

Bert slept for a time, and then his sleep was broken by dreams. Mostly he was fleeing from formless terrors down an interminable passage in an airship—a passage paved at first with ravenous trap-doors, and then with openwork canvas of the most careless description.

“Gaw!” said Bert, turning over after his seventh fall through infinite space that night.

He sat up in the darkness and nursed his knees. The progress of the airship was not nearly so smooth as a balloon; he could feel a regular swaying up, up, up and then down, down, down, and the throbbing and tremulous quiver of the engines.

His mind began to teem with memories—more memories and more.

Through them, like a struggling swimmer in broken water, came the perplexing question, what am I to do to-morrow? To-morrow, Kurt had told him, the Prince's secretary, the Graf Von Winterfeld, would come to him and discuss his flying-machine, and then he would see the Prince. He would have to stick it out now that he was Butteridge, and sell his invention. And then, if they found him out! He had a vision of infuriated Butteridges.... Suppose after all he owned up? Pretended it was their misunderstanding? He began to scheme devices for selling the secret and circumventing Butteridge.

What should he ask for the thing? Somehow twenty thousand pounds struck him as about the sum indicated.

He fell into that despondency that lies in wait in the small hours. He had got too big a job on—too big a job....

Memories swamped his scheming.

“Where was I this time last night?”

He recapitulated his evenings tediously and lengthily. Last night he had been up above the clouds in Butteridge's balloon. He thought of the moment when he dropped through them and saw the cold twilight sea close below. He still remembered that disagreeable incident with a nightmare vividness. And the night before he and Grubb had been looking for cheap lodgings at Littlestone in Kent. How remote that seemed now. It might be years ago. For the first time he thought of his fellow Desert Dervish, left with the two red-painted bicycles on Dymchurch sands. “‘E won't make much of a show of it, not without me. Any'ow 'e did 'ave the treasury—such as it was—in his pocket!”... The night before that was Bank Holiday night and they had sat discussing

their minstrel enterprise, drawing up a programme and rehearsing steps. And the night before was Whit Sunday. "Lord!" cried Bert, "what a doing that motor-bicycle give me!" He recalled the empty flapping of the eviscerated cushion, the feeling of impotence as the flames rose again. From among the confused memories of that tragic flare one little figure emerged very bright and poignantly sweet, Edna, crying back reluctantly from the departing motor-car, "See you to-morrer, Bert?"

Other memories of Edna clustered round that impression. They led Bert's mind step by step to an agreeable state that found expression in "I'll marry 'ER if she don't look out." And then in a flash it followed in his mind that if he sold the Butteridge secret he could! Suppose after all he did get twenty thousand pounds; such sums have been paid! With that he could buy house and garden, buy new clothes beyond dreaming, buy a motor, travel, have every delight of the civilised life as he knew it, for himself and Edna. Of course, risks were involved. "I'll 'ave old Butteridge on my track, I expect!"

He meditated upon that. He declined again to despondency. As yet he was only in the beginning of the adventure. He had still to deliver the goods and draw the cash. And before that—Just now he was by no means on his way home. He was flying off to America to fight there. "Not much fighting," he considered; "all our own way." Still, if a shell did happen to hit the Vaterland on the underside!...

"S'pose I ought to make my will."

He lay back for some time composing wills—chiefly in favour of Edna. He had settled now it was to be twenty thousand pounds. He left a number of minor legacies. The wills became more and more meandering and extravagant....

He woke from the eighth repetition of his nightmare fall through space. "This flying gets on one's nerves," he said.

He could feel the airship diving down, down, down, then slowly swinging to up, up, up. Throb, throb, throb, throb, quivered the engine.

He got up presently and wrapped himself about with Mr. Butteridge's overcoat and all the blankets, for the air was very keen. Then he peeped out of the window to see a grey dawn breaking over clouds, then turned up his light and bolted his door, sat down to the table, and produced his chest-protector.

He smoothed the crumpled plans with his hand, and contemplated them. Then he referred to the other drawings in the portfolio. Twenty thousand pounds. If he worked it right! It was worth trying, anyhow.

Presently he opened the drawer in which Kurt had put paper and writing-materials.

Bert Smallways was by no means a stupid person, and up to a certain limit he had not been badly educated. His board school had taught him to draw up to certain limits, taught him to calculate and understand a specification. If at that point his country had tired of its efforts, and handed him over unfinished to scramble for a living in an atmosphere of advertisements and individual enterprise, that was really not his fault. He was as his State had made him, and the reader must not imagine because he was a little Cockney cad, that he was absolutely incapable of grasping the idea of the Butteridge flying-machine. But he found it stiff and perplexing. His motor-bicycle and Grubb's experiments and the "mechanical drawing" he had done in standard seven all helped him out; and, moreover, the maker of these drawings, whoever he was, had been anxious to make his intentions plain. Bert copied sketches, he made notes, he made a quite tolerable and intelligent copy of the essential drawings and sketches of the others. Then he fell into a meditation upon them.

At last he rose with a sigh, folded up the originals that had formerly been in his chest-protector and put them into the breast-pocket of his jacket, and then very carefully deposited the copies he had made in the place of the originals. He had no very clear plan in his mind in doing this, except that he hated the idea of altogether parting with the secret. For a long time he meditated profoundly—nodding. Then he turned out his light and went to bed again and schemed himself to sleep.

6

The hochgeboren Graf von Winterfeld was also a light sleeper that night, but then he was one of these people who sleep little and play chess problems in their heads to while away the time—and that night he had a particularly difficult problem to solve.

He came in upon Bert while he was still in bed in the glow of the sunlight reflected from the North Sea below, consuming the rolls and coffee a soldier had brought him. He had a portfolio under his arm, and in the clear, early morning light his dingy grey hair and heavy, silver-rimmed spectacles made him look almost benevolent. He spoke English fluently, but with a strong German flavour. He was particularly bad with his "b's," and his "th's" softened towards weak "z'ds." He called Bert explosively, "Pooterage." He began with some indistinct civilities, bowed, took a folding-table and chair from behind the door, put the former between himself and Bert, sat down on the latter, coughed drily, and opened his portfolio. Then he put his elbows on the table, pinched his lower lip with his two fore-fingers, and regarded Bert disconcertingly with magnified eyes. "You came to us, Herr Pooterage, against your will," he said at last.

"Ow d'you make that out?" asked Bert, after a pause of astonishment.

“I chuge by ze maps in your car. They were all English. And your provisions. They were all picnic. Also your cords were entangled. You haf' been tugging—but no good. You could not manage ze balloon, and anuzzer power than yours prought you to us. Is it not so?”

Bert thought.

“Also—where is ze laty?”

“'Ere!—what lady?”

“You started with a laty. That is evident. You shtarted for an afternoon excursion—a picnic. A man of your temperament—he would take a laty. She was not wiz you in your balloon when you came down at Dornhof. No! Only her chacket! It is your affair. Still, I am curious.”

Bert reflected. “'Ow d'you know that?”

“I chuge by ze nature of your farious provisions. I cannot account, Mr. Pooterage, for ze laty, what you haf done with her. Nor can I tell why you should wear nature-sandals, nor why you should wear such cheap plue clothes. These are outside my instructions. Trifles, perhaps. Officially they are to be ignored. Laties come and go—I am a man of ze worldt. I haf known wise men wear sandals and efen practice vegetarian habits. I haf known men—or at any rate, I haf known chemists—who did not schmoke. You haf, no doubt, put ze laty down somewhere. Well. Let us get to—business. A higher power”—his voice changed its emotional quality, his magnified eyes seemed to dilate—“has prought you and your secret straight to us. So!”—he bowed his head—“so pe it. It is ze Destiny of Chermany and my Prince. I can undershtandt you always carry zat secret. You are afraidt of roppers and spies. So it comes wiz you—to us. Mr. Pooterage, Chermany will puy it.”

“Will she?”

“She will,” said the secretary, looking hard at Bert's abandoned sandals in the corner of the locker. He roused himself, consulted a paper of notes for a moment, and Bert eyed his brown and wrinkled face with expectation and terror. “Chermany, I am instructed to say,” said the secretary, with his eyes on the table and his notes spread out, “has always been willing to puy your secret. We haf indeed peen eager to acquire it fery eager; and it was only ze fear that you might be, on patriotic groundts, acting in collusion with your Pritish War Office zat has made us discreet in offering for your marvellous invention through intermediaries. We haf no hesitation whatefer now, I am instructed, in agreeing to your proposal of a hundert tousand poundts.”

“Crikey!” said Bert, overwhelmed.

“I peg your pardon?”

“Jest a twinge,” said Bert, raising his hand to his bandaged head.

“Ah! Also I am instructed to say that as for that noble, unrightly accused lady you haf championed so bravely against British hypocrisy and coldness, all ze chivalry of Chermany is on her site.”

“Lady?” said Bert faintly, and then recalled the great Butteridge love story. Had the old chap also read the letters? He must think him a scorcher if he had. “Oh! that's aw-right,” he said, “about 'er. I 'adn't any doubts about that. I—”

He stopped. The secretary certainly had a most appalling stare. It seemed ages before he looked down again. “Well, ze lady as you please. She is your affair. I haf performt my instructions. And ze title of Paron, zat also can pe done. It can all pe done, Herr Pooterage.”

He drummed on the table for a second or so, and resumed. “I haf to tell you, sir, zat you come to us at a crisis in—Welt-Politik. There can be no harm now for me to put our plans before you. Pefore you leafe this ship again they will be manifest to all ze worldt. War is perhaps already declared. We go—to America. Our fleet will descend out of ze air upon ze United States—it is a country quite unprepared for war eferywhere—eferywhere. Zey have always relied on ze Atlantic. And their navy. We have selected a certain point—it is at present ze secret of our commanders—which we shall seize, and zen we shall establish a depot—a sort of inland Gibraltar. It will be—what will it be?—an eagle's nest. Zere our airships will gizzer and repair, and thence they will fly to and fro ofer ze United States, terrorising cities, dominating Washington, levying what is necessary, until ze terms we dictate are accepted. You follow me?”

“Go on!” said Bert.

“We could haf done all zis wiz such Luftschiffe and Drachenflieger as we possess, but ze accession of your machine renders our project complete. It not only gifs us a better Drachenflieger, but it remofes our last uneasiness as to Great Pritain. Wizout you, sir, Great Pritain, ze land you lofed so well and zat has requited you so ill, zat land of Pharisees and reptiles, can do nozzing!—nozzing! You see, I am perfectly frank wiz you. Well, I am instructed that Chermany recognises all this. We want you to place yourself at our disposal. We want you to become our Chief Head Flight Engineer. We want you to manufacture, we want to equip a swarm of hornets under your direction. We want you to direct this force. And it is at our depot in America we want you. So we

offer you simply, and without haggling, ze full terms you demanded weeks ago—one hundred thousand poundts in cash, a salary of three thousand poundts a year, a pension of one thousand poundts a year, and ze title of Paron as you desired. These are my instructions.”

He resumed his scrutiny of Bert's face.

“That's all right, of course,” said Bert, a little short of breath, but otherwise resolute and calm; and it seemed to him that now was the time to bring his nocturnal scheming to the issue.

The secretary contemplated Bert's collar with sustained attention. Only for one moment did his gaze move to the sandals and back.

“Jes' lemme think a bit,” said Bert, finding the stare debilitating. “Look 'ere!” he said at last, with an air of great explicitness, “I GOT the secret.”

“Yes.”

“But I don't want the name of Butteridge to appear—see? I been thinking that over.”

“A little delicacy?”

“Exactly. You buy the secret—leastways, I give it you—from Bearer—see?”

His voice failed him a little, and the stare continued. “I want to do the thing Enonymously. See?”

Still staring. Bert drifted on like a swimmer caught by a current. “Fact is, I'm going to edop' the name of Smallways. I don't want no title of Baron; I've altered my mind. And I want the money quiet-like. I want the hundred thousand pounds paid into benks—thirty thousand into the London and County Benk Branch at Bun Hill in Kent directly I 'and over the plans; twenty thousand into the Benk of England; 'arf the rest into a good French bank, the other 'arf the German National Bank, see? I want it put there, right away. I don't want it put in the name of Butteridge. I want it put in the name of Albert Peter Smallways; that's the name I'm going to edop'. That's condition one.”

“Go on!” said the secretary.

“The nex condition,” said Bert, “is that you don't make any inquiries as to title. I mean what English gentlemen do when they sell or let you land. You don't arst 'ow I got it. See? 'Ere I am—I deliver you the goods—that's all right. Some people 'ave the cheek to say this isn't my invention, see? It is, you know—THAT'S all right; but I don't want that gone into. I want a fair and square agreement saying that's all right. See?”

His "See?" faded into a profound silence.

The secretary sighed at last, leant back in his chair and produced a tooth-pick, and used it, to assist his meditation on Bert's case. "What was that name?" he asked at last, putting away the tooth-pick; "I must write it down."

"Albert Peter Smallways," said Bert, in a mild tone.

The secretary wrote it down, after a little difficulty about the spelling because of the different names of the letters of the alphabet in the two languages.

"And now, Mr. Schmallyays," he said at last, leaning back and resuming the stare, "tell me: how did you ket hold of Mister Pooterage's balloon?"

7

When at last the Graf von Winterfold left Bert Smallways, he left him in an extremely deflated condition, with all his little story told.

He had, as people say, made a clean breast of it. He had been pursued into details. He had had to explain the blue suit, the sandals, the Desert Dervishes—everything. For a time scientific zeal consumed the secretary, and the question of the plans remained in suspense. He even went into speculation about the previous occupants of the balloon. "I suppose," he said, "the laty WAS the laty. Bot that is not our affair.

"It is fery curious and amusing, yes: but I am afraid the Prince may be annoyt. He acted wiz his usual decision—always he acts wiz wonterful decision. Like Napoleon. Directly he was tolt of your descent into the camp at Dornhof, he said, 'Pring him!—pring him! It is my shtar!' His shtar of Destiny! You see? He will be dthwarted. He directed you to come as Herr Pooterage, and you haf not done so. You haf triet, of course; but it has peen a poor try. His chugments of men are fery just and right, and it is better for men to act up to them—gompletely. Especially now. Particularly now."

He resumed that attitude of his, with his underlip pinched between his forefingers. He spoke almost confidentially. "It will be awkward. I triet to suggest some doubt, but I was over-ruled. The Prince does not listen. He is impatient in the high air. Perhaps he will think his shtar has been making a fool of him. Perhaps he will think / haf been making a fool of him."

He wrinkled his forehead, and drew in the corners of his mouth.

"I got the plans," said Bert.

“Yes. There is that! Yes. But you see the Prince was interested in Herr Pooterage because of his romantic seit. Herr Pooterage was so much more—ah!—in the picture. I am afraid you are not equal to controlling the flying machine department of our aerial park as he wished you to do. He hadt promised himself that....

“And der was also the prestige—the worldt prestige of Pooterage with us.... Well, we must see what we can do.” He held out his hand. “Gif me the plans.”

A terrible chill ran through the being of Mr. Smallways. To this day he is not clear in his mind whether he wept or no, but certainly there was weeping in his voice. “‘Ere, I say!” he protested. “Ain’t I to ‘ave—nothin’ for ‘em?”

The secretary regarded him with benevolent eyes. “You do not deserve anyzing!” he said.

“I might ‘ave tore ‘em up.”

“Zey are not yours!”

“They weren’t Butteridge’s!”

“No need to pay anyzing.”

Bert’s being seemed to tighten towards desperate deeds. “Gaw!” he said, clutching his coat, “AIN’T there?”

“Pe galm,” said the secretary. “Listen! You shall haf five hundert poundts. You shall haf it on my promise. I will do that for you, and that is all I can do. Take it from me. Gif me the name of that bank. Write it down. So! I tell you the Prince—is no choke. I do not think he approffed of your appearance last night. No! I can’t answer for him. He wanted Pooterage, and you haf spoilt it. The Prince—I do not understand quite, he is in a strange state. It is the excitement of the starting and this great soaring in the air. I cannot account for what he does. But if all goes well I will see to it—you shall haf five hundert poundts. Will that do? Then gif me the plans.”

“Old beggar!” said Bert, as the door clicked. “Gaw!—what an ole beggar!—SHARP!”

He sat down in the folding-chair, and whistled noiselessly for a time.

“Nice ‘old swindle for ‘im if I tore ‘em up! I could ‘ave.”

He rubbed the bridge of his nose thoughtfully. “I gave the whole blessed show away. If I’d j’es’ kep quiet about being Enonymous.... Gaw!... Too soon, Bert, my boy—too soon and too rushy. I’d like to kick my silly self.

“I couldn't 'ave kep' it up.

“After all, it ain't so very bad,” he said.

“After all, five 'undred pounds.... It isn't MY secret, anyhow. It's jes' a pickup on the road. Five 'undred.

“Wonder what the fare is from America back home?”

8

And later in the day an extremely shattered and disorganised Bert Smallways stood in the presence of the Prince Karl Albert.

The proceedings were in German. The Prince was in his own cabin, the end room of the airship, a charming apartment furnished in wicker-work with a long window across its entire breadth, looking forward. He was sitting at a folding-table of green baize, with Von Winterfeld and two officers sitting beside him, and littered before them was a number of American maps and Mr. Butteridge's letters and his portfolio and a number of loose papers. Bert was not asked to sit down, and remained standing throughout the interview. Von Winterfeld told his story, and every now and then the words Ballon and Pooterage struck on Bert's ears. The Prince's face remained stern and ominous and the two officers watched it cautiously or glanced at Bert. There was something a little strange in their scrutiny of the Prince—a curiosity, an apprehension. Then presently he was struck by an idea, and they fell discussing the plans. The Prince asked Bert abruptly in English. “Did you ever see this thing go op?”

Bert jumped. “Saw it from Bun 'ill, your Royal Highness.”

Von Winterfeld made some explanation.

“How fast did it go?”

“Couldn't say, your Royal Highness. The papers, leastways the Daily Courier, said eighty miles an hour.”

They talked German over that for a time.

“Couldt it standt still? Op in the air? That is what I want to know.”

“It could 'ovver, your Royal Highness, like a wasp,” said Bert.

“Viel besser, nicht wahr?” said the Prince to Von Winterfeld, and then went on in German for a time.

Presently they came to an end, and the two officers looked at Bert. One rang a bell, and the portfolio was handed to an attendant, who took it away.

Then they reverted to the case of Bert, and it was evident the Prince was inclined to be hard with him. Von Winterfeld protested. Apparently theological considerations came in, for there were several mentions of "Gott!" Some conclusions emerged, and it was apparent that Von Winterfeld was instructed to convey them to Bert.

"Mr. Schmallyays, you haf obtained a footing in this airship," he said, "by disgraceful and systematic lying."

"Ardly systematic," said Bert. "I—"

The Prince silenced him by a gesture.

"And it is within the power of his Highness to dispose of you as a spy."

"Ere!—I came to sell—"

"Ssh!" said one of the officers.

"However, in consideration of the happy chance that mate you the instrument unter Gott of this Pooterage flying-machine reaching his Highness's hand, you haf been spared. Yes,—you were the pearer of goot tidings. You will be allowed to remain on this ship until it is convenient to dispose of you. Do you understandt?"

"We will bring him," said the Prince, and added terribly with a terrible glare, "als *Ballast*."

"You are to come with us," said Winterfeld, "as pallast. Do you understandt?"

Bert opened his mouth to ask about the five hundred pounds, and then a saving gleam of wisdom silenced him. He met Von Winterfeld's eye, and it seemed to him the secretary nodded slightly.

"Go!" said the Prince, with a sweep of the great arm and hand towards the door. Bert went out like a leaf before a gale.

9

But in between the time when the Graf von Winterfeld had talked to him and this alarming conference with the Prince, Bert had explored the Vaterland from end to end. He had found it interesting in spite of grave preoccupations. Kurt, like the greater number of the men upon the German air-fleet, had known hardly anything of aeronautics before his appointment to the new flagship. But he was extremely keen

upon this wonderful new weapon Germany had assumed so suddenly and dramatically. He showed things to Bert with a boyish eagerness and appreciation. It was as if he showed them over again to himself, like a child showing a new toy. "Let's go all over the ship," he said with zest. He pointed out particularly the lightness of everything, the use of exhausted aluminium tubing, of springy cushions inflated with compressed hydrogen; the partitions were hydrogen bags covered with light imitation leather, the very crockery was a light biscuit glazed in a vacuum, and weighed next to nothing. Where strength was needed there was the new Charlottenburg alloy, German steel as it was called, the toughest and most resistant metal in the world.

There was no lack of space. Space did not matter, so long as load did not grow. The habitable part of the ship was two hundred and fifty feet long, and the rooms in two tiers; above these one could go up into remarkable little white-metal turrets with big windows and airtight double doors that enabled one to inspect the vast cavity of the gas-chambers. This inside view impressed Bert very much. He had never realised before that an airship was not one simple continuous gas-bag containing nothing but gas. Now he saw far above him the backbone of the apparatus and its big ribs, "like the neural and haemal canals," said Kurt, who had dabbled in biology.

"Rather!" said Bert appreciatively, though he had not the ghost of an idea what these phrases meant.

Little electric lights could be switched on up there if anything went wrong in the night. There were even ladders across the space. "But you can't go into the gas," protested Bert. "You can't breathe it."

The lieutenant opened a cupboard door and displayed a diver's suit, only that it was made of oiled silk, and both its compressed-air knapsack and its helmet were of an alloy of aluminium and some light metal. "We can go all over the inside netting and stick up bullet holes or leaks," he explained. "There's netting inside and out. The whole outer-case is rope ladder, so to speak."

Aft of the habitable part of the airship was the magazine of explosives, coming near the middle of its length. They were all bombs of various types mostly in glass—none of the German airships carried any guns at all except one small pom-pom (to use the old English nickname dating from the Boer war), which was forward in the gallery upon the shield at the heart of the eagle.

From the magazine amidships a covered canvas gallery with aluminium treads on its floor and a hand-rope, ran back underneath the gas-chamber to the engine-room at the tail; but along this Bert did not go, and from first to last he never saw the engines.

But he went up a ladder against a gale of ventilation—a ladder that was encased in a kind of gas-tight fire escape—and ran right athwart the great forward air-chamber to the little look-out gallery with a telephone, that gallery that bore the light pom-pom of German steel and its locker of shells. This gallery was all of aluminium magnesium alloy, the tight front of the air-ship swelled cliff-like above and below, and the black eagle sprawled overwhelmingly gigantic, its extremities all hidden by the bulge of the gas-bag. And far down, under the soaring eagles, was England, four thousand feet below perhaps, and looking very small and defenceless indeed in the morning sunlight.

The realisation that there was England gave Bert sudden and unexpected qualms of patriotic compunction. He was struck by a quite novel idea. After all, he might have torn up those plans and thrown them away. These people could not have done so very much to him. And even if they did, ought not an Englishman to die for his country? It was an idea that had hitherto been rather smothered up by the cares of a competitive civilisation. He became violently depressed. He ought, he perceived, to have seen it in that light before. Why hadn't he seen it in that light before?

Indeed, wasn't he a sort of traitor?... He wondered how the aerial fleet must look from down there. Tremendous, no doubt, and dwarfing all the buildings.

He was passing between Manchester and Liverpool, Kurt told him; a gleaming band across the prospect was the Ship Canal, and a weltering ditch of shipping far away ahead, the Mersey estuary. Bert was a Southerner; he had never been north of the Midland counties, and the multitude of factories and chimneys—the latter for the most part obsolete and smokeless now, superseded by huge electric generating stations that consumed their own reek—old railway viaducts, mono-rail net-works and goods yards, and the vast areas of dingy homes and narrow streets, spreading aimlessly, struck him as though Camberwell and Rotherhithe had run to seed. Here and there, as if caught in a net, were fields and agricultural fragments. It was a sprawl of undistinguished population. There were, no doubt, museums and town halls and even cathedrals of a sort to mark theoretical centres of municipal and religious organisation in this confusion; but Bert could not see them, they did not stand out at all in that wide disorderly vision of congested workers' houses and places to work, and shops and meanly conceived chapels and churches. And across this landscape of an industrial civilisation swept the shadows of the German airships like a hurrying shoal of fishes....

Kurt and he fell talking of aerial tactics, and presently went down to the undergallery in order that Bert might see the Drachenflieger that the airships of the right wing had

picked up overnight and were towing behind them; each airship towing three or four. They looked, like big box-kites of an exaggerated form, soaring at the ends of invisible cords. They had long, square heads and flattened tails, with lateral propellers.

“Much skill is required for those!—much skill!”

“Rather!”

Pause.

“Your machine is different from that, Mr. Butteridge?”

“Quite different,” said Bert. “More like an insect, and less like a bird. And it buzzes, and don't drive about so. What can those things do?”

Kurt was not very clear upon that himself, and was still explaining when Bert was called to the conference we have recorded with the Prince.

And after that was over, the last traces of Butteridge fell from Bert like a garment, and he became Smallways to all on board. The soldiers ceased to salute him, and the officers ceased to seem aware of his existence, except Lieutenant Kurt. He was turned out of his nice cabin, and packed in with his belongings to share that of Lieutenant Kurt, whose luck it was to be junior, and the bird-headed officer, still swearing slightly, and carrying strops and aluminium boot-trees and weightless hair-brushes and hand-mirrors and pomade in his hands, resumed possession. Bert was put in with Kurt because there was nowhere else for him to lay his bandaged head in that close-packed vessel. He was to mess, he was told, with the men.

Kurt came and stood with his legs wide apart and surveyed, him for a moment as he sat despondent in his new quarters.

“What's your real name, then?” said Kurt, who was only imperfectly informed of the new state of affairs.

“Smallways.”

“I thought you were a bit of a fraud—even when I thought you were Butteridge. You're jolly lucky the Prince took it calmly. He's a pretty tidy blazer when he's roused. He wouldn't stick a moment at pitching a chap of your sort overboard if he thought fit. No!... They've shoved you on to me, but it's my cabin, you know.”

“I won't forget,” said Bert.

Kurt left him, and when he came to look about him the first thing he saw pasted on the padded wall was a reproduction, of the great picture by Siegfried Schmalz of the War

God, that terrible, trampling figure with the viking helmet and the scarlet cloak, wading through destruction, sword in hand, which had so strong a resemblance to Karl Albert, the prince it was painted to please.

## CHAPTER V. THE BATTLE OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC

### 1

The Prince Karl Albert had made a profound impression upon Bert. He was quite the most terrifying person Bert had ever encountered. He filled the Smallways soul with passionate dread and antipathy. For a long time Bert sat alone in Kurt's cabin, doing nothing and not venturing even to open the door lest he should be by that much nearer that appalling presence.

So it came about that he was probably the last person on board to hear the news that wireless telegraphy was bringing to the airship in throbs and fragments of a great naval battle in progress in mid-Atlantic.

He learnt it at last from Kurt.

Kurt came in with a general air of ignoring Bert, but muttering to himself in English nevertheless. "Stupendous!" Bert heard him say. "Here!" he said, "get off this locker." And he proceeded to rout out two books and a case of maps. He spread them on the folding-table, and stood regarding them. For a time his Germanic discipline struggled with his English informality and his natural kindness and talkativeness, and at last lost.

"They're at it, Smallways," he said.

"At what, sir?" said Bert, broken and respectful.

"Fighting! The American North Atlantic squadron and pretty nearly the whole of our fleet. Our Eiserne Kreuz has had a gruelling and is sinking, and their Miles Standish—she's one of their biggest—has sunk with all hands. Torpedoes, I suppose. She was a bigger ship than the Karl der Grosse, but five or six years older. Gods! I wish we could see it, Smallways; a square fight in blue water, guns or nothing, and all of 'em steaming ahead!"

He spread his maps, he had to talk, and so he delivered a lecture on the naval situation to Bert.

“Here it is,” he said, “latitude 30 degrees 50 minutes N. longitude 30 degrees 50 minutes W. It's a good day off us, anyhow, and they're all going south-west by south at full pelt as hard as they can go. We shan't see a bit of it, worse luck! Not a sniff we shan't get!”

2

The naval situation in the North Atlantic at that time was a peculiar one. The United States was by far the stronger of the two powers upon the sea, but the bulk of the American fleet was still in the Pacific. It was in the direction of Asia that war had been most feared, for the situation between Asiatic and white had become unusually violent and dangerous, and the Japanese government had shown itself quite unprecedentedly difficult. The German attack therefore found half the American strength at Manila, and what was called the Second Fleet strung out across the Pacific in wireless contact between the Asiatic station and San Francisco. The North Atlantic squadron was the sole American force on her eastern shore, it was returning from a friendly visit to France and Spain, and was pumping oil-fuel from tenders in mid-Atlantic—for most of its ships were steamships—when the international situation became acute. It was made up of four battleships and five armoured cruisers ranking almost with battleships, not one of which was of a later date than 1913. The Americans had indeed grown so accustomed to the idea that Great Britain could be trusted to keep the peace of the Atlantic that a naval attack on the eastern seaboard found them unprepared even in their imaginations. But long before the declaration of war—indeed, on Whit Monday—the whole German fleet of eighteen battleships, with a flotilla of fuel tenders and converted liners containing stores to be used in support of the air-fleet, had passed through the straits of Dover and headed boldly for New York. Not only did these German battleships outnumber the Americans two to one, but they were more heavily armed and more modern in construction—seven of them having high explosive engines built of Charlottenburg steel, and all carrying Charlottenburg steel guns.

The fleets came into contact on Wednesday before any actual declaration of war. The Americans had strung out in the modern fashion at distances of thirty miles or so, and were steaming to keep themselves between the Germans and either the eastern states or Panama; because, vital as it was to defend the seaboard cities and particularly New York, it was still more vital to save the canal from any attack that might prevent the return of the main fleet from the Pacific. No doubt, said Kurt, this was now making records across that ocean, “unless the Japanese have had the same idea as the Germans.” It was obviously beyond human possibility that the American North Atlantic fleet could hope to meet and defeat the German; but, on the other

hand, with luck it might fight a delaying action and inflict such damage as to greatly weaken the attack upon the coast defences. Its duty, indeed, was not victory but devotion, the severest task in the world. Meanwhile the submarine defences of New York, Panama, and the other more vital points could be put in some sort of order.

This was the naval situation, and until Wednesday in Whit week it was the only situation the American people had realised. It was then they heard for the first time of the real scale of the Dornhof aeronautic park and the possibility of an attack coming upon them not only by sea, but by the air. But it is curious that so discredited were the newspapers of that period that a large majority of New Yorkers, for example, did not believe the most copious and circumstantial accounts of the German air-fleet until it was actually in sight of New York.

Kurt's talk was half soliloquy. He stood with a map on Mercator's projection before him, swaying to the swinging of the ship and talking of guns and tonnage, of ships and their build and powers and speed, of strategic points, and bases of operation. A certain shyness that reduced him to the status of a listener at the officers' table no longer silenced him.

Bert stood by, saying very little, but watching Kurt's finger on the map. "They've been saying things like this in the papers for a long time," he remarked. "Fancy it coming real!"

Kurt had a detailed knowledge of the Miles Standish. "She used to be a crack ship for gunnery—held the record. I wonder if we beat her shooting, or how? I wish I was in it. I wonder which of our ships beat her. Maybe she got a shell in her engines. It's a running fight! I wonder what the Barbarossa is doing," he went on, "She's my old ship. Not a first-rater, but good stuff. I bet she's got a shot or two home by now if old Schneider's up to form. Just think of it! There they are whacking away at each other, great guns going, shells exploding, magazines bursting, ironwork flying about like straw in a gale, all we've been dreaming of for years! I suppose we shall fly right away to New York—just as though it wasn't anything at all. I suppose we shall reckon we aren't wanted down there. It's no more than a covering fight on our side. All those tenders and store-ships of ours are going on south-west by west to New York to make a floating depot for us. See?" He dabbed his forefinger on the map. "Here we are. Our train of stores goes there, our battleships elbow the Americans out of our way there."

When Bert went down to the men's mess-room to get his evening ration, hardly any one took notice of him except just to point him out for an instant. Every one was talking of the battle, suggesting, contradicting—at times, until the petty officers hushed them, it rose to a great uproar. There was a new bulletin, but what it said he

did not gather except that it concerned the Barbarossa. Some of the men stared at him, and he heard the name of “Booteraidge” several times; but no one molested him, and there was no difficulty about his soup and bread when his turn at the end of the queue came. He had feared there might be no ration for him, and if so he did not know what he would have done.

Afterwards he ventured out upon the little hanging gallery with the solitary sentinel. The weather was still fine, but the wind was rising and the rolling swing of the airship increasing. He clutched the rail tightly and felt rather giddy. They were now out of sight of land, and over blue water rising and falling in great masses. A dingy old brigantine under the British flag rose and plunged amid the broad blue waves—the only ship in sight.

3

In the evening it began to blow and the air-ship to roll like a porpoise as it swung through the air. Kurt said that several of the men were sea-sick, but the motion did not inconvenience Bert, whose luck it was to be of that mysterious gastric disposition which constitutes a good sailor. He slept well, but in the small hours the light awoke him, and he found Kurt staggering about in search of something. He found it at last in the locker, and held it in his hand unsteadily—a compass. Then he compared his map.

“We've changed our direction,” he said, “and come into the wind. I can't make it out. We've turned away from New York to the south. Almost as if we were going to take a hand—”

He continued talking to himself for some time.

Day came, wet and windy. The window was bedewed externally, and they could see nothing through it. It was also very cold, and Bert decided to keep rolled up in his blankets on the locker until the bugle summoned him to his morning ration. That consumed, he went out on the little gallery; but he could see nothing but eddying clouds driving headlong by, and the dim outlines of the nearer airships. Only at rare intervals could he get a glimpse of grey sea through the pouring cloud-drift.

Later in the morning the Vaterland changed altitude, and soared up suddenly in a high, clear sky, going, Kurt said, to a height of nearly thirteen thousand feet.

Bert was in his cabin, and chanced to see the dew vanish from the window and caught the gleam of sunlight outside. He looked out, and saw once more that sunlit cloud floor he had seen first from the balloon, and the ships of the German air-fleet rising one by one from the white, as fish might rise and become visible from deep water. He

stared for a moment and then ran out to the little gallery to see this wonder better. Below was cloudland and storm, a great drift of tumbled weather going hard away to the north-east, and the air about him was clear and cold and serene save for the faintest chill breeze and a rare, drifting snow-flake. Throb, throb, throb, throb, went the engines in the stillness. That huge herd of airships rising one after another had an effect of strange, portentous monsters breaking into an altogether unfamiliar world.

Either there was no news of the naval battle that morning, or the Prince kept to himself whatever came until past midday. Then the bulletins came with a rush, bulletins that made the lieutenant wild with excitement.

“Barbarossa disabled and sinking,” he cried. “Gott im Himmel! Der alte Barbarossa! Aber welch ein braver kriegler!”

He walked about the swinging cabin, and for a time he was wholly German.

Then he became English again. “Think of it, Smallways! The old ship we kept so clean and tidy! All smashed about, and the iron flying about in fragments, and the chaps one knew—Gott!—flying about too! Scalding water squirting, fire, and the smash, smash of the guns! They smash when you're near! Like everything bursting to pieces! Wool won't stop it—nothing! And me up here—so near and so far! Der alte Barbarossa!”

“Any other ships?” asked Smallways, presently.

“Gott! Yes! We've lost the Karl der Grosse, our best and biggest. Run down in the night by a British liner that blundered into the fighting in trying to blunder out. They're fighting in a gale. The liner's afloat with her nose broken, sagging about! There never was such a battle!—never before! Good ships and good men on both sides,—and a storm and the night and the dawn and all in the open ocean full steam ahead! No stabbing! No submarines! Guns and shooting! Half our ships we don't hear of any more, because their masts are shot away. Latitude, 30 degrees 40 minutes N.—longitude, 40 degrees 30 minutes W.—where's that?”

He routed out his map again, and stared at it with eyes that did not see.

“Der alte Barbarossa! I can't get it out of my head—with shells in her engine-room, and the fires flying out of her furnaces, and the stokers and engineers scalded and dead. Men I've messed with, Smallways—men I've talked to close! And they've had their day at last! And it wasn't all luck for them!

“Disabled and sinking! I suppose everybody can't have all the luck in a battle. Poor old Schneider! I bet he gave 'em something back!”

So it was the news of the battle came filtering through to them all that morning. The Americans had lost a second ship, name unknown; the Hermann had been damaged in covering the Barbarossa.... Kurt fretted like an imprisoned animal about the airship, now going up to the forward gallery under the eagle, now down into the swinging gallery, now poring over his maps. He infected Smallways with a sense of the immediacy of this battle that was going on just over the curve of the earth. But when Bert went down to the gallery the world was empty and still, a clear inky-blue sky above and a rippled veil of still, thin sunlit cirrus below, through which one saw a racing drift of rain-cloud, and never a glimpse of sea. Throb, throb, throb, throb, went the engines, and the long, undulating wedge of airships hurried after the flagship like a flight of swans after their leader. Save for the quiver of the engines it was as noiseless as a dream. And down there, somewhere in the wind and rain, guns roared, shells crashed home, and, after the old manner of warfare, men toiled and died.

4

As the afternoon wore on the lower weather abated, and the sea became intermittently visible again. The air-fleet dropped slowly to the middle air, and towards sunset they had a glimpse of the disabled Barbarossa far away to the east. Smallways heard men hurrying along the passage, and was drawn out to the gallery, where he found nearly a dozen officers collected and scrutinising the helpless ruins of the battleship through field-glasses. Two other vessels stood by her, one an exhausted petrol tank, very high out of the water, and the other a converted liner. Kurt was at the end of the gallery, a little apart from the others.

“Gott!” he said at last, lowering his binocular, “it is like seeing an old friend with his nose cut off—waiting to be finished. Der Barbarossa!”

With a sudden impulse he handed his glass to Bert, who had peered beneath his hands, ignored by every one, seeing the three ships merely as three brown-black lines upon the sea.

Never had Bert seen the like of that magnified slightly hazy image before. It was not simply a battered ironclad that wallowed helpless, it was a mangled ironclad. It seemed wonderful she still floated. Her powerful engines had been her ruin. In the long chase of the night she had got out of line with her consorts, and nipped in between the Susquehanna and the Kansas City. They discovered her proximity, dropped back until she was nearly broadside on to the former battleship, and signalled up the Theodore Roosevelt and the little Monitor. As dawn broke she had found herself hostess of a circle. The fight had not lasted five minutes before the appearance of the Hermann to the east, and immediately after of the Furst Bismarck

in the west, forced the Americans to leave her, but in that time they had smashed her iron to rags. They had vented the accumulated tensions of their hard day's retreat upon her. As Bert saw her, she seemed a mere metal-worker's fantasy of frozen metal writhings. He could not tell part from part of her, except by its position.

“Gott!” murmured Kurt, taking the glasses Bert restored to him—“Gott! Da waren Albrecht—der gute Albrecht und der alte Zimmermann—und von Rosen!”

Long after the Barbarosa had been swallowed up in the twilight and distance he remained on the gallery peering through his glasses, and when he came back to his cabin he was unusually silent and thoughtful.

“This is a rough game, Smallways,” he said at last—“this war is a rough game. Somehow one sees it different after a thing like that. Many men there were worked to make that Barbarossa, and there were men in it—one does not meet the like of them every day. Albrecht—there was a man named Albrecht—played the zither and improvised; I keep on wondering what has happened to him. He and I—we were very close friends, after the German fashion.”

Smallways woke the next night to discover the cabin in darkness, a draught blowing through it, and Kurt talking to himself in German. He could see him dimly by the window, which he had unscrewed and opened, peering down. That cold, clear, attenuated light which is not so much light as a going of darkness, which casts inky shadows and so often heralds the dawn in the high air, was on his face.

“What's the row?” said Bert.

“Shut up!” said the lieutenant. “Can't you hear?”

Into the stillness came the repeated heavy thud of guns, one, two, a pause, then three in quick succession.

“Gaw!” said Bert—“guns!” and was instantly at the lieutenant's side. The airship was still very high and the sea below was masked by a thin veil of clouds. The wind had fallen, and Bert, following Kurt's pointing finger, saw dimly through the colourless veil first a red glow, then a quick red flash, and then at a little distance from it another. They were, it seemed for a while, silent flashes, and seconds after, when one had ceased to expect them, came the belated thuds—thud, thud. Kurt spoke in German, very quickly.

A bugle call rang through the airship.

Kurt sprang to his feet, saying something in an excited tone, still using German, and went to the door.

“I say! What's up?” cried Bert. “What's that?”

The lieutenant stopped for an instant in the doorway, dark against the light passage. “You stay where you are, Smallways. You keep there and do nothing. We're going into action,” he explained, and vanished.

Bert's heart began to beat rapidly. He felt himself poised over the fighting vessels far below. In a moment, were they to drop like a hawk striking a bird? “Gaw!” he whispered at last, in awestricken tones.

Thud!... thud! He discovered far away a second ruddy flare flashing guns back at the first. He perceived some difference on the Vaterland for which he could not account, and then he realised that the engines had slowed to an almost inaudible beat. He stuck his head out of the window—it was a tight fit—and saw in the bleak air the other airships slowed down to a scarcely perceptible motion.

A second bugle sounded, was taken up faintly from ship to ship. Out went the lights; the fleet became dim, dark bulks against an intense blue sky that still retained an occasional star. For a long time they hung, for an interminable time it seemed to him, and then began the sound of air being pumped into the balloonette, and slowly, slowly the Vaterland sank down towards the clouds.

He craned his neck, but he could not see if the rest of the fleet was following them; the overhang of the gas-chambers intervened. There was something that stirred his imagination deeply in that stealthy, noiseless descent. The obscurity deepened for a time, the last fading star on the horizon vanished, and he felt the cold presence of cloud. Then suddenly the glow beneath assumed distinct outlines, became flames, and the Vaterland ceased to descend and hung observant, and it would seem unobserved, just beneath a drifting stratum of cloud, a thousand feet, perhaps, over the battle below.

In the night the struggling naval battle and retreat had entered upon a new phase. The Americans had drawn together the ends of the flying line skilfully and dexterously, until at last it was a column and well to the south of the lax sweeping pursuit of the Germans. Then in the darkness before the dawn they had come about and steamed northward in close order with the idea of passing through the German battle-line and falling upon the flotilla that was making for New York in support of the German air-fleet. Much had altered since the first contact of the fleets. By this time the American admiral, O'Connor, was fully informed of the existence of the airships, and he was no

longer vitally concerned for Panama, since the submarine flotilla was reported arrived there from Key West, and the Delaware and Abraham Lincoln, two powerful and entirely modern ships, were already at Rio Grande, on the Pacific side of the canal. His manoeuvre was, however, delayed by a boiler explosion on board the Susquehanna, and dawn found this ship in sight of and indeed so close to the Bremen and Weimar that they instantly engaged. There was no alternative to her abandonment but a fleet engagement. O'Connor chose the latter course. It was by no means a hopeless fight. The Germans, though much more numerous and powerful than the Americans, were in a dispersed line measuring nearly forty-five miles from end to end, and there were many chances that before they could gather in for the fight the column of seven Americans would have ripped them from end to end.

The day broke dim and overcast, and neither the Bremen nor the Weimar realised they had to deal with more than the Susquehanna until the whole column drew out from behind her at a distance of a mile or less and bore down on them. This was the position of affairs when the Vaterland appeared in the sky. The red glow Bert had seen through the column of clouds came from the luckless Susquehanna; she lay almost immediately below, burning fore and aft, but still fighting two of her guns and steaming slowly southward. The Bremen and the Weimar, both hit in several places, were going west by south and away from her. The American fleet, headed by the Theodore Roosevelt, was crossing behind them, pounding them in succession, steaming in between them and the big modern Furst Bismarck, which was coming up from the west. To Bert, however, the names of all these ships were unknown, and for a considerable time indeed, misled by the direction in which the combatants were moving, he imagined the Germans to be Americans and the Americans Germans. He saw what appeared to him to be a column of six battleships pursuing three others who were supported by a newcomer, until the fact that the Bremen and Weimar were firing into the Susquehanna upset his calculations. Then for a time he was hopelessly at a loss. The noise of the guns, too, confused him, they no longer seemed to boom; they went whack, whack, whack, whack, and each faint flash made his heart jump in anticipation of the instant impact. He saw these ironclads, too, not in profile, as he was accustomed to see ironclads in pictures, but in plan and curiously foreshortened. For the most part they presented empty decks, but here and there little knots of men sheltered behind steel bulwarks. The long, agitated noses of their big guns, jetting thin transparent flashes and the broadside activity of the quick-firers, were the chief facts in this bird's-eye view. The Americans being steam-turbine ships, had from two to four blast funnels each; the Germans lay lower in the water, having explosive engines, which now for some reason made an unwonted muttering roar. Because of their

steam propulsion, the American ships were larger and with a more graceful outline. He saw all these foreshortened ships rolling considerably and fighting their guns over a sea of huge low waves and under the cold, explicit light of dawn. The whole spectacle waved slowly with the long rhythmic rising and beat of the airship.

At first only the Vaterland of all the flying fleet appeared upon the scene below. She hovered high, over the Theodore Roosevelt, keeping pace with the full speed of that ship. From that ship she must have been intermittently visible through the drifting clouds. The rest of the German fleet remained above the cloud canopy at a height of six or seven thousand feet, communicating with the flagship by wireless telegraphy, but risking no exposure to the artillery below.

It is doubtful at what particular time the unlucky Americans realised the presence of this new factor in the fight. No account now survives of their experience. We have to imagine as well as we can what it must have been to a battled-strained sailor suddenly glancing upward to discover that huge long silent shape overhead, vaster than any battleship, and trailing now from its hinder quarter a big German flag. Presently, as the sky cleared, more of such ships appeared in the blue through the dissolving clouds, and more, all disdainfully free of guns or armour, all flying fast to keep pace with the running fight below.

From first to last no gun whatever was fired at the Vaterland, and only a few rifle shots. It was a mere adverse stroke of chance that she had a man killed aboard her. Nor did she take any direct share in the fight until the end. She flew above the doomed American fleet while the Prince by wireless telegraphy directed the movements of her consorts. Meanwhile the Vogel-stern and Preussen, each with half a dozen drachenflieger in tow, went full speed ahead and then dropped through the clouds, perhaps five miles ahead of the Americans. The Theodore Roosevelt let fly at once with the big guns in her forward barbette, but the shells burst far below the Vogel-stern, and forthwith a dozen single-man drachenflieger were swooping down to make their attack.

Bert, craning his neck through the cabin port-hole, saw the whole of that incident, that first encounter of aeroplane and ironclad. He saw the queer German drachenflieger, with their wide flat wings and square box-shaped heads, their wheeled bodies, and their single-man riders, soar down the air like a flight of birds. "Gaw!" he said. One to the right pitched extravagantly, shot steeply up into the air, burst with a loud report, and flamed down into the sea; another plunged nose forward into the water and seemed to fly to pieces as it hit the waves. He saw little men on the deck of the Theodore Roosevelt below, men foreshortened in plan into mere heads and feet,

running out preparing to shoot at the others. Then the foremost flying-machine was rushing between Bert and the American's deck, and then bang! came the thunder of its bomb flung neatly at the forward barbette, and a thin little crackling of rifle shots in reply. Whack, whack, whack, went the quick-firing guns of the Americans' battery, and smash came an answering shell from the Furst Bismarck. Then a second and third flying-machine passed between Bert and the American ironclad, dropping bombs also, and a fourth, its rider hit by a bullet, reeled down and dashed itself to pieces and exploded between the shot-torn funnels, blowing them apart. Bert had a momentary glimpse of a little black creature jumping from the crumpling frame of the flying-machine, hitting the funnel, and falling limply, to be instantly caught and driven to nothingness by the blaze and rush of the explosion.

Smash! came a vast explosion in the forward part of the flagship, and a huge piece of metalwork seemed to lift out of her and dump itself into the sea, dropping men and leaving a gap into which a prompt drachenflieger planted a flaring bomb. And then for an instant Bert perceived only too clearly in the growing, pitiless light a number of minute, convulsively active animalcula scorched and struggling in the Theodore Roosevelt's foaming wake. What were they? Not men—surely not men? Those drowning, mangled little creatures tore with their clutching fingers at Bert's soul. "Oh, Gord!" he cried, "Oh, Gord!" almost whimpering. He looked again and they had gone, and the black stem of the Andrew Jackson, a little disfigured by the sinking Bremen's last shot, was parting the water that had swallowed them into two neatly symmetrical waves. For some moments sheer blank horror blinded Bert to the destruction below.

Then, with an immense rushing sound, bearing as it were a straggling volley of crashing minor explosions on its back, the Susquehanna, three miles and more now to the east, blew up and vanished abruptly in a boiling, steaming welter. For a moment nothing was to be seen but tumbled water, and—then there came belching up from below, with immense gulping noises, eructations of steam and air and petrol and fragments of canvas and woodwork and men.

That made a distinct pause in the fight. It seemed a long pause to Bert. He found himself looking for the drachenflieger. The flattened ruin of one was floating abeam of the Monitor, the rest had passed, dropping bombs down the American column; several were in the water and apparently uninjured, and three or four were still in the air and coming round now in a wide circle to return to their mother airships. The American ironclads were no longer in column formation; the Theodore Roosevelt, badly damaged, had turned to the southeast, and the Andrew Jackson, greatly battered but uninjured in any fighting part was passing between her and the still fresh

and vigorous Furst Bismarck to intercept and meet the latter's fire. Away to the west the Hermann and the Germanicus had appeared and were coming into action.

In the pause, after the Susquehanna's disaster Bert became aware of a trivial sound like the noise of an ill-greased, ill-hung door that falls ajar—the sound of the men in the Furst Bismarck cheering.

And in that pause in the uproar too, the sun rose, the dark waters became luminously blue, and a torrent of golden light irradiated the world. It came like a sudden smile in a scene of hate and terror. The cloud veil had vanished as if by magic, and the whole immensity of the German air-fleet was revealed in the sky; the air-fleet stooping now upon its prey.

“Whack-bang, whack-bang,” the guns resumed, but ironclads were not built to fight the zenith, and the only hits the Americans scored were a few lucky chances in a generally ineffectual rifle fire. Their column was now badly broken, the Susquehanna had gone, the Theodore Roosevelt had fallen astern out of the line, with her forward guns disabled, in a heap of wreckage, and the Monitor was in some grave trouble. These two had ceased fire altogether, and so had the Bremen and Weimar, all four ships lying within shot of each other in an involuntary truce and with their respective flags still displayed. Only four American ships now, with the Andrew Jackson leading, kept to the south-easterly course. And the Furst Bismarck, the Hermann, and the Germanicus steamed parallel to them and drew ahead of them, fighting heavily. The Vaterland rose slowly in the air in preparation for the concluding act of the drama.

Then, falling into place one behind the other, a string of a dozen airships dropped with unhurrying swiftness down the air in pursuit of the American fleet. They kept at a height of two thousand feet or more until they were over and a little in advance of the rearmost ironclad, and then stooped swiftly down into a fountain of bullets, and going just a little faster than the ship below, pelted her thinly protected decks with bombs until they became sheets of detonating flame. So the airships passed one after the other along the American column as it sought to keep up its fight with the Furst Bismarck, the Hermann, and the Germanicus, and each airship added to the destruction and confusion its predecessor had made. The American gunfire ceased, except for a few heroic shots, but they still steamed on, obstinately unsubdued, bloody, battered, and wrathfully resistant, spitting bullets at the airships and unmercifully pounded by the German ironclads. But now Bert had but intermittent glimpses of them between the nearer bulks of the airships that assailed them....

It struck Bert suddenly that the whole battle was receding and growing small and less thunderously noisy. The Vaterland was rising in the air, steadily and silently, until the

impact of the guns no longer smote upon the heart but came to the ear dulled by distance, until the four silenced ships to the eastward were little distant things: but were there four? Bert now could see only three of those floating, blackened, and smoking rafts of ruin against the sun. But the Bremen had two boats out; the Theodore Roosevelt was also dropping boats to where the drift of minute objects struggled, rising and falling on the big, broad Atlantic waves.... The Vaterland was no longer following the fight. The whole of that hurrying tumult drove away to the south-eastward, growing smaller and less audible as it passed. One of the airships lay on the water burning, a remote monstrous fount of flames, and far in the south-west appeared first one and then three other German ironclads hurrying in support of their consorts....

5

Steadily the Vaterland soared, and the air-fleet soared with her and came round to head for New York, and the battle became a little thing far away, an incident before the breakfast. It dwindled to a string of dark shapes and one smoking yellow flare that presently became a mere indistinct smear upon the vast horizon and the bright new day, that was at last altogether lost to sight...

So it was that Bert Smallways saw the first fight of the airship and the last fight of those strangest things in the whole history of war: the ironclad battleships, which began their career with the floating batteries of the Emperor Napoleon III in the Crimean war and lasted, with an enormous expenditure of human energy and resources, for seventy years. In that space of time the world produced over twelve thousand five hundred of these strange monsters, in schools, in types, in series, each larger and heavier and more deadly than its predecessors. Each in its turn was hailed as the last birth of time, most in their turn were sold for old iron. Only about five per cent of them ever fought in a battle. Some foundered, some went ashore, and broke up, several rammed one another by accident and sank. The lives of countless men were spent in their service, the splendid genius, and patience of thousands of engineers and inventors, wealth and material beyond estimating; to their account we must put, stunted and starved lives on land, millions of children sent to toil unduly, innumerable opportunities of fine living undeveloped and lost. Money had to be found for them at any cost—that was the law of a nation's existence during that strange time. Surely they were the weirdest, most destructive and wasteful megatheria in the whole history of mechanical invention.

And then cheap things of gas and basket-work made an end of them altogether, smiting out of the sky!...

Never before had Bert Smallways seen pure destruction, never had he realised the mischief and waste of war. His startled mind rose to the conception; this also is in life. Out of all this fierce torrent of sensation one impression rose and became cardinal—the impression of the men of the Theodore Roosevelt who had struggled in the water after the explosion of the first bomb. “Gaw!” he said at the memory; “it might 'ave been me and Grubb!... I suppose you kick about and get the water in your mouf. I don't suppose it lasts long.”

He became anxious to see how Kurt was affected by these things. Also he perceived he was hungry. He hesitated towards the door of the cabin and peeped out into the passage. Down forward, near the gangway to the men's mess, stood a little group of air sailors looking at something that was hidden from him in a recess. One of them was in the light diver's costume Bert had already seen in the gas chamber turret, and he was moved to walk along and look at this person more closely and examine the helmet he carried under his arm. But he forgot about the helmet when he got to the recess, because there he found lying on the floor the dead body of the boy who had been killed by a bullet from the Theodore Roosevelt.

Bert had not observed that any bullets at all had reached the Vaterland or, indeed, imagined himself under fire. He could not understand for a time what had killed the lad, and no one explained to him.

The boy lay just as he had fallen and died, with his jacket torn and scorched, his shoulder-blade smashed and burst away from his body and all the left side of his body ripped and rent. There was much blood. The sailors stood listening to the man with the helmet, who made explanations and pointed to the round bullet hole in the floor and the smash in the panel of the passage upon which the still vicious missile had spent the residue of its energy. All the faces were grave and earnest: they were the faces of sober, blond, blue-eyed men accustomed to obedience and an orderly life, to whom this waste, wet, painful thing that had been a comrade came almost as strangely as it did to Bert.

A peal of wild laughter sounded down the passage in the direction of the little gallery and something spoke—almost shouted—in German, in tones of exultation.

Other voices at a lower, more respectful pitch replied.

“Der Prinz,” said a voice, and all the men became stiffer and less natural. Down the passage appeared a group of figures, Lieutenant Kurt walking in front carrying a packet of papers.

He stopped point blank when he saw the thing in the recess, and his ruddy face went white.

“So!” said he in surprise.

The Prince was following him, talking over his shoulder to Von Winterfeld and the Kapitan.

“Eh?” he said to Kurt, stopping in mid-sentence, and followed the gesture of Kurt's hand. He glared at the crumpled object in the recess and seemed to think for a moment.

He made a slight, careless gesture towards the boy's body and turned to the Kapitan.

“Dispose of that,” he said in German, and passed on, finishing his sentence to Von Winterfeld in the same cheerful tone in which it had begun.

6

The deep impression of helplessly drowning men that Bert had brought from the actual fight in the Atlantic mixed itself up inextricably with that of the lordly figure of Prince Karl Albert gesturing aside the dead body of the Vaterland sailor. Hitherto he had rather liked the idea of war as being a jolly, smashing, exciting affair, something like a Bank Holiday rag on a large scale, and on the whole agreeable and exhilarating. Now he knew it a little better.

The next day there was added to his growing disillusionment a third ugly impression, trivial indeed to describe, a mere necessary everyday incident of a state of war, but very distressing to his urbanised imagination. One writes “urbanised” to express the distinctive gentleness of the period. It was quite peculiar to the crowded townsmen of that time, and different altogether from the normal experience of any preceding age, that they never saw anything killed, never encountered, save through the mitigating media of book or picture, the fact of lethal violence that underlies all life. Three times in his existence, and three times only, had Bert seen a dead human being, and he had never assisted at the killing of anything bigger than a new-born kitten.

The incident that gave him his third shock was the execution of one of the men on the Adler for carrying a box of matches. The case was a flagrant one. The man had forgotten he had it upon him when coming aboard. Ample notice had been given to every one of the gravity of this offence, and notices appeared at numerous points all over the airships. The man's defence was that he had grown so used to the notices and had been so preoccupied with his work that he hadn't applied them to himself; he pleaded, in his defence, what is indeed in military affairs another serious crime,

inadvertency. He was tried by his captain, and the sentence confirmed by wireless telegraphy by the Prince, and it was decided to make his death an example to the whole fleet. "The Germans," the Prince declared, "hadn't crossed the Atlantic to go wool gathering." And in order that this lesson in discipline and obedience might be visible to every one, it was determined not to electrocute or drown but hang the offender.

Accordingly the air-fleet came clustering round the flagship like carp in a pond at feeding time. The Adler hung at the zenith immediately alongside the flagship. The whole crew of the Vaterland assembled upon the hanging gallery; the crews of the other airships manned the air-chambers, that is to say, clambered up the outer netting to the upper sides. The officers appeared upon the machine-gun platforms. Bert thought it an altogether stupendous sight, looking down, as he was, upon the entire fleet. Far off below two steamers on the rippled blue water, one British and the other flying the American flag, seemed the minutest objects, and marked the scale. They were immensely distant. Bert stood on the gallery, curious to see the execution, but uncomfortable, because that terrible blond Prince was within a dozen feet of him, glaring terribly, with his arms folded, and his heels together in military fashion.

They hung the man from the Adler. They gave him sixty feet of rope, so that he should hang and dangle in the sight of all evil-doers who might be hiding matches or contemplating any kindred disobedience. Bert saw the man standing, a living, reluctant man, no doubt scared and rebellious enough in his heart, but outwardly erect and obedient, on the lower gallery of the Adler about a hundred yards away. Then they had thrust him overboard.

Down he fell, hands and feet extending, until with a jerk he was at the end of the rope. Then he ought to have died and swung edifyingly, but instead a more terrible thing happened; his head came right off, and down the body went spinning to the sea, feeble, grotesque, fantastic, with the head racing it in its fall.

"Ugh!" said Bert, clutching the rail before him, and a sympathetic grunt came from several of the men beside him.

"So!" said the Prince, stiffer and sterner, glared for some seconds, then turned to the gang way up into the airship.

For a long time Bert remained clinging to the railing of the gallery. He was almost physically sick with the horror of this trifling incident. He found it far more dreadful than the battle. He was indeed a very degenerate, latter-day, civilised person.

Late that afternoon Kurt came into the cabin and found him curled up on his locker, and looking very white and miserable. Kurt had also lost something of his pristine freshness.

“Sea-sick?” he asked.

“No!”

“We ought to reach New York this evening. There's a good breeze coming up under our tails. Then we shall see things.”

Bert did not answer.

Kurt opened out folding chair and table, and rustled for a time with his maps. Then he fell thinking darkly. He roused himself presently, and looked at his companion.

“What's the matter?” he said.

“Nothing!”

Kurt stared threateningly. “What's the matter?”

“I saw them kill that chap. I saw that flying-machine man hit the funnels of the big ironclad. I saw that dead chap in the passage. I seen too much smashing and killing lately. That's the matter. I don't like it. I didn't know war was this sort of thing. I'm a civilian. I don't like it.”

“I don't like it,” said Kurt. “By Jove, no!”

“I've read about war, and all that, but when you see it it's different. And I'm gettin' giddy. I'm gettin' giddy. I didn't mind a bit being up in that balloon at first, but all this looking down and floating over things and smashing up people, it's getting on my nerves. See?”

“It'll have to get off again....”

Kurt thought. “You're not the only one. The men are all getting strung up. The flying—that's just flying. Naturally it makes one a little swimmy in the head at first. As for the killing, we've got to be blooded; that's all. We're tame, civilised men. And we've got to get blooded. I suppose there's not a dozen men on the ship who've really seen bloodshed. Nice, quiet, law-abiding Germans they've been so far.... Here they are—in for it. They're a bit squeamy now, but you wait till they've got their hands in.”

He reflected. “Everybody's getting a bit strung up,” he said.

He turned again to his maps. Bert sat crumpled up in the corner, apparently heedless of him. For some time both kept silence.

“What did the Prince want to go and 'ang that chap for?” asked Bert, suddenly.

“That was all right,” said Kurt, “that was all right. QUITE right. Here were the orders, plain as the nose on your face, and here was that fool going about with matches—”

“Gaw! I shan't forget that bit in a 'urry,” said Bert irrelevantly.

Kurt did not answer him. He was measuring their distance from New York and speculating. “Wonder what the American aeroplanes are like?” he said. “Something like our drachenflieger.... We shall know by this time to-morrow.... I wonder what we shall know? I wonder. Suppose, after all, they put up a fight.... Rum sort of fight!”

He whistled softly and mused. Presently he fretted out of the cabin, and later Bert found him in the twilight upon the swinging platform, staring ahead, and speculating about the things that might happen on the morrow. Clouds veiled the sea again, and the long straggling wedge of air-ships rising and falling as they flew seemed like a flock of strange new births in a Chaos that had neither earth nor water but only mist and sky.

## **CHAPTER VI. HOW WAR CAME TO NEW YORK**

### **1**

The City of New York was in the year of the German attack the largest, richest, in many respects the most splendid, and in some, the wickedest city the world had ever seen. She was the supreme type of the City of the Scientific Commercial Age; she displayed its greatness, its power, its ruthless anarchic enterprise, and its social disorganisation most strikingly and completely. She had long ousted London from her pride of place as the modern Babylon, she was the centre of the world's finance, the world's trade, and the world's pleasure; and men likened her to the apocalyptic cities of the ancient prophets. She sat drinking up the wealth of a continent as Rome once drank the wealth of the Mediterranean and Babylon the wealth of the east. In her streets one found the extremes of magnificence and misery, of civilisation and disorder. In one quarter, palaces of marble, laced and crowned with light and flame and flowers, towered up into her marvellous twilights beautiful, beyond description; in another, a black and sinister polyglot population sweltered in indescribable congestion in

warrens, and excavations beyond the power and knowledge of government. Her vice, her crime, her law alike were inspired by a fierce and terrible energy, and like the great cities of mediaeval Italy, her ways were dark and adventurous with private war.

It was the peculiar shape of Manhattan Island, pressed in by arms of the sea on either side, and incapable of comfortable expansion, except along a narrow northward belt, that first gave the New York architects their bias for extreme vertical dimensions. Every need was lavishly supplied them—money, material, labour; only space was restricted. To begin, therefore, they built high perforce. But to do so was to discover a whole new world of architectural beauty, of exquisite ascendant lines, and long after the central congestion had been relieved by tunnels under the sea, four colossal bridges over the east river, and a dozen mono-rail cables east and west, the upward growth went on. In many ways New York and her gorgeous plutocracy repeated Venice in the magnificence of her architecture, painting, metal-work and sculpture, for example, in the grim intensity of her political method, in her maritime and commercial ascendancy. But she repeated no previous state at all in the lax disorder of her internal administration, a laxity that made vast sections of her area lawless beyond precedent, so that it was possible for whole districts to be impassable, while civil war raged between street and street, and for Alsacias to exist in her midst in which the official police never set foot. She was an ethnic whirlpool. The flags of all nations flew in her harbour, and at the climax, the yearly coming and going overseas numbered together upwards of two million human beings. To Europe she was America, to America she was the gateway of the world. But to tell the story of New York would be to write a social history of the world; saints and martyrs, dreamers and scoundrels, the traditions of a thousand races and a thousand religions, went to her making and throbbed and jostled in her streets. And over all that torrential confusion of men and purposes fluttered that strange flag, the stars and stripes, that meant at once the noblest thing in life, and the least noble, that is to say, Liberty on the one hand, and on the other the base jealousy the individual self-seeker feels towards the common purpose of the State.

For many generations New York had taken no heed of war, save as a thing that happened far away, that affected prices and supplied the newspapers with exciting headlines and pictures. The New Yorkers felt perhaps even more certainly than the English had done that war in their own land was an impossible thing. In that they shared the delusion of all North America. They felt as secure as spectators at a bullfight; they risked their money perhaps on the result, but that was all. And such ideas of war as the common Americans possessed were derived from the limited, picturesque, adventurous war of the past. They saw war as they saw history, through

an iridescent mist, deodorised, scented indeed, with all its essential cruelties tactfully hidden away. They were inclined to regret it as something ennobling, to sigh that it could no longer come into their own private experience. They read with interest, if not with avidity, of their new guns, of their immense and still more immense ironclads, of their incredible and still more incredible explosives, but just what these tremendous engines of destruction might mean for their personal lives never entered their heads. They did not, so far as one can judge from their contemporary literature, think that they meant anything to their personal lives at all. They thought America was safe amidst all this piling up of explosives. They cheered the flag by habit and tradition, they despised other nations, and whenever there was an international difficulty they were intensely patriotic, that is to say, they were ardently against any native politician who did not say, threaten, and do harsh and uncompromising things to the antagonist people. They were spirited to Asia, spirited to Germany, so spirited to Great Britain that the international attitude of the mother country to her great daughter was constantly compared in contemporary caricature to that between a hen-pecked husband and a vicious young wife. And for the rest, they all went about their business and pleasure as if war had died out with the megatherium....

And then suddenly, into a world peacefully busied for the most part upon armaments and the perfection of explosives, war came; came the shock of realising that the guns were going off, that the masses of inflammable material all over the world were at last ablaze.

2

The immediate effect upon New York of the sudden onset of war was merely to intensify her normal vehemence.

The newspapers and magazines that fed the American mind—for books upon this impatient continent had become simply material for the energy of collectors—were instantly a coruscation of war pictures and of headlines that rose like rockets and burst like shells. To the normal high-strung energy of New York streets was added a touch of war-fever. Great crowds assembled, more especially in the dinner hour, in Madison Square about the Farragut monument, to listen to and cheer patriotic speeches, and a veritable epidemic of little flags and buttons swept through these great torrents of swiftly moving young people, who poured into New York of a morning by car and mono-rail and subway and train, to toil, and ebb home again between the hours of five and seven. It was dangerous not to wear a war button. The splendid music-halls of the time sank every topic in patriotism and evolved scenes of wild enthusiasm, strong men wept at the sight of the national banner sustained by the

whole strength of the ballet, and special searchlights and illuminations amazed the watching angels. The churches re-echoed the national enthusiasm in graver key and slower measure, and the aerial and naval preparations on the East River were greatly incommoded by the multitude of excursion steamers which thronged, helpfully cheering, about them. The trade in small-arms was enormously stimulated, and many overwrought citizens found an immediate relief for their emotions in letting off fireworks of a more or less heroic, dangerous, and national character in the public streets. Small children's air-balloons of the latest model attached to string became a serious check to the pedestrian in Central Park. And amidst scenes of indescribable emotion the Albany legislature in permanent session, and with a generous suspension of rules and precedents, passed through both Houses the long-disputed Bill for universal military service in New York State.

Critics of the American character are disposed to consider—that up to the actual impact of the German attack the people of New York dealt altogether too much with the war as if it was a political demonstration. Little or no damage, they urge, was done to either the German or Japanese forces by the wearing of buttons, the waving of small flags, the fireworks, or the songs. They forgot that, under the conditions of warfare a century of science had brought about, the non-military section of the population could do no serious damage in any form to their enemies, and that there was no reason, therefore, why they should not do as they did. The balance of military efficiency was shifting back from the many to the few, from the common to the specialised.

The days when the emotional infantryman decided battles had passed by for ever. War had become a matter of apparatus of special training and skill of the most intricate kind. It had become undemocratic. And whatever the value of the popular excitement, there can be no denying that the small regular establishment of the United States Government, confronted by this totally unexpected emergency of an armed invasion from Europe, acted with vigour, science, and imagination. They were taken by surprise so far as the diplomatic situation was concerned, and their equipment for building either navigables or aeroplanes was contemptible in comparison with the huge German parks. Still they set to work at once to prove to the world that the spirit that had created the Monitor and the Southern submarines of 1864 was not dead. The chief of the aeronautic establishment near West Point was Cabot Sinclair, and he allowed himself but one single moment of the posturing that was so universal in that democratic time. “We have chosen our epitaphs,” he said to a reporter, “and we are going to have, 'They did all they could.' Now run away!”

The curious thing is that they did all do all they could; there is no exception known. Their only defect indeed was a defect of style. One of the most striking facts historically about this war, and the one that makes the complete separation that had arisen between the methods of warfare and the necessity of democratic support, is the effectual secrecy of the Washington authorities about their airships. They did not bother to confide a single fact of their preparations to the public. They did not even condescend to talk to Congress. They burked and suppressed every inquiry. The war was fought by the President and the Secretaries of State in an entirely autocratic manner. Such publicity as they sought was merely to anticipate and prevent inconvenient agitation to defend particular points. They realised that the chief danger in aerial warfare from an excitable and intelligent public would be a clamour for local airships and aeroplanes to defend local interests. This, with such resources as they possessed, might lead to a fatal division and distribution of the national forces. Particularly they feared that they might be forced into a premature action to defend New York. They realised with prophetic insight that this would be the particular advantage the Germans would seek. So they took great pains to direct the popular mind towards defensive artillery, and to divert it from any thought of aerial battle. Their real preparations they masked beneath ostensible ones. There was at Washington a large reserve of naval guns, and these were distributed rapidly, conspicuously, and with much press attention, among the Eastern cities. They were mounted for the most part upon hills and prominent crests around the threatened centres of population. They were mounted upon rough adaptations of the Doan swivel, which at that time gave the maximum vertical range to a heavy gun. Much of this artillery was still unmounted, and nearly all of it was unprotected when the German air-fleet reached New York. And down in the crowded streets, when that occurred, the readers of the New York papers were regaling themselves with wonderful and wonderfully illustrated accounts of such matters as:—

THE SECRET OF THE THUNDERBOLT

AGED SCIENTIST PERFECTS

ELECTRIC GUN

TO ELECTROCUTE AIRSHIP CREWS BY

UPWARD LIGHTNING

WASHINGTON ORDERS FIVE

HUNDRED

WAR SECRETARY LODGE DELIGHTED

SAYS THEY WILL SUIT THE  
GERMANS  
DOWN TO THE GROUND

PRESIDENT PUBLICLY APPLAUDS  
THIS MERRY QUIP

3

The German fleet reached New York in advance of the news of the American naval disaster. It reached New York in the late afternoon and was first seen by watchers at Ocean Grove and Long Branch coming swiftly out of the southward sea and going away to the northwest. The flagship passed almost vertically over the Sandy Hook observation station, rising rapidly as it did so, and in a few minutes all New York was vibrating to the Staten Island guns.

Several of these guns, and especially that at Giffords and the one on Beacon Hill above Matawan, were remarkably well handled. The former, at a distance of five miles, and with an elevation of six thousand feet, sent a shell to burst so close to the Vaterland that a pane of the Prince's forward window was smashed by a fragment. This sudden explosion made Bert tuck in his head with the celerity of a startled tortoise. The whole air-fleet immediately went up steeply to a height of about twelve thousand feet and at that level passed unscathed over the ineffectual guns. The airships lined out as they moved forward into the form of a flattened V, with its apex towards the city, and with the flagship going highest at the apex. The two ends of the V passed over Plumfield and Jamaica Bay, respectively, and the Prince directed his course a little to the east of the Narrows, soared over Upper Bay, and came to rest over Jersey City in a position that dominated lower New York. There the monsters hung, large and wonderful in the evening light, serenely regardless of the occasional rocket explosions and flashing shell-bursts in the lower air.

It was a pause of mutual inspection. For a time naive humanity swamped the conventions of warfare altogether; the interest of the millions below and of the thousands above alike was spectacular. The evening was unexpectedly fine—only a few thin level bands of clouds at seven or eight thousand feet broke its luminous clarity. The wind had dropped; it was an evening infinitely peaceful and still. The heavy concussions of the distant guns and those incidental harmless pyrotechnics at the

level of the clouds seemed to have as little to do with killing and force, terror and submission, as a salute at a naval review. Below, every point of vantage bristled with spectators, the roofs of the towering buildings, the public squares, the active ferry boats, and every favourable street intersection had its crowds: all the river piers were dense with people, the Battery Park was solid black with east-side population, and every position of advantage in Central Park and along Riverside Drive had its peculiar and characteristic assembly from the adjacent streets. The footways of the great bridges over the East River were also closely packed and blocked. Everywhere shopkeepers had left their shops, men their work, and women and children their homes, to come out and see the marvel.

“It beat,” they declared, “the newspapers.”

And from above, many of the occupants of the airships stared with an equal curiosity. No city in the world was ever so finely placed as New York, so magnificently cut up by sea and bluff and river, so admirably disposed to display the tall effects of buildings, the complex immensities of bridges and mono-railways and feats of engineering. London, Paris, Berlin, were shapeless, low agglomerations beside it. Its port reached to its heart like Venice, and, like Venice, it was obvious, dramatic, and proud. Seen from above it was alive with crawling trains and cars, and at a thousand points it was already breaking into quivering light. New York was altogether at its best that evening, its splendid best.

“Gaw! What a place!” said Bert.

It was so great, and in its collective effect so pacifically magnificent, that to make war upon it seemed incongruous beyond measure, like laying siege to the National Gallery or attacking respectable people in an hotel dining-room with battle-axe and mail. It was in its entirety so large, so complex, so delicately immense, that to bring it to the issue of warfare was like driving a crowbar into the mechanism of a clock. And the fish-like shoal of great airships hovering light and sunlit above, filling the sky, seemed equally remote from the ugly forcefulness of war. To Kurt, to Smallways, to I know not how many more of the people in the air-fleet came the distinctest apprehension of these incompatibilities. But in the head of the Prince Karl Albert were the vapours of romance: he was a conqueror, and this was the enemy's city. The greater the city, the greater the triumph. No doubt he had a time of tremendous exultation and sensed beyond all precedent the sense of power that night.

There came an end at last to that pause. Some wireless communications had failed of a satisfactory ending, and fleet and city remembered they were hostile powers.

“Look!” cried the multitude; “look!”

“What are they doing?”

“What?”... Down through the twilight sank five attacking airships, one to the Navy Yard on East River, one to City Hall, two over the great business buildings of Wall Street and Lower Broadway, one to the Brooklyn Bridge, dropping from among their fellows through the danger zone from the distant guns smoothly and rapidly to a safe proximity to the city masses. At that descent all the cars in the streets stopped with dramatic suddenness, and all the lights that had been coming on in the streets and houses went out again. For the City Hall had awakened and was conferring by telephone with the Federal command and taking measures for defence. The City Hall was asking for airships, refusing to surrender as Washington advised, and developing into a centre of intense emotion, of hectic activity. Everywhere and hastily the police began to clear the assembled crowds. “Go to your homes,” they said; and the word was passed from mouth to mouth, “There's going to be trouble.” A chill of apprehension ran through the city, and men hurrying in the unwonted darkness across City Hall Park and Union Square came upon the dim forms of soldiers and guns, and were challenged and sent back. In half an hour New York had passed from serene sunset and gaping admiration to a troubled and threatening twilight.

The first loss of life occurred in the panic rush from Brooklyn Bridge as the airship approached it. With the cessation of the traffic an unusual stillness came upon New York, and the disturbing concussions of the futile defending guns on the hills about grew more and more audible. At last these ceased also. A pause of further negotiation followed. People sat in darkness, sought counsel from telephones that were dumb. Then into the expectant hush came a great crash and uproar, the breaking down of the Brooklyn Bridge, the rifle fire from the Navy Yard, and the bursting of bombs in Wall Street and the City Hall. New York as a whole could do nothing, could understand nothing. New York in the darkness peered and listened to these distant sounds until presently they died away as suddenly as they had begun. “What could be happening?” They asked it in vain.

A long, vague period intervened, and people looking out of the windows of upper rooms discovered the dark hulls of German airships, gliding slowly and noiselessly, quite close at hand. Then quietly the electric lights came on again, and an uproar of nocturnal newsvendors began in the streets.

The units of that vast and varied population bought and learnt what had happened; there had been a fight and New York had hoisted the white flag.

The lamentable incidents that followed the surrender of New York seem now in the retrospect to be but the necessary and inevitable consequence of the clash of modern appliances and social conditions produced by the scientific century on the one hand, and the tradition of a crude, romantic patriotism on the other. At first people received the fact with an irresponsible detachment, much as they would have received the slowing down of the train in which they were travelling or the erection of a public monument by the city to which they belonged.

“We have surrendered. Dear me! HAVE we?” was rather the manner in which the first news was met. They took it in the same spectacular spirit they had displayed at the first apparition of the air-fleet. Only slowly was this realisation of a capitulation suffused with the flush of passion, only with reflection did they make any personal application. “WE have surrendered!” came later; “in us America is defeated.” Then they began to burn and tingle.

The newspapers, which were issued about one in the morning contained no particulars of the terms upon which New York had yielded—nor did they give any intimation of the quality of the brief conflict that had preceded the capitulation. The later issues remedied these deficiencies. There came the explicit statement of the agreement to victual the German airships, to supply the complement of explosives to replace those employed in the fight and in the destruction of the North Atlantic fleet, to pay the enormous ransom of forty million dollars, and to surrender the flotilla in the East River. There came, too, longer and longer descriptions of the smashing up of the City Hall and the Navy Yard, and people began to realise faintly what those brief minutes of uproar had meant. They read the tale of men blown to bits, of futile soldiers in that localised battle fighting against hope amidst an indescribable wreckage, of flags hauled down by weeping men. And these strange nocturnal editions contained also the first brief cables from Europe of the fleet disaster, the North Atlantic fleet for which New York had always felt an especial pride and solicitude. Slowly, hour by hour, the collective consciousness woke up, the tide of patriotic astonishment and humiliation came floating in. America had come upon disaster; suddenly New York discovered herself with amazement giving place to wrath unspeakable, a conquered city under the hand of her conqueror.

As that fact shaped itself in the public mind, there sprang up, as flames spring up, an angry repudiation. “No!” cried New York, waking in the dawn. “No! I am not defeated. This is a dream.” Before day broke the swift American anger was running through all the city, through every soul in those contagious millions. Before it took action, before it took shape, the men in the airships could feel the gigantic insurgence of emotion, as cattle and natural creatures feel, it is said, the coming of an earthquake. The

newspapers of the Knype group first gave the thing words and a formula. "We do not agree," they said simply. "We have been betrayed!" Men took that up everywhere, it passed from mouth to mouth, at every street corner under the paling lights of dawn orators stood unchecked, calling upon the spirit of America to arise, making the shame a personal reality to every one who heard. To Bert, listening five hundred feet above, it seemed that the city, which had at first produced only confused noises, was now humming like a hive of bees—of very angry bees.

After the smashing of the City Hall and Post-Office, the white flag had been hoisted from a tower of the old Park Row building, and thither had gone Mayor O'Hagen, urged thither indeed by the terror-stricken property owners of lower New York, to negotiate the capitulation with Von Winterfeld. The Vaterland, having dropped the secretary by a rope ladder, remained hovering, circling very slowly above the great buildings, old and new, that clustered round City Hall Park, while the Helmholtz, which had done the fighting there, rose overhead to a height of perhaps two thousand feet. So Bert had a near view of all that occurred in that central place. The City Hall and Court House, the Post-Office and a mass of buildings on the west side of Broadway, had been badly damaged, and the three former were a heap of blackened ruins. In the case of the first two the loss of life had not been considerable, but a great multitude of workers, including many girls and women, had been caught in the destruction of the Post-Office, and a little army of volunteers with white badges entered behind the firemen, bringing out the often still living bodies, for the most part frightfully charred, and carrying them into the big Monson building close at hand. Everywhere the busy firemen were directing their bright streams of water upon the smouldering masses: their hose lay about the square, and long cordons of police held back the gathering black masses of people, chiefly from the east side, from these central activities.

In violent and extraordinary contrast with this scene of destruction, close at hand were the huge newspaper establishments of Park Row. They were all alight and working; they had not been abandoned even while the actual bomb throwing was going on, and now staff and presses were vehemently active, getting out the story, the immense and dreadful story of the night, developing comment and, in most cases, spreading the idea of resistance under the very noses of the airships. For a long time Bert could not imagine what these callously active offices could be, then he detected the noise of the presses and emitted his "Gaw!"

Beyond these newspaper buildings again, and partially hidden by the arches of the old Elevated Railway of New York (long since converted into a mono-rail), there was another cordon of police and a sort of encampment of ambulances and doctors, busy with the dead and wounded who had been killed early in the night by the panic upon

Brooklyn Bridge. All this he saw in the perspectives of a bird's-eye view, as things happening in a big, irregular-shaped pit below him, between cliffs of high building. Northward he looked along the steep canon of Broadway, down whose length at intervals crowds were assembling about excited speakers; and when he lifted his eyes he saw the chimneys and cable-stacks and roof spaces of New York, and everywhere now over these the watching, debating people clustered, except where the fires raged and the jets of water flew. Everywhere, too, were flagstaves devoid of flags; one white sheet drooped and flapped and drooped again over the Park Row buildings. And upon the lurid lights, the festering movement and intense shadows of this strange scene, there was breaking now the cold, impartial dawn.

For Bert Smallways all this was framed in the frame of the open porthole. It was a pale, dim world outside that dark and tangible rim. All night he had clutched at that rim, jumped and quivered at explosions, and watched phantom events. Now he had been high and now low; now almost beyond hearing, now flying close to crashings and shouts and outcries. He had seen airships flying low and swift over darkened and groaning streets; watched great buildings, suddenly red-lit amidst the shadows, crumple at the smashing impact of bombs; witnessed for the first time in his life the grotesque, swift onset of insatiable conflagrations. From it all he felt detached, disembodied. The Vaterland did not even fling a bomb; she watched and ruled. Then down they had come at last to hover over City Hall Park, and it had crept in upon his mind, chillingly, terrifyingly, that these illuminated black masses were great offices afire, and that the going to and fro of minute, dim spectres of lantern-lit grey and white was a harvesting of the wounded and the dead. As the light grew clearer he began to understand more and more what these crumpled black things signified....

He had watched hour after hour since first New York had risen out of the blue indistinctness of the landfall. With the daylight he experienced an intolerable fatigue.

He lifted weary eyes to the pink flush in the sky, yawned immensely, and crawled back whispering to himself across the cabin to the locker. He did not so much lie down upon that as fall upon it and instantly become asleep.

There, hours after, sprawling undignified and sleeping profoundly, Kurt found him, a very image of the democratic mind confronted with the problems of a time too complex for its apprehension. His face was pale and indifferent, his mouth wide open, and he snored. He snored disagreeably.

Kurt regarded him for a moment with a mild distaste. Then he kicked his ankle.

“Wake up,” he said to Smallways' stare, “and lie down decent.”

Bert sat up and rubbed his eyes.

“Any more fightin' yet?” he asked.

“No,” said Kurt, and sat down, a tired man.

“Gott!” he cried presently, rubbing his hands over his face, “but I'd like a cold bath! I've been looking for stray bullet holes in the air-chambers all night until now.” He yawned. “I must sleep. You'd better clear out, Smallways. I can't stand you here this morning. You're so infernally ugly and useless. Have you had your rations? No! Well, go in and get 'em, and don't come back. Stick in the gallery....”

5

So Bert, slightly refreshed by coffee and sleep, resumed his helpless co-operation in the War in the Air. He went down into the little gallery as the lieutenant had directed, and clung to the rail at the extreme end beyond the look-out man, trying to seem as inconspicuous and harmless a fragment of life as possible.

A wind was rising rather strongly from the south-east. It obliged the Vaterland to come about in that direction, and made her roll a great deal as she went to and fro over Manhattan Island. Away in the north-west clouds gathered. The throb-throb of her slow screw working against the breeze was much more perceptible than when she was going full speed ahead; and the friction of the wind against the underside of the gas-chamber drove a series of shallow ripples along it and made a faint flapping sound like, but fainter than, the beating of ripples under the stem of a boat. She was stationed over the temporary City Hall in the Park Row building, and every now and then she would descend to resume communication with the mayor and with Washington. But the restlessness of the Prince would not suffer him to remain for long in any one place. Now he would circle over the Hudson and East River; now he would go up high, as if to peer away into the blue distances; once he ascended so swiftly and so far that mountain sickness overtook him and the crew and forced him down again; and Bert shared the dizziness and nausea.

The swaying view varied with these changes of altitude. Now they would be low and close, and he would distinguish in that steep, unusual perspective, windows, doors, street and sky signs, people and the minutest details, and watch the enigmatical behaviour of crowds and clusters upon the roofs and in the streets; then as they soared the details would shrink, the sides of streets draw together, the view widen, the people cease to be significant. At the highest the effect was that of a concave relief map; Bert saw the dark and crowded land everywhere intersected by shining waters, saw the Hudson River like a spear of silver, and Lower Island Sound like a shield. Even

to Bert's unphilosophical mind the contrast of city below and fleet above pointed an opposition, the opposition of the adventurous American's tradition and character with German order and discipline. Below, the immense buildings, tremendous and fine as they were, seemed like the giant trees of a jungle fighting for life; their picturesque magnificence was as planless as the chances of crag and gorge, their casualty enhanced by the smoke and confusion of still unsubdued and spreading conflagrations. In the sky soared the German airships like beings in a different, entirely more orderly world, all oriented to the same angle of the horizon, uniform in build and appearance, moving accurately with one purpose as a pack of wolves will move, distributed with the most precise and effectual co-operation.

It dawned upon Bert that hardly a third of the fleet was visible. The others had gone upon errands he could not imagine, beyond the compass of that great circle of earth and sky. He wondered, but there was no one to ask. As the day wore on, about a dozen reappeared in the east with their stores replenished from the flotilla and towing a number of drachenflieger. Towards afternoon the weather thickened, driving clouds appeared in the south-west and ran together and seemed to engender more clouds, and the wind came round into that quarter and blew stronger. Towards the evening the wind became a gale into which the now tossing airships had to beat.

All that day the Prince was negotiating with Washington, while his detached scouts sought far and wide over the Eastern States looking for anything resembling an aeronautic park. A squadron of twenty airships detached overnight had dropped out of the air upon Niagara and was holding the town and power works.

Meanwhile the insurrectionary movement in the giant city grew uncontrollable. In spite of five great fires already involving many acres, and spreading steadily, New York was still not satisfied that she was beaten.

At first the rebellious spirit below found vent only in isolated shouts, street-crowd speeches, and newspaper suggestions; then it found much more definite expression in the appearance in the morning sunlight of American flags at point after point above the architectural cliffs of the city. It is quite possible that in many cases this spirited display of bunting by a city already surrendered was the outcome of the innocent informality of the American mind, but it is also undeniable that in many it was a deliberate indication that the people "felt wicked."

The German sense of correctitude was deeply shocked by this outbreak. The Graf von Winterfeld immediately communicated with the mayor, and pointed out the irregularity, and the fire look-out stations were instructed in the matter. The New York police was speedily hard at work, and a foolish contest in full swing between

impassioned citizens resolved to keep the flag flying, and irritated and worried officers instructed to pull it down.

The trouble became acute at last in the streets above Columbia University. The captain of the airship watching this quarter seems to have stooped to lasso and drag from its staff a flag hoisted upon Morgan Hall. As he did so a volley of rifle and revolver shots was fired from the upper windows of the huge apartment building that stands between the University and Riverside Drive.

Most of these were ineffectual, but two or three perforated gas-chambers, and one smashed the hand and arm of a man upon the forward platform; The sentinel on the lower gallery immediately replied, and the machine gun on the shield of the eagle let fly and promptly stopped any further shots. The airship rose and signalled the flagship and City Hall, police and militiamen were directed at once to the spot, and this particular incident closed.

But hard upon that came the desperate attempt of a party of young clubmen from New York, who, inspired by patriotic and adventurous imaginations, slipped off in half a dozen motor-cars to Beacon Hill, and set to work with remarkable vigour to improvise a fort about the Doan swivel gun that had been placed there. They found it still in the hands of the disgusted gunners, who had been ordered to cease fire at the capitulation, and it was easy to infect these men with their own spirit. They declared their gun hadn't had half a chance, and were burning to show what it could do. Directed by the newcomers, they made a trench and bank about the mounting of the piece, and constructed flimsy shelter-pits of corrugated iron.

They were actually loading the gun when they were observed by the airship Preussen and the shell they succeeded in firing before the bombs of the latter smashed them and their crude defences to fragments, burst over the middle gas-chambers of the Bingen, and brought her to earth, disabled, upon Staten Island. She was badly deflated, and dropped among trees, over which her empty central gas-bags spread in canopies and festoons. Nothing, however, had caught fire, and her men were speedily at work upon her repair. They behaved with a confidence that verged upon indiscretion. While most of them commenced patching the tears of the membrane, half a dozen of them started off for the nearest road in search of a gas main, and presently found themselves prisoners in the hands of a hostile crowd. Close at hand was a number of villa residences, whose occupants speedily developed from an unfriendly curiosity to aggression. At that time the police control of the large polyglot population of Staten Island had become very lax, and scarcely a household but had its rifle or pistols and ammunition. These were presently produced, and after two or three

misses, one of the men at work was hit in the foot. Thereupon the Germans left their sewing and mending, took cover among the trees, and replied.

The crackling of shots speedily brought the Preussen and Kiel on the scene, and with a few hand grenades they made short work of every villa within a mile. A number of non-combatant American men, women, and children were killed and the actual assailants driven off. For a time the repairs went on in peace under the immediate protection of these two airships. Then when they returned to their quarters, an intermittent sniping and fighting round the stranded Bingen was resumed, and went on all the afternoon, and merged at last in the general combat of the evening....

About eight the Bingen was rushed by an armed mob, and all its defenders killed after a fierce, disorderly struggle.

The difficulty of the Germans in both these cases came from the impossibility of landing any efficient force or, indeed, any force at all from the air-fleet. The airships were quite unequal to the transport of any adequate landing parties; their complement of men was just sufficient to manoeuvre and fight them in the air. From above they could inflict immense damage; they could reduce any organised Government to a capitulation in the briefest space, but they could not disarm, much less could they occupy, the surrendered areas below. They had to trust to the pressure upon the authorities below of a threat to renew the bombardment. It was their sole resource. No doubt, with a highly organised and undamaged Government and a homogeneous and well-disciplined people that would have sufficed to keep the peace. But this was not the American case. Not only was the New York Government a weak one and insufficiently provided with police, but the destruction of the City Hall—and Post-Office and other central ganglia had hopelessly disorganised the co-operation of part with part. The street cars and railways had ceased; the telephone service was out of gear and only worked intermittently. The Germans had struck at the head, and the head was conquered and stunned—only to release the body from its rule. New York had become a headless monster, no longer capable of collective submission. Everywhere it lifted itself rebelliously; everywhere authorities and officials left to their own imitative were joining in the arming and flag-hoisting and excitement of that afternoon.

6

The disintegrating truce gave place to a definite general breach with the assassination of the Wetterhorn—for that is the only possible word for the act—above Union Square, and not a mile away from the exemplary ruins of City Hall. This occurred late in the afternoon, between five and six. By that time the weather had changed very much for

the worse, and the operations of the airships were embarrassed by the necessity they were under of keeping head on to the gusts. A series of squalls, with hail and thunder, followed one another from the south by south-east, and in order to avoid these as much as possible, the air-fleet came low over the houses, diminishing its range of observation and exposing itself to a rifle attack.

Overnight there had been a gun placed in Union Square. It had never been mounted, much less fired, and in the darkness after the surrender it was taken with its supplies and put out of the way under the arches of the great Dexter building. Here late in the morning it was remarked by a number of patriotic spirits. They set to work to hoist and mount it inside the upper floors of the place. They made, in fact, a masked battery behind the decorous office blinds, and there lay in wait as simply excited as children until at last the stem of the luckless Wetterhorn appeared, beating and rolling at quarter speed over the recently reconstructed pinnacles of Tiffany's. Promptly that one-gun battery unmasked. The airship's look-out man must have seen the whole of the tenth story of the Dexter building crumble out and smash in the street below to discover the black muzzle looking out from the shadows behind. Then perhaps the shell hit him.

The gun fired two shells before the frame of the Dexter building collapsed, and each shell raked the Wetterhorn from stem to stern. They smashed her exhaustively. She crumpled up like a can that has been kicked by a heavy boot, her forepart came down in the square, and the rest of her length, with a great snapping and twisting of shafts and stays, descended, collapsing athwart Tammany Hall and the streets towards Second Avenue. Her gas escaped to mix with air, and the air of her rent balloonette poured into her deflating gas-chambers. Then with an immense impact she exploded....

The Vaterland at that time was beating up to the south of City Hall from over the ruins of the Brooklyn Bridge, and the reports of the gun, followed by the first crashes of the collapsing Dexter building, brought Kurt and Smallways to the cabin porthole. They were in time to see the flash of the exploding gun, and then they were first flattened against the window and then rolled head over heels across the floor of the cabin by the air wave of the explosion. The Vaterland bounded like a football some one has kicked and when they looked out again, Union Square was small and remote and shattered, as though some cosmically vast giant had rolled over it. The buildings to the east of it were ablaze at a dozen points, under the flaming tatters and warping skeleton of the airship, and all the roofs and walls were ridiculously askew and crumbling as one looked. "Gaw!" said Bert. "What's happened? Look at the people!"

But before Kurt could produce an explanation, the shrill bells of the airship were ringing to quarters, and he had to go. Bert hesitated and stepped thoughtfully into the passage, looking back at the window as he did so. He was knocked off his feet at once by the Prince, who was rushing headlong from his cabin to the central magazine.

Bert had a momentary impression of the great figure of the Prince, white with rage, bristling with gigantic anger, his huge fist swinging. "Blut und Eisen!" cried the Prince, as one who swears. "Oh! Blut und Eisen!"

Some one fell over Bert—something in the manner of falling suggested Von Winterfeld—and some one else paused and kicked him spitefully and hard. Then he was sitting up in the passage, rubbing a freshly bruised cheek and readjusting the bandage he still wore on his head. "Dem that Prince," said Bert, indignant beyond measure. "E 'asn't the menners of a 'og!"

He stood up, collected his wits for a minute, and then went slowly towards the gangway of the little gallery. As he did so he heard noises suggestive of the return of the Prince. The lot of them were coming back again. He shot into his cabin like a rabbit into its burrow, just in time to escape that shouting terror.

He shut the door, waited until the passage was still, then went across to the window and looked out. A drift of cloud made the prospect of the streets and squares hazy, and the rolling of the airship swung the picture up and down. A few people were running to and fro, but for the most part the aspect of the district was desertion. The streets seemed to broaden out, they became clearer, and the little dots that were people larger as the Vaterland came down again. Presently she was swaying along above the lower end of Broadway. The dots below, Bert saw, were not running now, but standing and looking up. Then suddenly they were all running again.

Something had dropped from the aeroplane, something that looked small and flimsy. It hit the pavement near a big archway just underneath Bert. A little man was sprinting along the sidewalk within half a dozen yards, and two or three others and one woman were bolting across the roadway. They were odd little figures, so very small were they about the heads, so very active about the elbows and legs. It was really funny to see their legs going. Foreshortened, humanity has no dignity. The little man on the pavement jumped comically—no doubt with terror, as the bomb fell beside him.

Then blinding flames squirted out in all directions from the point of impact, and the little man who had jumped became, for an instant, a flash of fire and vanished—vanished absolutely. The people running out into the road took preposterous clumsy leaps, then flopped down and lay still, with their torn clothes smouldering into flame.

Then pieces of the archway began to drop, and the lower masonry of the building to fall in with the rumbling sound of coals being shot into a cellar. A faint screaming reached Bert, and then a crowd of people ran out into the street, one man limping and gesticulating awkwardly. He halted, and went back towards the building. A falling mass of brick-work hit him and sent him sprawling to lie still and crumpled where he fell. Dust and black smoke came pouring into the street, and were presently shot with red flame....

In this manner the massacre of New York began. She was the first of the great cities of the Scientific Age to suffer by the enormous powers and grotesque limitations of aerial warfare. She was wrecked as in the previous century endless barbaric cities had been bombarded, because she was at once too strong to be occupied and too undisciplined and proud to surrender in order to escape destruction. Given the circumstances, the thing had to be done. It was impossible for the Prince to desist, and own himself defeated, and it was impossible to subdue the city except by largely destroying it. The catastrophe was the logical outcome of the situation, created by the application of science to warfare. It was unavoidable that great cities should be destroyed. In spite of his intense exasperation with his dilemma, the Prince sought to be moderate even in massacre. He tried to give a memorable lesson with the minimum waste of life and the minimum expenditure of explosives. For that night he proposed only the wrecking of Broadway. He directed the air-fleet to move in column over the route of this thoroughfare, dropping bombs, the Vaterland leading. And so our Bert Smallways became a participant in one of the most cold-blooded slaughters in the world's history, in which men who were neither excited nor, except for the remotest chance of a bullet, in any danger, poured death and destruction upon homes and crowds below.

He clung to the frame of the porthole as the airship tossed and swayed, and stared down through the light rain that now drove before the wind, into the twilight streets, watching people running out of the houses, watching buildings collapse and fires begin. As the airships sailed along they smashed up the city as a child will shatter its cities of brick and card. Below, they left ruins and blazing conflagrations and heaped and scattered dead; men, women, and children mixed together as though they had been no more than Moors, or Zulus, or Chinese. Lower New York was soon a furnace of crimson flames, from which there was no escape. Cars, railways, ferries, all had ceased, and never a light lit the way of the distracted fugitives in that dusky confusion but the light of burning. He had glimpses of what it must mean to be down there—glimpses. And it came to him suddenly as an incredible discovery, that such disasters were not only possible now in this strange, gigantic, foreign New York, but also in

London—in Bun Hill! that the little island in the silver seas was at the end of its immunity, that nowhere in the world any more was there a place left where a Smallways might lift his head proudly and vote for war and a spirited foreign policy, and go secure from such horrible things.

## **CHAPTER VII. THE “VATERLAND” IS DISABLED**

### **1**

And then above the flames of Manhattan Island came a battle, the first battle in the air. The Americans had realised the price their waiting game must cost, and struck with all the strength they had, if haply they might still save New York from this mad Prince of Blood and Iron, and from fire and death.

They came down upon the Germans on the wings of a great gale in the twilight, amidst thunder and rain. They came from the yards of Washington and Philadelphia, full tilt in two squadrons, and but for one sentinel airship hard by Trenton, the surprise would have been complete.

The Germans, sick and weary with destruction, and half empty of ammunition, were facing up into the weather when the news of this onset reached them. New York they had left behind to the south-eastward, a darkened city with one hideous red scar of flames. All the airships rolled and staggered, bursts of hailstorm bore them down and forced them to fight their way up again; the air had become bitterly cold. The Prince was on the point of issuing orders to drop earthward and trail copper lightning chains when the news of the aeroplane attack came to him. He faced his fleet in line abreast south, had the drachenflieger manned and held ready to cast loose, and ordered a general ascent into the freezing clearness above the wet and darkness.

The news of what was imminent came slowly to Bert's perceptions. He was standing in the messroom at the time and the evening rations were being served out. He had resumed Butteridge's coat and gloves, and in addition he had wrapped his blanket about him. He was dipping his bread into his soup and was biting off big mouthfuls. His legs were wide apart, and he leant against the partition in order to steady himself amidst the pitching and oscillation of the airship. The men about him looked tired and depressed; a few talked, but most were sullen and thoughtful, and one or two were air-sick. They all seemed to share the peculiarly outcast feeling that had followed the

murders of the evening, a sense of a land beneath them, and an outraged humanity grown more hostile than the Sea.

Then the news hit them. A red-faced sturdy man, a man with light eyelashes and a scar, appeared in the doorway and shouted something in German that manifestly startled every one. Bert felt the shock of the altered tone, though he could not understand a word that was said. The announcement was followed by a pause, and then a great outcry of questions and suggestions. Even the air-sick men flushed and spoke. For some minutes the mess-room was Bedlam, and then, as if it were a confirmation of the news, came the shrill ringing of the bells that called the men to their posts.

Bert with pantomime suddenness found himself alone.

“What's up?” he said, though he partly guessed.

He stayed only to gulp down the remainder of his soup, and then ran along the swaying passage and, clutching tightly, down the ladder to the little gallery. The weather hit him like cold water squirted from a hose. The airship engaged in some new feat of atmospheric Jiu-Jitsu. He drew his blanket closer about him, clutching with one straining hand. He found himself tossing in a wet twilight, with nothing to be seen but mist pouring past him. Above him the airship was warm with lights and busy with the movements of men going to their quarters. Then abruptly the lights went out, and the Vaterland with bounds and twists and strange writhings was fighting her way up the air.

He had a glimpse, as the Vaterland rolled over, of some large buildings burning close below them, a quivering acanthus of flames, and then he saw indistinctly through the driving weather another airship wallowing along like a porpoise, and also working up. Presently the clouds swallowed her again for a time, and then she came back to sight as a dark and whale-like monster, amidst streaming weather. The air was full of flappings and pipings, of void, gusty shouts and noises; it buffeted him and confused him; ever and again his attention became rigid—a blind and deaf balancing and clutching.

“Wow!”

Something fell past him out of the vast darkneses above and vanished into the tumults below, going obliquely downward. It was a German drachenflieger. The thing was going so fast he had but an instant apprehension of the dark figure of the aeronaut crouched together clutching at his wheel. It might be a manoeuvre, but it looked like a catastrophe.

“Gaw!” said Bert.

“Pup-pup-pup” went a gun somewhere in the mirk ahead and suddenly and quite horribly the Vaterland lurched, and Bert and the sentinel were clinging to the rail for dear life. “Bang!” came a vast impact out of the zenith, followed by another huge roll, and all about him the tumbled clouds flashed red and lurid in response to flashes unseen, revealing immense gulfs. The rail went right overhead, and he was hanging loose in the air holding on to it.

For a time Bert's whole mind and being was given to clutching. “I'm going into the cabin,” he said, as the airship righted again and brought back the gallery floor to his feet. He began to make his way cautiously towards the ladder. “Whee-wow!” he cried as the whole gallery reared itself up forward, and then plunged down like a desperate horse.

Crack! Bang! Bang! Bang! And then hard upon this little rattle of shots and bombs came, all about him, enveloping him, engulfing him, immense and overwhelming, a quivering white blaze of lightning and a thunder-clap that was like the bursting of a world.

Just for the instant before that explosion the universe seemed to be standing still in a shadowless glare.

It was then he saw the American aeroplane. He saw it in the light of the flash as a thing altogether motionless. Even its screw appeared still, and its men were rigid dolls. (For it was so near he could see the men upon it quite distinctly.) Its stern was tilting down, and the whole machine was heeling over. It was of the Colt-Coburn-Langley pattern, with double up-tilted wings and the screw ahead, and the men were in a boat-like body netted over. From this very light long body, magazine guns projected on either side. One thing that was strikingly odd and wonderful in that moment of revelation was that the left upper wing was burning downward with a reddish, smoky flame. But this was not the most wonderful thing about this apparition. The most wonderful thing was that it and a German airship five hundred yards below were threaded as it were on the lightning flash, which turned out of its path as if to take them, and, that out from the corners and projecting points of its huge wings everywhere, little branching thorn-trees of lightning were streaming.

Like a picture Bert saw these things, a picture a little blurred by a thin veil of wind-torn mist.

The crash of the thunder-clap followed the flash and seemed a part of it, so that it is hard to say whether Bert was the rather deafened or blinded in that instant.

And then darkness, utter darkness, and a heavy report and a thin small sound of voices that went wailing downward into the abyss below.

2

There followed upon these things a long, deep swaying of the airship, and then Bert began a struggle to get back to his cabin. He was drenched and cold and terrified beyond measure, and now more than a little air-sick. It seemed to him that the strength had gone out of his knees and hands, and that his feet had become icily slippery over the metal they trod upon. But that was because a thin film of ice had frozen upon the gallery.

He never knew how long his ascent of the ladder back into the airship took him, but in his dreams afterwards, when he recalled it, that experience seemed to last for hours. Below, above, around him were gulfs, monstrous gulfs of howling wind and eddies of dark, whirling snowflakes, and he was protected from it all by a little metal grating and a rail, a grating and rail that seemed madly infuriated with him, passionately eager to wrench him off and throw him into the tumult of space.

Once he had a fancy that a bullet tore by his ear, and that the clouds and snowflakes were lit by a flash, but he never even turned his head to see what new assailant whirled past them in the void. He wanted to get into the passage! He wanted to get into the passage! He wanted to get into the passage! Would the arm by which he was clinging hold out, or would it give way and snap? A handful of hail smacked him in the face, so that for a time he was breathless and nearly insensible. Hold tight, Bert! He renewed his efforts.

He found himself, with an enormous sense of relief and warmth, in the passage. The passage was behaving like a dice-box, its disposition was evidently to rattle him about and then throw him out again. He hung on with the convulsive clutch of instinct until the passage lurched down ahead. Then he would make a short run cabin-ward, and clutch again as the fore-end rose.

Behold! He was in the cabin!

He snapped-to the door, and for a time he was not a human being, he was a case of air-sickness. He wanted to get somewhere that would fix him, that he needn't clutch. He opened the locker and got inside among the loose articles, and sprawled there helplessly, with his head sometimes bumping one side and sometimes the other. The lid shut upon him with a click. He did not care then what was happening any more. He did not care who fought who, or what bullets were fired or explosions occurred. He did not care if presently he was shot or smashed to pieces. He was full of feeble,

inarticulate rage and despair. "Foolery!" he said, his one exhaustive comment on human enterprise, adventure, war, and the chapter of accidents that had entangled him. "Foolery! Ugh!" He included the order of the universe in that comprehensive condemnation. He wished he was dead.

He saw nothing of the stars, as presently the Vaterland cleared the rush and confusion of the lower weather, nor of the duel she fought with two circling aeroplanes, how they shot her rear-most chambers through, and how she fought them off with explosive bullets and turned to run as she did so.

The rush and swoop of these wonderful night birds was all lost upon him; their heroic dash and self-sacrifice. The Vaterland was rammed, and for some moments she hung on the verge of destruction, and sinking swiftly, with the American aeroplane entangled with her smashed propeller, and the Americans trying to scramble aboard. It signified nothing to Bert. To him it conveyed itself simply as vehement swaying. Foolery! When the American airship dropped off at last, with most of its crew shot or fallen, Bert in his locker appreciated nothing but that the Vaterland had taken a hideous upward leap.

But then came infinite relief, incredibly blissful relief. The rolling, the pitching, the struggle ceased, ceased instantly and absolutely. The Vaterland was no longer fighting the gale; her smashed and exploded engines throbbed no more; she was disabled and driving before the wind as smoothly as a balloon, a huge, windspread, tattered cloud of aerial wreckage.

To Bert it was no more than the end of a series of disagreeable sensations. He was not curious to know what had happened to the airship, nor what had happened to the battle. For a long time he lay waiting apprehensively for the pitching and tossing and his qualms to return, and so, lying, boxed up in the locker, he presently fell asleep.

3

He awoke tranquil but very stuffy, and at the same time very cold, and quite unable to recollect where he could be. His head ached, and his breath was suffocated. He had been dreaming confusedly of Edna, and Desert Dervishes, and of riding bicycles in an extremely perilous manner through the upper air amidst a pyrotechnic display of crackers and Bengal lights—to the great annoyance of a sort of composite person made up of the Prince and Mr. Butteridge. Then for some reason Edna and he had begun to cry pitifully for each other, and he woke up with wet eye-lashes into this ill-ventilated darkness of the locker. He would never see Edna any more, never see Edna any more.

He thought he must be back in the bedroom behind the cycle shop at the bottom of Bun Hill, and he was sure the vision he had had of the destruction of a magnificent city, a city quite incredibly great and splendid, by means of bombs, was no more than a particularly vivid dream.

“Grubb!” he called, anxious to tell him.

The answering silence, and the dull resonance of the locker to his voice, supplementing the stifling quality of the air, set going a new train of ideas. He lifted up his hands and feet, and met an inflexible resistance. He was in a coffin, he thought! He had been buried alive! He gave way at once to wild panic. “Elp!” he screamed. “Elp!” and drummed with his feet, and kicked and struggled. “Let me out! Let me out!”

For some seconds he struggled with this intolerable horror, and then the side of his imagined coffin gave way, and he was flying out into daylight. Then he was rolling about on what seemed to be a padded floor with Kurt, and being punched and sworn at lustily.

He sat up. His head bandage had become loose and got over one eye, and he whipped the whole thing off. Kurt was also sitting up, a yard away from him, pink as ever, wrapped in blankets, and with an aluminium diver's helmet over his knee, staring at him with a severe expression, and rubbing his downy unshaven chin. They were both on a slanting floor of crimson padding, and above them was an opening like a long, low cellar flap that Bert by an effort perceived to be the cabin door in a half-inverted condition. The whole cabin had in fact turned on its side.

“What the deuce do you mean by it, Smallways?” said Kurt, “jumping out of that locker when I was certain you had gone overboard with the rest of them? Where have you been?”

“What's up?” asked Bert.

“This end of the airship is up. Most other things are down.”

“Was there a battle?”

“There was.”

“Who won?”

“I haven't seen the papers, Smallways. We left before the finish. We got disabled and unmanageable, and our colleagues—consorts I mean—were too busy most of them to trouble about us, and the wind blew us—Heaven knows where the wind IS blowing

us. It blew us right out of action at the rate of eighty miles an hour or so. Gott! what a wind that was! What a fight! And here we are!”

“Where?”

“In the air, Smallways—in the air! When we get down on the earth again we shan't know what to do with our legs.”

“But what's below us?”

“Canada, to the best of my knowledge—and a jolly bleak, empty, inhospitable country it looks.”

“But why ain't we right ways up?”

Kurt made no answer for a space.

“Last I remember was seeing a sort of flying-machine in a lightning flash,” said Bert. “Gaw! that was 'orrible. Guns going off! Things explodin'! Clouds and 'ail. Pitching and tossing. I got so scared and desperate—and sick. You don't know how the fight came off?”

“Not a bit of it. I was up with my squad in those divers' dresses, inside the gas-chambers, with sheets of silk for caulking. We couldn't see a thing outside except the lightning flashes. I never saw one of those American aeroplanes. Just saw the shots flicker through the chambers and sent off men for the tears. We caught fire a bit—not much, you know. We were too wet, so the fires spluttered out before we banged. And then one of their infernal things dropped out of the air on us and rammed. Didn't you feel it?”

“I felt everything,” said Bert. “I didn't notice any particular smash—”

“They must have been pretty desperate if they meant it. They slashed down on us like a knife; simply ripped the after gas-chambers like gutting herrings, crumpled up the engines and screw. Most of the engines dropped off as they fell off us—or we'd have grounded—but the rest is sort of dangling. We just turned up our nose to the heavens and stayed there. Eleven men rolled off us from various points, and poor old Winterfeld fell through the door of the Prince's cabin into the chart-room and broke his ankle. Also we got our electric gear shot or carried away—no one knows how. That's the position, Smallways. We're driving through the air like a common aerostat, at the mercy of the elements, almost due north—probably to the North Pole. We don't know what aeroplanes the Americans have, or anything at all about it. Very likely we have finished 'em up. One fouled us, one was struck by lightning, some of the men saw a

third upset, apparently just for fun. They were going cheap anyhow. Also we've lost most of our drachenflieger. They just skated off into the night. No stability in 'em. That's all. We don't know if we've won or lost. We don't know if we're at war with the British Empire yet or at peace. Consequently, we daren't get down. We don't know what we are up to or what we are going to do. Our Napoleon is alone, forward, and I suppose he's rearranging his plans. Whether New York was our Moscow or not remains to be seen. We've had a high old time and murdered no end of people! War! Noble war! I'm sick of it this morning. I like sitting in rooms rightway up and not on slippery partitions. I'm a civilised man. I keep thinking of old Albrecht and the Barbarossa.... I feel I want a wash and kind words and a quiet home. When I look at you, I KNOW I want a wash. Gott!"—he stifled a vehement yawn—"What a Cockney tadpole of a ruffian you look!"

"Can we get any grub?" asked Bert.

"Heaven knows!" said Kurt.

He meditated upon Bert for a time. "So far as I can judge, Smallways," he said, "the Prince will probably want to throw you overboard—next time he thinks of you. He certainly will if he sees you.... After all, you know, you came als \_Ballast\_.... And we shall have to lighten ship extensively pretty soon. Unless I'm mistaken, the Prince will wake up presently and start doing things with tremendous vigour.... I've taken a fancy to you. It's the English strain in me. You're a rum little chap. I shan't like seeing you whizz down the air.... You'd better make yourself useful, Smallways. I think I shall requisition you for my squad. You'll have to work, you know, and be infernally intelligent and all that. And you'll have to hang about upside down a bit. Still, it's the best chance you have. We shan't carry passengers much farther this trip, I fancy. Ballast goes over-board—if we don't want to ground precious soon and be taken prisoners of war. The Prince won't do that anyhow. He'll be game to the last."

4

By means of a folding chair, which was still in its place behind the door, they got to the window and looked out in turn and contemplated a sparsely wooded country below, with no railways nor roads, and only occasional signs of habitation. Then a bugle sounded, and Kurt interpreted it as a summons to food. They got through the door and clambered with some difficulty up the nearly vertical passage, holding on desperately with toes and finger-tips, to the ventilating perforations in its floor. The mess stewards had found their fireless heating arrangements intact, and there was hot cocoa for the officers and hot soup for the men.

Bert's sense of the queerness of this experience was so keen that it blotted out any fear he might have felt. Indeed, he was far more interested now than afraid. He seemed to have touched down to the bottom of fear and abandonment overnight. He was growing accustomed to the idea that he would probably be killed presently, that this strange voyage in the air was in all probability his death journey. No human being can keep permanently afraid: fear goes at last to the back of one's mind, accepted, and shelved, and done with. He squatted over his soup, sopping it up with his bread, and contemplated his comrades. They were all rather yellow and dirty, with four-day beards, and they grouped themselves in the tired, unpremeditated manner of men on a wreck. They talked little. The situation perplexed them beyond any suggestion of ideas. Three had been hurt in the pitching up of the ship during the fight, and one had a bandaged bullet wound. It was incredible that this little band of men had committed murder and massacre on a scale beyond precedent. None of them who squatted on the sloping gas-padded partition, soup mug in hand, seemed really guilty of anything of the sort, seemed really capable of hurting a dog wantonly. They were all so manifestly built for homely chalets on the solid earth and carefully tilled fields and blond wives and cheery merrymaking. The red-faced, sturdy man with light eyelashes who had brought the first news of the air battle to the men's mess had finished his soup, and with an expression of maternal solicitude was readjusting the bandages of a youngster whose arm had been sprained.

Bert was crumbling the last of his bread into the last of his soup, eking it out as long as possible, when suddenly he became aware that every one was looking at a pair of feet that were dangling across the downturned open doorway. Kurt appeared and squatted across the hinge. In some mysterious way he had shaved his face and smoothed down his light golden hair. He looked extraordinarily cherubic. "Der Prinz," he said.

A second pair of boots followed, making wide and magnificent gestures in their attempts to feel the door frame. Kurt guided them to a foothold, and the Prince, shaved and brushed and beeswaxed and clean and big and terrible, slid down into position astride of the door. All the men and Bert also stood up and saluted.

The Prince surveyed them with the gesture of a man who sits a steed. The head of the Kapitan appeared beside him.

Then Bert had a terrible moment. The blue blaze of the Prince's eye fell upon him, the great finger pointed, a question was asked. Kurt intervened with explanations.

"So," said the Prince, and Bert was disposed of.

Then the Prince addressed the men in short, heroic sentences, steadying himself on the hinge with one hand and waving the other in a fine variety of gesture. What he said Bert could not tell, but he perceived that their demeanor changed, their backs stiffened. They began to punctuate the Prince's discourse with cries of approval. At the end their leader burst into song and all the men with him. "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott," they chanted in deep, strong tones, with an immense moral uplifting. It was glaringly inappropriate in a damaged, half-overturned, and sinking airship, which had been disabled and blown out of action after inflicting the cruellest bombardment in the world's history; but it was immensely stirring nevertheless. Bert was deeply moved. He could not sing any of the words of Luther's great hymn, but he opened his mouth and emitted loud, deep, and partially harmonious notes....

Far below, this deep chanting struck on the ears of a little camp of Christianised half-breeds who were lumbering. They were breakfasting, but they rushed out cheerfully, quite prepared for the Second Advent. They stared at the shattered and twisted Vaterland driving before the gale, amazed beyond words. In so many respects it was like their idea of the Second Advent, and then again in so many respects it wasn't. They stared at its passage, awe-stricken and perplexed beyond their power of words. The hymn ceased. Then after a long interval a voice came out of heaven. "Vat id diss blace here galled itself; vat?"

They made no answer. Indeed they did not understand, though the question repeated itself.

And at last the monster drove away northward over a crest of pine woods and was no more seen. They fell into a hot and long disputation....

The hymn ended. The Prince's legs dangled up the passage again, and every one was briskly prepared for heroic exertion and triumphant acts. "Smallways!" cried Kurt, "come here!"

5

Then Bert, under Kurt's direction, had his first experience of the work of an air-sailor.

The immediate task before the captain of the Vaterland was a very simple one. He had to keep afloat. The wind, though it had fallen from its earlier violence, was still blowing strongly enough to render the grounding of so clumsy a mass extremely dangerous, even if it had been desirable for the Prince to land in inhabited country, and so risk capture. It was necessary to keep the airship up until the wind fell and then, if possible, to descend in some lonely district of the Territory where there would be a chance of repair or rescue by some searching consort. In order to do this weight had

to be dropped, and Kurt was detailed with a dozen men to climb down among the wreckage of the deflated air-chambers and cut the stuff clear, portion by portion, as the airship sank. So Bert, armed with a sharp cutlass, found himself clambering about upon netting four thousand feet up in the air, trying to understand Kurt when he spoke in English and to divine him when he used German.

It was giddy work, but not nearly so giddy as a rather overnourished reader sitting in a warm room might imagine. Bert found it quite possible to look down and contemplate the wild sub-arctic landscape below, now devoid of any sign of habitation, a land of rocky cliffs and cascades and broad swirling desolate rivers, and of trees and thickets that grew more stunted and scrubby as the day wore on. Here and there on the hills were patches and pockets of snow. And over all this he worked, hacking away at the tough and slippery oiled silk and clinging stoutly to the netting. Presently they cleared and dropped a tangle of bent steel rods and wires from the frame, and a big chunk of silk bladder. That was trying. The airship flew up at once as this loose hamper parted. It seemed almost as though they were dropping all Canada. The stuff spread out in the air and floated down and hit and twisted up in a nasty fashion on the lip of a gorge. Bert clung like a frozen monkey to his ropes and did not move a muscle for five minutes.

But there was something very exhilarating, he found, in this dangerous work, and above every thing else, there was the sense of fellowship. He was no longer an isolated and distrustful stranger among these others, he had now a common object with them, he worked with a friendly rivalry to get through with his share before them. And he developed a great respect and affection for Kurt, which had hitherto been only latent in him. Kurt with a job to direct was altogether admirable; he was resourceful, helpful, considerate, swift. He seemed to be everywhere. One forgot his pinkness, his light cheerfulness of manner. Directly one had trouble he was at hand with sound and confident advice. He was like an elder brother to his men.

All together they cleared three considerable chunks of wreckage, and then Bert was glad to clamber up into the cabins again and give place to a second squad. He and his companions were given hot coffee, and indeed, even gloved as they were, the job had been a cold one. They sat drinking it and regarding each other with satisfaction. One man spoke to Bert amiably in German, and Bert nodded and smiled. Through Kurt, Bert, whose ankles were almost frozen, succeeded in getting a pair of top-boots from one of the disabled men.

In the afternoon the wind abated greatly, and small, infrequent snowflakes came drifting by. Snow also spread more abundantly below, and the only trees were clumps

of pine and spruce in the lower valleys. Kurt went with three men into the still intact gas-chambers, let out a certain quantity of gas from them, and prepared a series of ripping panels for the descent. Also the residue of the bombs and explosives in the magazine were thrown overboard and fell, detonating loudly, in the wilderness below. And about four o'clock in the afternoon upon a wide and rocky plain within sight of snow-crested cliffs, the Vaterland ripped and grounded.

It was necessarily a difficult and violent affair, for the Vaterland had not been planned for the necessities of a balloon. The captain got one panel ripped too soon and the others not soon enough. She dropped heavily, bounced clumsily, and smashed the hanging gallery into the fore-part, mortally injuring Von Winterfeld, and then came down in a collapsing heap after dragging for some moments. The forward shield and its machine gun tumbled in upon the things below. Two men were hurt badly—one got a broken leg and one was internally injured—by flying rods and wires, and Bert was pinned for a time under the side. When at last he got clear and could take a view of the situation, the great black eagle that had started so splendidly from Franconia six evenings ago, sprawled deflated over the cabins of the airship and the frost-bitten rocks of this desolate place and looked a most unfortunate bird—as though some one had caught it and wrung its neck and cast it aside. Several of the crew of the airship were standing about in silence, contemplating the wreckage and the empty wilderness into which they had fallen. Others were busy under the impromptu tent made by the empty gas-chambers. The Prince had gone a little way off and was scrutinising the distant heights through his field-glass. They had the appearance of old sea cliffs; here and there were small clumps of conifers, and in two places tall cascades. The nearer ground was strewn with glaciated boulders and supported nothing but a stunted Alpine vegetation of compact clustering stems and stalkless flowers. No river was visible, but the air was full of the rush and babble of a torrent close at hand. A bleak and biting wind was blowing. Ever and again a snowflake drifted past. The springless frozen earth under Bert's feet felt strangely dead and heavy after the buoyant airship.

6

So it came about that that great and powerful Prince Karl Albert was for a time thrust out of the stupendous conflict he chiefly had been instrumental in provoking. The chances of battle and the weather conspired to maroon him in Labrador, and there he raged for six long days, while war and wonder swept the world. Nation rose against nation and air-fleet grappled air-fleet, cities blazed and men died in multitudes; but in Labrador one might have dreamt that, except for a little noise of hammering, the world was at peace.

There the encampment lay; from a distance the cabins, covered over with the silk of the balloon part, looked like a gipsy's tent on a rather exceptional scale, and all the available hands were busy in building out of the steel of the framework a mast from which the Vaterland's electricians might hang the long conductors of the apparatus for wireless telegraphy that was to link the Prince to the world again. There were times when it seemed they would never rig that mast. From the outset the party suffered hardship. They were not too abundantly provisioned, and they were put on short rations, and for all the thick garments they had, they were but ill-equipped against the piercing wind and inhospitable violence of this wilderness. The first night was spent in darkness and without fires. The engines that had supplied power were smashed and dropped far away to the south, and there was never a match among the company. It had been death to carry matches. All the explosives had been thrown out of the magazine, and it was only towards morning that the bird-faced man whose cabin Bert had taken in the beginning confessed to a brace of duelling pistols and cartridges, with which a fire could be started. Afterwards the lockers of the machine gun were found to contain a supply of unused ammunition.

The night was a distressing one and seemed almost interminable. Hardly any one slept. There were seven wounded men aboard, and Von Winterfeld's head had been injured, and he was shivering and in delirium, struggling with his attendant and shouting strange things about the burning of New York. The men crept together in the mess-room in the darkling, wrapped in what they could find and drank cocoa from the fireless heaters and listened to his cries. In the morning the Prince made them a speech about Destiny, and the God of his Fathers and the pleasure and glory of giving one's life for his dynasty, and a number of similar considerations that might otherwise have been neglected in that bleak wilderness. The men cheered without enthusiasm, and far away a wolf howled.

Then they set to work, and for a week they toiled to put up a mast of steel, and hang from it a gridiron of copper wires two hundred feet by twelve. The theme of all that time was work, work continually, straining and toilsome work, and all the rest was grim hardship and evil chances, save for a certain wild splendour in the sunset and sunrise in the torrents and drifting weather, in the wilderness about them. They built and tended a ring of perpetual fires, gangs roamed for brushwood and met with wolves, and the wounded men and their beds were brought out from the airship cabins, and put in shelters about the fires. There old Von Winterfeld raved and became quiet and presently died, and three of the other wounded sickened for want of good food, while their fellows mended. These things happened, as it were, in the wings; the central facts before Bert's consciousness were always firstly the perpetual

toil, the holding and lifting, and lugging at heavy and clumsy masses, the tedious filing and winding of wires, and secondly, the Prince, urgent and threatening whenever a man relaxed. He would stand over them, and point over their heads, southward into the empty sky. "The world there," he said in German, "is waiting for us! Fifty Centuries come to their Consummation." Bert did not understand the words, but he read the gesture. Several times the Prince grew angry; once with a man who was working slowly, once with a man who stole a comrade's ration. The first he scolded and set to a more tedious task; the second he struck in the face and ill-used. He did no work himself. There was a clear space near the fires in which he would walk up and down, sometimes for two hours together, with arms folded, muttering to himself of Patience and his destiny. At times these mutterings broke out into rhetoric, into shouts and gestures that would arrest the workers; they would stare at him until they perceived that his blue eyes glared and his waving hand addressed itself always to the southward hills. On Sunday the work ceased for half an hour, and the Prince preached on faith and God's friendship for David, and afterwards they all sang: "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott."

In an improvised hovel lay Von Winterfeld, and all one morning he raved of the greatness of Germany. "Blut und Eisen!" he shouted, and then, as if in derision, "Welt-Politik—ha, ha!" Then he would explain complicated questions of polity to imaginary hearers, in low, wily tones. The other sick men kept still, listening to him. Bert's distracted attention would be recalled by Kurt. "Smallways, take that end. So!"

Slowly, tediously, the great mast was rigged and hoisted foot by foot into place. The electricians had contrived a catchment pool and a wheel in the torrent close at hand—for the little Mulhausen dynamo with its turbinal volute used by the telegraphists was quite adaptable to water driving, and on the sixth day in the evening the apparatus was in working order and the Prince was calling—weakly, indeed, but calling—to his air-fleet across the empty spaces of the world. For a time he called unheeded.

The effect of that evening was to linger long in Bert's memory. A red fire spluttered and blazed close by the electricians at their work, and red gleams ran up the vertical steel mast and threads of copper wire towards the zenith. The Prince sat on a rock close by, with his chin on his hand, waiting. Beyond and to the northward was the cairn that covered Von Winterfeld, surmounted by a cross of steel, and from among the tumbled rocks in the distance the eyes of a wolf gleamed redly. On the other hand was the wreckage of the great airship and the men bivouacked about a second ruddy flare. They were all keeping very still, as if waiting to hear what news might presently be given them. Far away, across many hundreds of miles of desolation, other wireless

masts would be clicking, and snapping, and waking into responsive vibration. Perhaps they were not. Perhaps those throbs upon the ethers wasted themselves upon a regardless world. When the men spoke, they spoke in low tones. Now and then a bird shrieked remotely, and once a wolf howled. All these things were set in the immense cold spaciousness of the wild.

7

Bert got the news last, and chiefly in broken English, from a linguist among his mates. It was only far on in the night that the weary telegraphist got an answer to his calls, but then the messages came clear and strong. And such news it was!

“I say,” said Bert at his breakfast, amidst a great clamour, “tell us a bit.”

“All de vorlt is at vor!” said the linguist, waving his cocoa in an illustrative manner, “all de vorlt is at vor!”

Bert stared southward into the dawn. It did not seem so.

“All de vorlt is at vor! They haf burn' Berlin; they haf burn' London; they haf burn' Hamburg and Paris. Chapan hass burn San Francisco. We haf mate a camp at Niagara. Dat is whad they are telling us. China has cot drachenflieger and luftschiffe beyont counting. All de vorlt is at vor!”

“Gaw!” said Bert.

“Yess,” said the linguist, drinking his cocoa.

“Burnt up London, 'ave they? Like we did New York?”

“It wass a bombardment.”

“They don't say anything about a place called Clapham, or Bun Hill, do they?”

“I haf heard noding,” said the linguist.

That was all Bert could get for a time. But the excitement of all the men about him was contagious, and presently he saw Kurt standing alone, hands behind him, and looking at one of the distant waterfalls very steadfastly. He went up and saluted, soldier-fashion. “Beg pardon, lieutenant,” he said.

Kurt turned his face. It was unusually grave that morning. “I was just thinking I would like to see that waterfall closer,” he said. “It reminds me—what do you want?”

“I can't make 'ead or tail of what they're saying, sir. Would you mind telling me the news?”

“Damn the news,” said Kurt. “You'll get news enough before the day's out. It's the end of the world. They're sending the Graf Zeppelin for us. She'll be here by the morning, and we ought to be at Niagara—or eternal smash—within eight and forty hours.... I want to look at that waterfall. You'd better come with me. Have you had your rations?”

“Yessir.”

“Very well. Come.”

And musing profoundly, Kurt led the way across the rocks towards the distant waterfall.

For a time Bert walked behind him in the character of an escort; then as they passed out of the atmosphere of the encampment, Kurt lagged for him to come alongside.

“We shall be back in it all in two days' time,” he said. “And it's a devil of a war to go back to. That's the news. The world's gone mad. Our fleet beat the Americans the night we got disabled, that's clear. We lost eleven—eleven airships certain, and all their aeroplanes got smashed. God knows how much we smashed or how many we killed. But that was only the beginning. Our start's been like firing a magazine. Every country was hiding flying-machines. They're fighting in the air all over Europe—all over the world. The Japanese and Chinese have joined in. That's the great fact. That's the supreme fact. They've pounced into our little quarrels.... The Yellow Peril was a peril after all! They've got thousands of airships. They're all over the world. We bombarded London and Paris, and now the French and English have smashed up Berlin. And now Asia is at us all, and on the top of us all.... It's mania. China on the top. And they don't know where to stop. It's limitless. It's the last confusion. They're bombarding capitals, smashing up dockyards and factories, mines and fleets.”

“Did they do much to London, sir?” asked Bert.

“Heaven knows....”

He said no more for a time.

“This Labrador seems a quiet place,” he resumed at last. “I'm half a mind to stay here. Can't do that. No! I've got to see it through. I've got to see it through. You've got to, too. Every one.... But why?... I tell you—our world's gone to pieces. There's no way out of it, no way back. Here we are! We're like mice caught in a house on fire, we're like cattle overtaken by a flood. Presently we shall be picked up, and back we shall go into the fighting. We shall kill and smash again—perhaps. It's a Chino-Japanese air-fleet this time, and the odds are against us. Our turns will come. What will happen to you I don't know, but for myself, I know quite well; I shall be killed.”

“You'll be all right,” said Bert, after a queer pause.

“No!” said Kurt, “I'm going to be killed. I didn't know it before, but this morning, at dawn, I knew it—as though I'd been told.”

“'Ow?”

“I tell you I know.”

“But 'ow COULD you know?”

“I know.”

“Like being told?”

“Like being certain.

“I know,” he repeated, and for a time they walked in silence towards the waterfall.

Kurt, wrapped in his thoughts, walked heedlessly, and at last broke out again. “I've always felt young before, Smallways, but this morning I feel old—old. So old! Nearer to death than old men feel. And I've always thought life was a lark. It isn't.... This sort of thing has always been happening, I suppose—these things, wars and earthquakes, that sweep across all the decency of life. It's just as though I had woke up to it all for the first time. Every night since we were at New York I've dreamt of it.... And it's always been so—it's the way of life. People are torn away from the people they care for; homes are smashed, creatures full of life, and memories, and little peculiar gifts are scalded and smashed, and torn to pieces, and starved, and spoilt. London! Berlin! San Francisco! Think of all the human histories we ended in New York!... And the others go on again as though such things weren't possible. As I went on! Like animals! Just like animals.”

He said nothing for a long time, and then he dropped out, “The Prince is a lunatic!”

They came to a place where they had to climb, and then to a long peat level beside a rivulet. There a quantity of delicate little pink flowers caught Bert's eye. “Gaw!” he said, and stooped to pick one. “In a place like this.”

Kurt stopped and half turned. His face winced.

“I never see such a flower,” said Bert. “It's so delicate.”

“Pick some more if you want to,” said Kurt.

Bert did so, while Kurt stood and watched him.

“Funny 'ow one always wants to pick flowers,” said Bert.

Kurt had nothing to add to that.

They went on again, without talking, for a long time.

At last they came to a rocky hummock, from which the view of the waterfall opened out. There Kurt stopped and seated himself on a rock.

“That's as much as I wanted to see,” he explained. “It isn't very like, but it's like enough.”

“Like what?”

“Another waterfall I knew.”

He asked a question abruptly. “Got a girl, Smallways?”

“Funny thing,” said Bert, “those flowers, I suppose.—I was jes' thinking of 'er.”

“So was I.”

“WHAT! Edna?”

“No. I was thinking of MY Edna. We've all got Ednas, I suppose, for our imaginations to play about. This was a girl. But all that's past for ever. It's hard to think I can't see her just for a minute—just let her know I'm thinking of her.”

“Very likely,” said Bert, “you'll see 'er all right.”

“No,” said Kurt with decision, “I KNOW.”

“I met her,” he went on, “in a place like this—in the Alps—Engstlen Alp. There's a waterfall rather like this one—a broad waterfall down towards Innertkirchen. That's why I came here this morning. We slipped away and had half a day together beside it. And we picked flowers. Just such flowers as you picked. The same for all I know. And gentian.”

“I know” said Bert, “me and Edna—we done things like that. Flowers. And all that. Seems years off now.”

“She was beautiful and daring and shy, Mein Gott! I can hardly hold myself for the desire to see her and hear her voice again before I die. Where is she?... Look here, Smallways, I shall write a sort of letter—And there's her portrait.” He touched his breast pocket.

“You'll see 'er again all right,” said Bert.

“No! I shall never see her again.... I don't understand why people should meet just to be torn apart. But I know she and I will never meet again. That I know as surely as that the sun will rise, and that cascade come shining over the rocks after I am dead and done.... Oh! It's all foolishness and haste and violence and cruel folly, stupidity and blundering hate and selfish ambition—all the things that men have done—all the things they will ever do. Gott! Smallways, what a muddle and confusion life has always been—the battles and massacres and disasters, the hates and harsh acts, the murders and sweatings, the lynchings and cheatings. This morning I am tired of it all, as though I'd just found it out for the first time. I HAVE found it out. When a man is tired of life, I suppose it is time for him to die. I've lost heart, and death is over me. Death is close to me, and I know I have got to end. But think of all the hopes I had only a little time ago, the sense of fine beginnings!... It was all a sham. There were no beginnings.... We're just ants in ant-hill cities, in a world that doesn't matter; that goes on and rambles into nothingness. New York—New York doesn't even strike me as horrible. New York was nothing but an ant-hill kicked to pieces by a fool!

“Think of it, Smallways: there's war everywhere! They're smashing up their civilisation before they have made it. The sort of thing the English did at Alexandria, the Japanese at Port Arthur, the French at Casablanca, is going on everywhere. Everywhere! Down in South America even they are fighting among themselves! No place is safe—no place is at peace. There is no place where a woman and her daughter can hide and be at peace. The war comes through the air, bombs drop in the night. Quiet people go out in the morning, and see air-fleets passing overhead—dripping death—dripping death!”

## **CHAPTER VIII. A WORLD AT WAR**

### **1**

It was only very slowly that Bert got hold of this idea that the whole world was at war, that he formed any image at all of the crowded countries south of these Arctic solitudes stricken with terror and dismay as these new-born aerial navies swept across their skies. He was not used to thinking of the world as a whole, but as a limitless hinterland of happenings beyond the range of his immediate vision. War in his imagination was something, a source of news and emotion, that happened in a restricted area, called the Seat of War. But now the whole atmosphere was the Seat of War, and every land a cockpit. So closely had the nations raced along the path of research and invention, so secret and yet so parallel had been their plans and

acquisitions, that it was within a few hours of the launching of the first fleet in Franconia that an Asiatic Armada beat its west-ward way across, high above the marvelling millions in the plain of the Ganges. But the preparations of the Confederation of Eastern Asia had been on an altogether more colossal scale than the German. "With this step," said Tan Ting-siang, "we overtake and pass the West. We recover the peace of the world that these barbarians have destroyed."

Their secrecy and swiftness and inventions had far surpassed those of the Germans, and where the Germans had had a hundred men at work the Asiatics had ten thousand. There came to their great aeronaut parks at Chinsi-fu and Tsingyen by the mono-rails that now laced the whole surface of China a limitless supply of skilled and able workmen, workmen far above the average European in industrial efficiency. The news of the German World Surprise simply quickened their efforts. At the time of the bombardment of New York it is doubtful if the Germans had three hundred airships all together in the world; the score of Asiatic fleets flying east and west and south must have numbered several thousand. Moreover the Asiatics had a real fighting flying-machine, the Niais as they were called, a light but quite efficient weapon, infinitely superior to the German drachenflieger. Like that, it was a one-man machine, but it was built very lightly of steel and cane and chemical silk, with a transverse engine, and a flapping sidewing. The aeronaut carried a gun firing explosive bullets loaded with oxygen, and in addition, and true to the best tradition of Japan, a sword. Mostly they were Japanese, and it is characteristic that from the first it was contemplated that the aeronaut should be a swordsman. The wings of these flyers had bat-like hooks forward, by which they were to cling to their antagonist's gas-chambers while boarding him. These light flying-machines were carried with the fleets, and also sent overland or by sea to the front with the men. They were capable of flights of from two to five hundred miles according to the wind.

So, hard upon the uprush of the first German air-fleet, these Asiatic swarms took to the atmosphere. Instantly every organised Government in the world was frantically and vehemently building airships and whatever approach to a flying machine its inventors had discovered. There was no time for diplomacy. Warnings and ultimatums were telegraphed to and fro, and in a few hours all the panic-fierce world was openly at war, and at war in the most complicated way. For Britain and France and Italy had declared war upon Germany and outraged Swiss neutrality; India, at the sight of Asiatic airships, had broken into a Hindoo insurrection in Bengal and a Mohametan revolt hostile to this in the North-west Provinces—the latter spreading like wildfire from Gobi to the Gold Coast—and the Confederation of Eastern Asia had seized the oil wells of Burmha and was impartially attacking America and Germany. In a week

they were building airships in Damascus and Cairo and Johannesburg; Australia and New Zealand were frantically equipping themselves. One unique and terrifying aspect of this development was the swiftness with which these monsters could be produced. To build an ironclad took from two to four years; an airship could be put together in as many weeks. Moreover, compared with even a torpedo boat, the airship was remarkably simple to construct, given the air-chamber material, the engines, the gas plant, and the design, it was really not more complicated and far easier than an ordinary wooden boat had been a hundred years before. And now from Cape Horn to Nova Zembla, and from Canton round to Canton again, there were factories and workshops and industrial resources.

And the German airships were barely in sight of the Atlantic waters, the first Asiatic fleet was scarcely reported from Upper Burmah, before the fantastic fabric of credit and finance that had held the world together economically for a hundred years strained and snapped. A tornado of realisation swept through every stock exchange in the world; banks stopped payment, business shrank and ceased, factories ran on for a day or so by a sort of inertia, completing the orders of bankrupt and extinguished customers, then stopped. The New York Bert Smallways saw, for all its glare of light and traffic, was in the pit of an economic and financial collapse unparalleled in history. The flow of the food supply was already a little checked. And before the world-war had lasted two weeks—by the time, that is, that mast was rigged in Labrador—there was not a city or town in the world outside China, however far from the actual centres of destruction, where police and government were not adopting special emergency methods to deal with a want of food and a glut of unemployed people.

The special peculiarities of aerial warfare were of such a nature as to trend, once it had begun, almost inevitably towards social disorganisation. The first of these peculiarities was brought home to the Germans in their attack upon New York; the immense power of destruction an airship has over the thing below, and its relative inability to occupy or police or guard or garrison a surrendered position. Necessarily, in the face of urban populations in a state of economic disorganisation and infuriated and starving, this led to violent and destructive collisions, and even where the air-fleet floated inactive above, there would be civil conflict and passionate disorder below. Nothing comparable to this state of affairs had been known in the previous history of warfare, unless we take such a case as that of a nineteenth century warship attacking some large savage or barbaric settlement, or one of those naval bombardments that disfigure the history of Great Britain in the late eighteenth century. Then, indeed, there had been cruelties and destruction that faintly foreshadowed the horrors of the aerial war. Moreover, before the twentieth century the world had had but one experience,

and that a comparatively light one, in the Communist insurrection of Paris, 1871, of the possibilities of a modern urban population under warlike stresses.

A second peculiarity of airship war as it first came to the world that also made for social collapse, was the ineffectiveness of the early air-ships against each other. Upon anything below they could rain explosives in the most deadly fashion, forts and ships and cities lay at their mercy, but unless they were prepared for a suicidal grapple they could do remarkably little mischief to each other. The armament of the huge German airships, big as the biggest mammoth liners afloat, was one machine gun that could easily have been packed up on a couple of mules. In addition, when it became evident that the air must be fought for, the air-sailors were provided with rifles with explosive bullets of oxygen or inflammable substance, but no airship at any time ever carried as much in the way of guns and armour as the smallest gunboat on the navy list had been accustomed to do. Consequently, when these monsters met in battle, they manoeuvred for the upper place, or grappled and fought like junks, throwing grenades fighting hand to hand in an entirely medieval fashion. The risks of a collapse and fall on either side came near to balancing in every case the chances of victory. As a consequence, and after their first experiences of battle, one finds a growing tendency on the part of the air-fleet admirals to evade joining battle, and to seek rather the moral advantage of a destructive counter attack.

And if the airships were too ineffective, the early drachenflieger were either too unstable, like the German, or too light, like the Japanese, to produce immediately decisive results. Later, it is true, the Brazilians launched a flying-machine of a type and scale that was capable of dealing with an airship, but they built only three or four, they operated only in South America, and they vanished from history untraceably in the time when world-bankruptcy put a stop to all further engineering production on any considerable scale.

The third peculiarity of aerial warfare was that it was at once enormously destructive and entirely indecisive. It had this unique feature, that both sides lay open to punitive attack. In all previous forms of war, both by land and sea, the losing side was speedily unable to raid its antagonist's territory and the communications. One fought on a "front," and behind that front the winner's supplies and resources, his towns and factories and capital, the peace of his country, were secure. If the war was a naval one, you destroyed your enemy's battle fleet and then blockaded his ports, secured his coaling stations, and hunted down any stray cruisers that threatened your ports of commerce. But to blockade and watch a coastline is one thing, to blockade and watch the whole surface of a country is another, and cruisers and privateers are things that take long to make, that cannot be packed up and hidden and carried

unostentatiously from point to point. In aerial war the stronger side, even supposing it destroyed the main battle fleet of the weaker, had then either to patrol and watch or destroy every possible point at which he might produce another and perhaps a novel and more deadly form of flyer. It meant darkening his air with airships. It meant building them by the thousand and making aeronauts by the hundred thousand. A small uninitiated airship could be hidden in a railway shed, in a village street, in a wood; a flying machine is even less conspicuous.

And in the air are no streets, no channels, no point where one can say of an antagonist, "If he wants to reach my capital he must come by here." In the air all directions lead everywhere.

Consequently it was impossible to end a war by any of the established methods. A, having outnumbered and overwhelmed B, hovers, a thousand airships strong, over his capital, threatening to bombard it unless B submits. B replies by wireless telegraphy that he is now in the act of bombarding the chief manufacturing city of A by means of three raider airships. A denounces B's raiders as pirates and so forth, bombards B's capital, and sets off to hunt down B's airships, while B, in a state of passionate emotion and heroic unconquerableness, sets to work amidst his ruins, making fresh airships and explosives for the benefit of A. The war became perforce a universal guerilla war, a war inextricably involving civilians and homes and all the apparatus of social life.

These aspects of aerial fighting took the world by surprise. There had been no foresight to deduce these consequences. If there had been, the world would have arranged for a Universal Peace Conference in 1900. But mechanical invention had gone faster than intellectual and social organisation, and the world, with its silly old flags, its silly unmeaning tradition of nationality, its cheap newspapers and cheaper passions and imperialisms, its base commercial motives and habitual insincerities and vulgarities, its race lies and conflicts, was taken by surprise. Once the war began there was no stopping it. The flimsy fabric of credit that had grown with no man foreseeing, and that had held those hundreds of millions in an economic interdependence that no man clearly understood, dissolved in panic. Everywhere went the airships dropping bombs, destroying any hope of a rally, and everywhere below were economic catastrophe, starving workless people, rioting, and social disorder. Whatever constructive guiding intelligence there had been among the nations vanished in the passionate stresses of the time. Such newspapers and documents and histories as survive from this period all tell one universal story of towns and cities with the food supply interrupted and their streets congested with starving unemployed; of crises in administration and states of siege, of provisional

Governments and Councils of Defence, and, in the cases of India and Egypt, insurrectionary committees taking charge of the re-arming of the population, of the making of batteries and gun-pits, of the vehement manufacture of airships and flying-machines.

One sees these things in glimpses, in illuminated moments, as if through a driving reek of clouds, going on all over the world. It was the dissolution of an age; it was the collapse of the civilisation that had trusted to machinery, and the instruments of its destruction were machines. But while the collapse of the previous great civilisation, that of Rome, had been a matter of centuries, had been a thing of phase and phase, like the ageing and dying of a man, this, like his killing by railway or motor car, was one swift, conclusive smashing and an end.

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The early battles of the aerial war were no doubt determined by attempts to realise the old naval maxim, to ascertain the position of the enemy's fleet and to destroy it. There was first the battle of the Bernese Oberland, in which the Italian and French navigables in their flank raid upon the Franconian Park were assailed by the Swiss experimental squadron, supported as the day wore on by German airships, and then the encounter of the British Winterhouse-Dunn aeroplanes with three unfortunate Germans.

Then came the Battle of North India, in which the entire Anglo-Indian aeronautic settlement establishment fought for three days against overwhelming odds, and was dispersed and destroyed in detail.

And simultaneously with the beginning of that, commenced the momentous struggle of the Germans and Asiatics that is usually known as the Battle of Niagara because of the objective of the Asiatic attack. But it passed gradually into a sporadic conflict over half a continent. Such German airships as escaped destruction in battle descended and surrendered to the Americans, and were re-manned, and in the end it became a series of pitiless and heroic encounters between the Americans, savagely resolved to exterminate their enemies, and a continually reinforced army of invasion from Asia quartered upon the Pacific slope and supported by an immense fleet. From the first the war in America was fought with implacable bitterness; no quarter was asked, no prisoners were taken. With ferocious and magnificent energy the Americans constructed and launched ship after ship to battle and perish against the Asiatic multitudes. All other affairs were subordinate to this war, the whole population was presently living or dying for it. Presently, as I shall tell, the white men found in the

Butteridge machine a weapon that could meet and fight the flying-machines of the Asiatic swordsman.

The Asiatic invasion of America completely effaced the German-American conflict. It vanishes from history. At first it had seemed to promise quite sufficient tragedy in itself—beginning as it did in unforgettable massacre. After the destruction of central New York all America had risen like one man, resolved to die a thousand deaths rather than submit to Germany. The Germans grimly resolved upon beating the Americans into submission and, following out the plans developed by the Prince, had seized Niagara—in order to avail themselves of its enormous powerworks; expelled all its inhabitants and made a desert of its environs as far as Buffalo. They had also, directly Great Britain and France declare war, wrecked the country upon the Canadian side for nearly ten miles inland. They began to bring up men and material from the fleet off the east coast, stringing out to and fro like bees getting honey. It was then that the Asiatic forces appeared, and it was in their attack upon this German base at Niagara that the air-fleets of East and West first met and the greater issue became clear.

One conspicuous peculiarity of the early aerial fighting arose from the profound secrecy with which the airships had been prepared. Each power had had but the dimmest inkling of the schemes of its rivals, and even experiments with its own devices were limited by the needs of secrecy. None of the designers of airships and aeroplanes had known clearly what their inventions might have to fight; many had not imagined they would have to fight anything whatever in the air; and had planned them only for the dropping of explosives. Such had been the German idea. The only weapon for fighting another airship with which the Franconian fleet had been provided was the machine gun forward. Only after the fight over New York were the men given short rifles with detonating bullets. Theoretically, the drachenflieger were to have been the fighting weapon. They were declared to be aerial torpedo-boats, and the aeronaut was supposed to swoop close to his antagonist and cast his bombs as he whirled past. But indeed these contrivances were hopelessly unstable; not one-third in any engagement succeeded in getting back to the mother airship. The rest were either smashed up or grounded.

The allied Chino-Japanese fleet made the same distinction as the Germans between airships and fighting machines heavier than air, but the type in both cases was entirely different from the occidental models, and—it is eloquent of the vigour with which these great peoples took up and bettered the European methods of scientific research in almost every particular the invention of Asiatic engineers. Chief among these, it is worth remarking, was Mohini K. Chatterjee, a political exile who had formerly served in the British-Indian aeronautic park at Lahore.

The German airship was fish-shaped, with a blunted head; the Asiatic airship was also fish-shaped, but not so much on the lines of a cod or goby as of a ray or sole. It had a wide, flat underside, unbroken by windows or any opening except along the middle line. Its cabins occupied its axis, with a sort of bridge deck above, and the gas-chambers gave the whole affair the shape of a gipsy's hooped tent, except that it was much flatter. The German airship was essentially a navigable balloon very much lighter than air; the Asiatic airship was very little lighter than air and skimmed through it with much greater velocity if with considerably less stability. They carried fore and aft guns, the latter much the larger, throwing inflammatory shells, and in addition they had nests for riflemen on both the upper and the under side. Light as this armament was in comparison with the smallest gunboat that ever sailed, it was sufficient for them to outfight as well as outfly the German monster airships. In action they flew to get behind or over the Germans: they even dashed underneath, avoiding only passing immediately beneath the magazine, and then as soon as they had crossed let fly with their rear gun, and sent flares or oxygen shells into the antagonist's gas-chambers.

It was not in their airships, but, as I have said, in their flying-machines proper, that the strength of the Asiatics lay. Next only to the Butteridge machine, these were certainly the most efficient heavier-than-air fliers that had ever appeared. They were the invention of a Japanese artist, and they differed in type extremely from the box-kite quality of the German drachenflieger. They had curiously curved, flexible side wings, more like *bent* butterfly's wings than anything else, and made of a substance like celluloid and of brightly painted silk, and they had a long humming-bird tail. At the forward corner of the wings were hooks, rather like the claws of a bat, by which the machine could catch and hang and tear at the walls of an airship's gas-chamber. The solitary rider sat between the wings above a transverse explosive engine, an explosive engine that differed in no essential particular from those in use in the light motor bicycles of the period. Below was a single large wheel. The rider sat astride of a saddle, as in the Butteridge machine, and he carried a large double-edged two-handed sword, in addition to his explosive-bullet firing rifle.