathed a sentence at home.”

“He spoke as though he knew that the enemy intended more raids—but not just at present.”

Roseye suddenly stirred herself and stared at me in amazement with those big expressive eyes of hers.

“What? do you think—do you really suspect that Lionel Eastwell is our enemy, Claude?” she asked, suddenly pale and breathless.

“Well—perhaps not exactly that,” I replied hesitatingly. “Only his queer questions, naturally make one think. We know we have enemies, clever, unscrupulous ones who have not hesitated to attempt to take my life. Therefore we must both be wary—extremely wary—for we never know where the next pitfall may be concealed.”

“I quite agree with all that, dear,” answered Roseye, looking at me earnestly. “But I really can’t think that Lionel is anything else than one of our best friends. At least he’s been a really good chum to me, ever since we first met. No,” she added decisively, “I’m convinced that no suspicion can attach to him. Such an idea, Claude, is to me, too utterly absurd.”

“Yes. Well, I suppose you’re right, dearest,” I replied with a sigh. “Women always see so very much farther than men in matters of this sort.”

And I rose and, crossing to her chair, kissed her fondly upon the lips.

“I’m sorry—very sorry indeed, dearest, that I’ve cast any reflection upon your friend,” I said in deep apology. “Do please forgive me, and we’ll never mention the subject again.”

Chapter Nine.

Contains More Curious Facts.

One afternoon a week later, when out at Hendon, I heard accidentally from a man I knew—one of the instructors at the Grahame-White Aviation School—that Eastwell was very queer, and in bed.

The weather proved bad for flying, therefore I sent Theed off and returned to town. Teddy had gone down to the naval air-station at Yarmouth to see the test of a new seaplane, so I went along to look up Lionel at his rooms in Albemarle Street.

His man, a thin-faced, dark-haired fellow named Edwards, who admitted me, said that his master had had a bad attack of something, the true import of which the doctor had failed to diagnose.

I found him lying in bed in his narrow but artistic bachelor bedroom, looking very wan and pale.

“Hulloa, Claude!” he cried with sudden joy, as I entered. “Awfully good of you to come in, old chap! I’ve been horribly queer these last three days, but I’ll be fit again in a day or two, the doctor says. Well—what’s the news? How are the boys out at Hendon?”

“All right. I was there this morning. Harrington had rather a bad smash yesterday afternoon, I hear. Came down outside Ruislip, and made an unholy mess.”

“Not hurt, I hope?”

“Tore his face and hands a bit—that’s all. But his biplane is in scraps, they say.”

He pointed to the box of cigarettes, and I took one. Then, when I had seated myself at his bedside, I saw that he had newspapers scattered everywhere, including the Paris *Matin*, the *Journal*, and the Rome *Tribuna*. That was the first time I had known that our friend was a linguist.

“Well,” he asked. “What about the Zeppelin raids? Any more news?”

He had returned to the subject by which he seemed obsessed. Yet, after all, this was not surprising, for many people talked air-raids incessantly. One section of the public, as usual, blamed the authorities, while the other supported them.

"Well," I said cheerily, "there's a new invention they are all talking of at Hendon to-day. Somebody has claimed to be able to construct a biplane which will rise from the ground without running, and can attain any speed from ten to two hundred miles an hour."

"Phew! That's interesting," exclaimed Lionel, raising himself upon his elbow, and taking a sip of a glass of barley-water at his side. "And who is this wonderful man who has such a wonderful scheme?"

"Oh, I forget his name," I said. "But the theory, as far as I can gather, is rather a good one. He can rise so quickly."

"How?"

"Well," I replied. "From what I can hear, there is a kind of rotary wing—not a propeller and not a thing which can be classed as a helicoptic."

Lionel Eastwell grew intensely interested in the new invention which everybody at the aerodrome was discussing.

"Yes," he said. "I follow. Go on, Claude. Tell me all you've heard about it. The whole thing sounds most weird and wonderful."

"Well," I said, "from what I can find out, the machine is not designed to screw itself through the air in the direction of its axis, or, by pushing the air downwards, to impart upward motion to the structure, as a screw propeller in water imparts a forward motion to the vessel by pushing the water backwards. The biplane is designed to obtain by a rotary motion the same upward thrust in opposition to the downward pull of gravity as the flapping wings, and the passive outspread wings of birds, and to obtain it by the blades being projected through the air in such a manner as to extract and utilise the practically constant energy of the expansive force of the air."

"By Jove!" my friend exclaimed, stirring himself in his bed. "That theory is very sound indeed—the soundest I've ever heard. Who's invented it?"

"As I've told you, I've forgotten," I replied. "But what does it matter? There are hosts of new inventions every month, and the poor misguided public who put their money into them generally lose it. But I quite agree that the general idea of this is splendid. The war-inventions authorities ought at once to take it up hot and strong. The inventor is, no doubt, an ingenious man of thought and knowledge—whoever he may be. But alas! nobody ever meets with very much encouragement in aeronautics."

"No," he said, pillowing his head comfortably. "It is all so mysterious. We take on a wild-cat idea one day and manufacture machines that are declared to work miracles. Then, next week, we abandon the type altogether, and woo some other smooth-tongued inventor."

"That's just it," I laughed. "If the authorities could only adopt some really reliable type to fight Zeppelins. But alas! it seems that they can't," I added.

For a few seconds he remained silent. I saw that he was reflecting deeply.

"Well," he said. "We've established listening-posts all round London for its protection."

"A real benefit they are!" I laughed. "We have officers and men listening all night, it is true. Of course as a picturesque fiction in order to allay public curiosity they publish photographs of men listening to things like gramophone-trumpets."

"Exactly. The theory of that new invention is extremely sound. That's my opinion."

"And mine also," I said. "I hear that the inventor has told the authorities that if they will assist him to complete his machine—which I expect is a costly affair—he will be able to carry out daily raids on Cuxhaven, Essen, Düsseldorf, and even as far as Berlin; carrying several tons of explosives."

"How many?" asked my friend.

"Oh! four or five it is said."

"Phew!" remarked Lionel, again stirring in his bed. "That sounds really healthy—doesn't it?"

"Yes—the realisation of the dream of every flying-man to-day," I said.

Then our conversation drifted into another channel, and, half an hour later, I left him.

During the past few days Teddy and I had been very busy with our own invention, and had made a number of further experiments down at Gunnersbury.

We could easily direct the electric current upon those insulated steel guys around our distant wireless-pole, but our difficulty was how to increase our power without increasing the bulk of the apparatus which we should be compelled to take up in the monoplane for purposes of attacking a Zeppelin.

There was a limit to the weight which my Breguet with its 200 horse-power engines would carry, and though, of course, we believed it would be unnecessary to use bombs, yet some should be carried for purposes of defence, as well as a Lewis gun.

Therefore we were faced by a very difficult problem, that of weight.

The next day was Sunday, and Teddy having returned from Yarmouth, we spent the whole afternoon and evening down at the workshop, making further experiments. I had not seen Roseye since Friday evening, which I had spent at Lady Lethmere's, Sir Herbert being absent in Liverpool. Therefore, as we had carried out an alteration of the apparatus and intended to try sparking upon the pole again after dark, I rang Roseye up on the telephone shortly after five o'clock.

Mulliner, Lady Lethmere's maid, replied, and a few minutes later Lady Lethmere herself spoke to me.

"Oh, I've rung you up at your rooms half a dozen times to-day, Mr Munro—but could get no answer!" she said.

"Being Sunday, my man is out," I exclaimed. "I'm down here at Gunnersbury."

"Can you take a taxi at once, and come over and see me?" she urged. "I want to speak to you immediately."

"What about?" I asked anxiously.

"I can't say anything over the telephone," she answered in a distressed voice. "Do come at once, Mr Munro. I am in such trouble."

I promised. And after briefly relating the curious conversation to Teddy, I found a taxi, and at once drove to Cadogan Gardens.

"Mr Munro!" exclaimed Lady Lethmere, looking at me with a pale, anxious expression as I entered the morning-room. "Something has happened!"

"Happened—what?" I gasped.

"Roseye! She went out yesterday morning to go over to Hendon to meet you—she told me—*and she's not come back!*"

"Not back!" I cried, staring at her. "Where can she be?"

"Ah! That's exactly what I want to know," replied the mother of my well-beloved. "I thought perhaps she might have flown somewhere and had a breakdown, and was therefore unable to return, or to let me know last night. That happened, you recollect, when she came to grief while flying over the Norfolk Broads."

"But she never arrived at Hendon yesterday," I exclaimed. "I was there all the morning."

"So I understand from Mr Carrington of the Grahame-White School, to whom I telephoned this morning. It was after learning this curious fact that I began to try and get into communication with you."

"Well—where can she possibly be?" I asked in blank dismay.

"The only thing I can think of is that she altered her mind at the last moment, and went to see some friends. She may have given a servant a telegram to send to me, and the servant forgot to dispatch it. Such things have happened, you know."

I shook my head dubiously. Knowing Roseye as I did, I knew that she always sent important messages herself.

"One thing is certain, that she has not met with an accident while flying, for her machine is still locked up in the hangar."

"Yes. It is a consolation to know that she has not gone up and disappeared."

"No," I said. "She seems to have intended to meet me. But we had no appointment to meet. My intention yesterday morning was to go over to Gunnersbury, and I only changed my mind five minutes before I left my rooms. I spent part of the afternoon with Eastwell, who is queer in bed."

"I heard that he was not well. Roseye told me so yesterday morning before she went out."

"I wonder how she knew?" I exclaimed.

"I believe he spoke to her on the telephone on Friday night."

"You overheard some of their conversation, I suppose?"

"None. She was shut up in the telephone-box, and when she came out I asked her who had rung up. She replied, 'Oh! only Lionel!' Next morning, while we were at breakfast, she remarked that Mr Eastwell was ill and in bed. He must have told her so on the previous night."

I remained silent. This disappearance of Roseye, following so closely upon the dastardly attempt upon my life, caused me to pause. It was more than curious. It was distinctly suspicious.

Was the Invisible Hand—the claw-grip of which had laid such a heavy grasp upon Great Britain ever since August 1914—again at work? Was the clutch of that hand, which had so cunningly protected the enemy alien and fed the Germans, again upon myself and the woman I loved?

"Lady Lethmere, this is all too amazing. I had no idea that Roseye was missing," I said. "Sir Herbert has not returned, I suppose?"

"No. I expect him to-morrow. I have not yet sent him word. But I must say I am now getting most anxious."

"Of course," I said. "We have to remember that to-day is Sunday, and that few telegraph offices are open."

"Yet there is always the telephone," Lady Lethmere said.

I argued that, in many country places, the telephone service was not available on Sundays and, though I felt intensely anxious, I endeavoured to regard the matter with cheerful optimism. I saw, however, that Lady Lethmere, a good, kindly and most charming woman, who had ever been genuinely friendly towards me, was greatly perturbed regarding her daughter's whereabouts.

And surely not without cause. Roseye had left that house at eleven o'clock on the previous morning—dressed as usual in a navy-blue gaberdine coat and skirt, with her skunk boa and muff, intending to change later on into her Burberry flying-suit which she kept at Hendon. From the moment when she had closed the front door behind her, she had vanished into space.

Such was the enigma with which I—her lover—was at that moment faced.

I ask you, my reader, to place yourself for a moment in my position, and to put to yourself the problem.

How would you have acted?

Would you have suspected, as I suspected, the sinister and deadly touch of the Invisible Hand?

Chapter Ten.

The Tunnel Mystery.

I went back to my rooms in Shaftesbury Avenue and, in consequence of my telephone message, Teddy came and threw himself in the chair opposite me half an hour later, to discuss the curious disappearance of my well-beloved.

Teddy suggested that we should report the occurrence to the police, and give them Roseye's photograph, but I was averse to this course. I pointed out that, in all probability, she was with friends somewhere, and that Monday morning would bring me a letter from her.

Well—Monday morning came. Eagerly I went through my correspondence, but there was no word from her, either to her mother or to myself. It was only then that I began to be really anxious, and at noon I went down to Scotland Yard and there, in the cold waiting-room, stated exactly what had occurred.

The inspector, when he looked at the photograph I produced, exclaimed:

"Ah, sir. I've often seen Miss Lethmere's picture in the papers. Why, she's the famous flying-lady—isn't she?"

I replied in the affirmative, and explained how she had left her home in Cadogan Gardens to go to Hendon to meet me.

"I see. She was lost sight of between Cadogan Gardens and Hendon," he exclaimed, adding a memorandum to what he had already written down. "Well, sir," he said. "We'll do our best, of course. But—you don't think Miss Lethmere has disappeared intentionally—eh?"

And he looked at me inquiringly with his dark, serious eyes.

"Intentionally! No—why?"

"Well, because we get many young ladies reported missing in the course of a year, and many of them we find, on inquiry, have hidden themselves purposely, for their own private reasons, quarrels, run-away matches, hiding from angry parents, and such-like causes. I tell you," he added, "some of the cases give us quite a lot of trouble and annoyance."

"I'm quite sure that Miss Lethmere is not hiding herself purposely," I declared quickly. "There can be no object in her doing so."

"No. Not as far as you are aware, sir," the inspector replied very politely. "But neither you nor I can always follow the trend of the feminine mind," he added with a faint smile. "You, of course, do not suspect the existence of any motive which would lead her to disappear intentionally. Nobody in such circumstances as yours, ever does. Do you happen to know whether she took any money with her when she left home?"

"Mulliner, Lady Lethmere's maid, says that just before going out Miss Lethmere glanced in her purse, found that she only had a few shillings, and took four Treasury-notes from her jewel-box."

"Was that all the money in the jewel-box?" he asked.

"No. About eighteen pounds remains there now."

"H'm. She evidently did not make any preparation for a journey—or any long absence."

"Well," replied the inspector after a brief pause, "we will certainly circulate her description, and see what we can

gather. The young lady may have met with a street accident, and be in one of the hospitals. Though I hope she hasn't, of course!"

So with that rather poor assurance I had to be content, and took my leave.

That afternoon I again went out to Hendon, making inquiry everywhere of the men who were Roseye's friends, but she certainly never went there on the Saturday, and I found her machine still in the hangar. Her mechanic knew nothing, for he had received no orders from her since Friday.

Three days—three breathless anxious days passed. Ah! shall I ever forget the awful tension of those terrible hours!

Sir Herbert had returned, and, with his wife, was naturally distracted. He was making inquiries in every quarter of friends and acquaintances, and of anyone who might have been likely to see his missing daughter. In this, both Teddy and I actively assisted him.

On the third evening I returned to my rooms to wash, intending to go along to the Automobile Club to dine with the flying-boys who assembled there every night, when Theed told me that the police had, an hour before, rung me up from Scotland Yard, and requested me to go down there at once.

This I did without delay and, having been shown into that big, bare waiting-room, the same dark-haired inspector came to see me.

"Well, Mr Munro," he exclaimed, "we've met with no very great result, though the description of the missing young lady has been circulated right through the country. But the affair is certainly a mystery."

"Then you don't suspect that she has purposely disappeared—eh?" I asked quickly.

"Well—after all—I don't know," was his hesitating reply. "Something belonging to her has been found which rather leads to that supposition."

"What has been found?" I gasped eagerly.

"This," he answered, and he placed upon the table a gold chatelaine which I at once recognised as belonging to Roseye—for I had given it to her. It formed a jingling bunch. There was a chain-purse, a combined match-box and cigarette-case, a powder-box with its little mirror in the cover, and a card-case all strung upon thin gold chains which, in turn, were attached to a ring—so that it could be carried upon the finger.

"Wherever was that found?" I asked, turning pale at sight of it.

"It was discovered this morning by a platelayer engaged in examining the rails in the long tunnel just beyond Welwyn Station on the Great Northern Railway."

"In a tunnel!"

"Yes. The two tunnels which are quite near to each other have, at our request, been thoroughly searched by the local police and the platelayers, but nothing else has been found. My first fear was," added the inspector, "that there might have been a tragedy in the tunnel. Happily, however, there is no ground for any such suspicion."

"But there may have been a struggle in the train!" I suggested.

"Possibly," answered the inspector. "It's fortunate that the cards were in the case, for when the chatelaine was handed to the sergeant of constabulary at Welwyn, he at once recognised Lethmere as the name of the lady whose description had been circulated by us. Therefore the constabulary sent it up here at once."

I took it and found that in the purse were the four Treasury-notes, as the maid Mulliner had described, together with some silver. Three of my own particular brand of Russian cigarettes remained in the case, while among the cards which I opened upon the table was one of my own upon which I had, only a few days previously, written down the address of the makers of a new enamel which I had advised her to try upon her machine.

The tiny powder-puff and the small bevelled mirror were there, though the latter had been cracked across in its fall in the tunnel.

"Seven years bad luck!" I remarked to the inspector, whose name I had learned to be Barton.

I was turning over with curiosity that bunch of jingling feminine impedimenta which I knew so well, when the door suddenly opened, and a red-tabbed captain in khaki entered.

"This is Captain Pollock," Barton said, introducing him. "He wished, I believe, to ask you a question, Mr Munro."

I looked at the new-comer with some surprise, as he bowed and, in rather an authoritative manner, took a chair at the big leather-covered table at which I was seated with the inspector.

"The facts of your friend Miss Lethmere's disappearance have been communicated to us, Mr Munro," he commenced, "and we find that the lady's disappearance is much complicated by certain rather curious facts."

"Well?" I asked, rather resentful that another department of the State should enter upon what, after all, was a purely personal investigation. Besides, I could see no motive. The War Office had enough to do without making inquiries regarding missing persons.

"Well," said the captain politely, "I of course know you, Mr Munro, to be a well-known aviator, and have often read of the long and sensational flights undertaken by Miss Lethmere and yourself. I hope you will not think that I am personally inquisitive regarding your lady friend. But," he went on apologetically, "I am only performing my duty in inquiring in the interests of the State. You are, I know, an intensely patriotic man. I hope that I, as a British officer, am equally patriotic. Therefore we stand upon the same ground—don't we?"

"Most certainly," was my reply, though, much puzzled as to the drift of his argument, I looked straight into his face, a round, rather florid countenance, with a small sandy moustache.

"Good," he said. "Now I want you to answer me, in confidence, the questions I will put to you. Your replies I shall treat as absolutely secret."

"Captain Pollock is from the Intelligence Department," remarked the inspector, interrupting in explanation.

"I will answer, of course, to the best of my ability," I said. "But with one reservation—I will say nothing that might reflect upon a woman's honour."

He pursed his lips ever so slightly. But that very slight movement did not pass me unnoticed.

Was a woman's honour concerned in this?

The two men exchanged glances, and in an instant a fierce resentment arose within me. Between us, upon the bare table, lay the gold chatelaine that I had bought at Bouet's, in the Gallerie at Monte Carlo a year and a half ago.

It had been found in that tunnel on the main line of the Great Northern. Something tragic had occurred. Was there any further room for doubt?

"The matter does not concern a woman's honour—er—not exactly so," the man in khaki said slowly.

"I want to know—" And he paused, as though hesitating to explain his motive for coming along to see me.

"What do you want to know about?" I asked boldly. "Come, Captain Pollock, let us face each other. There is a mystery here in Miss Lethmere's disappearance, and in the finding of this bunch of feminine fripperies in the tunnel. I intend to elucidate it."

"And I will assist you, Mr Munro—if you will only be frank with me."

"Frank!" I echoed. "Of course I'll be frank!" Again he looked me straight in the face with those funny, half-closed little eyes of his. Then, after a few moments' pause, he asked:

"Now—tell me. Is it a fact that you, with a friend of yours named Ashton, have made some very remarkable electrical discovery?"

I looked at him, stunned by surprise. He noticed my abject astonishment.

"I'll go farther," he went on. "Does this discovery of yours concern aircraft; is it designed to bring disaster upon Zeppelins; and are you engaged in perfecting a secret invention in which you have the most entire confidence? In other words, have you nearly perfected a method by which you will be able to successfully combat enemy airships in the air? Tell me the truth, Mr Munro—in strictest secrecy, remember."

His words staggered me. How could he know the secret that we had so closely guarded?

I did not reply for several moments.

"Well?" he asked, repeating his question.

"I don't see why I should reveal to anyone—even to you—what I have been doing in the interests of the defence of our country," I protested.

"Except that by doing so we should both be able to carry our investigations farther—and, I hope, to a satisfactory issue."

I had given my word to Teddy and to Roseye, and they had given their words to me, to disclose nothing. This I recollected and, therefore, I hesitated.

The captain, seeing my reluctance, said:

"In this inquiry we ought, surely, to assist each other, Mr Munro! Miss Lethmere is missing, and it is for us to unite in our efforts to elucidate the mystery."

"But how can answers to the questions you have put to me serve, in any way whatever, to bring us nearer to the truth of what has happened to Miss Lethmere?" I queried.

"They do. I merely ask you, yes or no. Your reply will at once place us in a far better position to conduct this most important inquiry," he said. "I may tell you that at present the gravest suspicion rests upon Miss Lethmere."

"Suspicion!" I echoed angrily. "Of what, pray?"

The captain drew a long breath and, once more looking me straight in the face, replied:

"Well, of being a secret agent of the German Government—or to put it very bluntly, of being a spy!"

"Roseye a spy!" I shouted, starting up from my chair. "A most foul and abominable lie! How dare you cast any such imputation upon her?"

"It is, unfortunately, no imputation, Mr Munro," replied the captain. "You naturally doubt the truth, but we have documentary evidence that the missing lady is not exactly the purely patriotic young person whom you have so long believed her to be. Since the war lots of men who have trusted pretty women have had many rude awakenings, I assure you."

"I'll believe nothing against Roseye!"

"Well," answered Pollock, taking from his pocket an official envelope, "perhaps you will look at this!" and from the envelope he took a half sheet of dark-blue notepaper of a type and size used by ladies, and handed it across to me, saying:

"This was found in her card-case here. From Scotland Yard they sent it over to us this afternoon, and its real import we very quickly discovered."

My eyes fell upon the paper, and I saw that it was covered with lines of puzzling figures in groups of seven, all written neatly in a distinctly feminine hand.

"Well," I asked in surprise, "what does all this mean?"

"Only one thing," was the hard reply. "This paper, folded small and secreted, was found in this card-case. Those figures you see convey a message in the secret code of the Intelligence Department of the German Naval War Staff—a seven-figure code. A couple of hours ago we succeeded in deciphering the message, which is to the effect that you and Ashton have made an astounding discovery and have succeeded in directing a powerful electric wave by which you can charge metals at a distance, and cause sparking across any intervening spaces of those metals. By this means you are hoping to defeat Zeppelins by exploding the gas inside their ballonets, and as you are both highly dangerous to the success of the enemy's plans for the wholesale destruction of life and property by airships, it is here suggested that you should both meet sudden ends at the hands of certain paid hired assassins of the Berlin secret police."

Then, after a pause, the captain again looked at me, and said very slowly:

"Mr Munro. This document found in Miss Lethmere's purse is nothing else but your own death-warrant! Miss Lethmere is a spy and, though she may be your friend, she is plotting your death!"

Chapter Eleven.

The Signalman's Story.

I sat, staggered by that damning evidence placed before me!

Proof indisputable lay there that Roseye—my own dear well-beloved, she whose ready lips met mine so often in those fierce, trustful caresses—the intrepid girl who had been as "a pal" to Teddy and myself in our secret experiments, and who knew all the innermost secrets of our invention and our power to fight Zeppelins—was a traitor to her country!

It was incredible!

Was it by her connivance that the steel bolt in my machine had been withdrawn, and one of wood substituted?

In this terrible war men laughed, and women wept. The men went out to the front in Flanders with all the fine patriotic sentiment of Britons, singing gaily the various patriotic songs of war. But alas! how many went to their death, and the women wept in silence in the back streets of our dear old London, and of every town in the work-a-day kingdom.

In official circles it was known—known indeed to the public at large—that the Zeppelin menace was a real and serious one. Teddy and I had, in secret, striven our best to discover a means by which to combat these sinister attacks upon our non-combatants.

Yet upon that leather-covered table before me lay that puzzling cryptic message found among the belongings of my missing beloved.

The whole affair was, indeed, a mystery. After a few moments of silence I raised my head and, looking again at Pollock, said:

"All this is, of course, very interesting from the point of view of a police problem, but the hard, real fact remains."

"What fact?" he asked.

"That I, with my friend Ashton, am in possession of certain discoveries by which we can, under given conditions, bring Zeppelins to the ground."

The red-tabbed captain curled his lip in a rather supercilious smile.

He was evidently one of those persons imported into the Department after the outbreak of war and, in comparison with Barton as an investigator, was a nonentity.

True, a piece of paper bearing a message in the enemy's cipher had been found secreted in Roseye's card-case.

But I argued that before the owner of the card-case could be condemned, she must be found, and an explanation demanded of her.

"You surely cannot condemn an accused person in her absence!" I argued.

Barton agreed with me. It was against all principles of justice to condemn an accused person unheard.

"Well," explained the red-tabbed captain, "upon the face of it, there can be no real defence. Here we have the missing lady's belongings found in a tunnel, and in them—fortunately, for ourselves—we discover a message intended for transmission to the enemy. That message, Mr Munro, is quite plain, and speaks for itself. You have made an interesting scientific discovery. Possibly they have ferreted out your secret. It interests them: they fear you and, therefore, they have plotted your death."

"I won't believe that!" I cried in angry resentment. "Ask yourself! Would you yourself believe it of the woman whom you loved?"

"My dear Mr Munro," replied the captain coldly, "we are at war now. We cannot gauge either our feelings, or our beliefs, by the standard of pre-war days."

"Well," I declared bluntly, "I don't believe it. Miss Lethmere would never hold any communication with the enemy. Of that I'm quite positive."

"But we have it written down here—in black and white!"

"True. But before we take this as authentic we must discover her, and question her. To you mysterious people of the Secret Service the task will, surely, not be so very difficult. You know the mystery of Miss Lethmere's sudden and unaccountable disappearance. Therefore I leave all to you—to investigate, and to elucidate the puzzle. I don't pretend to account for it. You, both of you, of the War Intelligence Department and the Special Branch of Scotland Yard, have the facts before you—plain facts—the disappearance of Lady Lethmere's daughter. When her whereabouts is ascertained then the remainder of the inquiry is surely quite easy. I am not an investigator," I added with biting sarcasm. "I'm only an inventor, and I leave it to you both to discover why Miss Lethmere disappeared."

"You apparently have invented something of which the enemy is determined, at all hazards, to learn the truth," remarked Inspector Barton.

I laughed, and slowly took a cigarette from my case.

"They will never know that," I declared with entire confidence. "I can tell you both that the secret experiments of Ashton and myself have been crowned with success. We have, however, been most wary and watchful. We are well aware that at our works out at Gunnersbury there have been intruders, but those who have dared to enter at night to try and discover our plans have been entirely misled and, up to the present, no single person beyond ourselves has ever seen, or has ever gained any knowledge whatsoever of that electrical arrangement which constitutes our discovery."

"Then you really can fight Zeppelins?" asked Barton, much interested.

I nodded in the affirmative, and smiled.

"So what is written here in cipher is perfectly correct?" asked Pollock.

"Perfectly. The missing lady has actively assisted Mr Ashton and myself in our experiments."

"And apparently the lady wrote down this message giving you away," remarked Barton.

"Somebody wrote it—but it certainly is not her handwriting."

"Quite so. Spies frequently get other persons to copy their messages in order that they can disclaim them," replied the Intelligence officer. "We've had several such cases before us of late."

His words aroused my anger bitterly. That Roseye had held any communication with the enemy I absolutely refused to believe. Such suggestion was perfectly monstrous!

Yet how was it possible that anyone should know of the success of our experiments at Gunnersbury?

Recollection of that well-remembered night when Teddy had declared there had been strangers prowling about, flashed across my mind.

I knew, too well, that the evil that had befallen me, as well as the disappearance of my well-beloved, had been the work of the Invisible Hand—that dastardly, baneful influence that had wrecked my machine and nearly hurled me to the grave.

"Well," I said at last, "I would much like a copy of this remarkable document."

"I fear that I cannot give it to you, Mr Munro," was the captain's slow reply. "At present it is a confidential matter,

concerning only the Department, and the person in whose possession it was.”

“We must find that person,” I said resolutely.

“What is your theory regarding Miss Lethmere?” I asked, turning to Barton.

“Well, Mr Munro, it would appear that either the lady herself, or some thief, threw the chatelaine from a train passing north through the tunnel.”

“There may have been a struggle,” I remarked, “and in trying to raise the alarm it might have dropped from her hand.”

“That certainly might have been the case,” the inspector admitted.

An hour later, accompanied by Teddy and Barton, I set out from King’s Cross station and, on arrival at Welwyn—a journey a little over twenty miles—we spent the evening in searching inquiry.

The station-master knew nothing, except that both tunnels had been searched without result.

The story told by the platelayer who found the chatelaine was to the effect that he noticed a paper bag lying in the centre of the up-express line and, on picking it up, found the jingling bunch of gold impedimenta. The paper bag had probably been blown along there by a passing train and had somehow become entangled among the short lengths of chain composing the chatelaine.

“Of course it might ha’ been there a couple o’ days,” the stout, sooty-faced man replied to a question of Barton’s. “I work in the tunnels all the time, but I didn’t see it before to-day. We often finds things thrown out o’ trains—things people want to get rid of. They must ‘ave quite a fine collection o’ things up at King’s Cross—things what I and my mates have found while we’ve been a goin’ along with our flares.”

“You can form no idea when it might have been thrown out?” I asked.

“Probably late last night, or early this mornin’,” was the man’s reply. “I started to examine all the rails just after eleven o’clock last night, and had not quite finished when the 11:30 express out o’ King’s Cross for Edinburgh came through.”

“It might have been thrown from that,” I remarked. “Where was the first stop made by that express?”

“Grantham, sir—at 1:33 in the morning—then York,” he replied, in a hard, rough voice. His face was deeply furrowed, and his eyes were screwed up, for he spent more than half his life in the darkness, choking smoke and wild racket of those two cavernous tunnels through which trains roared constantly, both night and day. “Of course, sir,” he added, “there were lots o’ trains a passing on the up-line during the night, mails, goods, and passengers. Therefore it’s quite impossible to say from which the gold stuff was thrown. My idea is that a thief wanted to get rid of it.”

“No,” I replied. “If that were so he’d most certainly have taken the money from the purse. The Treasury-notes and silver could not have been identified.”

“Then your theory is that it was dropped out by accident?” asked Teddy, who had been listening to the man’s story with keenest interest.

“Well—it certainly was not got rid of purposely by any thief,” was my answer, and with this Barton agreed.

Of other railwaymen we made inquiry. To each I showed Roseye’s photograph, but none of the porters had any recollection of seeing her.

The signalman who was on night duty in the box north of the second tunnel was somewhat dubious. When I showed him the photograph he said:

“Well, sir, Saturday night was a bright calm night—and when the Scotch express was put through to me from Welwyn box I was wondering if there were any Zeppelins about, for it was just such another night as that on which they recently attacked London. They always seem to look for the railway lines for guidance up to town. After I had attended to my signals, and accepted the express, I went to the window of my cabin to look out. As I was standing there the express came out of the tunnel and flew by. The driver was a little late and was, I saw, making up time. As it went past nearly all the windows had drawn blinds—all but about three, I think. At one of them I caught a glimpse of two women who, standing up near the door, seemed to be struggling with each other.”

“You saw them distinctly?” I asked eagerly. “Two women?”

“Yes. I saw them quite plainly,” he replied, and I realised that he was a man of some intelligence. “When trains go by, especially the expresses, the glimpse we get is only for a fraction of a second. But in that we can often see inside the carriages at night, if the regulations are broken and the blinds are up. A good many people disregard the danger—even in these days of Zeppelins.”

“They do,” I said. “But please describe, as far as you are able, exactly what you saw.”

“Well, sir, the Scotch express tore past just as I was standing at the window star-gazing. My mate at Stevenage had just put through an up-goods, and all was clear, so I stood wondering if the Zepps would dare to venture out. Then I heard the low roar of the Edinburgh night-express approaching up the tunnel, and a moment later it ran past me. As it did so I saw in one of the carriages the two women standing there. Both had their hats off. One, a fine big strong

person I should take her to be, seized the other, whose hair had fallen about her shoulders, and she seemed to be helplessly in her grip."

"Did you report it?" Barton asked quickly.

"I rang up Stevenage and told my mate that something was going on in the express. But he replied later on to say that he had watched, and seen nothing. Later on in the night he spoke to me again, and said that the man in the Hitchin box, who had kept a look out, had reported back that all blinds of the express had then been drawn."

"So the assumption seems to be that Roseye was attacked by some strange woman," I said, turning to Teddy. "She struggled at the door, and in the struggle the chatelaine which she had in her hand fell out upon the line."

Barton drew a long breath.

"It's all a profound mystery, Mr Munro," he said.

"If your theory is correct, then we must go a step further and assume that the stout woman overpowered Miss Lethmere, and afterwards drew down the blinds before the express reached Hitchin, where there is a junction and the train would, I suppose, slow down."

"Yes, sir," exclaimed the signalman. "Drivers have orders to go slow through Hitchin because of the points there."

"But why should Miss Lethmere be attacked by a woman?" I queried in dismay.

"Why should she have disappeared from home at all, Mr Munro?" asked Barton. "Yes. I quite agree with you, sir, the more we probe this mystery, the more and more complicated it becomes."

"Well, Mr Barton?" I exclaimed. "Now, tell me frankly, what's your theory. Why has Miss Lethmere disappeared?"

The inspector, one of the best and shrewdest officials attached to the Criminal Investigation Department, paused for a few moments and, looking me full in the face, replied:

"To tell you the truth, Mr Munro, I'm still absolutely puzzled. The whole affair seems to grow more involved, and more astounding."

Chapter Twelve.

Reveals an Astounding Fact.

Weeks passed, but alas! the problem remained unsolved. I became plunged in the darkest depths of despair.

The hue-and-cry had been raised all over the kingdom. Sir Herbert Lethmere had offered a reward for any information concerning his daughter, but nobody came forward with any really tangible declaration.

The hard indisputable fact was that she had gone down those front-door steps in Cadogan Gardens and disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed her.

For me, those weeks were weeks of keen, hourly anxiety, weeks of grief and breathless forebodings.

The woman I loved so dearly had been snatched from me, and now I felt that I had no further object in life. Indeed, I had no heart to make any further experiments to perfect my Zeppelin-destroyer, and though Teddy, in his old cheery way, tried to console me and endeavoured to get me down to Gunnersbury, I always firmly refused to go. The place was now hateful to me. My keenness had vanished. Now and then I went out to Hendon and looked at Roseye's machine still there. Her mechanic, whom Sir Herbert still kept on—he being unfit for military service—hung about the aerodrome and smoked "yellow perils" awaiting his mistress's return.

Once or twice, on bright days, I made a short flight just to keep fit. Otherwise I generally remained at home in my rooms pondering, or else out trying to follow some imaginary clue to which my theory led me.

Lionel Eastwell always expressed himself full of sympathy. Many times we met at the club and elsewhere, and he always expressed his belief that Roseye was somewhere with friends. Indeed, he seemed full of optimism.

"My firm opinion is that Miss Lethmere has met with an accident, and is in some hospital or other—some cottage hospital perhaps. Maybe she has lost her memory as result of her unfortunate mishap," he suggested one day. "There are lots of such cases recorded in the papers."

Truth to tell, my suspicion of Lionel Eastwell had daily increased. First, he had always appeared far too inquisitive regarding our experimental work. Secondly, he had been ever polite and affable towards Roseye with a view, it seemed, of preserving an extremely close friendship. Why, I wondered? I knew that she had liked him for his courtesy and pleasant demeanour ever since they had first met. And the point that they had first met in Germany I had never forgotten. It had increased my suspicion—and pointedly so.

The most puzzling fact concerning him, however, was that I had discovered during my eager and constant investigations, from one of the boys at Hendon—Dick Ferguson, who was flying a new REP "Parasol," that on the very evening of the day that I had called at Albemarle Street to find him ill in bed, he had met him in Hatchett's in Piccadilly, and had actually dined with him there in the grill-room.

When I had sat at Eastwell's bedside, three hours before, he had then declared himself unable to move without pain, and had told me that the doctor had strictly forbidden him to get up. Yet, on that very same night, he had dined down below in the cheerful grill-room and, according to Dick, was as merry as ever.

These were facts which certainly required explanation.

Why had he not gone along to the Piccadilly Hotel, or to the Club, as was his habit? Was it because, fearing to be seen, he had chosen the smaller and quieter resort?

Most probably he feared to meet either Teddy or myself at the Piccadilly, for we both frequently went there as a change from the Automobile Club. We flying-men are a small circle, and we have our own particular haunts—just as every other profession has.

Three times I had questioned Dick Ferguson regarding Lionel's presence at that small, but popular restaurant on that particular night. At first I believed that he had probably mistaken the date—which was so easy. But he had fixed it absolutely by telling me that it was the night when the Admiralty had admitted that Zeppelins had again been over Essex and Norfolk and been driven back by our anti-aircraft guns.

Certainly I had no reason to doubt Dick's story. He was a pal of Teddy's, and I had been up with him twice on his new "Parasol"—that machine which Hendon men will remember as having caused such a sensation.

How flying has changed since the war! In the pre-war days those Sunday meetings out at Hendon, with their passenger-flights, were quite smart frivolous gatherings. In the enclosure stood rows of fine cars with many young "bloods"—who afterwards gallantly put on khaki—with many of their best girls, some of them of the bluest blood of the land, while others were revue actresses, with a few women aged, apeing and adipose, with of course a good sprinkling of girls on the keen look out for husbands.

There are some men who went regularly to "exhibitions of flying" before the war who could tell strange tales—of pretty women held in the clutches of blackguards, and of good, innocent boys who fell, were blackmailed, and were "squeezed" to their death.

But it is ever so in sport. The racecourse and the *tapis vert* have both been the cause of the downfall of a good many excellent fellows, therefore the organisers of the aerodromes are not to be blamed for the exploits of those pestilent undesirables who as at Epsom, Newmarket or Sandown, having paid the admission fee, passed through its gates.

Ah! I recall—and many will recall with me—those summer afternoons upon the lawn where the little tea-tables were set, and where some of the worst girls in the smartest and most daring of costumes sat with some of the best girls in the neatest to sip the innocuous beverage and to nibble cakes with the best and bravest young fellows in all England.

That strange, daring little world of flying-men—knew it, but they were level-headed and, keeping themselves to themselves, gave the cold shoulder to the unknown ones who drifted in from nowhere to display their brilliant raiment, and to watch, in a bored way, such feats as looping the loop, and other exercises which have proved such splendid training for our flying-boys to-day.

I did not trust Eastwell. Both his actions and his attitude puzzled me. An intimate friend of Sir Herbert, he was often at Cadogan Gardens, telling his host and Lady Lethmere that he firmly believed that Roseye was still ill, and still unidentified.

Purposely I avoided him. Teddy and I were in full agreement over this. A man who had been ill in bed and in pain, with no prospect of getting about for some days, and yet could go and dine merrily at Hatchett's that same evening, was, I argued, not to be trusted further.

All that Captain Pollock and Inspector Barton had told me served to increase the amazing puzzle.

They said that Roseye was a spy of Germany, but I defied them. I declared that they had lied.

"My own opinion, Munro, is that my poor girl is dead," Sir Herbert declared one afternoon when I called. "I know," he went on sympathetically. "I know how deeply devoted you were to her. But alas! we must be brave and face facts in this critical situation in which we all find ourselves to-day."

For a moment I did not reply. I had frankly told him of that mysterious message found in Roseye's card-case, and he had followed every channel of my inquiries with eager interest, paying most of the out-of-pocket expenses and having one or two confidential interviews with Inspector Barton.

Like myself, and like Teddy also, he would not hear of any allegation against his daughter. That cryptic message he regarded as the work of the Invisible Hand which, since August 1914, had been raised against our dear beloved country.

Once or twice Lionel Eastwell had called upon me in Shaftesbury Avenue and sat beside my fire, discussing the war, the Zeppelin menace and the apparent apathy in certain quarters to deal firmly with it. At that moment the popular Press were loud in their parrot-cries that we had no adequate defence. In a sense, they voiced the public demand. But those papers which were now loudest in the denunciation of the Government were the selfsame which, before the war, had jeered at any suggested progress in aviation, and had laughed to scorn any prizes offered to aviators as encouragement in designing machines, or in flying them.

The Invisible Hand was, even in those days, laid heavily upon the Press, who laughed at Zeppelins, and declared that on that night long ago, when they had been seen hovering over Sheerness, the naval witnesses of their arrival were "pulling the long bow."

The Invisible Hand indeed stretched far and wide in the pre-war days. From Wick to Walmer, from Cork to Cromer, and from Donegal to Dover, the British public were assured that Zeppelins could never cross the North Sea. They were only very delicate gas-bags—some called them egg-shells—which could perhaps take up passengers in fair weather and, given continued fair weather, deposit them somewhere in safety.

The Invisible Hand wrote screeds of deliberate lies and utterly bamboozled England, just as the Crowned Criminal of Germany carried on his secret and insidious policy of the Great Betrayal.

Curiously enough the very organs of the Press which in 1913, when strange airships were reported over Yorkshire and the North-East coast, received the news with incredulity and amusement, were the very organs which now cried the loudest that something must be done to destroy Zeppelins.

I was chatting with Teddy one afternoon in my room, and had pointed out that fact, whereupon he blew a cloud of cigarette smoke from his lips, and said:

“You’re quite right, my dear Claude. The armchair sceptics of 1913 were the people who have since told us that Zeppelins could kill only an occasional chicken—that Zeppelins could not reach London—that Zeppelins, if they did get to London, would never return—that Zeppelins were useless in bad weather—that Zeppelins could not survive a fall of snow—and so on.”

“Do you recollect how one section of the Press violently attacked another because the latter had dared to warn the country against the danger of attacks from the air?” I asked. “The purblind optimists waxed hilarious, and called it the ‘Scareship Campaign.’”

Teddy laughed, as he stretched himself in his chair.

“Yes,” he said. “I recollect quite well, though I had not yet taken my ‘ticket,’ how the ‘trust-our-dear-German-brother’ propagandists were terribly angry because some newspaper or other had demanded a large provision for dirigibles in the coming Estimates. They accused the paper of ‘staging the performance’ for the sake of a new journalistic scoop. One paper, a copy of which I still have,” Teddy went on, “expressed greatest amusement at the statements of witnesses who had seen and heard Zeppelins on the North-East coast. I was only reading it the other day. One person heard ‘the whirr of engines’; another ‘a faint throbbing noise.’ To one, the airship appeared as ‘a cigar-shaped vessel,’ to another as ‘a small luminous cloud.’ These variations—they are not contradictions—were sufficient, in the opinion of that particular paper, to discredit the whole business. The writer of the article calmly stated that what was alleged to be a Zeppelin ‘turns out to have been merely a farmer working at night in a field on the hilltop, taking manure about in a creaky wheelbarrow, with a light swung on the top of a broomstick attached to it.’”

“I know, Teddy,” I exclaimed. “Our dear old England has been sadly misled by those who intended to send us to our ruin and dominate the world. Yet we have one consolation—you and I—namely, that we have, within our hands, a power of which the enemy knows nothing, and—”

“But the enemy suspects, my dear old fellow,” said my friend seriously. “That’s why you had your unfortunate spill—and why Roseye is to-day missing. Probably I shall be the next to fall beneath the clutch of the Invisible Hand.”

“Yes. For heaven’s sake! do be careful,” I exclaimed anxiously. “You can’t be too wary!”

“Well—we’ve the satisfaction of knowing that they haven’t discovered our secret,” he declared.

“No—and, by Jove! they won’t!” I declared firmly. “Yet, the way in which we have been misled by those infected with the Teuton taint is really pathetic. I remember the wheelbarrow story quite well. Just about that same time a foreign correspondent of one of our London daily papers wrote telling us that Zeppelins were mere toys. They cost fifty thousand pounds apiece to build, and German experts had agreed that in fine weather they might reasonably expect to reach our coast, but that it was doubtful if they could get back. The return voyage, with the petrol running low and the capacity of the ship and crew approaching exhaustion, would probably end in disaster if the wind were contrary. We were also told by this wonderful correspondent that the idea that these ships could drop from one to two tons of explosives on our heads at any time was absurd.”

“Yes, yes,” Teddy sighed. “It is all too awful! That correspondent’s story only serves to show how easily we were fascinated by German friendship, and by the Emperor himself, who raced at Cowes, and who, while bowing his head piously over Queen Victoria’s grave, was already secretly plotting our downfall. But are we not secretly plotting the downfall of the Zeppelins—eh?” he added, with his usual cheery good humour.

“Yes, we are. And, by Gad, we’ll show the world what we can do, ere long,” I said. “But I am full of fierce anger when I recollect how our little aviation circle has been ridiculed by red-taped officialdom, and starved by the public, who thought us airy cranks just because the Invisible Hand was all-powerful in our midst. The German experts deceived the Berlin correspondents of our newspapers; the Emperor uttered his blasphemous prayers for peace, the Teutonic money-bags jingled and their purse-strings were opened. And so our trustful public were lulled to sleep, and we were told to forget all about Zeppelins for they were mere harmless toys, and we were urged, in leading articles of our daily papers, to get on with the Plural Voting Bill, and to investigate the cause in the fall of the output of sandstone—‘including ganister’ as officialdom describes that commodity.”

“True, Claude,” exclaimed my friend, as we smoked together. “The whole thing is a striking example of the blindness of those who would not see; and who, even now, when innocent women and children are being killed, are dismissing the raids as ‘of no military importance.’”

“Since war broke out we’ve learnt one or two things—haven’t we?” I said. “Though the public are still in ignorance of the actual truth, we flying-men who have studied aeronautics as perfected by Germany, know that Zeppelins can now

be brought to a standstill and mark time during the observations of their pilots. Aiming is still in a primitive stage, notwithstanding the use of 'directed' aerial torpedoes such as we know, by the Press bureau, have been used. Smoke-bombs are effective to cover the rising of the airship to safety heights. Zeppelins can fly at a height of two and a half to three miles, while shots through the fabric can be repaired during the flight."

"Exactly," replied Teddy. "But we have also proved that warnings to Britons do not foster panic. Nowadays we see quite plainly that Zeppelin raids have been adopted by the Germans as part of their regular campaign, and it is quite clear that during the coming months they may 'increase and multiply'—whatever the civilised world may say or think. The enemy is out to damage our cities, and has, indeed, told the neutrals that he will do so, regardless of every law of civilised warfare."

"I contend that Zeppelin raids *are* of military importance—of very great importance—and I intend to devote myself to treating them as such, whatever officialdom may say to the contrary," I declared.

"Bravo! old man!" Teddy said. "And I'll help you—with every ounce of energy I possess!"

Yet scarcely had he uttered those words, when Theed opened the door and held it back for a visitor to enter.

I started to my feet, pale and speechless! I could not believe my eyes.

There, before us, upon the threshold, dressed cheaply, plain, even shabbily, and utterly unlike her usual self, stood Roseye—my own beloved!

Chapter Thirteen.

The Leopard's Eyes.

For a few moments I stood dumbfounded.

I could scarcely believe my own eyes.

The figure before me was pale-faced and wan. She wore an old blue felt hat with wide brim which was most unbecoming, a faded jersey that had once been dark mauve, and an old black skirt, while her boots were cracked and bulging, and she was without gloves.

She smiled at me inanely, as she came across the room and Theed closed the door after her.

"Roseye!" I gasped. "Whatever does this mean?"

"Is it really you!" cried Teddy, equally amazed.

"It is," she replied in a low, very weary voice.

I saw that she appeared exhausted, for she clutched at the edge of the table, so I led her gently to my chair wherein she sank inertly, with a deep sigh.

"Roseye," I said. "Where have you been?"

She turned her gaze upon the fire. Her face remained hard-set. The expression upon her white countenance was one of tragedy.

Her chest heaved and fell, and I saw that her ungloved hands, grasping the arms of the chair, were trembling.

"You are cold!" I cried. And dashing to the cupboard I got out some brandy and a siphon.

She sipped a few drops from the glass I offered her, smiling in grateful acknowledgment.

Then, as I stood upon the hearthrug facing her, I repeated my question:

"Tell us, Roseye. Where have you been?"

In her great blue eyes I noticed a strange, vacant expression; a look such as I had never seen there before. She only shook her head mournfully.

"What has happened?" I inquired, bending and placing my hand tenderly upon her shoulder.

But, with a sudden movement, she buried her face in her small hands and burst into a torrent of tears.

"Don't ask me!" she sobbed. "Don't ask me, Claude!"

"Look here, old chap," exclaimed Teddy, who was quite as mystified as myself. "I'll come back later on. That Miss Lethmere is safe is, after all, the one great consolation."

And, rising, my friend discreetly left the room.

When he had gone I fell upon my knees before my rediscovered love and, taking her cold hands in mine, covered them with hot, fervent kisses, saying:

"Never mind, darling. You are safe again—and with me!"

All my efforts to calm her, however, proved unavailing, for she still sobbed bitterly—the reaction, no doubt, of finding herself again beside me. With women, in circumstances of great strain, it is the feminine privilege to relieve themselves by emotion.

"Speak!" I urged of her. "Tell me where you've been, darling?"

But she only shook her head and, still convulsed by sobs, sat there inert and heedless of all about her.

As I knelt in silence, the quiet of my room remained unbroken save for the low ticking of the clock, and the soft sobs of the woman I so dearly loved.

Tenderly I took my own handkerchief and wiped those tears from her white, hard-set face. Then, for the first time, I saw that her left eyebrow showed a dark red scar. It had not been there on the last occasion when we had been together.

That mark upon her brow set me wondering.

Across her forehead she drew her hand wearily, as at last she sat forward in her chair, an action as though to clear her confused and troubled brain.

"Let me take off your hat," I said and, with a man's clumsiness, removed the old felt hat from her head.

As I did so her wealth of soft hair, which I saw had been sadly neglected, fell unkempt about her shoulders.

"That—*that woman!*" she suddenly ejaculated, half starting from her seat. "*Ah! that woman!*" she cried.

"What woman, dear?" I asked, much mystified at her words.

"That woman—that awful woman!" she shouted.

"Ah! send her away—save me from her—Oh! save me. *Look!*"

And she pointed straight before her at some phantom which she had conjured up in her imagination.

At once I realised that she was hysterical, and that some hideous ghost of her past adventure had arisen before her.

"Calm yourself, darling," I urged softly, my arm around her waist. "There is no one here. You are alone—alone with me—Claude!"

"Claude!" she echoed, turning toward me and gazing blankly into my eyes with an expression which lacked recognition. "Oh—yes!" she added in a tone of surprise. "Why—yes—Claude! Is it you—*really you?*"

"Yes. I am Claude—and you are alone with me," I said in great apprehension, for I feared lest she might be demented. No doubt she had been through some terrible experiences since last I had clasped her hand.

Again she sighed deeply. For the next few moments she gazed into my eyes in silence. Their stony stare thrilled and awed me. At last a very faint smile played about her lips, and she exclaimed: "Oh, yes! How awfully silly of me, Claude! How very foolish. Forgive me, won't you?"

"Forgive you, darling! Why, of course," I said, pressing her closely to me.

"But—but that terrible woman!" she cried, still terrified. "You won't let her come near me again—will you?"

"No. She shan't. I'm with you, and will protect you, darling. Trust in me."

"Ah!" she sighed. "It was awful. How—how I've lived through it I don't know."

"Through what?" I asked, eager to induce her to tell her story.

"No," she answered. "You—you would never believe me!—you would never understand! Oh! that woman! Look!" and in terror she raised her finger and pointed again straight before her. "Look! Don't you see her! She's fixed her eyes upon me—*those awful leopard's eyes!*"

"There's nobody here, Roseye," I assured her. "You're alone with me."

"Alone! Why, no. She's there—see straight over there!" cried my love, her face distorted by wild terror. "Ah! she's coming nearer!" she shrieked, again covering her face with her hands, as though to shut out the imaginary face.

"Ugh!" she shuddered. "Don't let her touch me! Don't let her touch me! Don't, Claude—for Heaven's sake, I beg of you. That woman—that awful woman with the leopard's eyes!"

"Come, come," I said, rather severely. "You must not give way to these hallucinations, Roseye. There's nobody here, I assure you. It's all—"

"But she *is* here!" she shrieked. "You can't deceive *me*; she's here—with us. Perhaps you can't see her—but I can. Oh! those horrible eyes—the fiend! Ah! what I have suffered!"

I did not reply. I was at a loss how to act. Sight of my beloved betraying such abject terror unnerved me.

Too well did I recollect the story of the railway signalman near Welwyn, how, when the night-express came out of the tunnel tearing north from London, he had distinctly seen two women struggling. One was in the grasp of the other.

Was this the woman whom Roseye believed was present in my room—the mysterious Woman with the Leopard's Eyes?

I crossed to the window, and standing at the spot where at my love declared she could see the mysterious female by which she seemed haunted, said:

"Now, look, dear! There is nobody here."

"There is!" she persisted. "She's there just behind you. Mind! She intends to do you harm! Yes," she added. "I saw her at Hendon. I remember, most distinctly! She knows you—and she means to do you harm!"

I returned to her side, frantic at my inability to convince her that all was her imagination.

There was no doubt that, deeply impressed upon her memory, was some recollection of terrifying events in which a mysterious woman had played a leading part.

As I looked at that blank, yet horrified expression upon her pale, sweet face I became more than ever convinced that she had been held beneath the thralldom of some woman of evil intent—that woman whom she described as possessing the crafty eyes of a leopard.

For a full half-hour I argued with her, endeavouring to calm her but, unfortunately, to little avail. Presently, however, her expression altered, she grew less agitated, until at last, as I sat holding her in my arms, I kissed her fondly upon the lips, and again begged:

"Do tell me, my darling, where you have been all this long time? I've searched for you everywhere."

"I—I don't know," was her blank reply. "I can't tell you."

"But surely you recollect something?" I urged eagerly. "Those are not your own clothes that you are wearing. Where did you get them from?"

She looked quickly down at her jersey and at her skirt, and then raised her eyes to me in dismay. Apparently, for the first time, she now realised that she was dressed in some one else's clothes.

"That's curious!" she exclaimed, as though speaking to herself. "That's very curious. That hat is not mine, either!"

"No, it isn't," I said, handing it to her to examine, which she did critically.

Then, placing her hands idly upon her knees, she remained for a long time with brows knit in silence, apparently trying to recall the past.

"You lost your chatelaine—the one I gave you," I said, hoping that the fact might, in some way, stir the chords of her blunted memory.

"My chatelaine!" she repeated, looking at me vacantly.

"Yes. You lost your purse and money, and other things," I said. "I think you must have lost it from a train."

Suddenly she raised her face again to mine, and asked in a half-dazed kind of way:

"Are you—*are you Claude?*"

"Yes," I replied. "Surely you remember me!"

"Oh—yes! But—oh! my head—my poor head!" and she placed her hands to her temples and drew a long breath.

"Cannot you recollect—do try and tell me something. Try and describe to me what occurred after you left home. What happened to you?"

She shook her head sadly.

"I can't tell you," she said at last, speaking quite rationally. "I really can't."

"But you must recollect something, dear?" I asked. "Your chatelaine was found dropped from a train on the line near Welwyn station, on the Great Northern Railway."

"On the railway?" she repeated slowly. "Ah!"

"That brings back something to your memory, dearest, does it not?" I inquired anxiously, for I now felt convinced that she remembered something regarding her loss.

"Yes—but—but—well, I can't tell you about it, Claude."

"You can't, dearest—or do you mean that you decline to tell me! Which?"

For a few moments she was again silent. Her blank white face had become almost as its own self, with that sweet, calm smile I had known so well.

"I must decline to tell you," she slowly answered at last. "I'm sorry—but I—I only ask your forgiveness, Claude."

"What is there for me to forgive?" I cried dismayed. "You disappeared. Everybody feared foul play—and—"

"There was foul play!" she interrupted in a hoarse voice.

"By whom?"

"By somebody."

"You know who were your enemies?" I asked quickly. "You must know, indeed."

She nodded in the affirmative, her eyes once more downcast, as though fearing to meet my gaze.

"Cannot you name them—cannot you denounce them, darling? It is your duty," I said in a low, persuasive tone. "Reveal the truth to me, Claude."

"No, never!" was her plain and instant reply.

"Why not?"

"There are reasons."

"What reasons?"

"Reasons of my own. Strong reasons."

"And may I not know them?" I asked with some resentment.

"No, Claude—I can never reveal the truth—not even to you." She was now quite her old self.

"But I thought we trusted each other blindly and implicitly," I protested. "You surely know how deeply and fondly I love you, my darling."

"Exactly," she exclaimed, with one of those sweet and winning smiles of hers. "That's just my point. If you love me as you declare—and I believe you do—then you will trust me, and you will, when I assure you that I cannot tell you what has happened, refrain from further questioning me."

Her argument was, certainly, one to which I could not very well reply. It was a curious argument, and aroused suspicion within me.

She had now grown quite calm, and I could plainly see that she had at last recalled the past, yet she did not intend to make any statement whatever regarding it.

Why? This disinclination to reveal to me the slightest fact was, in itself, most extraordinary. I then found myself reflecting upon the discovery of that secret memorandum in her card-case, and the allegation made against her by the red-tabbed Intelligence officer.

I was on the point of telling her what had been discovered—the purport of the cipher-message and the suspicion which rested upon her. Yet, would that induce her to be frank and tell me the truth? I decided that it would not, therefore I said nothing. Instead, I remarked in a low, sympathetic voice: "I really think, darling, that it is due to me—to your people also—that you should tell us the truth of what happened to you, and of the identity of your enemies."

"I have already told you, Claude," was her quiet response. "If you really love me, then you should at least trust me."

"I do trust you, darling!" I protested quickly. "You surely know that! You are in possession of all the secrets of our invention, and—"

"Ah! the invention—the *invention!*" she cried and, as she suddenly recollected it, her whole manner instantly changed.

She started from her chair crying: "Yes—yes! Now I remember! I remember! It was awful—terrible—ugh! Ah! my poor brain!" and again she drew her hand across her brow. "My poor head!"

She paused but, next second, she turned to me, exclaiming in a tone quite unusual to her:

"No! I shall tell you nothing—I shall say nothing! I do not want to remember—I pray only to forget—yes, to forget all—everything. It is too horrible! Too cruel!" and I saw that my reference to our secret apparatus had stirred another chord in her memory—one that caused her both fierce anger and bitter remorse.

That fact, in itself, revealed to me quite plainly that her tragic experiences, whatever they might have been, had some curious connexion with our invention for the destruction of Zeppelins. Thus, arguing with myself further, I became more than ever convinced that she, in all her innocence, had fallen defenceless into the unscrupulous grip of the terrible but relentless Invisible Hand.

Why did she so persistently withhold from me the truth? What more natural than, knowing the identity of her

enemies, she should seek to denounce and justly punish them? Now she was back at my side she surely could not fear them!

Certainly her demeanour was most mysterious, and I stood there, facing her, utterly bewildered. The expression in her dear face was quite uncanny.

Once again I begged her to tell me something—however slight—regarding what had occurred to her. I told her of our tireless search; of the eager hue and cry; of the publication of her portrait, and of the offered reward for any information.

“Ah!” she replied, with a strange, faint smile, as though of triumph almost. “All that was to no effect. The precautions taken were far too complete. Nobody could have found me—for I was in a living grave.”

“Yes,” I said, hoping that she would reveal to me something more, however vague. “Tell me about it, darling. Do, Roseye.”

“Tell you!” she echoed with angry resentment, putting me from her firmly and staring at me. “No, never!” Then a second later she turned towards the curtained window and shrieked:

“Ah! look!—that accursed woman again! Why do you allow her to come here—if you love me, Claude!”

“She is not here,” I declared firmly. “It is all your silly imagination!”

“She is!” cried my love wildly. “You are lying to me! She’s there! Over there! Kill her—Claude—or she will kill you—ah! *that Woman with the Leopard’s Eyes!*”

Chapter Fourteen.

False or True?

One bright crisp afternoon in mid-December, Roseye, wrapped warmly in her furs, sat beside me in the car as we sped through Leatherhead on our way out to Burford Bridge, where we had decided to have tea.

In the grey wintry light the landscape had become gloomy and depressing. Yet my love chatted merrily as we sped along.

Since that well-remembered evening at my rooms when she had made her sudden reappearance on my threshold from nowhere, the days had been very dark and terribly anxious ones.

After her refusal to tell me anything, I had taken her home, where her sudden arrival had been as a thunderbolt to her parents. But alas! her overstrained brain had then given way, and for three weeks she had remained in bed under the care of Sir Charles Needham, one of the greatest mental specialists in Harley Street.

Thanks to his skill, she had slowly recovered—very slowly it seemed to me.

A dozen times I had chatted with Sir Charles, and he had admitted to me that the case was not only most unusual, but almost unique. He could not obtain from her any lucid account of what had occurred after she had left home on that fatal morning. She had contradicted herself so many times.

Any reference to inventions, to electricity, to trains, to Zeppelins, or to women, sent her into fierce paroxysms of anger. Her attitude was most mysterious. In fact her adventures during the time she had been missing were enveloped in a dark cloud of mystery which, even Barton himself, was unable to penetrate.

Captain Pollock, of course, had been informed and had repeated his red-taped suspicions. But, having no reliable or actual evidence upon which to base his assertions, Barton seemed inclined to disregard them.

I noticed this, putting it down to the usual disagreement which exists in officialdom the world over. No one official has ever been known to be in actual accord with another in another Department. That’s why the clock of State creaks on so rustily in every civilised community.

Arrived at that motoring rendezvous, the Burford Bridge Hotel, we took a stroll in its picturesque grounds on the slope of Box Hill, leafless and deserted on that December afternoon.

Having walked some distance along the gravelled paths, we sat together upon a seat, when her sudden silence caused me to ponder. Since we had been walking she had scarcely uttered a word, and had appeared utterly absorbed.

At last she exclaimed:

“I shall be so very glad when they let me fly again, Claude. I feel ever so much better now—quite my old self again.”

“I’m delighted to hear that,” was my reply. “But you must wait another week or two before you take out your machine. Your man is overhauling it thoroughly. When I was at Hendon yesterday I saw that he had taken down the engine.”

“Yes. I’m most anxious to help you, dear, with your great invention. How is it getting on?”

"Famously," I replied. "Teddy and I have been working hard for the last four days, and have made progress in both lightening the weight of the outfit, and increasing its power. I've ordered a big new dynamo to be constructed on such lines that it can be placed on my machine with a second engine. This engine will either run the dynamo, or the propeller."

"Of course, I quite see," she exclaimed. "You must have a second engine for night-flying. How long will it be, do you think, before you can make a trial flight?" she asked anxiously.

"Early in January I hope, darling."

"And you will let me come with you—won't you? Now promise me. Do," she urged, placing her gloved hand upon my arm, and looking earnestly into my face.

"Yes. I promise," I answered laughing. "Teddy will, no doubt, be very anxious to come, but you shall make the first flight, darling. It is your privilege."

"May I come out to Gunnersbury and help you?" she asked. "I'm quite all right again, I assure you."

"When Sir Charles gives his consent, then you may come," I replied.

"I'll ask him to-morrow," she cried gladly. "I'm so horribly tired of leading an idle life at home. Lionel lunched with us yesterday, and took me out to a *matinée*. It was quite jolly to have such a change. We had tea at the Piccadilly afterwards."

"Lionel!" I exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes. Why? Are you jealous—you dear old thing?"

I drew a deep breath, and she evidently noticed my displeasure.

"Jealous!" I cried with affected nonchalance. "Why should I be?"

"Well—I ought, of course, to have told you before," she answered. "But he's such a good friend of ours, you know."

Good friend. All the suspicions I held regarding him flashed across my mind. Why had he pretended to be an invalid on that day I had sat at his bedside, and yet afterwards had dined at Hatchett's? Why was he ever inquisitive regarding our secret experiments, and why did he appear to possess such unusual knowledge of coming events?

"Yes," I remarked after a pause. "He is, no doubt, a good friend."

I saw that I could learn more by disarming suspicion than by appearing ungenerous.

"You don't mind me going to a *matinée* with him, do you, Claude?" she asked frankly. "Of course, if it has annoyed you, I won't go again. But mother said she thought a theatre would be a pleasant relaxation for me, now that we can't go out at night on account of the darkened streets and the bad winter weather."

"The darkened streets seem to make no difference to pleasure-going," I said bitterly, and purposely disregarding her first question. "Though we are at war—though thousands upon thousands of our poor brave fellows have been killed or maimed in the defence of their homes and their loved ones, yet the London public are still the same. Nothing seems to disturb them. Bond Street, with all its fripperies, is still in full swing: the drapers everywhere are paying big dividends—money is being squandered in luxuries by those who have never previously known such things; jewellers are flourishing, and extravagance runs riot through the land. Men and women go nightly to revues and join in rollicking choruses, even while the death-rattle sounds in the throats of Britain's bravest sons. Ah! Roseye," I said. "It is all too awful. What I fear is that we are riding gaily for a fall."

"No," she said. "I agree in a sense with all you say. But we are not riding for a fall, so long as we have brave men ready to sacrifice their lives in Britain's cause. You, Claude, are one of those," she added, looking straight into my face with an open, frank expression—that love-look which can never be feigned, either by man or by woman.

In that second I realised that at least my suspicion that she had any secret affection for Lionel Eastwell was groundless.

Yet I was, nevertheless, annoyed that he should still mislead her parents by expressions of friendship. True, when I came to examine and to analyse my doubts, I could discover no real and actual foundation for them. Perhaps it was an intuition that possessed me—a strange half-formed belief that Eastwell, though such a cheerful companion, such a real good fellow, and so popular with all the flying-boys, was not exactly of the truly patriotic type which he represented himself to be.

For that reason alone I inwardly objected to Roseye associating with him, yet as he was such a warmly welcomed friend of the family, it was extremely difficult for me to move in any antagonistic spirit.

Within myself I had a fierce and desperate struggle, yet long ago I had realised that if I intended to win I must not show the slightest sign of anger or of suspicion.

So, as we sat there together—gazing across the sloping lawn, so melancholy in that falling December twilight, yet so picturesque and gay on those summer evenings as I had often known it—I crushed down the apprehension that had arisen within me, and laughed gaily with my dainty well-beloved.

Still the facts—the mysterious inexplicable facts—remained. Was it possible that my love desired again to assist in the completion of our experiments in order to know the result of them—and perhaps to betray them?

No. I could not—even in my inward anger at the knowledge that she had spent the previous afternoon with the man I suspected—bring myself to believe that she was really acting in contradiction to the interests of the country.

Somebody has truly said that love is blind. Well, I loved Roseye. And my blindness had been a very pleasant and delightful affliction up to that tragic day of her disappearance.

Through those weeks when her mind had remained unbalanced and unhinged, she had never once made any statement nor had she ever inadvertently admitted anything which might reveal the truth as to where she had been, or the identity of the person whom she held in greatest terror—that Woman with the Leopard's Eyes.

With all the cunning I possessed I had sought to glean from her some fact, any fact however vague, concerning those weeks when she had been missing, but beyond what I have written in these pages, I could gather no single incident.

I was but an ordinary man—one whose father had risen in the medical profession to grasp one of its plums. From being a ne'er-do-well and idler, I had taken up aviation and, after much perseverance, had learned to fly. I suppose I was gifted with ordinary intelligence, and that intelligence had shown me that, now we were at war, the enemy had placed upon the whole country that secret Hand, eager and clutching, to effect and secure our undoing. Its fingerprints, indelible and unmistakable, remained wherever one sought them.

That Hand had been upon me when I had crashed to earth with a wooden bolt in my machine in place of one of steel.

But whether the Hand had really been placed upon Roseye was a problem which utterly defied solution.

That she had suffered had been vividly apparent, yet her absolute and fixed refusal to say anything, to admit anything, or to make any charge against anyone, was, in itself, an astounding feature of what was an extremely curious situation.

I remained that afternoon at Burford Bridge just as dumbfounded and mystified as I had been at that moment when Theed had opened the door of my sitting-room and she had returned from what, in her own words, had been a living tomb.

Why a living tomb? Who had prepared the trap—if trap there had been? Who was the unknown woman, the very mention of whom terrified her—the Woman with the Leopard's Eyes?

Though we sat there and laughed together—for I had affected, I hope successfully, an utter disregard of any suspicion or jealousy of Eastwell—I gazed upon her, and I saw that she had grown nervous and anxious.

Why?

It seemed to me that, with her woman's innate cleverness and cunning—which by the way is never outmatched by that of the mere man—she was reading my own innermost thoughts. She knew my suspicions, and her intention, at all hazards, was to conceal from me some bitter and perhaps disgraceful truth.

This thought aroused within me a relentless hatred of the fellow Eastwell. Nevertheless, once again when I came to examine the actual facts, I could discover really nothing tangible—nothing which ought to lead me, with any degree of right or justice, to an adverse decision.

I had revealed much to Inspector Barton before Roseye's disappearance. I had told him of my suspicions of Eastwell, but I suppose he had—as natural to, an investigator of crime—regarded those suspicions as the natural outcome of a man's jealousy. But they were not, because I had never been jealous of the man—not until we sat there on the lawn before the hotel, and she had told me how she had spent an afternoon at the theatre in his company.

As a matter of fact jealousy had never entered my head. Previously I had always regarded Eastwell as quite a good fellow, full of the true stamina of a patriot. He had been, I knew, full of schemes for the future of aviation in England ever since he had taken his first flap at the aerodrome. Once, indeed, he had serious thoughts, in the pre-war days, of putting up as Parliamentary candidate for a Yorkshire borough. But the matter fell through because the Opposition, on their part, ran a man whose chances were assured—an Anglo-Indian colonel who had passed through every local distinction, from being a member of the local Board of Guardians to becoming a DL. Against such odds Eastwell could not fight. In the great game of politics it has ever been that the local man who spends his money with the local butcher, baker and candlestick-maker, is usually returned with a thumping majority.

The man from afar, the man with a mission, the man who knows his job and will dare to raise his voice in the House to declaim his country's shortcomings, will usually be jeered at as a "carpetbagger" and hopelessly outpaced and outvoted.

I knew this. I had seen it long ago.

As I sat there at Roseye's side I fell to wondering—wondering whether she had actually played an open, straightforward game.

Or was she deceiving me!

Which?

Chapter Fifteen.

Concerns Harold Hale.

Christmas came, but it brought no relaxation to Teddy, or to myself.

We were working hard at our scheme out at Gunnersbury, making experiment after experiment, many being failures, with a few successes.

Of Eastwell we saw nothing, for he had flown up to the north-east coast in order to watch some evolutions being carried out by the anti-aircraft corps, and had not returned.

Sir Charles had now given Roseye permission to assist us in our work and, indeed, one morning in the first week of the New Year she made her first flight since that day of her disappearance.

My mind, however, was by no means at rest. After my own experiences I was careful to examine and to fly her machine several times around the aerodrome before I would allow her to go up. If my machine had been tampered with in the way it had, then there was but little doubt that an attempt might be made against her.

She had gone for about an hour when I saw her returning, a tiny speck in the clear sky coming from the south-west, and flying very high. When at last she landed and I handed her out of the pilot's seat, she put up her big goggles and, flushed with satisfaction, cried:

"I've had such a splendid wind behind me! The weather is quite perfect. How good it feels to be out once again, Claude!"

"Yes, dear," I answered, as we strolled together over towards the hangars, whence one of the school-buses had just begun to flap. "I should like to go up but, as you know, they are busy putting in my second engine for night-flying, and to drive the dynamo. I fear it won't be ready for quite another fortnight yet."

"What speed do you really expect to develop?" she asked, much interested.

"In order to overtake a Zeppelin I must, at least, be able to fly eighty miles an hour," was my reply. "And I must also be able to fly as slowly as thirty-five in order to economise fuel and to render the aim accurate as well as to make night-landing possible."

"Are you certain that you will be able to do it?" she asked, a little dubiously I thought. She knew that, as far as our apparatus for the direction of the intense electric current was concerned, it was practically perfect. Yet she had, more than once, expressed her doubt as to whether my monoplane, with its improvements of my own design, would be able to perform what I so confidently expected of it.

"Of course one can be certain of nothing in this world, dear," was my reply. "But by all the laws of aerodynamics it should, when complete, be able to do what I require. I must be able to carry fuel for twelve hours cruising at low speed, so as to enable me to chase an airship to the coast, if necessary. Further, I must, in order to be successful, be able to climb to ten thousand feet in not more than twenty minutes. You see," I explained, "I am trying to have the engines silenced, and I am fitting up control-gear for two pilots, so as to allow one to relieve the other, and, further, I have designed the alterations whereby either Teddy or myself can have equal facilities to work the searchlight as well as the deadly current."

"I do hope it will be a success. You have had so many failures, dear," she said, as we stood together, watching Teddy make a descent, for he was up testing his engine.

"Yes, that first magnetic wave idea proved a failure," I said regretfully. "And why, I can't yet discover. My first idea was to create an intensified magnetic wave which would have the effect of 'seizing' the working parts of the Zeppelin engines, and putting them out of action. For instance, from your aeroplane you would direct this wave against the Zeppelin and bring its engines gradually into a state of immobility. The natural act of the Zeppelin engineer, on finding that his engine was slowing down, would be to admit more fuel for a few moments. On the sudden release of the arresting medium the engine would 'pick-up' violently and blow the heads out of the cylinders, thereby causing the explosion which we desire to create."

"Your experiments were all in secret," Roseye remarked. "The theory seems sound enough. Curious that it did not work!"

"Yes. Even now I can't, for the life of me, discover the reason," I replied. "Yet we have, happily, tested this new apparatus of ours, and we know it is feasible as soon as ever we can get its weight further reduced, and the ray intensified."

"And the sooner you can do that, the better," my well-beloved declared. "Before very long, at the present rate of increase, we shall, I expect, see Zeppelins of a much greater size."

"True," I remarked, as I watched Teddy spring out of his bus, and make his way across the aerodrome in our direction. "No time should be lost. To be effective the aeroplane will have to be able to climb to 18,000 feet, and even remain aloft at that height for hours to lie in wait for the airship. The airship of one year hence will inevitably be a much more formidable machine than the present Zeppelin."

"But we must be most careful to keep the secret, Claude," she urged. "The enemy must not know it, or they may combat us!"

I was silent for a few moments. Across my mind there flashed the recollection of that strange enemy message in cipher that had been found in her card-case.

What could be the explanation of that mystery? It was plain that the enemy were in possession of some facts and, further, that at all hazards, and regardless of all risks, they intended to discover our secret.

I disregarded her remark, merely answering:

"I fear the Zeppelin menace will be serious in the North Sea before many months. It is only the bad weather which protects us."

The alterations to my machine were being carried on by a first-class firm at Willesden, therefore, at Teddy's suggestion, all three of us ran over in the car in order to inspect the work, which we found progressing most favourably.

The foreman engineer, a big fat, elderly man, just as we were about to leave the premises, called me aside and, in a confidential tone, exclaimed:

"Excuse me, sir. But did you send a gentleman named Hale here?"

"Hale?" I repeated, looking at him in surprise. "I know nobody of that name!"

"Well—here's his card," said the engineer. "He called yesterday afternoon, and told me that you'd sent him, and that he had your authority to look at your machine."

I took the rather soiled card, and saw upon it the name: "Harold Hale—National Physical Laboratory."

I held it in my hand in surprise.

"A Government official!" I exclaimed in wonder. "I gave no such permission!" I declared. "As I have repeatedly said, these alterations you are making are strictly in secret."

"That's what I told him, sir."

"You didn't let him see the work, I hope?" I asked anxiously.

"Not very likely, sir," was the man's reply. "I asked him for a written authorisation, but he said he'd left it in his office. There was a good deal of swank about him, I thought. He seemed to have a swelled head."

"Well—what happened?" I inquired.

"Oh! He became very officious-like—said he was a Government inspector of aircraft, and demanded to see what alterations you were making in your machine. My reply was to tell him that when he brought a letter from you, I'd show him—and not before."

"Excellent!" I said. "Then he didn't produce any credentials?"

"None. But he argued with me for a long time—told me that I had no right to deny him access to information required for official purposes; that I was liable under the Defence of the Realm Act, and all sorts of other bunkum. In reply, I merely told him to go along to the office and see Mr Smallpiece, our manager—whom I knew to be up at the London office," added the foreman with a grin.

"What kind of man was he? Describe him," I urged.

"Well—he was about forty I should say—round-faced, with a little close-cropped black moustache. He was well dressed—a dark-blue overcoat with velvet collar, and a grey plush hat. He came in a taxi."

"Ah! If we could find the driver, we might perhaps discover who he was," I exclaimed.

"Well, sir, I suspected him, somehow. I didn't like him. So I took the number of the taxi. You'll see it on the back of the card."

I looked, and there found a number scribbled in pencil.

"By Jove!" I cried. "Most excellent. I'll soon find out what his movements were. Thank you very much," I added. "Remember nobody is to know anything whatever of the work in progress. That man may have been a Spy."

"That's just exactly what I put him down to be, sir!" declared the foreman. "But trust me. Nobody shall know anything."

When I rejoined Roseye and Teddy they were inquisitive—and very naturally—as to what the foreman had been telling me. But I kept my own counsel, determined to make investigations alone.

We drove back to town and lunched in the restaurant at the Piccadilly Hotel. Teddy had suggested the Automobile Club, but I had overruled him, and we went to the Piccadilly instead. At the club there was far too much flying "shop"—and I wanted time to think.

At three o'clock I ran Roseye home, dropping Teddy on the way, and then returned to Shaftesbury Avenue.

As I entered, Theed told me that his father had been up to say that on the previous night there had been some strangers about the shed at Gunnersbury. He had heard footsteps around the place at about three o'clock in the morning, but on going out he could discover nobody. He had taken out his big heavy Browning pistol which I had bought for him, and he had told his own son that he regretted that he had not caught the intruders.

Here was another source of suspicion! It confirmed my belief that the Invisible Hand had been laid once more upon us, and, further, that whoever directed it was alike most daring and unscrupulous.

"That's most curious!" I said, in reply to Theed. "Your father seems to be having quite a lively time at night out there!"

"Yes. He does, sir. He's convinced that somebody is watching to find out what's going on—spies, he declares."

"No, no, Theed," I laughed, in order to hearten him. "There's far too much bunkum talked about spies, and far too many sensational rumours on every hand. Tell your father that he's becoming nervous. Surely he ought not to be after all his long police service!"

I only uttered those words for effect. I knew that Theed would bully the old man, and tell him that he was suffering from nerves. Every son loves to jeer at his father, be he peer or peasant.

I passed into my room and took up the telephone.

In a few moments I was on to my friend Professor Appleton, the Director of the National Physical Laboratory, that department which, for years, had studied aeronautics.

"I don't follow you, Mr Munro," he said, when I told him the facts. "What name do you say?"

"Hale," was my reply. "H-a-l-e," and I spelt it.

"We've nobody of that name. There must surely be some mistake!"

"But he came with a visiting-card," I said. "He went to the firm of engineers who are making certain alterations in my monoplane, and demanded of the foreman the right to examine what was in progress. He told them at Willesden that he was an official of your Department, sent by you, with authority from myself."

"Well, Mr Munro," replied the professor, in that quiet, matter-of-fact way of his, "this is the first I've ever heard of any Mr Hale. He certainly has never been sent by us. In fact I was entirely unaware, until this moment, that you had any experiments in progress."

"Really, professor, I'm awfully sorry to trouble you," I said. "But I'm only trying to do my little bit—my very small bit—in the war. Thank you for telling me this. One never knows when one meets enemies. The Germans are so clever, so practical, and so subtle."

"They are," he answered. "Be wary, my dear Munro. If you are carrying out experiments upon any extensive scale you may be quite certain that somebody in enemy pay is watching. I have long seen it—long before the outbreak of war."

Here again we had come up against the dead wall of fact.

"Then you think that the stranger was an enemy spy?" I asked.

"Well, in face of the facts, and of what I myself know, I'm perfectly certain of it," the professor said. "I have no knowledge whatever of any person called Harold Hale. He evidently went out to Willesden to try and obtain certain knowledge, yet, by the sturdy attitude of the foreman whom you mention, he was defeated. Truly the wily and dastardly plots of our dear-brother-Germans—as they were called by some irresponsible Englishmen those hot August days of the declaration of war—have been amazing. It seems to me, Munro," added the voice over the wire, "that if you are wary and watchful you may discover something that may be of unusual interest to the Intelligence Department."

Then in my ear there was a loud buzz, followed by a sharp click, and all became silent.

Chapter Sixteen.

At Holly Farm.

Those constant proofs of the enemy's eager inquisitiveness were, I here freely admit, very disconcerting.

We seemed surrounded by spies.

A dastardly attempt had been made to kill me, while some evil—what, I knew not—had happened to my well-beloved. It often struck me as most peculiar why she should preserve that strict secrecy regarding her whereabouts through those weeks when she had been missing.

Her terror of the mysterious woman whom she so constantly described as possessing the eyes of a leopard, together with the unbalanced condition of her brain, were, in themselves, solid proof that she had passed through some horrifying and terrible experience. Besides, had she not admitted that she had existed in what she herself had termed "a living tomb?"

So evident was it that we were being watched by some persons who intended, at all hazards, to discover the secret of our directive electrical apparatus that Teddy and I now adopted a new scheme. Each evening, after concluding our experiments, instead of taking the brown deal box back to my rooms, both my friend and myself disconnected the essential parts of the apparatus, each taking part of it home for safe keeping, thus leaving only the shell to be inspected by any intruder who might make a further visit to the shed.

Old Theed, however, kept a good look out and, as twice he had reported suspicious persons in the vicinity at night, he always carried his Browning pistol.

A fortnight had passed and my newly-arranged monoplane was nearing completion. Daily I went out to Willesden to superintend, and make certain alterations which had occurred to me since I had adopted my new design.

That more Zeppelin raids were expected everybody knew, and none better than myself.

The weather in the last fortnight of January 1916 was bad, and many people were declaring that the German airships would not dare to venture out except in calm conditions.

Some of the boys were discussing that point at Hendon one afternoon.

Teddy was inclined to argue as the public argued, that Zeppelins were affected by weather conditions, and advanced many theories of fogs, clouds, rain, snow, and the barometer.

"Then you don't think inclement weather any protection, Claude?" asked my friend, while the others all listened in silence.

"No," I said. "I quite agree with the arguments put forward on a basis of fact by many writers in the press. Of course Zeppelins, like every other craft not independent of the weather, prefer to sally forth in calms or light winds. But the utmost one can say is, first, that the calmer the weather the likelier a raid is to occur; and, secondly, that raids are less likely to occur in broad moonlight than on dark nights."

"Then, my dear fellow," whispered Teddy into my ear, in a tone so low that the others could not hear, "it is on one of the dark nights that we must make our trial flight—eh?"

"Well, according to the latest yarns," remarked a fellow named Ainley, "the newest Zeppelins are armoured, and these very large craft have a gross lift of over thirty tons."

"That is not much larger than the Zeppelins existing when war broke out," I said, "but, of course, it must be admitted that even a small increase of size enlarges an airship's capabilities and range. The top speed of the new thousand horse-power type is said to be about sixty-two miles an hour, but driving at such high speed must involve a heavy consumption of petrol."

"What about climbing?" asked Ainley. "You've made Zeppelins a study, Munro. Tell us your opinion?"

"Well, in order to escape, more than one German airship has risen, we know, to 10,000 feet, but that was only in case of great emergency, and meant sacrifice of load and great waste of gas. You see, if a Zeppelin is over a town and is discharging her bombs and consuming her petrol, her natural tendency would be to rise. Probably the new type of super-Zeppelin could, I should say, rise 4,000 to 5,000 feet, but it must be remembered that it cannot, with impunity, go to 12,000 or 15,000 feet because of the density of the atmosphere."

"Cover Great Britain with up-to-date 'Archies.' That's my opinion—and one shared by many competent writers on the subject," Ainley remarked, whereupon Teddy and I exchanged glances.

Little did that small group of pilots dream of the great surprise which we had "up our sleeve."

A few days later—the First of February to be exact—the country was startled by the news published in the morning papers that on the previous night no fewer than six Zeppelins had flown over some Midland counties, dropping a large number of bombs, and killing and injuring many innocent women and children.

People who read the accounts stood aghast. Then, once again, came the cry from the big populous centres in the Midlands that warning of the approach of enemy aircraft should be given, and once again the papers were flooded with letters from indignant readers making all sorts of wild suggestions how to combat the Zeppelin peril. On top of this, however, came the welcome news that the L19, one of the raiders, had been found by a trawler in a sinking condition in the North Sea.

At least one of the barbaric baby-killers had got its just deserts.

Personally, I felt deeply moved by this latest dastardly invasion. That there must be an end to "traditions," to political speech-making, to conferences and to promises of imaginary "nests of hornets," was now clear. The homes of Englishmen were threatened with destruction. Germany had adopted a new mode of warfare that must change everything. Therefore, happily, unfettered by red tape, and unattached to any naval or military branch of the Service, but merely an experimenter, I intended, at the earliest moment, to put my directive wave to the crucial test.

During the past week we had not been idle a moment, and Teddy and I, after more failures, had at last been able to reduce the weight of our apparatus by nearly one-half, while we had been able to more than double the intensity of the current since that well-remembered night when we had tested it upon our wireless-pole while strangers had lurked unseen in the vicinity.

My monoplane was at last completed, and ready for delivery. All three of us became greatly excited, for after so

many months of patient experimenting and designing, all was now ready for a practical trial in the air.

Lionel had returned from the North, but was gone to France in connexion with some trials of a new French monoplane at the aerodrome at St. Valéry-en-Caux. Therefore he was in ignorance of our pending experiments.

That we were being closely watched by spies, and that our every movement was being noted, we knew quite well. Indeed, Roseye seemed, curiously enough, to be filled with serious apprehensions.

Because of this, I decided not to fly from Hendon, but to experiment out in the country. Therefore on Thursday, the Tenth of February, in greatest secrecy, I removed my machine in two motor-lorries down to a little place called Nutley, on the borders of those high lands of Ashdown Forest, about eleven miles north of Lewes.

There, after some search, we found a convenient barn at a lonely, out-of-the-world place called Holly Farm, and this we soon converted into a suitable hangar.

The farmer and his wife were quite ready to rent us the house furnished as it stood, so next day we found ourselves in full possession.

Our party consisted of Teddy Ashton, the Theeds (father and son), Roseye, the maid Mulliner, and myself. Roseye and I made another journey by car up to Gunnersbury, and also to my rooms, in order to fetch down the remainder of the apparatus, and on the third day of our arrival all the parts were ready for assembling.

Holly Farm was a small but comfortable old house, with an ancient whitewashed kitchen which had black oak beams across its ceiling. The living-room was typical of the "best room" of the old-fashioned British farmer. In the deep-seated window stood a case of wool-flowers beneath a glass dome, while upon the horsehair-covered furniture were many crocheted antimacassars, and upon the wide, open hearth the farm-hand, an old fellow of nearly eighty, made huge log fires which were truly welcome in that wintry chill.

We had brought with us an ample stock of provisions, for the place we had chosen stood upon one of the highest points, not far from Chelwood Beacon, and miles from any town or village of any size.

From the attic windows which peeped forth from the thatch, we commanded a magnificent view both away north over Surrey, and south across the Downs to the Channel. We were up upon what the Bathy-ographical map of England terms "The Forest Ridge," which lies between the North Downs and the sea.

With old Theed as sentry, we worked away in the farmyard, the doors of which were carefully closed, assembling the machine. That work took three days, though we all strove with a will, leaving Mulliner to act as housekeeper and prepare our meals.

Every day Theed's son took the farmer's cycle and went to get us a paper at Forest Row Station on the line between Tunbridge Wells and Horsham, that being the only connexion we held with the world outside. The good farmer I had paid handsomely, and had frankly told him that we were making some secret experiments with a new aeroplane against the Germans, whereupon he, as a good Englishman, had promised to hold his tongue.

That week passed rapidly—a week of arduous work, of intense anxiety and excitement. Sometimes a part would not fit, or was missing, and then our spirits would instantly flag. Still, after much eagerness—and sometimes a few bad words, *sotto voce*, of course—we gradually got the machine into readiness, and began the engine-test.

So powerful were those twin engines, with their wide throttle range, that their roar could be heard miles away, for I had not been able to silence them. Nevertheless, nowadays, country people are happily so used to hearing the rhythmic throb of aeroplane engines, that they scarcely take notice of it. Mine, however, were unusually fierce, especially when both were working, one for the propeller, and the other either for the searchlight or the directive sparking apparatus.

They had both been run "upon the bench" for many hours, of course, and passed as perfect by the makers. Yet a pilot never likes to trust himself upon something he has not tested with his own hands.

Each one of us had his or her own work, and each one of us worked with a true spirit of patriotism. I had argued that if the Anti-Aircraft Service were unable to bring down Zeppelins, then I, as a private individual and a pilot who had had some experience in the air, was ready to risk my own life in the attempt. And in this Teddy was whole-heartedly with me.

Naturally, Roseye often grew apprehensive. It was because of that she made me repeat many times the promise I had given her—that she should make the first flight with me in the newly-constructed machine.

Each day Teddy and I, aided by young Theed, worked testing, tightening strainers, seeing to pins and washers, adjusting bolts and other things. And at evening, while the Theeds and Mulliner gossiped in the kitchen, we three made ourselves comfortable before the great log fire in the farmer's best room, and sometimes passed the time with cards, a well-thumbed pack of which Roseye had discovered in a drawer.

One evening we had played cards and Teddy had wished us good night, taken his candle and ascended the narrow creaky stairs, worn hollow by the tread of generations of farmers.

"Claude," exclaimed my love, when we were alone, "I feel so very worried over you! I know how keen you are to act your part in this war, and to put your theory to the test. But is it really wise? Remember that you are going to risk your life. The creation of that electric wave, when in the air, may re-act upon your own engines and seize them—or it may create a spark across your own petrol-tank. In that case you would be blown up in mid-air!"

"Ah! That contingency I've already provided for, darling," I assured her. "Have you not seen that my new petrol-tank is a wooden barrel held by wooden bands, so that there is no metal over which to spark?"

"I know. But electricity is such a mysterious force, one never knows what it will do, or how it will take effect."

"You are going a little wide of the mark, Roseye," I laughed. "We know pretty well the limitations of electricity—or rather we three know as much—and perhaps a little more, than the enemy does. My discovery is quite simple, after all. I have found out the means by which to create and to direct a flash of intense electrical current, a kind of false lightning. And that current, sparking over the interstices between the aluminium lattice-work and envelope of a Zeppelin, must certainly ignite the inflammable gas with which the ballonets are filled and which is so constantly escaping."

"Yes, I know," was her answer, as she allowed me to place my arm tenderly about her slim waist.

Then she seemed unduly thoughtful and apprehensive.

"Well?" I asked. "Why are you worrying, darling? I am striving to do my very best for my country. I am going to fight—or attempt to fight—just as valiantly as though I were dressed in khaki, and wore the winged badge of the pilot of the Royal Flying Corps. Indeed, my chance is better. I have no Flight-Commander to look to for orders. I am simply a handy man of the air who has, I trust, thought out a feasible plan."

"Your plan is most excellent, Claude," she admitted. "But what I fear is the great personal risk and peril to yourself."

"There's none," I laughed. "You, my dear, have no fear when you are flying—even at high altitudes. Neither have I. Both of us are used to being up, and our machines are part of ourselves. I never think of danger; neither do you, Roseye. So don't let us discuss it further," I urged.

Then, in order to turn our conversation into a different channel, while I still held her hand as she sat upon that old black horsehair couch with me at her side, I said:

"I've just been reading what is termed a hot-aircraft poem in the *Aeroplane*. I wonder if I recollect the concluding lines. They run something like this:—"

The Scout makes no question of Ays or Noes,
But right or left, as banks the Pilot, goes
And he who dropped One down into the Field—
He knows about it all—he knows, he knows!

Here with a Dud Machine, if Winds allow,
A Flask of Wine, a Load of Bombs—and Thou
Before me sitting in the Second Seat—
A Midnight Raid is Paradise enow.

And when I turn upon the Homeward Trail,
Dreaming of Decorations, Cakes and Ale,
How bitter on the First Day's Leave to find
My Name spelt wrongly in the "Daily Mail!"

"Ah!" protested my love. "You really don't take it with sufficient seriousness, Claude!"

"I do," was my quick protest. "I am not worrying about failure: I am only anticipating success."

"Do not be over sanguine, dear, I beg of you."

"I never have been," was my reply. "To-morrow I shall make the first test in the air—and you shall come with me, as I have for so long promised."

Chapter Seventeen.

Not Counting the Cost.

From our aviation map—a plan of the country unfamiliar to most people—we had ascertained that about fourteen miles away, in a direct line due east from Holly Farm, and about three miles beyond the little town of Mayfield, lay a small village called Stockhurst.

The reasons why it attracted us were twofold. First the church was situated alone at some little distance from the village, and, secondly, it possessed an unusually high, pointed spire.

Therefore on the following morning Teddy and I took the car, and after going round by the high road which took us eighteen miles, through Maresfield, Buxted, and across Hadlow Down, we at last, after going along a picturesque lane, then brown and leafless, arrived at the long, straggling village street of Mayfield, a quiet old-world place, far removed from the noise and bustle of the world at war. Most of the homely cottages were thatched, and the whole place was typical of the charm of rural Sussex. As we passed slowly along we saw upon our right an ancient comfortable-looking inn with its big stable-yard at the side, the "AA" badge and a sign which told us that it was "The George." Yet, farther on, an incongruous note was struck by a glaring red-brick shop called "The Stockhurst Stores."

That morning was bright and crisp, with a clear blue sky. Indeed, before we had left we noted that the barometer was rising, and that the flight conditions were hourly improving.

A little way out of the village we came upon the fine old ivy-covered church, with a tall spire of a type similar to that of St. Martin's in Trafalgar Square, while the dimensions of the aisle showed that it had been built in the long ago medieval days when Stockhurst had been one of the important market-towns of that district, until other and more convenient markets had sapped its trade, and it had slowly dwindled down to an obscure little place known only by reason of the monumental brasses and beautiful stained glass of its church, which Thomas Cromwell had happily spared.

Pulling up the car, I placed a file, a pair of heavy cutting-pliers, a piece of asbestos cloth and a short length of copper-wire cable in my pockets and, with Teddy, wandered through the graveyard in pretence of inspecting the exterior of the beautiful castellated fabric. By some arched windows we saw that its earlier portions were undoubtedly Norman, while others were of the Perpendicular Period. These we examined, and discussed, in order not to attract the undue attention of anybody in the vicinity.

We tried all the doors, much gratified, in secret, to find them locked. It proved the absence of any sexton or cleaner.

During our inspection of the church tower we had noticed the exact spot where descending from the spire ran the narrow flat strip of copper connecting the lightning-conductor with its earth-plate. We sauntered back to that place, where in the angle of the ancient flint wall, beside one of the heavy buttresses the metal strip went straight down into the turf. The copper was much oxidised, for it had been placed there many years ago for the protection of the steeple during thunderstorms.

"We mustn't lose time," I muttered to Teddy.

"Can you see anybody about?"

"No. All's clear," he declared. "I'll watch, while you do it!"

I went quickly across to the wall and at a spot about five feet from the ground behind a big laurel bush I pulled the strip away from the wall with my fingers and worked at it with file and pliers, until I had severed it.

Then, at about a foot nearer the ground, I made a nick in the copper with my file and bent it until it broke, leaving a portion of the conductor about a foot long in my hand. This I at once concealed beneath the bush, while I placed a strip of asbestos cloth against the wall beneath each of the loose ends of the copper conductor, the latter holding the protective cloth in position upon the wall. Then, when I had concluded the work to my satisfaction, I pushed back the shrub so as to conceal as far as possible the damage to the lightning-conductor, and rejoined my friend.

"I'm afraid the rector wouldn't much approve of our work—if he knew," laughed Teddy, as we returned to the car.

"No," I said, adding, "I suppose you'll spend a pretty quiet day in this place, won't you?"

"Yes. The George looks comfortable, but not too cheerful," was Teddy's reply. "What time shall you fly over?"

"Just after ten. The whole village should be in bed by then. You go out of the hotel just before the place shuts, and wander up here and watch. Theed, after seeing us off, will jump into the car and come over for you at once. Meanwhile, after the experiment, you can employ your time in connecting up the broken conductor with the bit of wire cable. I've left it all ready under the bush."

"By Jove, Claude!" he said enthusiastically. "I shall be standing there eager to see whether it sparks across when you turn on the current."

"I shall do so four times—judging the distance at five hundred, one thousand, two thousand, and three thousand yards," I said. "Then I shall flash you two shorts from the searchlight to show you that I've finished. Understand?"

"Quite. Afterwards I shall wait about for Theed to pick me up," Teddy replied. "I do hope we shall meet with success."

"We ought. The points of the lightning-conductor should pick up the intense current. We've proved the theory on our insulated guys upon the wireless-pole," I said in confidence. "But, of course, we don't want to attract too much attention here. So make up some feasible story at the hotel after I've left you there."

Ten minutes later we were in the old-fashioned bar-parlour of the George, where the tables were highly polished by the spilt ale of generations, and where the landlady, a buxom widow in a cap, greeted us courteously.

I stayed for a quarter of an hour, and smoked a cigarette. Then, rising, I said loudly:

"Well—you go over and see about it. Make the best bargain you can. But don't pay more than ninety to ninety-five. Jack will run over in the car for you sometime this evening."

And so giving the landlady the idea that my friend was about to go out and do business with some neighbouring farmer, I went out and drove as rapidly as I could back to Holly Farm.

That afternoon I spent with Theed tuning up in the yard, running the dynamo, making tests of the searchlight, manipulating the dual controls, and seeing to my altimeter and other instruments. I intended that, as far as was humanly possible, there should be no hitch of any kind.

Rosey, in her mechanic's overalls, helped me eagerly. Her small hands, so white and delicate at the Savoy or the

Carlton, were now oily and grimy, and across her chin was a smudge of oil, giving her an almost weird and comical appearance.

"Well?" she asked. "And what does it matter, pray? I haven't my best frock on, nor my newest *crêpe-de-chine* blouse."

Yes. She was a real "sport." She knew as much of aircraft as most pilots in the services, and could effect a repair as well as most of the cigarette-smoking mechanics of the Royal Flying Corps. Women, when they take to flying aeroplanes, are often too daring, and take risks at which men would hesitate. Roseye was an illustration. I had often stood in breathless fear watching her bank in a manner that I should never have dared to, yet she had come to ground lightly as a bird, and hopped out of her seat laughing with the pure joy of living the exhilarating life in the air.

Truly the cobwebs are blown away from the brains and lungs of those who fly. Indeed, it is a chilly proceeding, even when indulged in during the dog days. Motoring without a wind-screen is considered rough by many people, but let them fly an aeroplane at forty miles an hour at 8,000 or 10,000 feet on any day. It is always chilly in the air, and by our thermometer that afternoon we both knew that we should have a cold night-flight.

Beyond the little front garden of the farm, a square ill-kept grass patch, bordered by neglected standard roses, was a big grass-field, while beyond lay the open down sloping away to the valley. At each corner of the field we had already placed big acetylene lights, ready charged, so that after we left, old Theed could light them to show us our landing-place, for a descent at night is always dangerous, especially if there is no landmark and the night be dark.

Through those exciting days of our sojourn at Holly Farm, I, assisted by Teddy and Roseye, had worked night and day attending to every detail. Indeed, at six o'clock that very morning—almost before the grey dawn—I had gone round to these four lamps, the intense white light of which would be visible for many miles, and lit and tested them in order to assure myself that all was in working order.

The afternoon wore on. Mulliner brought us out cups of tea into the yard, for we were far too anxious and busy to think of the afternoon gossip. The days were lengthening, of course, but we found them all too short. This final experiment that we were undertaking would prove whether, after all, we had any effective defence against the terror of the night—or not.

Try how I would, I could not put entirely away from myself the growing suspicion that, if spies had been so watchful, they would now be increasingly eager and ingenious in their endeavour to combat us. Once I laughed at those who told us there were German spies about us—I denounced them as scaremongers. But hard facts, shown to us in black and white, shown to us in prosecutions and actual executions of spies, had convinced me—as they must have convinced every Briton unless he were a pro-German or a lunatic—that dastardly secret agents existed even in the most unsuspected quarters, and that the Invisible Hand had been responsible for many a disaster to the British arms on land and at sea.

Would that Hand still bring disaster upon myself?

Daylight faded—and quickly. The evening was calm and clear, with an orange glow of sunset in the west.

All was in readiness. My machine, with its big dual engines, its searchlight, its dynamo, and that most deadly apparatus contained in the brown deal box, stood in the yard running like clockwork, all its controls in order, every strainer taut, every nut locked, and the wooden petrol-container filled.

All that was required was to wheel it out into the big grass-field and give the propeller a start.

Roseye and I ate a frugal meal alone. Mulliner, who served it, must have commented inwardly upon our unusual silence. We generally chattered merrily. Truth to tell, my mind was just then too full for words. If the test succeeded, then all would be well, and Great Britain could defy the enemy's Zeppelins. If it failed, I would not only be ruined—for I had borrowed money to reconstruct my machine—but I should know that all my theories had been blown to the winds, and that the enemy's bombastic threats to set London in flames were no idle ones.

Roseye, reading my thoughts, became also pensive. The hour of our great trial was now at hand.

Even as we sat at table we could hear the quick throb of the engines for a few moments, and then they were cut off. Theed was busy getting everything in order.

Darkness had fallen.

There was scarcely a breath of wind; the stars shone brightly in the steely-blue heavens, and the barometer was steadily rising.

"A splendid night for flying!" I declared, and as Roseye stood with me upon the threshold my arm stole lightly around her waist.

"Yes, dear," was her reply, as she stood gazing away at the surrounding hills silhouetted against the night sky.

The silence was intense. From the distance, far away from the depth of the opposite valley, came the noise of a train on the main line which ran between London and the sea.

We both looked across the starlight scene, and wondered.

It was only half-past eight, so we went back into the farmer's best room, and sat before the logs chatting.

In those strenuous days we were seldom alone together. Yet, full well, I knew how she reciprocated my affection, and how her every thought was for my welfare.

Yes. We loved each other truly, and my life would have been one of the most perfect bliss were it not for that gulf of suspicion that had been opened by her inexplicable disappearance. That hour, however, was not the one in which to recall it, so I crushed down its bitter memory. Roseye was mine—and mine alone.

“You really want to go up with me to-night, darling?” I asked, as I again sat beside her upon the frayed old couch before the big blazing fire. “You are not afraid?”

“I fear nothing, Claude, when I am with you,” she replied, raising her big blue eyes to mine. And then my lips met hers in a long, rapturous caress.

In the dim light of the cheap paraffin lamp upon the table I saw that her expression was one of complete trust and devoted affection. How could I doubt her further?

And yet the motive of her absolute refusal to tell me the truth concerning where she had been was veiled in mystery. It was an enigma that had puzzled me to distraction.

“Remember, darling,” I said, “you have never before flown at night. We have no landmarks, and can only guide by the compass. Towns and villages which, in normal times, can be easily identified, are now blotted out by the lighting regulations, and even when we find our church spire, our landing-place here may be difficult to discover.”

“But it will be lighted, and we shall see it,” she said. “If we steer by the compass for Stockhurst, Teddy—hearing our approach—will show us flashes from his lamp.”

“I hope so. He’s had a weary job I expect in that dead-alive place all day,” I laughed.

“No doubt. But by this time he’s active enough,” she replied.

And then we both lit cigarettes, for she was very fond of my own particular brand—one that I had found in the ward-room of one of our battle-cruisers before the war, and had always smoked since.

The cheap American clock upon a side table crept slowly on. Both of us were impatient. We waited still half-past nine, when Theed came in to report that all was in readiness. Would I help to wheel out the machine into the grass-field, he asked.

This I did. The three of us, including Roseye, put out the monoplane into position, pointing eastwards away from the trees, and facing the valley where, in the bright starlight, we saw that a faint grey mist was now rising.

Afterwards we returned into the farm-house and I helped Roseye into her flying-suit, with its strapped wind-cuffs and wide belt. She loosened her wealth of hair and, twisting it up deftly, without pins, placed it beneath her leather helmet, after which she stuffed her padded gloves into her pocket.

“It’s going to be cold,” I said. “I hope you’re warm enough, darling?” I asked anxiously.

“Quite,” she assured me. “My suit is wind-proof.”

Very quickly I also got into my kit—a kit I had used for months, because in an experiment of that sort one wants to be hampered with nothing new. Then, when we were both ready for the flight, we went into the field and, climbing into our seats, buckled the straps across us.

Theed junior and his father were attending to us, the former being at the propeller and in readiness.

“As soon as we’ve gone, jump into the car and go out for Mr Ashton,” I said to the younger man. “You’ll find him somewhere near Stockhurst church.” He knew the road, for he had gone over it on the previous day in order to explore.

“Right, sir! I’ll get away at once and leave father to light the flares for landing,” was his reply.

Then, one after the other, I made tests. First, I ran the engine, then I switched on the small light which showed our compass, the map in its celluloid cover, the altimeter, and the other instruments ranged before me. Afterwards I switched on the searchlight which for a few seconds shot a white beam of intense brilliancy towards the sky.

Having proved to my satisfaction that both engines the and dynamo were working well, I shouted the word to Theed.

In a few seconds there was a sudden throb of the engine which instantly developed into such a roar that to speak to Roseye at my side became quite impossible.

We shot forward into the darkness, a sharp gust of wind struck our faces, we bumped for a few seconds along the ground, and then left the earth, the noise of the powerful engines almost splitting the drums of our ears.

I saw before me a belt of trees and, pulling over the lever, rose above them, described a semicircle, and then, watching my compass, rose at once and headed for Stockhurst church, where I knew Teddy was anxiously awaiting our arrival.

I know that Roseye, with the icy wind cutting her eyes, lowered her goggles, but after that I fear I became too occupied to notice anything further.

It was a wild night-flight, and I knew that both our lives were now in jeopardy.

Chapter Eighteen.

The Tri-Coloured Rings.

Almost as soon as we rose we saw straight before us a beam of reddish light moving swiftly northward in the direction of London.

For a few seconds it was shut off, shone out again, and then went out. I knew it to be from a railway engine, the stoker of which had been firing up. Moving trains, notwithstanding the pulling down of carriage-blinds, and the darkening of railway platforms so that persons break their legs in descending, or getting out at a supposed platform and falling upon the line, form the best guides for aircraft at night. By following an express locomotive, which must be stoked at frequent intervals, and looking out for the coloured signal-lights along the line, an airman can always reach the London area. I had, when night-flying at Hendon before the war, often guided myself home by following an up-express.

So terrific was the roar of my new engine that I could only communicate with Roseye by signs.

I pointed at the moving train and, understanding my gesture, she nodded.

As we rose higher and yet higher into the calm starlit sky, the earth beneath us became increasingly mysterious and misty. Here and there dim lights showed, single lights of scattered cottages unseen by rural constables, or improperly obscured lights from the larger houses.

Soon some red and green lights showed away on our left, and I knew that in the valley there ran the main railway line to London.

By day, at an altitude of 2,500 feet, the whole surface of the earth appears perfectly flat, hills and valleys seeming to be on the same level. Therein lies one of the dangers of aerial navigation. The contour of the earth is quite indistinguishable when one is half a mile high, therefore the altimeter is not of very great use—and more especially so at night. The instrument only records the number of feet above sea-level, and not above the earth. Thus, a pilot flying by night can very easily pass over a valley and suddenly find himself encountering a range of high hills with a fatal belt of trees or row of houses.

Such is exactly what happened to us on that memorable night. We crossed the valley, and as I steered straight by compass in the direction of Stockhurst at about thirty miles an hour, I had dipped and of a sudden I found myself nearing a dark, high hill. Just in time I shot up and cleared, I believe only by inches, the roof of a house.

Roseye was quick to notice our sudden ascent and how we skimmed over the house and the trees of somebody's park as we kept our rather zigzag course.

A clever writer upon aeroplanes has, with much truth, pointed out that the natural course of a machine is never a direct one, and if a line could be drawn between two given points it would be found that first it veered slightly to the left of this line, then gradually worked back to the true direction, afterwards heading off to the right and again returning. Thus the true course is in the form of a continuous series of left and right-hand semicircles.

These eccentric semicircles we were making with the engine running like clockwork. There were few clouds and, therefore, the chance of a nasty "nose-dive" was not to be apprehended. Once a machine gets into clouds it behaves like a ship in a stormy sea, and clouds can easily be met with after height of three thousand feet.

After passing over the hill I dropped again to 2,000 feet, that being the best height to fly on a crosscountry journey. There now opened out to our view a quantity of lights, among which were the red glare of a furnace, and a long row of small lights which evidently marked the main street of some little town in defiance of the "order."

I planed down till I could clearly see the obscured lights of a railway station, and by my map, over which my little four-volt lamp was shining, I decided it to be Uckfield. I therefore realised that I was bearing too far south and, further, just at that moment I had a "bump"—as we call it—or rather I ran into a patch of rarefied air which caused the machine to plunge heavily and tilt.

Righting her, I rose again rapidly to 3,000 feet to get out of the danger-zone and, turning east, discerned in the darkness below me yet another cluster of lights which I approached rapidly, having decided that it must be Buxted.

Still steering south-east I could see, away on my left in the far distance, a number of scattered lights in a long line, denoting where Hastings and St. Leonards lay. Beyond those lights, away upon the dark sea, showed the long beam of a ship's searchlight moving slowly in an arc in the Channel.

Roseye, seated beside me, touched my arm and pointed to it. Again I nodded in response.

By the map I saw we were now approaching that high ridge which stretches from Heathfield across to Burwash, the ridge which overlooks Hailsham and the Pevensey Levels. My altimeter then showed 2,800 feet and all went well for ten minutes, or so, until just as I approached the railway line near Heathfield, we became suddenly blinded by the white beam of a searchlight from below.

Roseye put up both hands to her eyes, but I bent my head and kept on my course.

I saw her put out her hand as though to turn our own searchlight downwards and gripped her wrist, preventing her.

I knew that our approach had been heard by the anti-aircraft listening-post on Brightling Beacon, and that, having picked us up, they would see the tri-coloured rings beneath my planes. Truly it was fortunate that I had had them painted there, for I knew that upon the Beacon they had a very useful anti-aircraft gun.

Beneath my breath, however, I cursed the men with that searchlight for, following us, it blinded us. My first impulse was to turn away from it but, next instant, I realised that to do so might arouse suspicion below and they might open fire. Therefore I kept on though, so intense was the glare, that I could see nothing of my instruments before me, and Roseye sat with her gloved hands covering her face.

As suddenly as it had opened upon us, the light was shut off. The naval gunners on duty below had evidently satisfied themselves that we were not enemies, and therefore, finding myself too far south for Mayfield, I made a semicircle until I again came across a railway line going north. I decided that if I followed it I must find Mayfield station.

It struck me that already Teddy must be hearing my approach. My luminous wrist-watch showed it to be now past ten. Curious how very quickly time passes in the air if there is but little wind, and one's engine is running well. It only seemed as though we had left Holly Farm a few minutes before. Since we had left I had spoken no word with my well-beloved, the roar of the exhaust and the shrill whistling of the icy wind preventing conversation. Yet I could see her well-wrapped-up figure silhouetted against the sky as, seated alert and watchful, she was now on the look out for Teddy's signal.

That we were flying far too high I suddenly realised, therefore I planed down to about 900 feet, and at that altitude we sailed over Mayfield which was, however, in complete darkness, save for a cycle travelling along its main street, and a couple of lights at the station whither the green and red signals had guided us. Passing Mayfield I still descended to 600 feet, and then again circled round, but neither of us could discern any flashing signal.

Teddy had with him a strong electric torch, and we had arranged that he should give me a number of "shorts" followed by a number of "longs" in order to tell me that all was clear.

But we could discern no signal!

Still lower I descended and circled about until I had actually picked out the pointed spire of Stockhurst church.

Yet there was still no sign.

Roseye saw how puzzled I had become, and extended her palms to denote dismay. What could have gone wrong? Where was the hitch?

Back I turned over Mayfield again, and once more took certain bearings, for night-flying is always fraught with many difficulties, and one can so very easily get lost. I consulted both map and compass very carefully, satisfying myself at last that I had made no mistake.

I had certainly picked up Stockhurst. But where was the agreed sign?

Something surely must have happened! Why did not Teddy show us his light?

The time was quite correct. We were only ten minutes late. I knew my friend too well to put his silence down to mere forgetfulness.

No. Something had happened!

Both of us strained our eyes into that black, cavernous space below, as we hovered in mid-air full of hesitation and perplexity.

There was but one thing to do, namely, to make our way back, for a landing there was quite impossible, scarcely anything being distinguishable save a small winding stream. Besides, I was without knowledge as to whether the wind had changed since I had left the farm. It probably had.

Suddenly, flying as low as I really dared, I struck out a little to the south making a complete circle of Stockhurst, but avoiding Mayfield. I had no desire to rouse the town again by the noise of my exhaust, for in those days of Zeppelin peril the throb of aircraft engines was always alarming, and more especially at night.

Three times did I circle round, but failed to attract Teddy's attention.

Suddenly Roseye nudged me and pointed eagerly down to the left. Her quick eyes had detected a tiny white light showing, which looked like short and long sparks.

My heart gave a bound. Yes, it was Teddy!

Yet we were now so high again, to avoid the surrounding hills, that his flash-lamp only looked a tiny point of light.

He flashed some message in Morse, but I only got a few letters.

Would he repeat it? We both watched breathlessly, as I headed the machine in his direction.

Yes!

Again the light spoke in the "longs" and "shorts" of the Morse code, which both Roseye and I could understand.

Together we read it.

"Return in an hour," he signalled.

Why? I wondered. What could have occurred?

Somehow, by the appearance of his light, I thought he must be signalling in secret, and not in the open.

He would expect some acknowledgment from me, telling him that I understood.

Therefore I elevated our searchlight so as to shine upward, instead of below. Then, touching the lever, a long beam of white light shot skyward for a second.

Afterwards I shut it off, and made straight away due southward by the compass, greatly puzzled.

What could possibly have happened?

Chapter Nineteen.

Flashes in the Night.

It was most fortunate that I had taken in plenty of petrol.

Picking up the railway line close to Mayfield, I followed it due south towards Heathfield. For half the distance I could see that it ran through woods, for the moon was rising, and gave us a slightly better view of what lay below us.

When just over Heathfield Station the searchlight from the anti-aircraft post on Brightling Beacon again shot up suddenly, and in a few moments was upon us. I was flying quite leisurely, and banked so that they might get another good view of the rings on my planes.

They evidently recognised me through their glasses, for very quickly they shut off their light and I continued, finding my way by the coloured signal-lights of the line from London to Eastbourne.

The land beneath us was low-lying and pretty level. There, before me, I saw a few half-obscurd lights denoting Hailsham town, then the railway lights of Polegate junction came into view, and still farther in the distance the row of scattered lights, some of which were moving, denoted the position of Eastbourne.

The authorities may make all sorts of complicated "lighting orders" with power to the police to enforce them, but it is next to impossible to black out any even moderately populous area.

While a hundred residents will effectually darken their windows, there are the few thoughtless ones who burn gas beneath their skylights, or who do not sufficiently cover one window—often a staircase-window—or servants who go to bed neglectful to draw their curtains across the blinds.

Then there are shaded street lamps burning at dangerous corners, or at cross-roads, and these, provided the ground is wet after rain, reflect a zone of bright light which acts as an excellent guide to aviators aloft.

In the increasing light of the moon I made out the big gasometers of Eastbourne which stood out as a landmark in the direction of Langney, but, leaving them on my left, I steered a course for the coast over Willingdon Hill, my altimeter again showing 2,800 feet.

I flew slowly and leisurely for fear of our anti-aircraft guns.

As I expected, a few moments later the listening-post on Beachy Head, having heard my approach, was instantly on the alert, and the beam from their searchlight shot up, searching slowly about for me, because at that moment I had run into a bank of cloud and became obscurd.

We were suddenly both enveloped in darkness, our only light being that little bulb set over the map. Still I kept blindly on, hoping to get out of it quickly. Yet the moments seemed hours as we went along. I increased the speed, but so long were we in that damp obscurity, that I knew that we had entered the cloud at its greatest length.

At last we emerged once more into the cold bright night. The atmosphere of the cloud had chilled us both to the bone, but as we emerged the long white ray fell quickly upon us. Then I swerved, so as to exhibit to the naval watchers the rings upon my planes and decreased my speed to show that I had neither desire nor intention to escape. Indeed, I hovered there for a few moments in order to let them have good sight of me. This satisfied them, and once again the long white ray was shut off.

In the increased light I found that road which most motorists know so well, the steep and often winding way which runs near Beachy Head down to Friston and on to Seaford. Then, flying over Newhaven, I kept on to Rottingdean and headed for the scattered and ill-obscurd lights of Brighton.

Flying at 3,000 feet I passed over the central station at Brighton, striking north to Lewes, with my eyes constantly upon my watch. From Lewes I followed the right-hand line of railway which I saw, by the map, would lead me past Barcombe to Uckfield. And with my engine running well I again, on gaining Buxted, struck due east in search of another line of railway which would lead me to Mayfield.

Here, I had some difficulty. I found a winding river, and believing it to be the Rother, took my bearings by it. Ten

minutes later I found I had made an error, and had to return to Buxted and take fresh bearings, which eventually led me once again back over Mayfield.

An hour had passed, and I now again began to search for Teddy.

By the bearings I had taken before, I soon picked up the spire of Stockhurst and, descending to about 500 feet, again circled around it.

I had only made one circuit when we both saw Teddy's flashes, and then we knew that all was in readiness. *The moment of our great experiment had come!*

Roseye, who had taken careful instructions beforehand, prepared to manipulate the levers, while I flew the machine.

To judge distance in the darkness is always extremely difficult, especially when one is flying an aeroplane. Nevertheless, I had already made calculations and, assisted by my previous experiences of night-flying, began the trial.

I had been travelling at sixty miles an hour for the past few minutes, but I now slowed up and, dropping still another hundred feet or so, circled out until I gauged that I was about five hundred yards distant from the tall, thin steeple.

While I pointed the nose of the machine in the direction of the church, Roseye set the secondary engine and dynamo at work. Then I drew over the little red-painted switch on the box close at my hand ere Roseye was aware of my intention. I left it there for a full minute, directing the invisible wave of electricity upon the lightning-conductor of the church. Then I released it, and wondered what result the watchful Teddy had observed.

Circling the steeple again still higher, and going out farther, to what I judged to be a thousand yards distant, I repeated the experiment three times, in order that Teddy could make accurate observation. Roseye pulled over the lever the last time, for at that moment we had a "bump."

I wondered if he was witnessing sparks flying across that intervening space of the severed lightning-conductor—sparks of twelve inches, or so.

Or was he watching and seeing nothing—in which case it would be proved that the invention, when put to practical test in the air, was a failure.

A further thousand yards away I proceeded, and thrice again Roseye pulled over the switch, peering down below, as though in order to try and get sight of the flashes of electricity behind that convenient laurel bush.

For a few moments I made a rapid spiral ascent until I judged that I was a full three thousand yards in a westerly direction from the church steeple.

Then I myself made the contact with our apparatus, directing the intensely powerful current towards the church.

Thrice I repeated it. Then, once more I went back to a thousand yards, and again switched on the current. Afterwards I made two rapid "shorts" with the searchlight, to indicate to my friend that I had finished and, turning tail, set forth straight back to try and find the spot where old Theed had lit the acetylene lamps to mark the field wherein we could land.

Being so late, all lights of the villages were now practically extinguished except railway signal-lights.

In consequence, a great difficulty confronted me.

With Roseye seated at my side, motionless and wondering whether our experiments had proved successful, I flew on until, of a sudden, we entered a second bank of cloud, all the vista before and below us becoming obscured. Since we had started some drifting clouds had blown across, and in one of these we now found ourselves. To rise higher would mean that I could not pick up any landmarks, or perhaps not see the flares awaiting us.

We knew that young Theed had found Teddy with the car, for he had flashed on his electric headlights three times to us as signal.

I confess that, at the moment, I became greatly puzzled for, on emerging from the cloud, I found myself over a big patch of forest, with rising ground behind it. My altimeter showed three thousand three hundred feet, and before me were other clouds drifting rapidly in my direction.

A biting wind having sprung up I, for a full half-hour, lost my bearing altogether. Roseye, practised airwoman that she was, had quickly discerned my perplexity and danger. Yet she showed no fear—trusting in me implicitly.

There seemed to be a quantity of rising ground about me, therefore I decided to ascend farther, first to avoid the oncoming clouds that were drifting low, precursory of rain or snow, and secondly, from a higher altitude to be able to pick up hoping, Theed's flares guiding us home.

I rose to five thousand eight hundred feet when, on my left, I saw in the far distance a red stream of light from the furnace of a locomotive, but on what line of rail it was I could not decide. Lost I was in that unbounded space of darkness—lost until I saw half a dozen scattered street lamps darkened on top and shedding slight patches of light upon the pavement, when I suddenly realised that below me lay a small town. I recognised station lights! I had seen those once before that evening. It was Uckfield!

While lost I had flown in a complete circle quite unconsciously, as every airman flies. But now, steering again by

compass, it was not long before I at last saw those four tiny points of white light below—the acetylene lamps over which old Theed was keeping guard.

At such a height were we that the flashes looked mere specks.

Roseye nudged me, and pointed down at them, while I nodded a response.

Just at that moment we saw, a tiny pin-point of light flashing near the lamps, and knew it to be old Theed signalling to us, fearing lest at that height we might miss our landmark and go forward.

He could not see us, but of course he must have been hearing our powerful engine for some time.

In response, I gave one short flash with the searchlight, and then commenced to plane rapidly down, circling above the field marked for our landing.

A belt of firs stood on the west side I knew, and these I was compelled to avoid. My additional difficulty was one that always confronts a pilot when landing at night, namely, an ignorance of the direction of the wind. By day the pilot can tell this from the way in which smoke blows, the currents of air waving across growing crops, and by other signs which in the darkness are not available. A good landing should be against the wind, so as to break the impact of coming to earth. Yet by night, if there be no mark in the aerodrome telling the pilot the direction of the wind, he has to take chances and risk it.

This I did. I came down in a rapid spiral over Holly Farm and, circling the field twice, alighted carefully, facing the front of the house. Unable to judge the distance exactly we, of course, bumped along a little, but I succeeded in steadying her, and a moment later we were stationary on terra-firma after nearly two hours and a quarter in the air.

Instantly I shut off the engine and then, turning to Roseye, uttered the first word.

“Well?” I asked, taking her gloved hand in mine.

“Splendid, Claude!” she cried enthusiastically.

“Splendid! Absolutely splendid!”

I saw that she was pinched with cold, half-frozen indeed, and very cramped, therefore I unstrapped her, and lifted her out into the arms of old Theed, who came running up to us.

Then I hopped out myself and, taking my love’s arm, we walked up to the farm where we were soon before the huge log fire in the farmer’s best room, while Theed went round to extinguish the lamps.

Then, as we stood before the fire to thaw, still in our flying clothes, I drew her dear face towards mine and kissed her fondly upon the lips.

“I wonder why Teddy sent us away for an hour, as he did?” she queried.

“Don’t know, dearest,” was my reply. “He’ll be back very shortly, and will tell us what happened.”

At that moment Mulliner entered with two cups of hot cocoa, a beverage at that hour and in those circumstances very welcome.

“You managed splendidly!” Roseye declared. “Isn’t it awfully exciting to be up in the dark! Nobody who hasn’t been up at night would ever dream how weird and yet how lovely is the feeling—would they?”

“It’s far worse with these new lighting orders,” I remarked. “One gets so few landmarks. That’s why I lost my way more than once.”

Scarcely had I uttered those words when Teddy, in his big brown motor-coat and muffler, burst into the room.

Dashing across to me he wrung my hands with wild enthusiasm.

“It works, Claude!” he cried. “The conductor sparked across at every test. Even the last, at three thousand yards, the spark was quite an intense one!”

“Then we haven’t failed!” I cried breathlessly.

“No. I should rather think not!” was my friend’s eager reply. “Why, at five hundred yards the laurel bush got badly burnt, and at a thousand it made a fearful crackle and was alight.”

“But it really acted at three thousand—you say?”

“It acted perfectly—and over a twelve-inch spark, too!”

“Then it shows that, after all, we can direct the electric current and thus create sparks across from metal to metal!” I remarked.

“Yes. We’ve succeeded,” he said. “To-night I’ve witnessed something that no man has hitherto seen. Our minor experiments were interesting enough, but this is proof positive that an invincible power to successfully destroy Zeppelins has at last been put into our hands.”

"I hope so," declared Roseye. "Mr Munro and I have had a most exciting flight. But why," she asked, "why did you send us away on our arrival?"

"Because the terrible roar made by your engine alarmed the whole neighbourhood, and some people ran out in their night-clothes towards the church, believing you to be an enemy machine. Therefore I climbed a wall and signalled to you to return in an hour, when all would, I hope, be quiet again."

"Was all quiet when we returned?"

"Yes, they had all gone back to their beds. Theed had arrived for me by that time, so after your second visit he assisted me to take out the asbestos sheet and rejoin the conductor with the copper cable. We made a good joint; so that there'll be no danger to the church in case of a thunderstorm."

"Then the importance of the invention is proved?" asked Roseye.

"Proved?" he echoed. "Proved without a shadow of doubt."

And he unwound his muffler, cast off his heavy frieze coat, and we both went out to assist in wheeling the machine back into the barn.

That night we had proved to our satisfaction that our long and patient labours had certainly not been in vain.

Chapter Twenty.

Those "Eyes!"

Next day dawned wild and wet, with a sixty-mile-an-hour wind.

During the morning Teddy and I, assisted by Theed, made some little adjustments to the machine which, though reposing in the barn, was ready at any instant for another flight.

All three of us were, naturally, full of glee that our invention was a proved success. It only remained for us to rise and attack the next Zeppelin that came over.

This idea, however, was all very well, of course, but enemy airships had a sly knack of coming over the sea at unexpected moments, dropping bombs, and returning before our aeroplanes could rise sufficiently high to drop incendiary bombs upon them. The exploits of poor young Warneford, and of the French gunners behind the lines at Brabant-le-Roi, had been hailed with delight by the Allies, and naturally so, yet no enemy aircraft had been brought down on British soil. That was a feat which I intended, even at the risk of my own life, to achieve.

The power to destroy a Zeppelin had been placed within my hand, and I intended to use it, though at present I had not matured any actual plan.

After our frugal luncheon that day, a meal of boiled bacon and beans, the weather cleared up, so Roseye expressed a wish to go down to Eastbourne to buy something she required. So I took her in the ear. A nip was in the air, so she wore a veil, and on starting away I told Teddy that, in all probability, we should have dinner in Eastbourne before returning.

"Right ho! old man," he replied. "Perhaps I shall run up to town. We want those two new nuts and the sparking-plugs you know, so I can get them. If I go, I shan't be down till the last train, so send Theed over to Nutley to meet me, won't you?"

"Right," I said, and a moment later, with Roseye beside me, I started off down the long narrow wooded lane which led round by a place called Oldlands, and down into Maresfield.

The winter landscape was dull and dispiriting.

We had passed through the little town, and out again upon the Lewes road when, having gone about four miles, we suddenly saw a big dark green limousine standing at the roadside. The chauffeur, whose coat was off, had evidently got tyre-trouble, and, the road at that bend being very narrow, I was compelled to slow down in order to pass.

Beside the car, watching the chauffeur as he worked, was a middle-aged man in a thick drab motor-coat and cap of shepherd's plaid, while beside him stood a tall, erect woman in furs. The man was idly smoking a cigar end and laughing with the woman, and as we passed the latter turned to gaze at us. In the passing glance I obtained of her I saw that hers was a hard, thin face, with high cheek-bones, an unusually pointed chin, and a curious expression in her eyes.

Somehow—why I cannot tell—I thought she regarded us a little inquisitively.

Next instant Roseye, in breathless fear, clutched at my arm, gasping:

"Quick, Claude! For Heaven's sake let's get away!"

"Why?" I asked, much surprised at the sudden terror she had evinced.

"That woman!" cried my love, in a voice of alarm. "Did she see me—do you think she saw me?" she asked, her trembling hand still upon my arm.

"How could she, through that veil?" I asked. "It was impossible."

"Is my veil really thick enough to conceal my face entirely?" she asked eagerly.

"Not absolutely to conceal it, but to render identification extremely difficult at such a distance," I replied. "But—tell me, why are you trembling like this, Roseye?"

"Oh, drive on," she cried. "Drive quickly. Do! She saw you—she will know you from those photographs in the newspapers. I saw by her look that she recognised you. Don't glance round. Keep on, keep on! Go as fast as ever you can. Save me from her—oh! do save me, Claude!" she implored.

I saw, with much apprehension, that her unaccountable mental agitation was returning.

"But who is the woman?" I demanded eagerly. "She's a perfect stranger to me."

"Ah! but not to me, Claude! That woman!" she gasped, as her gloved hands lying upon her knees clutched convulsively. "That woman is—she's the Woman with the Leopard's Eyes!"

"That woman!" I ejaculated, amazed. "Was that really the woman?"

"Yes. But—why is she about here? She means mischief, Claude. She means to do us both harm!"

"And the man?" I asked, bending to her without glancing into her face, for I was driving at increased pace in obedience to her command. "Who is he?"

"I couldn't see his face—only hers—the fiend!"

"Shall we turn back and watch their movements?" I suggested.

"No, no! A thousand times no!" she shrieked, apparently terrified at such a suggestion. "Don't go near her. Save me from her—won't you, Claude? If you love me, don't let her approach me. Will you?"

"Trust in me, darling," I said reassuringly, yet greatly puzzled at the unexpected encounter, and in fear also that sudden sight of the hated woman might bring on another nerve attack.

She drew aside her veil and lifted her close-fitting little motor-hat from her brow, as though its weight oppressed her. Then I noticed how pale and terrified was her face. She had blanched to the very lips.

"Don't trouble about the matter any more," I urged, yet I knew well that sight of the mysterious woman had recalled to her memory some evil and terrible recollection that she had been striving to put from her for ever.

"But I do trouble about it, Claude," she said in a harsh, apprehensive voice. "I fear for you more than I fear for myself. She is your enemy, as well as mine. Against her we are, both of us, powerless."

I pricked up my ears at her words.

"What do you mean, Roseye?" I asked. "How can she be my enemy? I've never before set eyes upon the woman!"

"Ah! you don't know, dear—so you can't understand," was my love's impatient reply.

"No. I want you to tell me," I said. "If danger really besets both of us, is it not your duty to explain the facts to me, and leave me to take steps to protect ourselves?"

"Yes. I would tell you, dear—only—only—"

"Only what?"

"Only—well—only I can't!" she answered evasively. Then, a second later, she added: "I told you, Claude, long ago that I couldn't tell you anything."

"You hold some secret; and yet you conceal it from me!" I remarked in a tone of reproach.

"Because—because I am compelled. I—I am in fear—in deadly fear, Claude!"

"In fear of what?" I asked, for I saw by her demeanour that such was the nerve-strain that she was on the point of tears.

For a second she hesitated. Then she said:

"In fear of that woman—the one with the Leopard's Eyes."

I saw it was quite useless to argue further with her while driving, for we were then travelling at a great pace, and had already passed the four-ways at the Cross-in-Hand.

She lapsed into a long silence, seated immovably at my side, her gaze was fixed blankly upon the muddy road that constantly opened out before us.

On the previous night we had been flying over that very road.

I remarked upon it, in order to change the conversation, but she only nodded. Truly her figure was a pathetic one, for

she had turned back her veil, so that the air might cool her troubled brain.

As a result that passing glimpse of the mysterious woman whom she held in such fearsome terror, her whole attitude had again become changed. She looked wild and haggard, and in her great blue eyes, so clear and trustful, there was a queer, uncanny look that caused me both wonderment and apprehension.

On we went, through Hailsham and Polegate, until we ran over the steep hill at Willingdon, and at last descended through Eastbourne Old Town, until we reached the busy Terminus Road of the fashionable go-ahead watering-place, the road which led to the fine sea-front so beloved by the summer visitor.

Roseye having done her shopping in the Terminus Road, we ran along past the Wish Tower to the Grand Hotel, where we took tea at one of the little wicker tables in the glass-fronted lounge, and afterwards smoked cigarettes.

Though it was winter, the hotel was filled by a smart crowd.

I met Tringham, who had learnt flying with me and who was now a naval Flight-Commander. He was with his young wife and we four had a long gossip, but of course I said nothing of our secret flight on the previous night.

Naturally, our talk was of Zeppelins, and in the course of our chat Tringham, who was in naval uniform, discussed with me what was necessary to damage a Zeppelin sufficiently to bring her down.

"The question," he declared emphatically, "has several answers. If the machine is hit fair and square by an explosive-incendiary projectile, which ignites the gas as it escapes from the damaged gas-bags after mixing with the air, it is certain it will crash to earth a blazing wreck, as the one did behind the French lines the other day. But rifle bullets will do little harm, as they only make small holes, which often can be repaired by the crew whilst aloft."

"I quite agree that rifles against a Zeppelin are just about as efficacious as firing with pea-shooters," I remarked.

"The public have not yet realised that a Zeppelin is a very difficult thing to attack successfully," declared the Flight-Commander, who as one of the best-known of our naval pilots, had done much heroic work, and was now stationed somewhere on the East Coast. "Shells which don't hit fair to the mark may badly damage one of the eighteen ballonets, but this is not sufficient to bring her down. However, it may partially cripple the machine by upsetting its stability, and it is then highly dangerous to run the powerful engines at speed. To hit either of the gondolas would, of course, do serious harm, but at six thousand feet they are at night an almost invisible mark, and it is only by a lucky chance they would be damaged."

"And what, in your opinion, is the best means of destroying Zeppelins?" Roseye asked, with a sly glance at me.

"My dear Miss Lethmere," he replied, "guns and guns alone are at present of any use against these air monsters. We must see to it that the weapons we use are sighted to carry to 12,000 feet, and fire a shell that will not only rip up casing and ballonet, but will at the same time ignite the escaping gas."

"The newest super-Zeppelins have a sentry posted on top," remarked Mrs Tringham, a smart little lady, well-known to Roseye, for she had often flown with her husband. "He is separated from the crew far below, but he is in telephonic communication with the commander, so that he can warn him of any aeroplane ascending above for bomb-dropping. I quite agree with Alfred," she went on, "well-equipped guns and good naval gunners are the best defences against this new peril of the night."

"Moreover," Tringham remarked, "I give no credence whatever to the reports that the Germans are circulating, namely, that they are completing two new Zeppelins a week."

"I agree," I said. "That story has gone the round of the Press, but is only a piece of clever propaganda sent out to neutral countries with the object of being seized upon by their sensational newspapers. No! Airships are big, unwieldy, as well as very vulnerable things. That the enemy has a number of them is quite certain, but the policy of frightfulness on paper is part of the Teuton plan. I admit that we are behindhand with our air-defences; but I do not support the Press in its shrieking clamours. We shall defeat the Huns one day—never fear. England has never yet been beaten."

And again I glanced at my well-beloved, whom I saw had already read what was passing in my mind. Our secret was our own.

But I was glad to have the views of such an air expert as my friend Tringham, because he reflected what was just then uppermost in the official mind.

Evidently the "nest of hornets" fallacy had been dismissed.

When the Flight-Commander and his wife left us—for he was on forty-eight hours leave, and they were motoring back to town—Roseye and I went for a stroll back into the town. There was nothing to do before dinner, so we went into a cinema and sat watching the latest picture-drama—a certain photo-play that was highly popular at that moment and which, with transpontine vividness, showed a fuzzy-haired heroine, bound and gagged by the cigarette-smoking villain, flung down into a slimy sewer, and afterwards rescued by the muscular and, of course, clean-shaven hero. I wonder why, to-day, no hero ever wears a beard? Twenty years ago they were all blonde-bearded. But Mr Frank Richardson having declared that whiskers and love are as oil and water, the public have adopted that view.

After the "pictures" we returned to the hotel, where we dined and, shortly after nine, left in the car for Holly Farm.

The night was again bright, clear and starlit, and the run home was very pleasant, even though the prohibition of headlights necessitated the greatest caution and a reduction of speed.

Roseye said little during the journey back. I saw she was unduly thoughtful. No doubt she was reflecting upon that incident on the road. While Tringham and his wife had sat with us and we were gossiping, she had been quite her old self again, but I had noticed that as soon as they had left she had lapsed into that strange attitude of nervous, even terrified apprehension.

She seemed to be possessed of some presage of coming evil. And yet she refused—blankly refused—to tell me the truth, and so place me upon my guard against any plot or pitfall which the enemy might prepare for us.

We ran on. Noting her silence, I pushed forward with all haste until at length we swung round from the lane into the farmyard, the gates of which old Theed had left open for us.

The old fellow ran up to us from out of one of the sheds wherein he had been seated awaiting us.

“Mr Munro!” he cried eagerly. “May I see you at once, sir. I want to tell you something. There’s some mystery here, sir.”

“Mystery?” I echoed together with Roseye.

Then, noting his scared face beneath the light of my side-lamps, I asked:

“Mystery? What mystery? Tell me.”

Chapter Twenty One.

Roseye’s Secret.

Old Theed, the stalwart ex-police officer, was greatly excited.

“Just before half-past eight, my son having gone in the car over to Horsham to see his young lady, and afterwards to pick up Mr Ashton, I was sitting in the kitchen with Mulliner,” he said. “Suddenly I thought I heard footsteps out in the yard. I listened for a few moments and then I heard, quite distinctly, a curious sawing noise. I went silently out by the front door and was just creeping round the corner of the house, when the figure of a man—who was evidently on the watch—suddenly sprang from the shadow. I was seized by the collar, and the next I knew was that a handkerchief was stuffed into my mouth and a rope tied round my arms and legs. I tried to cry out, but I could not. I was trussed like a fowl. My assailants were two men, and pretty tough ones they were, too!”

“Mulliner was in the house—eh?” asked Roseye.

“Yes, miss. They flung me down into the garden yonder, up against those rose-bushes, and then went into the house after her,” Theed went on. “I heard her scream, but could not move to assist her. She shouted for help, but I couldn’t answer. But she was plucky and she saved the situation.”

“How?” I asked, amazed.

“Why, she shouted out to me: ‘It’s all right, Theed! I’ve telephoned down to Nutley. The police will soon be here!’”

“That was certainly a master-stroke, considering that we have no telephone here,” I exclaimed.

“No. But it scared the thieves—or whoever they were—for they didn’t wait, but made off in a car which they had waiting down the lane. I heard them hurry away down to the lane, and soon afterwards the car started.”

“Who released you?” I asked.

“They had tied Mulliner to a chair in the kitchen but, after half an hour, she managed to get free, and came out to find and release me. Then, on going into the yard with a lamp, we found a curious thing. They had evidently been examining your aeroplane, sir.”

“They’ve been in there!” I gasped. “Strangers!”

“Yes, sir. But, as far as I can see, they’ve done nothing.”

I at once took one of the side-lamps from the car and, with Roseye, went into the barn. Mulliner, who had now recovered from her fright, followed us.

As far as I could discern by a cursory glance, nothing had been tampered with. It was fortunate, however, that we had removed the box containing the secret electrical apparatus, and that it was concealed in the house, as was our constant habit.

The story told by the pair was certainly alarming.

Once again I recognised here the evil finger-prints of the Invisible Hand.

“You saw the men who attacked you?” Roseye said to Mulliner when we were again in the house. “Describe them to us.”

“Well, miss. There’s the difficulty. There were two men, I know, as well as a woman—a tallish woman, dressed in a fur-coat and a small motor-hat. She had a thin, dark-looking face and funny eyes, and she spoke to the men in some

foreign language—Italian, I think.”

“Ah!” gasped Roseye, turning to me terrified. “The woman! I feared it—I knew it! The woman with the Leopard’s Eyes!”

“And the men?” I asked. “Did you not see them?”

“I only caught a glimpse of one of them,” and the description she gave of him almost tallied with that of the man whom we had seen in the woman’s company at the roadside. The pair had evidently been on the watch ever since afternoon. They no doubt had seen us leave, and also watched Teddy and Theed’s son go away.

“But the second man?” I demanded eagerly. “Can’t you give us any description of him?”

The maid hesitated, and fidgeted slightly. I saw that she was undecided and a little unwilling. Her hair was still awry from her attack, and she had forgotten, in her excitement, to replace her well-starched Dutch-cap.

“Well, sir,” she answered at last, “I have a suspicion—but only a very faint one—remember I couldn’t really see his face, for he sprang upon me from behind. But he spoke to his companion, and I thought I recognised his voice—only a faint suspicion,” the woman added. “Indeed, I don’t really like mentioning it, because I’m sure you’ll laugh at me. You’ll think it too absurd.”

“No. This is no laughing matter, Mulliner,” I said. “We are in deadly earnest. It is only right of you to tell us any suspicion that you entertain.”

“Well—to tell you the truth, sir, I thought I recognised the voice of a gentleman who often visits Cadogan Gardens—Mr Eastwell.”

“Eastwell!” I echoed. “Do you really think it was actually Mr Eastwell?”

I glanced at Roseye and saw that, at mention of the man’s name, her face had instantly gone pale as death, and her hands were trembling.

“Are you quite sure of that, Mulliner?” she asked breathlessly.

“No. Not quite. I only know that he wore a big pair of motor-goggles with flaps on the cheeks, and those effectively altered his appearance, but as he assisted in tying me up in the chair, my eyes caught sight of his watch-chain. It was familiar to me—one of alternate twisted links of gold and platinum of quite uncommon pattern. This I recognised as Mr Eastwell’s, for I had seen it many times before, and it went far to confirm my suspicion that the voice was undoubtedly his. I admit, miss, that I was staggered at the discovery.”

I led Roseye into the best room and, having closed the door, stood before her in front of the log fire and asked:

“Now what is your opinion, dear? Has Lionel Eastwell been here to-night, do you really think?” Her pale lips compressed, and her eyes narrowed at my words. I saw that she was unnerved and trembling.

“Yes,” she whispered at last. “Yes—Claude—I believe he has been here!”

“Then he’s not our friend, as we have so foolishly believed—eh?”

She drew a long breath, and gazed about the room as though utterly mystified.

“I—I never suspected this!” was her low reply. “But—”

“But what? Tell me, darling. Do tell me,” I begged.

“But he may be acting in conjunction with that woman in some desperate plot against us!”

“I believe he is,” I declared. “I believe that whatever has happened to you, and my accident also, are both the result of cunning and dastardly plots directed by this man who has so long posed as our friend. Have you never suspected it?” I asked of her.

“Never—until to-night,” was her reply. “But if he has dared to come here in order to assist that woman, then his action places an entirely fresh complexion upon the whole affair.”

“My opinion is that Lionel Eastwell has, all along, suspected that we have perfected our invention, and has formed a most clever and desperate plot to possess himself of our secret, in order to transmit it to Germany,” I declared, as I held her hand tenderly in mine.

“Yes,” she replied, sighing after a pause. “Your surmise may be correct, Claude.”

“But do you share my views?”

“Well—” she responded at last, “yes, Claude—I do! But,” she added, “the whole affair is too mystifying—too utterly amazing. When, one day, I can tell you what happened to me you will, I know, stand aghast. Ah! when I think of it all,” she cried hoarsely, “I often regard it as a miracle that I am alive and at your side again—at the side of the man I love!”

More than this she refused to tell me.

I had, at last, established that the hand of Lionel Eastwell, the popular pilot at Hendon, was the hand of the enemy. I had suspected it, but here was proof!

His association with the mysterious woman was, of course, still an enigma, but I saw that Roseye herself held the key to it, and now that we had agreed that Eastwell was playing us both false, I hoped that this, in itself, would induce her to tell me the frank and open truth.

When Teddy returned he heard from my lips what had happened during our absence, and he stood speechless.

"Let's run the dynamo, light up, and examine the machine," he suggested, and though it was already midnight we readily adopted his suggestion.

That it had again been tampered with I felt no doubt.

That statement of old Theed's that he had heard "sawing" made it plain that some devil's work had been done—and by Eastwell no doubt, because he was an expert in aviation. The expert knows exactly the point at which he can weaken the strongest aeroplane.

Well, we soon ran the dynamo, and had a good light going, one that was almost too glaring in that confined space. All of us were present, including the maid Mulliner, as slowly we examined and tested, piece by piece, every bolt, nut, strainer, and indeed every part of the machine.

It was past three o'clock in the morning ere we finished, yet we could find absolutely nothing wrong. The engines worked well: the dynamo was in order, the intensified current for the working of the invisible wave was up to the high voltage as before, and as far as we could discover the machine had not been tampered with in any way.

"They intended to investigate the secrets of the box," Teddy remarked. "No doubt that's what they were after."

"Well—they didn't see very much!" I laughed, for already I had been up to the locked attic to which we had carried it on the previous night, and found it there with the door still secure.

Then, having satisfied ourselves that no damage had been done, we all retired to rest.

But sleep did not come to my eyes.

Hour after hour I lay awake until the grey dawn, pondering over the events of that night. That a desperate plot of the enemy was afoot against us could not be doubted, and I realised that it would take all our ingenuity and foresight to combat the plans of an unscrupulous enemy well provided with money, and desperate upon a resolve.

To go boldly to the authorities and denounce Lionel Eastwell as a spy would avail me nothing. Indeed, there was no actual evidence of it. No more popular man at Hendon, at Brooklands, or at the Royal Automobile Club was there than Eastwell. Yet, was not that popularity, purchased by the ample means at his disposal, and the constant dinners and luncheons which he gave regardless of their cost, proof in itself that he was acting secretly against the interests of Great Britain? Long ago I had suspected that his was the Invisible Hand that sent every secret of our progress in aviation to Germany by way of the United States. He had several American friends to whom I had been introduced, apparently business men who had come over for various reasons, and it was, no doubt, those men who conveyed back to New York secret information which, later on, returned across the Atlantic and was duly docketed in the Intelligence Bureau of the German General Staff at Berlin. Truly the wily Teuton leaves nothing to chance, and has his secret agents in the most unsuspected places.

Yet, reflecting as I did in those long wakeful hours, I saw that it was not surprising, and that the enemy would, naturally, have kept a very watchful eye upon anyone who had devised a means of fighting Zeppelins, and, if possible, defeat him in his attempt.

This thought decided me. I meant, at all hazards, to try my device against an enemy airship, even though I might fail. I had foreseen all the risks of machine-guns mounted upon the top of the latest airship, of the dangers of night-flying, of landing difficulties even if successful, and the hundred and one mishaps which might occur in the excitement and darkness.

Indeed, in following a Zeppelin at a high altitude and in clouds, I might very easily be mistaken for an enemy attendant aeroplane, and thus draw the fire of our own anti-aircraft guns. In addition, I held no official position in the anti-aircraft service. As far as the newly-formed Joint Naval and Military Air Committee were concerned, I might be a mere man-in-the-street. Therefore I should be compelled to act upon my own initiative. Indeed, I had already offered my invention to the proper official quarter, but had only received a type-written acknowledgment. I, however, was not surprised, because that Department had, I knew, been flooded by the devices of hot-air cranks.

Still, as I lay reflecting, I remembered that we could build 1,700 aeroplanes for the cost of one Dreadnought, and a Zeppelin would cost a good deal less than a destroyer. I did not approve of that shrieking section of the Press which was loudly declaring that we had lost the supremacy in aeroplanes which we possessed at the beginning of the war. That was not a fact. We, of course, had no dirigibles worth the name and, perhaps, we were asking pilots to fly machines inferior to the Fokker. Yet we had brought Fokkers down at the front, and with good experimental work and a speedy policy of construction we should, I believed, soon be far ahead of the Central Powers as far as aircraft was concerned.

Those days were dark and perilous days for Britain.

That something must be done, every one was agreed. Yet, as I tossed upon my bed in that narrow little room in the obscure farm-house, I knew that within my hand I possessed a great, and yet mysterious power—and that power I

intended to use and prove at the earliest opportunity.

Still I had to reckon with enemies; cool, clever, cunning persons who would hesitate at nothing in order to nullify my efforts, and wreck my machine and all my hopes.

Ah! If only Roseye, my well-beloved, would reveal to me the truth.

Why did she so persistently refuse?

Why? I wondered why?

Chapter Twenty Two.

More Devil's Work.

Next day I decided that, in view of the fact that our enemies had traced us, it would be best to at once remove our headquarters. Further, in order to attack a Zeppelin, as I intended, we ought to station ourselves upon the line of their advance from the East Coast towards London, and somewhere in proximity to an anti-aircraft listening-post.

All three of us held council and decided that, as I knew of a listening-post in East Anglia, I should fly the machine to that neighbourhood, rather than dismantle it and take it by road. It was arranged that Teddy should accompany me, and that Theed should drive Roseye, Mulliner and his father in the car. By this rapid and unexpected flight we hoped to at least evade the unwelcome attentions of that mysterious woman whom Roseye described as having leopard's eyes.

Experience had taught us that in the Zeppelin raids upon England the airships generally approached by crossing the coast-line between Lowestoft and Margate, therefore I decided upon a district that would be the centre of a danger-zone.

Having studied my map I saw that my most direct route would be over Tonbridge, thence by the railway line to Sevenoaks, and then north-east till I could pick up Gravesend—which would be easy on account of the river Thames—and afterwards due north would bring me to G—, which would be easily distinguishable by certain landmarks.

We had wheeled out the machine, and I was tuning her up before starting, both Teddy and I ready in our air-clothes, when Theed, who was giving the machine a final look round, suddenly gave vent to an ejaculation of dismay.

"Why look, sir!" he cried. "What's this?"

I hopped quickly out of the pilot's seat and, joining him, saw to my surprise that, beneath the wooden petrol-tank a fine insulated twin-wire had been, placed, and upon it, tacked lightly to the wood, was a small disc of some black-looking material through which the fine wire ran.

In breathless eagerness I traced the wire and, to my horror, saw what a devilish contrivance it was. The twin-wire had been connected up to the battery that ran the lamp over my map and instruments, therefore had I switched on the light at night, it would have failed, for it was intended that the current should ignite that little disc of inflammable material and explode my petrol-tank behind me!

Truly, the device of those crafty and subtle enemies was a devilish one. That wire had been connected up by an Invisible Hand—by the hand of one who certainly knew the most vulnerable point of the machine.

Teddy and Roseye both stood aghast at this latest revelation.

Then, when I had disconnected the wire, I placed it with the little black incendiary disc upon the ground and connected up the wires to an accumulator from the car.

In a moment the black substance shot into a fierce red flame which burned and spluttered with intense heat for fully five minutes.

From the barn, a few minutes later, Theed emerged carrying a piece of the wire, evidently discarded by the intruder who had so swiftly and so cunningly prepared another death-trap for me.

A further hour we spent in making a second examination of the machine, and then having appointed to meet that evening at the old King's Head, in G—, at seven o'clock, I climbed into the pilot's seat and, with Teddy at my side, we shot forward and soon left the ground heading for the railway line which I knew would run from right to left across our track at Tonbridge.

I was really glad to place Holly Farm behind me. It certainly was not a "healthy" spot, as far as we were concerned. The low-down cunning of our enemies had once more been revealed. Yet how I longed for Roseye to tell me the actual truth! Why did she so persistently refuse? What could she have to hide from me—the man who loved her so very dearly.

We trusted each other. She had trusted her life to me in the air on many occasions—even on the previous night. Yet she remained silent.

The day was bright and crisp, with a slight north-westerly wind and a few scudding clouds. Very soon, when we had risen to about four thousand feet—for I had determined to fly high again—I saw a big seaplane coming up from the

coast. It passed us about four miles distant and then I gave over the dual controls to Teddy, so that he might get used to them ready for the crucial test when it must mean either destruction to a Zeppelin, or to ourselves.

Teddy was a first-rate patriot. There was nothing of the milk-and-water type about him, and yet, at the same time, he was nothing of a lady's man. He was always courteous, humorous, and charming with the fair sex, but he preferred to read and smoke his rather foul briar pipe, than to go out of an evening into the glitter and clatter of London life. But we were friends—firm friends, and he was just as prepared and keen to take the risk as I was.

We found Tonbridge quite easily. Below us what looked like a toy-train was puffing along towards Dover, leaving a white streak of steam behind. For a few minutes I made a short circuit over the town in order to find the line that ran across to Sevenoaks, and at last, distinguishing it, I made my way over that rather scattered place and then struck another railway line at a place marked upon the map as Fawkham, after which I soon picked out the shining river with Gravesend on one bank and Tilbury on the other. I glanced at the altimeter. We were 10,500 feet up. Below us all was misty in the valley of the river. Then over the brown land of Essex I sped forward until I again found another railway line at Brentwood and, following it, soon saw my landmark—one which I need not refer to here, for I have no desire to instruct enemy airmen.

Nothing extraordinary had met my eye. I was used to the patchwork landscape.

Then began a search for a convenient field in which to land.

I came down from ten thousand to a thousand feet in long sweeping circles, examining each grass meadow as I went.

The lower I came, the more easily could I distinguish the pastures and ploughed land and woods.

A train was passing and I noted the direction of the smoke—most important in making a landing. Teddy at my side, as practised as I was myself in flying, had never moved. Through his big goggles he was gazing down, trying to decide upon a landing-place, just as I was.

I banked for a moment. Then put her nose down and then, finding no spot attractive, climbed again.

I did not want to land too near the town, for I had no desire to attract undue attention.

I was trying to find a certain main road, for, truth to tell, I had been up very early that morning consulting my maps.

On that main road were two or three farms in which I hoped I could shelter my machine, just as I had done at Holly Farm.

I suppose we spent perhaps nearly half an hour in the air before, after critical examination, I decided to descend into a large park before a good-sized old Georgian house belonging, no doubt, to some county family.

Parks, provided they have few trees, are always desired by the aviator as landing-places.

Indeed, as I circled round I could plainly see that several figures, attracted by the heavy, roar of my engine, were standing outside watching us.

Two minutes later I brought the machine round to the wind.

Down went her nose—down, down. The air screamed about our ears. The earth rushed up to meet us, as it always seems to do. Truth to tell, by my own fault, I had had a nasty nose-dive, but I righted her and, touching the grass, managed to pull up dead.

Teddy, who had been watching it all, never turned a hair.

Only when I shut off the roar of the engine, he remarked:

“By Jove! Devilish good landing! That nose-dive was rather a nasty one, Claude—wasn't it?”

And, unstrapping himself, he hopped out and sought his cigarette-case from his hip-pocket, as was his habit.

We were close against the big, rather ugly country house, therefore, leaving the machine, we went up and soon found its owner—a retired colonel of the usual JP type—hard on poachers when on the County Bench, I expect.

Still, he welcomed us warmly and was, we found, quite a good sort.

I asked him to take us aside, and he conducted us to the library, a fine old-fashioned room lined with brown-backed books.

There I told him the truth—of what we were after.

“Well,” said the white-haired old man, looking me up and down, “you seem a pretty keen young fellow, and your friend also. If you are over here on such a mission then I hope you will, both of you, consider yourselves my guests. I've a big barn beyond the stables where I can garage your machine quite well.”

Then I told him of the trio who were on their way to the King's Head, in G—.

“I shall only be too delighted to be their host,” he replied at once. “I know Sir Herbert and Lady Lethmere well, but I don't believe I've ever met their daughter.”

Then he introduced his wife, a rather youngly-dressed woman, whose eyes were “made-up” and the artificiality of whose cheeks were just a trifle too transparent. But artificiality seems fashionable to-day.

We duly put the machine away into the barn and later, when we sat at tea in the drawing-room, the conversation naturally turned upon Zeppelins.

Colonel Cator, for such we had found our host’s name to be, held rather sceptical views regarding the power of aeroplanes to combat airships, and he waxed distinctly humorous as we sat together.

“There have been so many fables told us about aircraft,” declared the erect old man, “that one does not really know what to believe.”

“There have been a good many improvements recently in aircraft of all sorts, so that most of the pre-war types have been already scrapped,” I said.

“Yes, yes, I know,” exclaimed our host. “But what I object is to the fairy-tales that we’ve been told in the past—how we’ve been reassured.”

“But does the past really affect the present very much?” I queried.

“I contend that it does. We should have been told the truth,” he declared emphatically and, rising, he took from beneath a table a large scrap-book.

Then, returning to his chair, he said: “I have here a cutting from *The Times* of March 20, 1913. I came across it only the other day. Listen—and I’ll read it to you, because it is most illuminating to you airmen.”

And then he read to us as follows:—

“Colonel Seeley, Secretary of State for War, said yesterday: We have decided that the Army should have small *dirigibles* which could be packed up in *boxes*, put in motor-lorries or in ships, and sent wherever they are required. These we have got. These dirigibles, I say without hesitation—and all who understand the matter will agree—are superior to any other kind of portable airship. They have various mechanical advantages, which I do not wish to dwell upon, because those concerned believe the secret is our own, enabling them to rise more rapidly in the air, and enabling them, above all, to avoid having to part with hydrogen when they rise, and therefore there is no need for reinforcing the hydrogen when they fall. They have these advantages, which we believe are *superior to those of any other nation.*”

Then, pausing, the colonel raised his eyes to mine, and, with a merry laugh, asked:

“Now. What do you think of that for a Ministerial statement eh?”

“Perhaps, instead of putting them in boxes, we might have had them put into paper bags, and distributed with pounds of tea?” suggested Teddy. “Why not?”

“But I don’t see how it affects the present situation at all,” I argued. “We are surely much wiser now than we were three years ago.”

“Well—let’s hope so,” laughed the colonel. “But that speech is full of grim humour—is it not?”

And with that we were compelled to agree.

Chapter Twenty Three.

The “L39.”

Having taken Colonel and Mrs Cator into our confidence, and they having invited Roseye to stay with them, we were all, on the following day, duly installed at Swalecliffe Park.

Without delay I called upon the officer in charge of the listening-post—the whereabouts of which I do not intend to disclose—and, to my joy, found that he was a man named Moncrieff whom I had met many times at Hendon, and also at the club.

Having told him of my intention to have a “go” at the next enemy airship that might come over, he readily promised that upon receiving the next alarm, he would make a point of ringing me up at Swalecliffe.

Then, with the machine in readiness and already tested and re-tested, and also with a full petrol-tank, there was nothing further to do but to draw it out into the park each night, and await the alarm.

It was on the first day of March when we had come down in Swalecliffe Park as strangers—on a Wednesday I remember—and the following days had been fully occupied with our preparations, while throughout each night Teddy and I, ready dressed for flight, sat in the colonel’s study wherein the telephone was installed.

Thursday night passed quite uneventfully. During the earlier hours the colonel and Roseye sat with us, but the barometer being low, and the weather gusty, we had, even at ten o’clock, decided that no Zeppelin would risk crossing the North Sea.

On Friday night the four of us played bridge till half-past four, the Theeds being, of course, on duty outside. We had

the consolation of knowing that, though the Invisible Hand might be searching for us, it had not yet discovered our place of concealment. Each evening we tested the telephone—through the local exchange—out to the listening-post, and each evening Moncrieff, who was in charge, answered cheerily:

“Don’t fear, old chap, I’ll give you a ring as soon as anything is going on.”

Saturday, the fourth of March, was bright and warm, but just before sunset a sharp easterly breeze sprang up and, with a falling barometer, we knew that our vigilance would remain unrewarded. So again we played bridge until Roseye grew sleepy and then retired. Certainly we did not appear to meet with any luck.

On Sunday morning we all went to the pretty little church of Swalecliffe, and in the afternoon I went out for a pleasant stroll with Roseye through the park and leafless woods.

Again I pressed her to reveal to me what she knew regarding that mysterious woman who was in association with the fellow Eastwell.

But once again she steadfastly declined to reveal anything.

“No, no!” she protested. “Please don’t ask me, Claude.”

“But surely I have a right to know!” I declared. “Your enemies are mine; and we are fighting them together. We have agreed to marry, Roseye, therefore you may surely trust me with your secret!”

I had halted at a stile before crossing our path leading into the wood, and, as I held her hand in mine, I looked straight into her big blue eyes.

She drew a long breath, and her gaze wavered. I saw that she now relented, and that she was unable to refute my argument.

I pressed her hand and, in a deep, earnest voice, urged:

“Tell me darling. *Do tell me?*”

Again her chest heaved and fell beneath her furs.

“Well, Claude. It’s—it’s a strange story—as strange as any woman has ever lived to tell,” she said at last, with great hesitation and speaking very slowly. “On that morning when I left I received a letter purporting to come from you, and urging me to meet you in secret on the departure platform of the Great Northern station at King’s Cross. Naturally, much puzzled, I went there, wondering what had happened. While waiting, a woman—the woman you have seen—came up to me and told me that you had sent her—that you wished to see me in secret in connexion with your invention, but that you were in hiding because you feared that some spies intended to obtain knowledge of the truth. She said that there were enemy spies on every hand, and that it would be best to go over to the hotel, and there wait till night before we went North to Grantham, whither you had gone.”

“Grantham!” I echoed. “I’ve not been in Grantham for years.”

“But I believed that you were there, so plausible was the woman’s story,” she replied. “We left at night, travelling in a first-class compartment together. On the way, I suddenly suspected her. Somehow I did not like the look in those strange eyes of hers, and I accused her of deceiving me. Indeed, while dozing, I had seen her carefully take my chatelaine, put something into it, and drop it out of the window. We were in a tunnel, I believe.”

“Then it was that woman who put the cipher-message into your card-case!” I exclaimed. “Yes, go on.”

“Yes,” she replied. “I sprang up, and tried to pull the communication-cord as we came out of the tunnel, but she prevented me. She pushed a sponge saturated with some pungent-smelling liquid into my face, and then I knew nothing more until I found myself in a small room in a cottage somewhere remote in the country.”

“Then you were detained there—eh?”

“Yes. Forcibly. That awful woman tried, by every means in her power, to force or induce me to reveal the details of the experiments which you and Teddy were making at Gunnersbury. But I refused. Ah! how that hell-fiend tortured me day after day!

“She nearly drove me mad by those fearful ordeals which, in a hundred ways, she put upon me—always promising to release me if I would but reveal details of what we had discovered. But I refused—refused always, Claude—because I knew that she was an enemy, and victory must be ours if I remained silent. Days—those terrible days—passed—so many that I lost count of them—yet I knew that the woman with the cruel eyes of a leopard had dosed me with some drug that sapped my senses, and she held me irrevocably in her power, prompted no doubt by somebody who meant to work evil also upon you. In the end I must have lost my reason. I think she must have given me certain drugs in order to confuse me as to the past. Then, one day, I found myself in the town of Grantham, inquiring for the station. I was in a maid’s clothes, and in them I eventually returned to you. And you—Claude—you know all the rest.” And she burst into a torrent of tears.

“Yes,” I said slowly. “And that blackguard Lionel Eastwell is the man who has directed all this intricate and dastardly intrigue against us.”

Then I took my love into my arms, and pressing her to me, soothed her tears with my passionate kisses.

What she had revealed to me amazed me.

In the evening, just after the Sunday-night supper, Benton, the fat old butler, entered the drawing-room and, approaching me, said:

“Mr Moncrieff is on the telephone, sir.”

I sprang up with alacrity and, a few seconds later, spoke to my friend at the listening-post.

“You there, Munro?” he asked. “We’ve just had a message to say that three Zeppelins are crossing the North Sea in the direction of the Norfolk coast.”

“Right!” I said, and shut off at once. There was no time to lose.

In a moment I told them of the alarm. Without much delay Teddy and I slipped into our air-kit, while Theed, with the machine wheeled out into the park, reported that all was in readiness.

I met Roseye in the corridor above the central staircase of the great old-world house, and there kissed her fondly.

“For your dear sake I go, and for the sake of my King and country!” I whispered. “Good-bye, my darling. Keep a stout heart until you hear of me again!”

“But—oh!—oh!—I fear, Claude!” she cried anxiously, clinging to me.

“No, my darling. We must, to-day, all make sacrifices. There must be no fear. I shall be back with you to-morrow.”

And then again I kissed her and disengaged those loving, clinging arms about me.

Five minutes later Teddy and I were away in the air.

The night was dull and overcast with a promise of clearing—yet bitterly cold.

Of course with our big engine roaring we could hear nothing of the enemy’s approach, but I deemed it wise to rise high and, at the same time, to follow the railway line from Colchester towards London, because that, no doubt, was the route which the airships would follow.

The alarm had been given, trains being darkened and brought to a standstill, station and signal-lights extinguished and towns blotted out, I quickly lost sight of the railway track and could only go very slowly to save petrol in case of a chase, and guide myself by my compass.

From a town somewhere on the coast I could see the long scintillating beams of a searchlight striking across the dark night sky, first directed in one quarter and then in another. I think it must have been the searchlight on the coast at T—.

I saw Teddy was busy adjusting the Lewis machine-gun at his side as we climbed rapidly in the pitch darkness. The engine raced and hummed and the wind shrieked weirdly around us.

I switched on the bulb over the instruments, in order to look at my altimeter, but so dark was it that the light got into my eyes and I was compelled to shut it off again.

I flew in a wide circle at first, steadily climbing until the few faint twinkling lights below had disappeared entirely. We were getting nearer and nearer the Zeppelin altitude.

Ah! how the engine throbbed and roared.

Suddenly something black shot up close to me, rushing on as quickly as an express train. So suddenly did it rise up against me, that it gave me quite a start. It seemed a great, unholy thing, and quite shapeless.

It was another aeroplane, like ourselves, out to destroy the enemy airship with bombs. And by Jove! we narrowly avoided a nasty collision.

A second later we heard the loud report of a gun. Our anti-aircraft gunners had spotted their quarry somewhere in the vicinity. A moment afterwards upon our left, straight before us, two long beams of searchlight shot out, and then a sharp volley from the guns.

They were possibly five miles distant, and in the direction of London—somewhere near Brentwood I thought.

Bang! bang!—bang! we could hear, even above the throb of our powerful engine. Teddy turned on the second engine, and then opened up the searchlight, sweeping it around before us. But we could see nothing save some thin filmy clouds.

Suddenly the searchlights from below went out, and the guns ceased. With one eye upon the altimeter I peered over, hoping to pick up some landmark, but I could find absolutely none.

That a Zeppelin was in the vicinity was certain. I tried to keep as cool as I possibly could, but I confess that at that moment it was difficult.

I cruised about, knowing that I was now nearing the London area.

Suddenly, deep below, yet some miles ahead, I saw a blood-red flash. The Zeppelin had dropped a bomb!

Again I switched on the little light, and a glance at my altimeter showed that I was up eleven thousand feet, therefore I pushed straight along in the direction of that red glare.

That it was an incendiary one I saw, because the flare continued far down in the misty workaday world below.

The Zeppelin was executing its evil work upon the harmless civilian inhabitants.

I craned and peered around on all sides, but could see nothing else—only the glare from the incendiary fire.

The night was rapidly growing brighter, and we could see the stars. Again we heard a violent cannonade, and once more half a dozen beams of searchlights swept the sky from several points evidently much nearer to London. More than once the searchlights picked us up and examined us with suspicion, blinding us with their glare the while.

Once more from below there came up two loud detonations—high explosive bombs—yet we could see no Zeppelin, though we peered into the darkness again as soon as the searchlight left us.

Blinded by the glare, I had banked a little too steeply, and nearly had another bad nose-dive. Teddy noticed it, and said something, but what it was I could not hear for the roar. That an enemy airship was about, and that it had dropped incendiary bombs was proved by the three or four red glares we could distinctly see beneath us.

No doubt the Zeppelin was moving fast, dropping her bombs preparatory to rising and escaping beyond the zone of our anti-aircraft guns. I rose higher, but still no sign of it. Apparently the searchlights, having once located it, had again lost it, for once more all the guns were silent.

I began to lose heart. How horribly cold it was!

I was now over London, unless I was much mistaken. Several other of our bomb-dropping aeroplanes were circling below me, also unable to find the Zeppelin.

Suddenly Teddy gave me a sharp nudge and pointed upward.

I glanced in the direction he indicated, and there saw the great long dark hull of the airship hovering quite near us.

We were then over eight thousand feet up, and the airship was perhaps another thousand feet higher. I could distinguish its two gondolas, and as we passed near its stern its fins and planes were now plainly silhouetted against the bright, steely sky.

With all speed possible I shot upward, but apparently the commander of the Zeppelin had discovered us, while at that very same moment a searchlight from somewhere below picked him up and revealed him, a huge silvery object, upon the side of which was painted in black a large iron-cross, the Hun badge of frightfulness, together with initial and number "L39."

Scarcely had I become aware of the close proximity of the enemy when I saw a little spurt of red flare from the forward gondola. It continued for several moments, and I knew that it was a machine-gun spitting forth its leaden hail upon us.

Therefore I drew away and rose still higher, while, next second, the propellers of the monster airship began to whirr and it started away, nose upward and due east, evidently upon its homeward journey.

Unfortunately the men manning our searchlights below kept one of their beams upon us as well as another upon the Zeppelin, and I must confess that both Teddy and I, in our excitement, consigned them to a place with an atmosphere slightly warmer than the one we were at that moment experiencing. It seemed as though the anti-aircraft gunners, knowing the airship to be now out of range, were seized by a sudden curiosity to see what we were doing chasing the Zeppelin away as we gradually rose above it.

Ah! Shall I ever forget those exciting moments! Time after time the machine-gun on the monster airship fired upon us, but I was flying in such a manner that to hit us would, I knew, be difficult. Yet just then a stray bullet struck one of my planes and went through it, while a second later another tore through the casing of the fuselage.

The commander of the Zeppelin thought, no doubt, that our intention was to rise and drop a bomb upon him, and he was now travelling very quickly in order to try and outpace us. In this, however, he did not succeed.

How far we travelled I have no idea. In those moments I lost all sense of time and of distance. I only know that, though so high, I could distinguish the Thames with its few dotted lights about, though we were rapidly leaving London behind.

We were passing over Essex, for I could plainly see the Thames widening upon my right, and I was gradually overhauling the enemy.

At that moment I steadied myself, for I knew that the smallest slip would mean death to us both. At signal from me Teddy—who had already had the dynamo running for some time—placed his hand upon the switch which controlled the unseen, but deadly current.

Slowly I crept nearer and nearer. Four thousand yards off—three thousand—another spurt—then I judged I was only two thousand yards away. Yet try how I would, I could get no nearer.

Again I set to work and, letting out my roaring engines to their full power, I slowly decreased the space between the fleeing monster and myself, Teddy still awaiting my signal.

Next instant I saw yet another spurt of fire from the rear gondola of the Zeppelin, and felt a hot, burning sensation in my forearm.

Then I knew that I had been hit!

I nudged Teddy, and he nodded. He understood and with the end of the box in which was the large, lens something like a camera, directed full upon the enemy, he pulled over the switch.

The result was appalling.

Next instant there was a blinding flash as the electric sparks flying from point to point all over the metal framework of the Zeppelin ignited the hydrogen; a huge red burst of flame came from the centre of the great airship, and following it was a terrific explosion, the frightful force of which would have turned us completely over had I not been prepared.

I swerved quickly, in order to get out of the vicinity, for the danger at that instant was very great.

Then, as I glanced aside, I saw the huge monster plunge down to earth, ablaze and flaring like a huge torch.

A second terrific explosion of bombs occurred when it reached the ground, and the whole country-side, shaken as though by an earthquake, became instantly illuminated for miles around.

Appalled at the sight, and yet relieved of the terrible tension, we both looked down and found that the enemy airship had, fortunately, fallen upon some flat land without houses—a wide, lonely marsh it appeared to be.

I at once dropped to a thousand feet and then, with a final glance at our work of destruction, turned tail and set about finding a landmark.

It was difficult, but I discovered one at last and, half an hour later, finding old Theed's flares in Swalecliffe Park, gently planed again to earth.

Need I detail the congratulations showered upon Teddy and myself; of Roseye's delight, or of her parent's enthusiasm next day? Indeed, it seemed as though the world about us—our little world who knew the truth of our night-exploit—had gone mad with joy.

On the following day I reported personally to the authorities, and afterwards had a long conference with certain high officials, who listened most intently to the description of my apparatus, and who heartily congratulated both Teddy and myself.

That same night, indeed, my description being but superficial, experts came down with me to Swalecliffe, where the apparatus was thoroughly and satisfactorily tested, and declared to be an air-defence of the highest importance, and one which must soon prove our superiority against the Zeppelin menace.

It was, I felt, my duty to reveal in the proper quarter the dastardly attempts made upon all three of us by our enemies, directed by the man Eastwell, who I feared knew something of our secret, whereupon orders were at once given to the Special Branch of Scotland Yard for his arrest under the Defence of the Realm Act.

Two officers ascended to his rooms in Albemarle Street an hour later, but when he learnt they were detectives he dashed into his bedroom and, without hesitation and before they could prevent him, shot himself.

Sir Herbert has now given his consent to Roseye's marriage "directly after the war," and as for myself—well, I have been given an important post—with Teddy, of course, as my co-worker. We are working hard day and night in construction of certain heavy brown deal boxes, the secret of which the enemy in our midst is straining every nerve to discover.

The only mention of the missing airship was a telegram published in the London newspapers on March 12, 1916, and which can be turned up in the files by any curious reader. I here give it in facsimile:—

SEQUEL TO AIR RAID.

ONE OF THE ZEPPELINS REPORTED DESTROYED.

The Hague, March 11.—Private information received from Cologne says that one of the Zeppelins which dropped bombs recently in England has not yet returned. It is believed that the airship was wrecked.—Central News.

The End.

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