

DAVE DASHAWAY AROUND THE WORLD

Or

A Young Yankee Aviator Among Many
Nations

By Roy Rockwood

*AUTHOR OF "DAVE DASHAWAY AND HIS HYDROPLANE,"
"THE SPEEDWELL BOYS SERIES," THE GREAT MARVEL
SERIES," ETC.*

ILLUSTRATED

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This book is a product of the time in which it was written. As such, you will find that some words appear to either be spelled incorrectly, or have odd hyphenations. This was standard in the early 1900s. We have left these as is for historical accuracy.

You will also find words referencing people of non-Caucasian races, such as the use of the words spoken by the “negro”man, Washington. These may seem either archaic or insulting, or both, but were in normal use at the time this story was created. We sincerely hope that no offense is taken. Absolutely none is intended by this publisher!

Please note that during the scanning process it became evident that our battered, old copy had deteriorated badly. We have gone through the resulting text carefully, but may have missed a few errors. We believe we have restored the proper text with no added errors. If we goofed, we apologize.

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Dave Dashaway the Young Aviator

By Roy Rockwood

THE Baby Racer. That was the name of the new vehicle. And the *Baby Racer* would propel Dave Dashaway into an exciting new adventure!

Dave Dashaway was a young pilot in the exciting first years of aviation in the early twentieth century when most things that flew with a motor were biplanes. When his father, a noted balloonist, died a mean old skinflint named Silas Warner had been appointed his guardian. Despite Silas Warner's machinations, Dave's natural love for aeronautics won out, and he'd already had adventures on his way to becoming a well-known pilot.

Hiram Dobbs was Dave's friend. Together the two would have an even more exciting adventure with hydroplanes on the Great Lakes.

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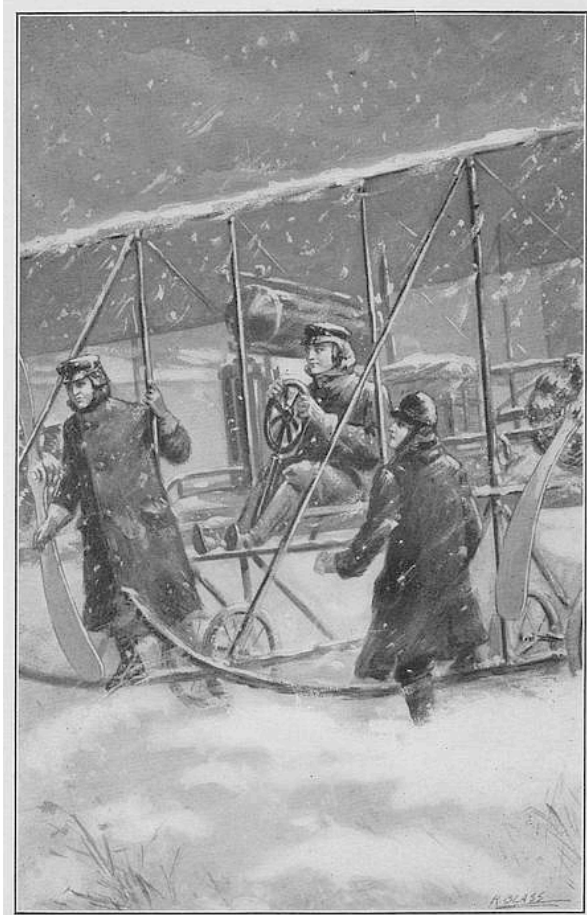
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Dave Dashaway Around the World

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IN ADDITION TO THE ENVELOPING GLOOM OF THE STORM,
IT HAD BEGUN TO GET DUSK.

CHAPTER I

THE COMET

"I wish Dave Dashaway would hurry up here," said Hiram Dobbs, who was for the time being in charge of the biplane, the *Comet*.

"What's your great anxiety, Hiram?" questioned Elmer Brackett, reclining comfortably in one of the spacious seats behind the pilot post of the machine.

"Do you know that fellow with the long frock coat over yonder—the one who looks like some cheap sharp lawyer? There," added Hiram, pointing at a group near a hangar, "he's talking now with that fat, porpoise-looking man with gold braid on his cap and a badge on his coat."

"I see them," nodded young Brackett. "Never saw either before that I can remember. What of them?"

"Just this," replied the young airman, quite seriously. "That lawyer fellow has been rustling around like a hen on a hot griddle for the last ten minutes. He seemed to be waiting for someone. Then I saw that man with the light fuzzy hat, and a moustache and glasses, come in a great hurry up to him, and direct his attention to the airship here. Just now the same fellow pointed it out to that constable—policeman—or whatever he is."

"I declare!" exclaimed Elmer, with a start, sitting up and taking notice. "Why, I know the man with the fuzzy hat."

"You do?"

"I am sure of it, Hiram. He is disguised, but I certainly recognize him. That fellow is my enemy," and the speaker shifted around in his seat, greatly disturbed.

“Do you remember that fellow Vernon?”

“I should say so, and I suspected it to be just that individual all along,” explained Hiram. “He’s made all of us trouble enough not to be forgotten.”

“I wish Dave would come,” said Elmer, anxiously. “It would be a terrible thing if, after all my hopes and preparations, something should come up to prevent my going with you on the great airship trip around the world.”

Elmer Brackett spoke very earnestly. He might well do so. When he referred to an exploit that sounded like the scheme of some visionary, his words had a tangible and sensible business basis.

His companion was pretty nearly a professional airman, and Elmer himself knew a great deal about aircraft. His father was practically the owner of the Interstate Aero Company. The person they were now awaiting, Dave Dashaway, was a youth who had won fame and fortune in the aviation field.

Young as Dave was, this expert had pretty nearly reached the top as a professional airman. Those who have been introduced to him in the first book of the present series, named “Dave Dashaway, the Young Aviator,” will recall with interest his first struggles to earn recognition and a living in a line to which he was naturally adapted. Dave Dashaway’s father had been a scientific balloonist, and when Dave met the old aviator, Robert King, he found a man who was glad to help him on in his ambition to succeed as a sky sailor.

Dave steadily and earnestly studied aeronautics as if he was learning a trade. In the second volume of this series, entitled “Dave Dashaway and His Hydroplane,” the energetic young airman won marked distinction at

an aero meet by his monoplane and hydroplane work. His ability won the attention of a friend and former professional associate of his father, and the latter agreed to finance the most stupendous aerial proposition ever attempted.

The result has been told in the preceding volume of this series called, "Dave Dashaway and His Giant Airship." The remarkable adventures of Dave and his friends while sailing the mammoth airship, the *Albatross*, across the Atlantic Ocean have there been narrated. After the giant airship had started on its extraordinary trip, a stowaway had been discovered—Elmer Brackett.

It seemed that the lad had gotten into bad company. His father was rich and he had plenty of money, which he spent very foolishly. He had formed the acquaintance of a clever schemer named Vernon. This man had so enmeshed Elmer in his toils, that he made the boy believe that he could send him to prison, and ruin his father's business. All this was untrue, but in sheer desperation, believing he had wrecked all his chances in life, the frightened lad had secretly stolen aboard of the *Albatross*. In a very heroic way he had saved the crew of the giant airship from capture by some mountain outlaws in North Carolina, where the *Albatross* had descended for repairs. This had made him a welcome comrade to Dave and Hiram. When the former returned to the United States, victor in the great race across the Atlantic and the possessor of a small fortune in prize money, his first task was to hunt up the schemer, Vernon. Dave gave the rascal to understand that if he annoyed Elmer any further, he would find himself in serious trouble.

For all that Dave Dashaway and the powerful friends

he had made did, however, Vernon was slow to abandon his hope of fleecing his victim out of more money. He tried to blackmail Mr. Brackett, and even brought a suit against the wealthy manufacturer on some notes he had induced the son to sign under false pretences. To get rid of him, Mr. Brackett had finally given Vernon a sum of money to cease his annoying persecutions. Then Vernon had disappeared, and Dave had supposed that he was "off the map" for good.

Elmer had acted like a new being since coming under the healthy influence of the brisk, high-minded young airman, Dave Dashaway, and his ardent assistant, Hiram Dobbs. For the first time in his life, the zest of adventure and the ambition to make something of himself had acted like a spur on the young fellow.

For over a month our hero, Dave, and his two loyal comrades had led an existence of delight. The young airman had become greatly interested in an exploit in which he had been invited to take part. The National Aero Association had arranged for a wonderful novelty and a test in the aviation field. This was nothing less than an aeroplane race around the world.

The route had been marked out, the prizes announced and the rules of the contest adopted. Nearly half a score of contestants had registered. In the official list there had been published a line or two that the adventurous Hiram read proudly a dozen times a day: "Entrant VI—the biplane *Comet*, pilot Dave Dashaway."

An aero meet was now in progress near the city of Washington, which was to be the starting point of the great race. Dave and his young assistants had fairly lived at the plant of the Interstate Aero Company. Every facility of the great factory had been placed at the command of Dave. The result had been the construction

of the *Comet*, probably the most perfect and splendid aircraft ever built.

There was a permanent aero practice field near the factory, and on the afternoon when our story opens the *Comet* was ready to make its daily trial flight. With the morrow, entirely equipped and its crew aboard, the model biplane was to sail across the country for Washington, to be on hand for the start of the race around the world a few days following.

Other skycraft were in practice or motion about the field. Hiram and Elmer had gotten their machine in order for a non-stop flight of one hundred miles. They were waiting for the arrival of Dave, when Hiram made the discovery that upon the very eve of their grand and stimulating star exploit, an old enemy had suddenly appeared upon the scene.

Hiram Dobbs bent a keen, suspicious glance at the three men whom he had pointed out to his comrade. A worried look came into Elmer's face as he, too, watched them.

"Yes," said the latter in an uneasy tone, but convincingly, "one of those men is Vernon."

"And the others are a lawyer and an officer of the law," added Hiram. "There's something afoot, Elmer. I guess what it is and—I'll fool them."

"The constable is coming this way!" exclaimed Elmer, apprehensively.

"He won't get here quick enough," declared Hiram. "I see through their tricks—Vernon is bent on having you arrested on some flimsy charge. The scoundrel counts on the belief that your father will pay him more money rather than see the *Comet* delayed for the race. We'll disappoint him."

The speaker shot out his hand to the wheel. His foot was ready to depress the self-starter button.

“All clear?” he called to the field man who stood close by, and the latter nodded and waved his hand.

“The constable is running towards us,” said Elmer rapidly.

Chug! chug! The *Comet* rose from the ground. Elmer Brackett uttered a great sigh of relief. Hiram chuckled softly to himself.

“Hold on! I’ve got a warrant! In the name of the law—ugh!”

The *Comet* gave a great sway. Its pilot dared not relax attention to his duties, but he shot a swift glance at the source of the outcry.

“The mischief!” uttered Hiram, in surprise and concern.

The big bulky constable was clinging to the machine body, his feet dangling, his face white and scared-looking, swaying helplessly except for his frantic hand-hold fifty feet above the ground!

CHAPTER II

AN INVOLUNTARY PASSENGER

Dave Dashaway's assistant knew his business too well to attempt any rash or reckless change in the course of the biplane. At a glance Hiram had taken in the situation. In a flash he gave the right order.

"Help him—pull him in," he directed.

"Yes, he'll smash the wing and we'll all go down in a heap if he hangs on there," declared Elmer, quickly.

"Let me off! Let me off!" puffed and panted the constable. "Help! I'll drop! Murder! I'm a goner!"

"Easy, officer!" cried out Hiram, in his clear, ringing tones. "Don't get rattled or you'll be gone, indeed."

Elmer had grasped the arm of the clinging man. He had strapped himself into his seat, and this position assisted in giving him a tugging strength that counted for something. The white, scared face of the constable came nearer and nearer to him. Through great efforts the trespasser was hauled up over his center of balance, and he tumbled into the vacant seat all in a heap.

"Let down this balloon! I've got a warrant," began the constable, breathlessly—"oogh!"

A whirl of the biplane sent the man banging against the side of the seat till his teeth rattled.

"Strap him in," called out Hiram, "if he don't want to get a spill."

"Oh, my! Stop! Please stop! Let me out!"

Meantime Elmer had snapped the belt in place. It was well that he had acted speedily. The *Comet* made a

switch just there which caused the involuntary passenger to tremble with terror, yell outright, and crouch back in his seat.

Hiram directed a smooth volplane and made an even spurt of speed on a set level. This gave the intruder a chance to steady his nerves and regain his breath. He was still, however, big-eyed and chattering. The young pilot dared not direct attention from his task of running the machine, but he managed to turn his face sideways so as to give Elmer a significant glance. The latter half smiled as he understood what was on the programme.

“Now, see here, officer,” spoke Hiram, past his shoulder, “I can’t give you any further attention than to tell you what to do. If the machine tips—”

“Is there danger?” gasped the overcome constable. “Say, please go down! Easy, you know! P-please-p-please!”

“You had better show some sense,” retorted Hiram, with pretended sternness. “There is always danger of a spill. Don’t help it any.”

“N-no, I won’t,” chattered the officer. “I—I’ll do just what you tell me.”

“Then sit still and keep still. Elmer, get him into that airman armor. He’s pretty bulky, and if we take a flop—”

“Br-rr-r!” shivered the unfortunate passenger. “Oh, don’t talk about it!”

“Get the aerodrome safety helmet on him,” pursued Hiram. “It will save his head if he tumbles.”

“Say, I don’t want to! You’ve got to stop! I’m an officer of the law and I order you to lower this balloon.”

“You want to drop, do you?” called back Hiram, “All

right, if you say so, only—”

“No! no! no!” fairly bellowed the constable, as the pilot described a manœuvre pretty near to accomplishing a “shoot-the-chutes” dive in aviation. “You know best. I’ll do as you say.”

He allowed Elmer to fasten on the helmet as the machine steadied. It made his big shock-haired head look bigger than ever.

“Now then, the felt safety buffers,” directed Hiram, and his willing accomplice bundled the passenger in between two thick pads covering chest and shoulders like a wad of pillows.

“He’d better have the earflaps and respirators if you’re going up into the rarefied air,” suggested Elmer, solicitously.

“Don’t go! Say, I’m not well! This air is good enough for me,” remonstrated the constable.

“Now for the non-concussion girdle,” ordered the merciless pilot.

Elmer was almost bursting with suppressed merriment. He was so sure that Hiram knew his business and that no real danger was imminent in that calm air with a perfect head breeze, that he enjoyed the occasion immensely.

By this time their frantic fellow passenger resembled a diver, swathed as he was in thick leather safety devices crowned with steel. Muffled up and helpless, he squirmed, groaned and closed his eyes with a sickening shudder every time he glanced over the edge of the machine. The unusual sight of the earth fading away, the swift passage of the landscape, fairly chilled him.

For five or ten minutes the passenger was content to

remain mute, trying to realize and become accustomed to his unexpected condition. The machine had a duplicate control system. That is, the rudder wires ran to the right hand second seat as well as to that of the pilot. This made it possible for Hiram to confine his attention exclusively to spark and throttle control, while his assistant could cooperate as to the steering gear whenever the tail trailed heavily. Elmer, too, could cooperate in the aileron and elevator control, and the flight settled down to a smooth, perfect rush through the atmosphere.

“Ahem,” ventured their passenger as he regained his scattered wits. He spoke in a vague, uncertain tone. “I told you that I had a warrant and I want to explain—whew!”

Hiram Dobbs was bound to shut off the passenger from any official complication of matters. His eye had been fixed to a row of hills ten miles distant. He had marked out his course and he had a definite destination in view. Just now he stirred up the officer considerably with a new joggling twist of the machine, just as he had planned to do. The fright of the constable was renewed. He forgot what he had started to say.

“What’s the programme?” whispered Elmer, bending over close to the ear of the pilot.

“I want to get you to a point of safety before that fellow has a chance to read that warrant of his,” was the low-toned reply.

“I see; but how are you going to work it?” questioned Elmer, in some perplexity.

“Leave that to me,” returned Hiram, in a confident way.

“Yes, I’m going to.”

“I want to get beyond the ridge ahead—in fact, as far away from our starting point as I can.”

“I want to explain,” here again broke in their passenger. “I’ve got a document here—”

There he stopped. Hiram had to laugh and Elmer chuckled. The constable made several ineffectual efforts to reach a pocket in his coat. The muffling devices he wore prevented him. He was like a man encased in a suit of armor.

“Never mind the document,” said Hiram. “Just tell us what it’s about.”

“It’s a warrant, and it charges this young man with trespassing on the property of a farmer with an airship. The complainant has a legal right, *ipse dixit*, to claim malicious intent, which makes it a criminal offense.”

“I thought so. Pretty flimsy,” remarked Hiram. “They’ve raked up some trifle to give that miserable Vernon an excuse to keep you in court for a week or more. All right officer,” he added, “read your warrant.”

“How can I read it when I can’t get my hands with these pesky things on them anywhere near my pocket?” demanded the constable, wrathily.

“Very well, then don’t say I obstructed the law by refusing you your rights.”

“When you land I’ll read the warrant,” explained the constable. “This boy has got to come with me. It’s defiance of law to refuse.”

“We will land very soon now,” promised Hiram. “Whisper, Elmer.”

The skillful pilot worked the exhaust purposely to cover a quick undertoned interview with his friend.

There was a perfect understanding between them by the time the colloquy was concluded.

“All right,” said Elmer simply, and with a satisfied expression on his face, as he sank back in his seat.

The young air pilot skirted a great grove of trees and flew the *Comet* high above a range of hills beyond. Then, near a little town with a railroad depot showing in its midst, he prepared to descend.

Hiram made a thrilling dive that nearly sent the constable into hysterics. The *Comet* reached the ground and settled down upon it as safely and gracefully as a bird sinking to its nest.

“Jump out,” he said simply, to Elmer.

The latter unbuckled the seat belt promptly and leaped to the ground beside the machine.

“Hold on! Stop!” shouted the constable.

Elmer showed no disposition to run away. He only walked briskly up and down, stamping his feet and exercising his arms.

“That boy is under arrest,” continued the officer, struggling with his burden of wraps.

“Not quite yet, officer, I fancy,” retorted Hiram.

“Well, he will be soon as I get out and read my warrant. I order you to help me, young man. If you refuse, I shall complain of your aiding and abetting a criminal to escape.”

“Bah!” cried Hiram, “you know as well as I do that he is no criminal. Here,” and he assisted his passenger in getting rid of the hampering devices. “I’ll help you.”

With a great snort of relief the bulky officer stepped to the ground. His first act was to shake his cramped

limbs. Then he fished in his pockets for the warrant.

“In the name of the law,” he began with assumed dignity, producing a folded document.

“Hold on,” challenged Hiram, “what are you up to?”

“I’m going to arrest one Elmer Brackett.”

“I think not,” retorted Hiram, coolly. “It seems you’ve forgotten something rather important, Mr. Officer.”

“What’s that?” snorted the constable.

“We have landed just over the state line and your warrant is no good in this locality.”

CHAPTER III

ON THE WING

The constable stared at Hiram. He glanced at Elmer with half a scowl. Then he rubbed his head as if seeking for new ideas. Finally a sort of sickly grin overspread his flabby face.

“You’d make a good lawyer,” he observed. “Over the state line I am, sure enough, with no warrant served. Well, I’m not so sorry as you may think.”

“I’m glad to hear you say so,” declared Hiram. “You’ll be glad, too, when you come to know that the man behind the gun in this case is an unmitigated rascal.”

“I didn’t know anything about that, I simply followed orders,” said the official, in a slightly apologetic tone.

“Well, good-bye, officer, I suppose I can go?” broke in Elmer.

“I shan’t hinder you. Only keep out of my territory.”

Elmer exchanged a look of mutual understanding with Hiram, and walked slowly away. He soon disappeared beyond a little thicket, heading in the direction of the town and the railroad station.

“Well, officer?” spoke up Hiram, moving about the biplane to see that everything was in order.

“Well, lad,” returned the constable, “I suppose it’s in order for me to get back home after this fool’s errand.”

“I’ll be glad to take you back with me,” said Hiram.

“Humph!” and the constable shrugged his shoulders in a dubious way. “I’m safe on the ground once more, thank goodness; and I reckon I’ll stay here.”

“Oh, come ahead in the machine,” invited the young pilot. “No capers, officer, honestly. I had to do some gliding to make you forget business till my friend was over the safety line, but I’ll take you home steady as a Pullman, I promise you.”

“No diver’s suit, though, mind you.”

“That isn’t necessary,” laughed Hiram. “Just strap yourself in and I’ll give you a nice ride.”

By the time they got back to the aero grounds the constable was as friendly as could be. He shook hands good-bye with Hiram, and winked at him and chuckled to himself as he walked over to where the lawyer-like man and the disguised Vernon stood waiting for him. They evidently had seen the *Comet* returning and had hastened to the grounds to hear the news.

Hiram lingered, watching the group until they disappeared. Dave Dashaway came out of the hangar as the assistants ran the biplane towards it.

Bright as a dollar, looking every inch the active, ambitious fellow his friends called him, the young airman regarded his assistant inquiringly and expectantly.

“You didn’t wait for me,” observed Dave.

“No, I was in a hurry,” laughed Hiram. “I suppose you know what was doing?”

“I’ve heard something about a warrant for Elmer. I’ve guessed out the plot. Mr. Brackett was here, quite worried.”

“He needn’t be,” declared Hiram, reassuringly. “There he is now. It’s all right, Mr. Brackett,” added Hiram, advancing to meet the wealthy manufacturer. “They didn’t get Elmer, and, what’s more, they won’t get

him very soon.”

Dave Dashaway led the way into the little portable house adjoining the *Comet* hangar where the boys slept nights. All sat down on camp stools.

“I hope this new trouble is not going to disturb your plans,” spoke Mr. Brackett.

“Not a bit of it,” replied Hiram. “Elmer is safely out of the way, and everything is arranged to keep that miscreant, Vernon, from annoying him.”

Hiram recounted all that had transpired. The cloud of uneasiness passed from the brow of the president of the Interstate Aero Company. He smiled approvingly at the keen-witted narrator.

“Elmer will take a train and go right on to an arranged rendezvous,” explained Hiram. “He will be on hand for the start, Mr. Brackett.”

“I shall start for Washington,” announced the manufacturer. “I want to see the *Comet* begin the big race in which I feel Dashaway and his friends will win new laurels.”

“Thank you for your confidence in us,” said the young airman. “I expect to deserve it. There’s a reason—you have given us a biplane that is a marvel.”

“Yes,” declared Hiram, enthusiastically, “there will be nothing in the field that can even begin to compare with the *Comet*.”

Our hero and his assistant spent some time going over the splendid piece of mechanism, after Mr. Brackett had gone away. The highest skill had been employed in the construction of the *Comet*. From barograph to breeches buoy it was as nearly perfect and thoroughly equipped as money and intelligence could

make it.

The biplane was of original design. It had a tube mechanism and universal bearing that were entirely new in the aviation field. The arrangements for gasoline, oil and water had been the main consideration. The capacity for carrying extra weight the second. The coverings were rubberized fabric, the machine had the very newest shock absorbers, and the double-control system admitted of a manipulation that not only divided the operation work, but added to the safety of navigation.

As to the superb balancing and self-righting powers of the *Comet*, the boys had demonstrated these merits only the day previous. With a ripping crash the machine had entered the perimeter of a corkscrew glide. Dave found the tilt so steep there seemed no chance to come out of the spiral. Hiram, in the second seat, by a deft, quick operation of the rudder control, changed the equilibrium. Dave did the rest, and the *Comet* passed a hair-breadth ground swoop clean as an acrobat.

On account of the long flights necessary, probable landings in desert spots far from civilization, and the menace of supplies giving out, the *Comet* had been constructed of a weight, breadth and length that would admit of the utilization of a so-called ballast pit. This was located directly behind the seats. It was compactly filled at the present time, all ready for the start scheduled for a few days later. With every article cared for, and after a close calculation of the effect of dislodgment and replacement, the young aviator in command of the machine felt that he had mastered most of the details of the prospective trip around the world.

Before Mr. Brackett had left them, he had made

arrangements to join them at the aero meet at Sylvan Park, near Washington. There were some final details of the journey to arrange for after they reached the aviation field. So far as their present situation was concerned, however, the *Comet* was all ready for the flight.

The sky was clear, the stars shone brightly and there was a gentle breeze entirely favorable to them, as, about ten o'clock the *Comet* was quietly rolled out of the hangar. The young airman purposely evaded any publicity as to their start on account of Elmer and his enemies. The two assistants waved them a hearty adieu, but stirred up no commotion. Within five minutes the splendid piece of mechanism was speeding on its way for a point fifty miles distant.

"At Fordham, you said," remarked Dave, as they settled down to an even course of progress.

"Yes, just beyond the town. We all know the town, it's right in our course—and I thought that the best place to have Elmer wait for us."

The *Comet* passed over half a dozen quaint little villages. Then it followed the railroad tracks, the signal lights operating as guides. They knew Fordham, because they had made several trial spurts to and from the place. They passed its rows of street lights, slowed down, and the *Comet* reached *terra firma* inside of the town baseball grounds.

"Hello!" at once hailed them, and Elmer came forward from a seat on the bleachers, where he had been resting. "Everything all right?"

"As a trivet," pronounced Hiram. "Been a slow wait; eh?"

"Oh, I snoozed a little," replied Elmer; "lunched

some, and had a hard time explaining my being here to a suspicious old watchman who looks after the grounds.”

“Get aboard,” directed Dave, and Elmer sank into the seat with a contented sigh.

“It’s business now, I suppose,” he remarked. “Say, fellows, it’s a big thing we hope to do; isn’t it?”

“Yes,” assented the sprightly Hiram; “and I reckon we’ll have seen some startling sights before we come this way again.”

CHAPTER IV

A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

Dave Dashaway stood at the entrance to the hangar of the *Comet* at Sylvan Park. The machine had done nobly on the trial field near the Capitol city. Now it was housed among the group of competitors in the great race. The pick of the world's best airmen was represented at this international meet, and the scene was one of activity and interest.

The airship boys were comfortably housed in the living tent just beyond the hangar. At first upon arriving it had been decided to have Elmer stay away from the field until the final start was made. This procedure was actuated by the fear that the troublesome Vernon might put in an appearance and continue to annoy and hamper the young airman. The next morning, however, Mr. Brackett arrived.

"I am here for two reasons," he had announced. "First, I wish to see our last word in biplanes, the *Comet*, sail off on the race I know you are going to win. Next, I want to be on hand if that troublesome Vernon tries any more of his tricks."

"I hardly think he will attempt to follow us this far," was the expressed opinion of our hero. "It would cost him some money, and it would be somewhat dangerous for him to work any trumped-up charge with so many of our airmen friends around to defeat his plans."

"There is still more than that," remarked the airship manufacturer, in a confident way.

"What do you mean, father?" inquired his son.

"Just this," answered Mr. Brackett, "as I left home my

lawyer, who was looking up Vernon, put in my possession some documents that will enable me to baffle this wretch at every turn. I only hope he will appear. It will be to receive a final quietus, believe me.”

The big event was now only three days distant. The *Comet* was in perfect shape for its long flight. The boys had used prevision and judgment in all their preparations; and had not really much to do. Dave, however, was kept pretty busy with a constant stream of visitors. Professional and otherwise, those who had seen descriptions of their splendid machine in the public prints were eager to view that work of mechanical perfection. A group of them were now gathered inside the shelter building. Experts were examining and admiring the *Comet*.

It pleased Mr. Brackett to exhibit this last masterpiece from the Interstate Aero Company's factory. As a strictly passenger carrying biplane it had never been equalled. Mr. Brackett showed all its improvements, from the new chain drive apparatus to the high pitch revolution screws. The original model of the *Comet* had represented a machine weighing over one thousand five hundred pounds with a spread of thirty-eight by sixty-three and one-half feet, pitch speed five thousand six hundred feet, average flight record fifty miles. The old style rear propeller drive had been supplanted by tractor screws. The tubing truss underneath the center section and skid bracing also in the rib or plane section was a new feature. A divergence from the popular headless screw traction design was the use of the Curwell type of outriggers. This did away with an attachment at the end of a monoplane type of fuselage.

It was almost dusk when the visitors began to depart.

Dave was giving orders to two of the hangar men to lock up the machine for the night, when an automobile drew rapidly up to the spot. As the young aviator glanced casually at the machine, he saw that besides the chauffeur it contained a veiled, girlish form.

The chauffeur stopped the machine directly before the living tent. He leaped from the auto and approached Mr. Brackett, who was standing near by.

“Can you direct me to the *Comet* hangar?” he inquired, touching his cap politely.

“This is the place,” explained the manufacturer.

“And Mr. Dave Dashaway—do you know where I can find him?”

The young airman overheard this conversation. He stepped forward at once with the words:

“I am Dave Dashaway. What can I do for you?”

The chauffeur moved aside with a movement of his head towards the automobile. Its occupant leaned slightly forward, and extended a daintily gloved hand. As Dave advanced and lifted his cap she spoke to him in a low, tremulous tone.

“I wish to speak to you for a few moments, Mr. Dashaway,” she said. “In private,” she added, with a glance at the several persons in view.

“Certainly,” responded Dave readily, but in some wonderment. “There is our office, miss. May I assist you?”

The little lady uttered a fluttering sigh as our hero helped her from the machine and led the way to the living tent. Hiram had just lighted a lamp. Both he and Elmer regarded their friend’s companion in some

surprise. They were too well bred, however, to stare at the newcomer, who seemed timid and uncertain. The boys moved quietly from the tent, Dave set a stool for his visitor and seated himself at a little distance, awaiting her pleasure.

“You must not think it strange that I have come to you, Mr. Dashaway,” she said. “I—that is, I was directed to you by a very close friend, who knows you well.”

“Ah, indeed?” spoke the young airman.

“Yes, I bring you a letter from a friend of my dear father, who is as well a close friend of your own—Mr. Robert King.”

“I am pleased and interested at once, Miss,” said Dave, trying to set the young lady at her ease under such strange surroundings. “Mr. King is, indeed, a close friend, and his friends are very welcome.”

“You are most kind,” said the visitor, nervously searching for the letter in question, and in her confusion lifting her veil. From her face Dave saw that she was about his own age. There was an anxious look in her eyes. She finally found the letter, and handed it to the young airman with the explanation:

“We went to Mr. King where he is sick at his home in New York City.”

“Yes, I know,” said Dave. “He wrote me only last week.”

“I am Edna Deane,” proceeded the young lady. “My father is himself something of an invalid and could not come with me to-day. We went to Mr. King to ask his help in a case where he only, or somebody like him, could be of any assistance.”

“You mean in the aviation way?” inquired Dave,

getting interested.

“Yes, Mr. Dashaway,” replied the young girl. “I want my father to explain to you about it. He has written our address on the envelope—Hampton Flats. He wishes to have you make an appointment to meet him, if you will be so kind.”

“I certainly shall be glad to be of service to any friends of the gentleman who taught me all I know about sky sailing,” began Dave, and then he added very heartily: “Surely I will come, Miss Deane. To-morrow morning, if you wish. Shall we say at ten o’clock? I have some few things to attend to that will take up my time until then.”

“My father will be very glad,” murmured the girl, gratefully.

A glance at the letter from the veteran aviator, Mr. King, had at once influenced Dave. The old airman wrote briefly, but to the point. He stated, that were he in shape to do so, he would at once assist Mr. Deane. He asked his former assistant to act in his place, could he at all arrange to do so. Mr. King hinted that there was an opportunity for a great humane act. He said he was sure that when Dave knew its details, his generous heart would respond to an unusual appeal for help in a strangely pathetic case.

Meantime Hiram and Elmer had strolled to a distance. They passed Mr. Brackett, who was seeing to it that the hangar men safely housed his pet biplane for the night. Hiram looked curiously at his companion.

“Well,” he observed, “sort of mysterious, Elmer; eh?”

“You mean that young lady?”

“I do. Automobile—mysterious veiled visitor,” said

Hiram with a smile.

“Maybe it’s another of those venturesome college girls wanting to make a flight for the name of it. Dave will tell us when he sees us. No nonsense about him. He’s too busy for romance.”

“That’s so. There she goes, Elmer,” announced Hiram.

The boys made out Dave, cap in hand, walking beside the automobile as it started up slowly, and conversing with its occupant. Then, curious and eager to learn the merits of the interesting episode, they proceeded towards the living tent, approaching it by a roundabout route so as not to look as if they were “snooping around,” as Hiram put it.

Just as they neared it, Elmer grasped the arm of his companion, bringing him to a halt with a startling: “S—st!”

“What is it?” demanded Hiram, staring ahead in the direction in which the glance of his companion was fixed.

“Look for yourself,” whispered back Elmer, pointing to a crouching figure just behind the tent. “See—a man, a lurker, a spy! Who do you suppose he is; and what is he up to?”

CHAPTER V

SOMETHING WRONG

The boys stood perfectly still. The crouching man had not heard them coming nor did he see them now. He half rested on one elbow and one knee, close up to the end of the tent. It looked as if he had been posted there for some time, as if peering into the tent through some break in the canvas and listening to what had been spoken inside.

Just now he was guardedly looking past the corner of the tent and following Dave and the automobile with his eyes. It was fast getting dark, but the glint of the headlight of the auto as it turned towards the entrance to the grounds swept over him, and Elmer gave a great start.

“Why,” he spoke suddenly, “Hiram, it’s that man—Vernon!”

“You don’t say so,” returned Hiram. “Are you sure of it?”

“Yes, I am,” declared Elmer, in a disturbed way. “He is after me again, and may make all kinds of new trouble for us.”

“He won’t,” asserted Hiram, with a quick snap of his lips, and the old farmer-boy fight and determination in his face. “Get ready to help me.”

“What are you going to do?” inquired Elmer, as his companion began to roll up his coat cuffs.

“I’m going to nail that fellow, good and sure,” pronounced Hiram. “Maybe your father would like to see him. Now then!”

Hiram made a spring. He landed on the shoulders of the crouching figure, Elmer close at his heels. The unsuspecting spy went flat, the nimble Hiram astride of him.

“What are you up to, and who are you?” demanded Hiram. “You needn’t tell,” he added swiftly, as his prisoner squirmed about and his face came into view. “You’re that mean rascal Vernon, and we’re going to know what you are plotting this time before we let you go. Grab him, Elmer.”

Each seized an arm of the squirming captive. Hiram arose to his feet without letting Vernon go, although the latter struggled fiercely. He managed to break the grasp of Elmer, but Hiram held on to him—would have held on to him if he had dragged him all over the field.

“What’s this?” cried Mr. Brackett, attracted to the spot by the noise of the struggle. Then he recognized Vernon. “Ah, it’s you is it?” he said, bending his brows at the prisoner. “I have something to say to you,” and he seized the man by his coat collar and assisted Hiram in dragging him around to the front of the tent.

“Oh, you have?” sneered Vernon, ceasing to struggle as he found his efforts in that direction vain. “Well, you want to say it quick and short.”

“What are you doing around here?” demanded the aeroplane manufacturer, sternly.

“What do you suppose?” retorted the schemer boldly, thinking brag and bluster only would serve him now. “I’m in the market with information, and you had better buy it.”

“You sit there,” ordered Mr. Brackett, forcing the miscreant upon a stool with the gesture of disgust. Then he motioned to Hiram and Elmer to guard the doorway

and sat down facing the captive. "You have gone to the last length, my man, in persecuting my son. There is not a vestige of accusation against him that you can press legally."

"Oh, I think I can make you a little uneasy," boasted the conscienceless one.

"We shall see. It is only a few days since my lawyer reported to me the facts of an investigation into your career. I have a few questions to ask you. After that, I fancy you will be glad to get away from us and stay away in the future."

"Oh, is that so?" said Vernon, coldly.

"My lawyer has placed certain documents and information in my hands," continued Mr. Brackett. "One of them," and he reached into his pocket and produced a photograph, "is a picture of a man who served a prison term. Do you recognize it?" and the speaker held up the photograph full in the lamp light.

Vernon changed color. He quaked and wriggled about, but he was silent, for it was his own portrait, in prison garb.

"How far the word of a convict will go against that of my son, whom you duped into signing notes he could not pay, and which I will never pay, for no consideration was involved, I do not know," proceeded the aeroplane manufacturer. "I do know, however, that you dare not make another move. This document," and he showed a folded paper, "describes you as the man who is wanted in Boston for forfeiting a bail bond. I have only to send word to the authorities there of your whereabouts to have you shut up for some time to come. Now go. If I so much as hear of your hanging around this vicinity, I will telegraph to the people who are searching for you."

Mr. Brackett pointed to the doorway. Vernon arose and like a whipped cur slunk through it. An expression of relief crossed Elmer Brackett's face.

"I only hope we are rid of him for good," he said, fervently.

"There seems to be no doubt of that," declared Hiram, with a satisfied smile. "Say, though, I wonder why he was sneaking around the hangar here?"

"To pick up what information he could about our plans, to disturb them if he could, I suppose," said Elmer.

Just then Dave appeared. His friends noticed that he was somewhat thoughtful. No one alluded to the visit of the girl whom the young aviator had just escorted to the automobile. Dave did not seem to have any explanations to make. The others told him about the discovery of Vernon and his summary disappearance. Then the incident was dismissed from their minds as they all went over to the restaurant at the other end of the big aviation grounds for supper.

Dave told his young assistants that he had an engagement in the city the next morning. There were some little purchases to make for the *Comet*, and he took Hiram along with him.

"I am going to call upon the friends of the young lady you saw last evening, Hiram," he confided to his friend. "They live at the Hampton Flats," and he gave Hiram the location. "If you like, after you get through with your shopping you can call there for me. Then we can go back to the park together."

"All right," assented Hiram, "I shan't be busy for more than an hour."

It was about eleven o'clock when Hiram started for the Hampton Flats. He finally turned into the street where the building was located. As he neared it, a man came hurriedly down its steps, passed down the street, and disappeared from view around the corner.

"Well, I'll be bumped!" exclaimed Hiram, forcibly.

He came to a dead stop, irresolute as to the course he ought to pursue. Hiram had recognized the man as Vernon. He wondered how the rascal came to be in the building where his airman friend was.

"Why, he's nagging Dave, that's sure," declared Hiram. "But why? It won't do any good to run after him. I must tell Dave about it, though, and—there he is now."

The young aviator appeared at just that moment. He looked up and down the street and then advanced towards Hiram as he made him out. The latter fancied he had never seen Dave look so grave and thoughtful, but our hero roused up into instant interest as Hiram said:

"I saw Vernon come out of that building just before you did."

"What's that!" challenged Dave. "Out of that building?"

"Yes, he did, Dave. Now what do you suppose he was doing there?"

The young airman did not reply. He walked along in silence. Hiram saw that he was a good deal stirred up, but all Dave said about the incident was:

"I'm glad you discovered this, Hiram, and told me about it. We want to look out for that fellow."

All that day, Hiram noticed that the pilot of the

Comet seemed to be preoccupied. The hum and bustle of the approaching event, however, took up the attention of all hands. They had a busy day of it, and Hiram was so tired out by nightfall that he had well-nigh forgotten all about the unexplained incident of the earlier hours of the day.

Just after daylight the next morning Elmer stirred on his sleeping cot and drowsily cried out:

“What’s up? I thought I heard some one call for Dave.”

“You did,” replied Hiram, jumping from under the bedclothes. “I just roused up to see one of the hangar men scurrying out of here, and Dave, half dressed, rushing after him. Hurry up, get your clothes on.”

“What for?” inquired Elmer, sitting up in his cot and rubbing his eyes sleepily.

“Because I caught a remark the hangar man made.”

“What was it?”

“Something wrong with the *Comet!*”

CHAPTER VI

THE STOLEN BIPLANE

The alarming words spoken by Hiram were sufficient to at once bring Elmer out of bed and onto his feet. Speedy as Elmer was, however, Hiram was outside, shoeless and hatless, almost before his drowsy companion had drawn on his sweater.

“What’s the trouble?” panted Elmer, trailing after his companion a minute later.

His eyes grew big with wonder and suspense as he noticed Dave and the hangar man running around to the rear of the portable biplane shelter. In front he saw Hiram posed like a statue and staring hard.

“The *Comet* is gone!” announced Hiram. “Look there—gone!”

He spoke in a tone of voice as if the whole world was slipping away from them. Elmer, gaining his side, saw that the hangar was empty.

“Oh, say!” he gasped, “you don’t mean to say—”

“Stolen? Yes! That is sure,” came in Dave’s tones, and the young aviator hurried around to the spot.

“You see, whoever took it drew the steel frames and canvas out of the whole back,” the hangar man was explaining. “The wheel marks yonder run about twenty feet. Whoever did it knew his business. There was no wasted fooling around—up and away was the programme.”

Dave stood silent, thinking hard. Elmer came up to him, worried and anxious. By this time Hiram had got full steam of excitement on.

“See here, Dave,” he cried, “what is this—a trick, or something serious?”

“It’s pretty serious,” answered the young airman. “Whoever ran away with the *Comet* had a bad motive in view—I feel certain of that.”

“You mean, to keep us from making the start in the race?” inquired Elmer, anxiously.

“Just that,” assented Dave, positively. “No ordinary thief would steal the biplane, for he couldn’t sell it. Professionals do not meddle with other people’s machines. I’ve got a lot of suspicions about this mysterious piece of business, but there’s no time to lose in theorizing.”

“No, we must get on the track of the *Comet* right away,” declared Hiram, adding, “but how?”

Dave gave a few rapid, undertoned directions to the hangar man. Then he hurried back to the living tent, followed by his friends, and all completed dressing. Then, Dave piloting the way, they made a brisk run for the office building of the club in control of the meet.

The young airman was lucky in running across the manager, a man who knew his business thoroughly. Inside of an hour, with his perfect knowledge of details, he had telegraphed every aviator and practice station in the East to be on the watch for the stolen machine. Dave was leaving the office building when they met Mr. Brackett.

“Oh, father!” exclaimed his son, in distress, “the *Comet* has been stolen!”

The aeroplane manufacturer was stunned by the announcement. Dave motioned him instantly to one side. Hiram’s heart took hope as he noted the business-

like look on Dave's face.

"He's got some plan worked out already," announced Hiram to Elmer. "Dave isn't telling us all he has guessed out."

Whatever information the young airman was imparting to Mr. Brackett, the latter seemed greatly interested, and his troubled face cleared somewhat as Dave proceeded. Soon the manufacturer hurried away. Dave consulted his watch and came briskly up to his young fellow aviators.

"There's just time to get our breakfast," he announced.

The boys had about completed the meal, when an automobile drove up in front of the restaurant and the aeroplane manufacturer got out. Dave hurried to his side. There was a brief consultation, and our hero beckoned to his friends.

"You had better come with me, Hiram," said the young aviator; "I shall need you. If you will keep track of things around the hangar, Elmer, it will help out."

Dave waved his hand to the manufacturer and his son, and told Hiram to jump into the seat beside him. They made a quick spin for the office of the manager. The young airman came out with several telegrams in his hand. He read these over carefully while his companion was cranking the machine. Then he thrust them into his pocket and took charge of the wheel.

"Say," began Hiram, as they left the aero grounds and started down a lonely country road; "tell me are you going on a hunt for the *Comet*?"

"Yes," replied the young airman. "I don't know that there is much chance of running down the people who

stole the biplane, but they can't sail far without being reported."

"What is their object in stealing it, anyhow?" asked Hiram.

"If you want my honest opinion, I think they are trying to keep us out of the race," replied Dave.

"Oh!" exclaimed his companion, "then you think it's professionals who are at the bottom of this mischief?"

"It was certainly an expert airman who piloted the *Comet* away so snugly," declared Dave. "I believe, though, that he was hired by others."

"Why, Dave, what do you mean?" inquired the puzzled Hiram.

"I can't explain everything to you just now," replied Dave. "I am not trying to throw any air of mystery about this strange disappearance of the *Comet*, but you remember telling me about seeing that schemer, Vernon, come out of the Hampton Flats in the city?"

"Why, yes," assented Hiram, with a start of enlightenment.

"Well, I have reason to believe that he is mixed up with this affair."

"You don't say so! Bound to bother the Bracketts to the last limit, is he?"

"No, I believe his motives lead in an entirely different direction this time," replied Dave, but he would say no more on the topic just then. He resumed: "Of course, we must find the *Comet* by this time to-morrow, or start in the race with another machine."

"Oh, then we'll go anyway?" asked Hiram, brightening up. "Say, that's great!" and he uttered an

immense sigh of relief.

“Mr. Brackett has telegraphed for the *Zephyr*, which is at Baltimore,” explained Dave. “It will be on the grounds before night.”

“Have you any clue as to what has become of the *Comet*?” asked Hiram.

“I have a very strong theory,” replied the young aviator. “Whoever made away with the *Comet* did not venture to fly north—too many machines were on their way to the meet, and they would be seen. The manager wired in every direction. An unknown airship was sighted twice, early this morning, both times about fifty miles from Washington, going southwest and making for the mountain districts.”

“What do you guess from that, Dave?” inquired Hiram, eagerly.

“I think they are trying to hide or lose the *Comet* until it is too late to start in the race. Of course, hopeless as it may seem, we must try and recover the machine.”

“Yes, the *Zephyr* cannot begin to compare with our special machine,” said Hiram.

“Besides that,” added Dave, “I hope to find out who ran away with the biplane. If Vernon is indeed back of it, that discovery would throw a good deal of light on a certain subject in which I am greatly interested at the present time.”

Hiram was prudently silent. He wondered to himself, however, if the subject at which his companion hinted had anything to do with the young lady in the automobile and Dave’s visit to the Hampton Flats.

It was about eleven o’clock when the young airman stopped at a town named Wayne. He made a second

stop at a little settlement ten miles beyond. The automobile had now gotten well in among the hills, and the scenery had grown wilder and wilder.

“Some airship passed over here just before daylight this morning,” Dave finally reported to Hiram.

“Do you know the direction it went in?” asked the latter.

“Yes. We will keep on and make Tarryford. If we get no information there, I guess we will have to give up the hunt.”

It was shortly after noon when they passed an old farmhouse. As they whizzed by, Hiram remarked some sheds in ruins, and smoking yet as if recently consumed by fire. He called the attention of his comrade to the fact. They sped on. Less than half a mile accomplished, they saw ahead a steep, high hill. By the side of the road, seated on a level rock, was a man holding a rifle between his knees.

Something about the grim, watchful manner of the farmer attracted the curious attention of both of the boys. Dave brought the machine to a halt at the side of the road.

“Say, my man,” he called out, pleasantly, “have you seen or heard of an airship anywhere around here this morning?”

It was quite startling the way the farmer came to his feet. His eyes flashed and he handled his weapon in a menacing way.

“Have I?” he cried, fiercely. “I reckon so, and I’m ready to riddle the troublesome old contraption the minute she shows herself again!”

CHAPTER VII

FOUND

“We’re going to find out something sure,” declared Hiram. “Say, Dave, that man knows something about our machine.”

The young airman leaped from the auto and approached the farmer. The latter stood viewing the newcomers in a surly, suspicious way.

“You say you have seen an airship,” observed Dave. “Where? when?”

The farmer eyed our hero and his companion shrewdly.

“What do you want to know for?” he questioned.

“Well,” answered Dave, bluntly, “someone stole a biplane from the aero field, near Washington, last night, and we are looking for it.”

“Oh, you are?” muttered the man. “Belongs to you, maybe?”

“To a company which we represent.”

“Responsible for damages?” insinuated the farmer, with a shrewd glint in his calculating eyes.

“Is there some damage to account for?” inquired Dave.

“I reckon,” pronounced the man seriously. “Did you happen to notice the last farm down the road?”

“We saw it, mister,” nodded Hiram, impatient to hurry up the man with his disclosures.

“I suppose you saw them smoking ruins. Them was a

shed, a pigsty and a stack of hay. I don't reckon fifty dollars would replace them."

"What has an airship to do with them?" inquired Hiram.

"Everything. See here, just at daylight this morning I came to the back door. I heard a whir and a ping overhead, and I saw an airship going lickety-switch. Just as it passed over the house, some one in it must have thrown a lighted cigar overboard. I didn't see it fall, but after I had gone into the house and finished dressing and came out again, I saw the airship dropping into the basin on top of Pike Hill up yonder. Then I smelled smoke. I ran around towards the sheds. The stack was blazing. I know it was a cigar that started it, for I found one on the ground where the fire started, and we smoke nothing but corncob pipes around these diggings."

"And you say the airship landed on top of Pike Hill, as you call it?" inquired Dave. "How do you know that?"

"Say, get up on this rock with me. That's it. Now then, take a squint past the spur of rock way up near the crest of the hill. See it?"

"Hello!" instantly exclaimed Hiram, in a state of great excitement.

"Why, sure as you live it's the end of a wing," declared Dave. "Have you seen anything of the persons running it, mister?"

"No, I haven't. The way I figure it out is that they ran out of steam. Mebbe they thought no one saw them when they flew over the farm. Mebbe they're hiding. Mebbe, when they saw me start on guard down here with my rifle, after we'd tried to put the fire out, they were afraid to budge."

“It is very likely they alighted on account of the lack of gasoline,” Dave said to Hiram. “We didn’t leave much in the tanks last night.”

“That’s so,” assented Hiram. “What are you going to do?”

The young aviator reflected for a moment. Then he turned to the man again.

“See here, mister,” he said, “I must find out the condition of that biplane up there. It may not be ours. If it is, I promise you one thing.”

“And what’s that?” demanded the farmer.

“Your bill will be paid, and as much more on top of it for directing us to the machine. Is the ascent of the hill hard?”

“A stranger might find it so,” replied the man. “Very few ever go there, and there’s no regular path to the top. If you’ll wait till some neighbors I’ve sent for to help rout out those fellows up there come, we’ll make an attack on them.”

“I don’t think you will find anybody up there,” said Dave. “No, I don’t,” he reiterated, as Hiram regarded him inquiringly. “I reason it out just as I said at the first, that whoever stole the *Comet* planned to hide it where we couldn’t find it. That is a capital place up there to fit into their scheme. I’ll tell you, mister, you stay down here if you want to, and we will go up and see what we can find out.”

“I don’t know about that,” demurred the farmer, suspiciously.

“Why not?” inquired Dave.

“How do I know but what you belong to the crowd

and have been telling me a fool story all along? Easiest thing in the world for you to start up in the airship and leave me to whistle for my damages.”

“What, with the automobile here for security?” asked Dave, with a laugh.

“That’s so,” remarked the farmer, thoughtfully. “All right, go ahead. You’ll find it no easy job, though. I can tell you another thing—if I see that airship rising, I’ll plug it.”

“We will report to you before we go away,” promised the young aviator. “Come on, Hiram.”

The farmer had not misstated the ascent of Pike Hill. Country bred as he was, Hiram grumbled heartily at the brambles, and Dave got tangled several times in a network of hampering vines.

“Whew! the last climb,” announced Hiram, finally, as they gained a topmost ridge of rocks.

“No one here,” cried the young airman. “See, Hiram, they have let the *Comet* sink down into this natural basin here, thinking it was a safe hiding place.”

“It would have been a famous one if that old farmer hadn’t caught sight of the machine,” said Hiram. “No one would ever think of looking for an airship in this out of the way place.”

The *Comet* lay slightly tipped to one side, unharmed. Dave examined the machine casually.

“Everything is all right,” he reported to his companion. “I was correct about the gasoline. There isn’t enough juice left to run the machine a mile.”

“But where are the people who stole it?” asked Hiram.

“Went down the other side of the hill, I suppose. They had accomplished what they were hired to do. Now then, Hiram, this is a great piece of good luck.”

“I should say so,” enthused Hiram.

“You go back down the hill—it will be easier than climbing up.”

“I should hope so,” grimaced Hiram, rubbing his bruised knees.

“Tell the man down there about the situation, and that I am going to fly the machine over onto his farm and fix things up with him.”

Dave waited till his handy assistant had reached the bottom of the hill. In a few moments, on the watch for some signal from below, he noticed Hiram conversing with the farmer. There were apparent explanations and discussions. Then Hiram waved his hand as had been agreed on with the young aviator, and Dave knew that the coast was clear for a run with the biplane.

CHAPTER VIII

SOMETHING OF A MYSTERY

Our hero found the gasoline tanks pretty well emptied of oil. He realized that the "juice" on hand would not admit of a long flight. Satisfied, however, that there was sufficient fuel to fly the *Comet* out of its resting place and down to level ground, Dave got to the pilot post and operated the self-starter.

The biplane arose promptly to the occasion. A little deft guiding cleared the hill. The machine and its occupant came safely and gently to a new landing place in a field nearby. Hiram and the farmer hastened to the spot as Dave alighted.

"I call that purty cute," announced the farmer, a good deal interested. "Now then, stranger, what about them damages?"

"Just what I said," replied Dave. "You have done us a great service and we appreciate it. There is your money."

"Say, you're square and white," declared the farmer, overjoyed at the possession of so much cash.

"We try to be," answered Dave, pleasantly. "Just sign that receipt, will you? The aeroplane company will pay for this, and I want my voucher all straight and regular."

Dave wrote out a receipt on the back of a card and the man signed it. Then the young aviator proceeded to the automobile.

"Can't I help you some?" inquired the farmer, accommodatingly.

"If you will loan us a tin pail for a bit it will be of service to us," replied Dave. "There is plenty of spare

gasoline in the auto tank, Hiram,” he explained.

It did not take the boys long to transfer enough of the gasoline to last the *Comet* for a home flight. Dave arranged to fly the machine and directed Hiram to take charge of the automobile.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when the adventurers reported on the aero grounds. Mr. Brackett was delighted at their success and Elmer was fairly overjoyed. No damage whatever had been done to the biplane, it was found, after a careful inspection of the machine.

“I say, Dave,” spoke Hiram, as he and his chief sat eating a fine dinner sent by Mr. Brackett from the restaurant; “there’s a good deal about this business that puzzles me.”

“I suppose that is true,” responded the young aviator, with a slight smile. “What principally is troubling you, Hiram?”

“Why, the whole proceeding. If somebody wanted to put us out of business, why didn’t they sink the airship somewhere or burn it up?”

“I think they counted on the *Comet* remaining undiscovered until long after the other entries had started,” said Dave.

“Spite, then?” suggested Hiram.

“No, I don’t think that.”

“Then if that Vernon had anything to do with it—”

“I am satisfied that he did,” declared Dave. “His object was not to keep Elmer from getting out of the country, though.”

“Why, what else could it be?” questioned Hiram in

wonderment.

“I shall tell you later, Hiram,” replied Dave in quite a serious way. “The fact is, there are some things about stealing the airship that I do not entirely understand myself. When I have posted myself on those details, I fancy I shall have a decidedly interesting story to tell you and Elmer.”

“Say, can I ask you one question?” propounded Hiram, and then, as Dave nodded in assent, he added: “Has that girl, and your visit to the city and the appearance of Vernon at the Hampton Flats got anything to do with it?”

“Everything, in my opinion,” answered the young airman, gravely.

“Humph!” commented Hiram. “A romance and a mystery, eh?”

“Hardly, Hiram,” responded Dave gravely. “It is business, pure and simple. I will say this much to you at the present time: whatever dealings I am having with Mr. Deane, the father of the girl you saw, may involve all the skill and nerve the crew of the *Comet* have at their command.”

The young airman had given his interested assistant a good deal to think over. Hiram, however, and in fact everybody about the place, were soon immersed in things strictly professional. At noon the following day the race around the world was to start. There were not a large number of entries, but every individual contestant had his own pet machine and his coterie of friends and admirers.

The field was a lively scene all day. The various machines made trial flights. Then there was the packing of supplies, which necessarily had to be of limited

volume. All of the contestants in turn visited the office of the Aero Association to receive definite route instructions. There was a good deal of red tape to go through, credentials to secure, and arrangements made for reporting progress to headquarters from set points along the route.

The young aviator and his assistants spent nearly an hour over a blue print map which had been furnished each of the contestants by the management of the event. Hiram got out a geography and studied out the situation in a more detailed way. Elmer, at the suggestions of Dave, made two copies of the list of points from which the *Comet* was to report progress.

The boys were interrupted in this congenial work by the appearance of one of the hangar men at the door of the living tent. He beckoned to Dave, who at once went outside, received some message, and called back to his friends:

“I’ve got to go to the city, fellows. Won’t be over two hours. Keep a close watch on everything until I get back.”

“Wonder what’s up now?” remarked Hiram, speculatively. Then he went to the door and looked out. “H’m,” he observed, “Dave has a good deal of mysterious business on hand, it seems to me.”

“Where has he gone?” asked Elmer only casually, for he was deeply absorbed in his work.

“To the city he said, and say, in that same automobile that brought the young lady here day before yesterday.”

“Well, it must be something important to take Dave away from here at just this time,” commented Elmer.

The young aviator reappeared about two hours later.

The chauffeur who had come for him brought him back. Dave came into the living tent all briskness and cheery as usual. The watchful Hiram, however, whispered cautiously to Elmer that "he acted as if he had something heavy on his mind."

The boys made frequent visits to the *Comet* during the evening. Hiram noticed that Dave seemed very solicitous that a double watch should be kept over the machine during the night. He hired two extra men to spell the regular watchmen, and gave them close directions as to their care of the biplane.

A band of music woke up the three young airmen early in the morning. It announced a reception to some French experts who had arrived to take part in the international flights. Dave was out of bed first, as usual, and bolted out of the place, anxious to see if all was well with the *Comet*.

Hiram and Elmer began to dress. They felt buoyant and eager for the work of the day. In sport, as Elmer finished dressing first, he made a grab for the pillow on the cot Dave had occupied and sent it hurtling at the head of his companion.

"That's the last pillow you'll see for a long time to come," he announced. "Hello! Why, Hiram, look here!"

The speaker stood stock still, gazing spellbound at the head of the cot whence he had taken the pillow. Hiram, joining him, looked down like himself in sheer, startled wonder.

CHAPTER IX

THE PATH OF THE EAGLE

“Well, I declare!” almost shouted Hiram Dobbs.

“I should say so,” vociferated Elmer. “You see, Dave in his hurry forgot that package under his pillow. There’s a photograph—”

“Of the girl who came in the automobile! What is it Dave calls her? Oh, yes—Edna Deane.”

“And that pile of bank bills, Hiram!” cried the astounded Elmer, as he gingerly flicked over the edge of a heap of bills surrounded by an elastic band. “Big bills! See, look! Why, there must be hundreds there!”

“Hundreds?” repeated Hiram, equally dumbfounded, like his comrade. “See the printed figures on that paper band—‘\$5,000.’ Don’t touch them, cover them up. It’s Dave’s business, and we have no right to spy into his affairs. All the same—thunder!”

Elmer replaced the pillow. Then both boys sat down on stools and stared at the cot and then at each other.

“It’s a mystery,” broke out Elmer, after a tantalizing spell of silence. “What’s Dave doing with all that money? It puzzles me.”

“No, it’s what is he going to do with it,” corrected Hiram. “You can make up your mind, it’s business. The girl’s picture I can’t exactly figure out. Dave will explain it all when the right minute comes. Here he is now.”

Somewhat flushed, the young aviator came hurrying into the tent. Hiram pretended to be arranging his necktie and Elmer was lacing a shoe. Dave proceeded to the bed and threw aside the pillow. He stored the

package he found there in an inside pocket.

“You want to hurry, fellows,” he said. “There’s a lot to do this morning, you know.”

There was so much to do, that after a hurried breakfast the crew of the *Comet* found every minute occupied for the ensuing two hours. The *Comet* was in perfect trim for the start. There were a hundred little things to think of in the way of supplies and duplicate parts of machinery. Mr. Brackett appeared on the scene early, and went over the biplane he understood so well with the care and anxiety of an automobile owner entering his pet car for a race.

All the time bands were playing, banners flying, and a vast concourse of people had gathered. There was a speech from the president of the National Aero Association, with the contestants to the fore. The young airman and his friends went down the line, looking over the various machines that were to take part in the event. Each one bore a numeral, and had some distinctive mark that gave it a clear identity.

“We are number three,” said Hiram. “That was always my lucky number. I went to school three years, got licked three times before I left and worked three years on the farm. This is the third big event I’ve had anything to do with, there are three of us—”

“Three cheers for number three!” cried Elmer. “There’s father beckoning to me. No, he wants us all, fellows.”

Our hero and the aero manufacturer had talked over all business details earlier in the morning. The kind-hearted Mr. Brackett, however, could not see his proteges start out on a long and perilous flight without a few words of fatherly counsel. He gave them some

sensible advice, and Dave fancied he looked with considerable pride at Elmer. It was with satisfaction that the indulgent father compared the present courageous ambitions of his son with the useless life the prodigal had once led.

A bell was rung at the grandstand. This was the half-hour preparation signal. The airmen now proceeded to their machines. The scene became one of lively activity and gay colors. The *Comet*, neat, compact and perfect, showed up for the beautiful piece of mechanism it was in the clear, dazzling sunlight. Its crew, nattily attired, seemed to fit into a pleasing natural picture.

There was no expectation of a general uniform start when the second bell rang. With the long perilous journey before them, it was a matter of small consequence starting on the moment. Some of the aeroplanes, in fact, would not be in line for some hours to come. Ever ready at the business call, however; always on time as a matter of principle, the young pilot of the *Comet* wasted no time. Number three was the first to leave the field, and got all the first overflow of cheers and enthusiasm. Until a course due northwest was attained, Elmer and Hiram sat waving to the little group outside of their abandoned hangar. Mr. Brackett kept them in sight until the *Comet* was a fading blur, a mere speck in the far distance. The splendid machine struck its best gait staunchly, steadily, leaving a gasoline trail behind.

The boys had talked so much over the trip—they understood the *Comet* so well, that everything went like clockwork. Elmer had charge of the maps and charts. Hiram insisted on being purser extraordinary. All hands were prepared for any emergency that might arise.

The Aero Association had mapped out the general

route the contestants were to pursue. None was tied to rigid rules, however, outside of reporting at certain stations. All this had been arranged by letter and cable. The first reporting stop was to be made at Chicago, the next at Winnipeg. Between all reporting points, the contestants could follow their own route. They could land when they chose. Each one, however, must report at the stations designated and secure the credentials necessary to prove that he was still in the race.

The route chart showed towns and cities where an aero club or interested airman could be located. These would also answer as repair and supply stations. Even in foreign countries, so far as could be arranged, the contestants would be able to locate friends and receive succor or assistance as needed.

“We are going to blaze a great international trail,” observed Hiram, proudly.

“That is, if we get through all right,” remarked Elmer.

“Oh, we’ve got to do that,” proclaimed his light and airy comrade. “The *Comet* was made to do it. I wonder how many of the others will even reach Canada?”

“There were twelve entries,” spoke their pilot. “I will say, a finer lot of machines never started a flight. Of course they won’t all get through.”

“It will be kind of lonesome when we get pretty well scattered, and trailing over some desert or water waste, way out of range of civilization; eh, fellows?” suggested Elmer.

The *Comet* made a non-stop run of nearly two hundred miles. It was mid-afternoon when they descended half-way across a high mountain range. Dave went all over the machine and Elmer oiled and cleaned up the bearings. Hiram gathered some scraps for a little

fire, and they had hot coffee, as well as ham broiled on long forks, and the rest of a really good meal.

Then there was a pleasant chat, some exercise, and they were all aboard again and driving through a brief mountain rainstorm, coming into clear weather beyond.

Before dusk Hiram reported four competitors visible through his field glass. Two of them came pretty near to the *Comet*, and one signalled them. Then their routes deviated, and after a second landing the boys got ready for a six-hour steady night run.

About two o'clock in the morning they landed in a convenient field. The register showed four hundred and ninety-two miles accomplished in a little less than fourteen hours, almost straight flying.

It was late in the afternoon of the day following that the *Comet* came to a stop on the aero grounds just outside of Chicago. From having been there before and from their description chart, Dave was able to locate the place readily.

No meet was on at the time, but enthusiastic brother airmen were on hand expecting an arrival. Amid cheers and warm hand clasps, the tired crew of the *Comet* were greeted royally.

There was a blackboard outside the office building of the course. As they neared it Hiram uttered a triumphant chuckle. Its surface was unmarked until a man approached it, and chalked on its line the first arrival from starting point.

“*No. Three—the Comet.*”

CHAPTER X

A MIDNIGHT ALARM

“Why, hello, Hiram Dobbs!”

The young sub-pilot of the *Comet* turned quickly at the hail. It was half an hour after the arrival at the Chicago aero grounds. Hiram felt pretty important over the royal reception his comrades and himself had received from the aviation officials. Never too proud to greet a friend of humbler pretensions, however, he turned with his usual broad smile of good nature. Then he shot out his hand heartily.

A pale, thin lad, somewhat poorly dressed, had accosted him. Pleased and eager, he clasped the hand Hiram extended.

“Well,” exclaimed the latter, “if it isn’t Will Mason! How in the world do you come to be here?”

“You,” answered the lad promptly—“you’re to blame for my getting a splendid outdoor job, fine pay and jolly good people to work for,” and the speaker’s eyes twinkled.

“Let’s see,” said Hiram, ruminating. “It was at Columbus I met you; wasn’t it?”

“Yes, too sick to keep drudging my life away in the poison air of the zinc works,” nodded Will. “The doctor said I’d last a month longer, maybe. But there was mother, and I had to stick at my post till you kindly interested yourself in me.”

“And Dave Dashaway did the rest by getting you placed with the Chicago crowd; eh?” added Hiram. “It worked out? Good!”

“It worked out because you started the machinery,” declared the grateful Will. “Oh, it’s fine, Mr. Dobbs.”

“Hey! what? Wow! O-oh, my!” and, forgetting all dignity, Hiram fell against a hangar rope and almost roared. “Mister!” he gasped. “First time in my life I was called that. It will be ‘Professor’ next. Oh, but I’m getting on in the world. I suppose it may come to ‘Sir Hiram Dobbs,’ unless we fall down somewhere along the line. Then it will be back to plain Hiram, or just ‘Hi.’ I’m Hiram to my friends, though, always; so call me that and I’ll think you are really a friend.”

Will Mason was bubbling over with delight at his vastly improved condition and heartfelt gratitude towards the true friends who had helped him attain it. He was full of the subject and Hiram had to listen to the details.

Will told how he had a position clear up to the end of the year and a dozen prospects for the next season.

“It’s only helping around the hangars for the present,” he explained; “but Mr. King sent word that as soon as he gets well he will give me a regular place among his assistants. I’ve been able to send quite a bit of money to mother. This week there are some amateur airmen here who want special care for their machines, and I’m making a heap of extras.”

“Grand!” commended Hiram. “You’ll make it. You’re the kind that will.”

“And I feel so much better in health,” added Will. “I’ve gained ten pounds, and I feel just like a bird let out of its cage. That’s your machine over yonder; isn’t it?” asked Will, indicating the *Comet*, which was surrounded by interested investigating airmen.

“That’s the winner of the international race around

the world, yes,” proclaimed Hiram grandly.

“She looks it,” enthused Will. “I wanted to ask you about the biplane. You’re going to stay here till morning, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I guess that is the programme,” replied Hiram.

“Then you want to house the machine. I heard that some one stole the *Comet*. It was talked around here that some wanted to put the *Comet* out of the race because of her good chances.”

“Oh, is that so?” remarked Hiram.

“So, if you want the machine well taken care of,” proceeded Will, “give me the pleasure of doing it. You see that hangar over yonder—the one built of light cement blocks? It’s a remodeled storehouse. Belongs to Mr. Givins, a rich amateur. I take care of his machine when it’s here. He took a run up to Milwaukee this morning, and won’t be back until to-morrow, he said. There isn’t a safer, cleaner, more roomy place on the grounds. You see the windows are barred and there is a great big lock on the doors.”

“Why, say, that’s just famous,” said Hiram. “Dave will be glad to know of such good accommodations as you offer, Will.”

“Besides,” continued the hangar lad, “I’ll sleep in the place all night. Nobody will run away with the *Comet* while I am on watch.”

“I believe you,” cried Hiram buoyantly. “Come on, I want you to meet Dave. He will be mighty glad to see you.”

Number eight of the contestant group came in at dusk. Number eleven, a high power machine, reported an hour later. A wire had come from Pittsburgh

announcing the smash—up of number five, nobody hurt, but machine totally disabled and permanently out of commission.

The young pilot of the *Comet* had some very pleasant words for Will Mason. The offer of the hangar lad to take charge of the *Comet* for the night was entirely satisfactory. The local airmen vied in showing attention to their guests, and the eight hours stop was an enlivening break in the long expedition before them.

“What’s that you’ve got in that box, Hiram?” asked our hero, as they left the association building.

“Some of those fine dainties they set before us at that reception lunch,” reported Hiram. “I tipped the waiter to put it up for me. For Will Mason, you see.”

“That’s good,” commended Dave, “Will is a fine-going fellow.”

“Yes, and proud as can be to think you’ll trust him to keep any stragglers away from the *Comet*.”

The boys decided to look in on the machine before returning. A knock at the door of the hangar brought a sharp mandatory challenge from the vigilant guardian inside.

“Who is there?” demanded Will, approaching the portal.

“Midnight lunch for the watchman!” cried Hiram, in a jolly tone.

“Enter midnight lunch,” ordered Will, unlocking and swinging open the door.

“You are pretty fine and cozy here,” remarked Dave.

A lantern burned on a shelf. Will had made a comfortable bed on a tilted board. He smacked his lips

as Hiram disclosed the contents of the box.

“Why, it is a regular banquet,” declared the pleased lad. “What with that and my reading there’s no danger of my going to sleep.”

Hiram picked up a book lying on the shelf and read its title.

“H’m,” he remarked, “Advanced Aeronautics—1850.’ Say, this must seem queer along with the flying machines of to-day.”

“It’s almost funny in places,” explained Will. “I wonder what those old fellows with their big awkward gas bags would think of the nifty machine here, and a trip around the world in it, easy as a Pullman sleeper.”

“We don’t know that yet,” observed Dave. “There are probably some very unusual experiences ahead of us.”

“Oh, well, we’ll take it as it comes, a section at a time,” said Hiram. “With Dave Dashaway at the helm, we simply can’t fail.”

They were a sanguine, light-hearted group. The crew of the *Comet* chatted in a friendly way with Will for a few minutes. Then the trio repaired to a little hotel just outside the grounds.

The association had made arrangements for them there. The young airman left word to be called at daylight and the comrades were shown to a doubled-bedded room.

“This is pretty fine,” observed Hiram, bunking in with Elmer and stretching himself luxuriously. “There won’t be a lot more of it for some time to come, so let’s see who can sleep soundest.”

Our hero was certainly the expert aviator of the

group. He did not carry off the laurels in the slumber field, however. His comrades wrapped in profound sleep, Dave awoke and with a shock.

It must have been about three o'clock. It seemed to the young airman as though a cannon had gone off near by. His ears still rang with the echoes. Dave found the window frames of the room were still rattling.

"Wonder what that was?" he mused. He glanced towards the windows, but there was no glare of fire. Perfect stillness reigned outside. About to leave the solution of the question until daybreak, our hero listened intently as he heard someone in the next room spring from bed, cross the room hurriedly and apparently pick up a telephone receiver.

"Hello. This the hotel office?" fell upon Dave's hearing. "All right. Say, what was that just went off? Wait a minute? All right."

There was a brief lapse of silence. Then the bell in the next apartment rang out sharply. A message seemed to come over the wire, the young airman could catch its crackling echoes.

"What's that!" exclaimed the man at the 'phone. "Explosion at the aero grounds? Is that so? Hangar and machine blown to pieces! What was it? Oh, dynamite! Well! well!"

With a start and a thrill the young aviator sprang out of bed.

CHAPTER XI

IN PERIL

“Wake up, Hiram,” shouted our hero, seizing the arm of his sleeping assistant, who, rolling against Elmer, jogged him into wakefulness also.

“Ah, what did you say?” droned Hiram. “I was just dreaming that we were on the last home stretch with the *Comet* and—”

“Hurry up and dress, fellows,” ordered the young airman, rapidly.

“Why, it isn’t daylight yet,” remonstrated Elmer, with a drowsy stare.

“No,” answered Dave, seriously. “But there is some trouble over on the aero grounds, and we may be interested.”

“Say,” cried Hiram, fully aroused at the announcement, “you don’t mean trouble for the *Comet*?”

“I don’t know,” replied Dave. “There was an explosion. The man in the next room heard it, too. He called up the hotel clerk, and he told him that a hangar and its machine had been blown to pieces. Take everything with you, fellows,” advised the young airman. “We won’t come back here, even if this affair doesn’t affect us.”

“Do you think it does?” inquired Elmer anxiously. “How could there be an explosion of an airship? Yes, I’m ready.”

The boys hurried down the stairs. Dave, in the lead, found two men who had machines on the aero grounds.

They, too, had been aroused and were questioning the clerk.

“All I got over the 'phone from the office on the grounds was what I told you,” the clerk was saying —“building and machine blown to pieces.”

“Let's hurry,” said Hiram anxiously, as they reached the street. The two men from the hotel ran along with them. They overtook others, aroused by the explosion, and discussing it and trying to figure out what it might mean.

The guard at the gate of the grounds knew no more than what the boys had already learned. He said, however, that several from the office building had gone to the scene of the trouble. Half way across the field, a hangar man running to the office building with information, met them.

“What's the trouble?” inquired one of the hurrying group.

“One of the hangars blown up—dynamite, I guess,” was the reply.

“Accident?”

“No, looks more like malicious spitework. The superintendent and his men are trying to find out.”

Our hero and his comrades could see lanterns moving about over at the row of hangars where the *Comet* was housed. Another man from the scene was halted by them, and Dave asked quickly:

“Which one of the hangars was blown up?”

“The concrete one—the one the *Comet* was in.”

Hiram uttered a groan. Dave grew pale with anxiety and distress. Elmer grasped hold of his arm as if the

blow had made him reel.

“Dave,” spoke Hiram, in a trembling tone, “they stole our machine back at Washington. They’ve destroyed it, now!”

The young airman did not reply. His lips tightly compressed to hide his emotion, he hurried on. Then they all came to a stop. In dismay they stood staring at a mass of ruins—what was left of the wrecked hangar.

Pieces of concrete blocks littered the ground in all directions. Parts of an airship mechanism showed in the glare of the lanterns. The young aviator felt sick all over. He had known all along what there was to fear. His mind was quickly decided as to the motive and source of the vandal act.

“Dave,” suddenly whispered Hiram, in a shaking tone, “the *Comet* is gone! That may not matter, for we might get another machine, but—what about Will Mason?”

Dave thrilled at the question. He steadied himself as he best could, and touched the superintendent of the grounds, who was standing nearby, on the arm.

“There was somebody in the hangar,” he said.

“We suppose so,” replied the official, gravely. “Young Mason slept there nights and—”

“I’m all right,” interrupted an excited but clear voice, and the person under discussion came into view pulling on his sweater. “Just woke up, and they told me about this.”

“Will! Will!” spoke Dave, grasping the hand of the hangar lad fervently. Elmer was crying for joy. Hiram threw an arm about the young fellow and fairly hugged him.

“Oh, nothing matters so long as you wasn’t blown to pieces along with the machine,” almost sobbed the loyal Hiram. “How was it—how did you get out?”

“I wasn’t in,” replied Will. “When I moved the *Comet* out—”

“When you what?” shouted Hiram, in a frenzy of suspense.

“Why, I guess you’re thinking your machine was blown up,” said Will.

“Of course we do,” answered Elmer.

“Well, the *Comet* is all snug and safe in that fourth hangar down the row. The man who owns the wrecked hangar came in with his machine shortly after midnight. He routed me up, and I got the *Comet* out and his biplane in. I promised you I would keep an all-night watch over your biplane, and stayed with it.”

“Oh, Dave, I’m so glad!” cried Hiram, in a tone of immense relief.

The young pilot of the *Comet* left the group and drew the superintendent to one side.

“This is a pretty mysterious happening,” that official had just remarked.

“I may be able to throw some light upon it,” said Dave, in a very serious way. “I feel certain that the explosion was intended to destroy the *Comet*.”

“Is that so!” exclaimed the superintendent. “Then it was done by design?”

“Yes,” affirmed Dave, positively. “I think the Association people should know about it. Perhaps some search can be made for the persons who did the work. You know, the *Comet* was stolen from the grounds near

Washington.”

“It seems to me I did hear something about that,” replied the official.

“We did not say much about it at the time,” went on Dave; “but I had my suspicions.”

“What were they?”

“Someone was very much interested in keeping us out of the race,” explained the young airman.

“You mean professional rivals?”

“I won’t say that positively,” responded Dave, “although expert airmen certainly shared in the Washington end of the plot. I cannot doubt that instructions were sent to confederates here at Chicago to catch the *Comet* and finish the work.”

“You can’t name any one in this outrage; can you, Dashaway?” inquired the superintendent, roused up to a high pitch of excitement and indignation.

“I have a suspicion as to the person at the bottom of the scheme,” answered Dave. “I have a further idea as to the men who are carrying out instructions, but I have no positive proof as to their guilt. Neither of them is probably here. No, they must have wired accomplices at this point. All I can say is, that hired emissaries in a big plot to keep us out of this race are probably posted and instructed all along the line, determined to carry out their plan to prevent our making the world-circling flight.”

“I must report this to the officers of the association at once, Dashaway,” said the superintendent.

Hiram had sidled up to Dave. He seized the arm of the latter in a detaining grip as he was about to move

nearer to the ruins of the hangar.

“See here, Dave Dashaway,” he said, earnestly, “there’s a lot you are keeping to yourself, and I’ve a right to know what it is.”

“I think so, too,” replied the young airman at once. “I saw no good accomplished by worrying you with that I only guessed, until this explosion occurred. Now I feel it a duty to share my knowledge with you and Elmer, just as you are sharing the risk and danger of this journey. As soon as we get started again, I will have an interesting story to tell you.”

“All right, Dave,” agreed Hiram, “only I’m terribly anxious and curious. Can I ask you just one question?”

“Yes, if you choose,” replied Dave.

“Is the man behind all this trouble the fellow I have all along guessed—that fellow, Vernon?”

“You needn’t guess it,” answered Dave. “You have hit it just right. It is Vernon.”

CHAPTER XII

THE SECRET TOLD

“Now then, Dave, we are all ready to hear that promised story of yours,” said Hiram Dobbs.

“Yes,” added Elmer Brackett, “there’s no danger of any spies or eavesdroppers in this lonely place.”

It was a lonely place, indeed. Half a week in time and over a thousand miles in distance removed from the Chicago aero grounds, the three young airmen were taking a rest in the midst of a far-spreading Canadian forest.

Right at the spot where they were camping was a knob, or hill. At its bottom, a level stretch of some extent, there spread about a vast, wild swamp. This afforded a good anchor spot for the biplane. The *Comet* rested on its base somewhat travel-stained, but staunch and reliable as at the start. The crew of the machine looked as if they had never felt better in their lives. Wind, rain and sun had begun to brown them up like gipsies. Energy showed in their clear, vigilant eyes, and confidence and ambition in every movement they made. They had just dispatched what Elmer had described as “a royal feast,” which sharp appetites had fully enjoyed. Then, each of the trio outstretched on the grass, they luxuriated in a restful position that a rigid posture in the *Comet* during a day of hard traveling had not allowed.

“All right, fellows,” said the young airman, “I guess the time has come when it is safe for you to know what you have called a great secret.”

“Yes, out with it, Dave,” urged Hiram, “I’ve been dying with curiosity ever since I got a hint that some big

mystery was afoot.”

“It is less of a mystery than an important piece of professional work,” explained our hero. “I didn’t tell you about it at Washington, because I was in doubt myself. When we escaped that explosion at Chicago, I was afraid it would unnerve and worry you to have a dread and uncertainty on your mind. I really thought something was going to happen to us at Winnipeg. It didn’t. We’re ahead or out of range of the enemy now, I feel pretty certain. To sum it all up, I hardly think we will be interfered with again—at least this side of the first Coast station, Sitka.”

“No, it doesn’t look as if anybody would try to chase us through three thousand miles of wilderness,” remarked Elmer.

“Anyway, there has been no sign of it so far,” said Dave.

“Provided that tramp monoplane we noticed at Winnipeg isn’t sneaking around somewhere,” put in Hiram, quite seriously.

Dave smiled, and Elmer laughed outright, with the words:

“That was all fancy.”

“Was it?” protested Hiram, getting excited. “I tell you, that black-looking machine was after something. You two didn’t see it as many times as I did. There wasn’t an airman I questioned who recognized the machine. It was a tramp, a pirate, and you won’t convince me that it wasn’t hanging around purposely to make somebody trouble.”

“Well, we missed it, if it was the *Comet* they were after,” said Dave. “Now then, fellows.”

With a business like air Dave took from his pocket a box-like envelope. He proceeded to undo its flap. Then he drew out its contents. Just as his peering comrades expected, the young aviator revealed a heap of bank notes and a photograph.

“Hold on, Dave,” interrupted Hiram, as his friend was about to speak; “we don’t want to hide anything from you. We have seen that money and picture before.”

“Oh, is that so?” asked Dave, in some surprise.

“Yes,” and Hiram related when and where.

“No harm done,” said Dave lightly. “You are good, true chums, I see that. About this packet: Its story leads back to the day that a young lady in an automobile came up to our hangar near Washington. Her name is Edna Deane, and her father is General Deane, a man of some means. His son, Morris Deane, was a noted traveler and explorer. For over two years he has been missing. It was not until quite recently that his devoted father and sister learned that he was either dead or a prisoner.”

“A prisoner?” exclaimed the interested Hiram. “A prisoner? Tell me how and where, Dave?”

“In the heart of Thibet, thousands and thousands of miles away from here. It is a strange story, fellows, and a serious one. It seems that young Deane in his travels ventured to enter the great sacred city of Lhasa. It meant death or permanent imprisonment, but he risked it. There he disappeared. His anxious father and sister know this, but nothing further. They tried to hire detectives and daring adventurers outside of that profession to penetrate to his place of captivity. Knowing the peril, none would go. It appears that it is almost impossible to reach Lhasa by land or water. Every road is guarded to keep out intruders. General

Deane knew Mr. King. The thought came to him that an airship might accomplish what ordinary vehicles of travel could not."

"I see," said Hiram. "That might be all right, if it was simply a dive and a quick rescue."

"Which it will not be," replied Dave, "for the information General Deane has gathered up as to the exact fate or whereabouts of his son is very vague. Well, as I said, the General went to Mr. King. Our old friend is laid up, as you know. He directed the general to us, knowing about the intended trip around the world. That little business lady, Miss Deane, came to see me. Then I went to her father."

"And he gave you all that money to undertake the search for his missing son?" guessed Elmer.

"Not at all," replied Dave. "He told me a story that not only interested me, but excited my sympathy greatly. A year ago an uncle of Morris Deane died, leaving an enormous estate. The relative left the estate to a man who had been his nurse and private secretary for years. His name is Arnold Wise. It seems he is a perfect villain, and that is not putting it one bit too strong, I think."

"What about him?" pressed the curious Elmer.

"According to the terms of the will, Wise was to inherit the estate, unless within two years Morris Deane appeared and claimed it. At the time he made his will, the uncle had about made up his mind that his nephew was dead."

"Suppose he turns up or is found?" inquired Hiram.

"Then Wise is to deliver the estate over to him minus one hundred thousand dollars, which will be his rightful

share. The uncle left a note urging Wise to seek for his missing nephew.”

“Did he do it?” asked Elmer.

“Yes, he did, and found out something, the general and his daughter believe, although he reported to them that young Deane was surely dead long since. They finally got to believing that Wise was wicked enough to think of having the rival heir put out of the way. Later events proved that he is a cruel, soulless man. This brings us to our old-time enemy, Vernon.”

“Aha! he’s mixed up with it, too?” cried Hiram.

“You remember that you discovered Vernon lurking around the hangars that night near Washington?”

“Yes, and later coming out of the house where the Deane family lived,” added Hiram.

“Well, I am now satisfied that Vernon overheard my entire first conversation with Miss Edna Deane. Also that later he sneaked into Hampton Flats, and probably overheard enough more to suggest a new scheme to that crafty mind of his. At all events, there was a faithful old servant of the dead uncle who had been retained by Wise. She came to the Deanes and told them that a man named Vernon had come to Wise and told him that the general was sending an airship expedition to find his missing son.”

“I begin to see the light,” remarked Hiram.

“From what happened later,” proceeded the young airman, “I am satisfied that some bargain was made between Wise and Vernon. I believe that Wise hired our old-time enemy to outwit us. I feel sure it was Vernon who got somebody to run away with the *Comet*. Failing to stop us he wired accomplices in Chicago to blow up

the machine. We have gone so fast that he probably was not able to reach us at Winnipeg. He is undoubtedly supplied with plenty of money. I should not be surprised if he kept up his game of trying to block us all along the route. That, fellows, is the story. The money you see here is the sum of five thousand dollars, supplied by General Deane to use if necessary to secure the release of his son."

"And the photograph, Dave?" inquired Hiram. "Keepsake, eh?"

"Not at all," replied the young aviator. "That, shown to young Deane, if we once find him, is a token that will convince him that we are sent by friends. Fellows, I know you are like me—willing to do all you can for a fellow being in trouble. It would be a grand, humane act if we succeeded. The general places no limit to the reward, but I wouldn't listen to that kind of talk."

"Good for you," applauded Elmer. "Say, I only hope we can find Morris Deane."

"We are going to try to," announced our hero, quietly, but in a determined way. "Get out the chart, Hiram, and I'll show you how I believe we can take in Thibet without seriously losing time in the race."

Hiram arose to his feet to obey this direction, when Elmer got up and began sniffing.

"I say, Dave," he observed, "do you smell it? Smoke! There's fire somewhere!"

CHAPTER XIII

AN EXCITING MOMENT

“Yes, there is smoke—and fire behind it!” cried Hiram. “And see—the wind is changing—whew!”

The biplane boys had been so engrossed in their own affairs that they had not noticed until now that a dense, high-up vapor had gradually clouded the sun. All of a sudden, however, some new current of wind drove the smoke downwards. As it struck the hill it wound around it like a veil. It came so thick and fast that it began to choke and blind them. Filmy cinders and a growing heat in the air were to be observed.

“See here, Dave,” spoke Hiram, “hadn’t we better get aloft?”

“Look at that now,” chimed in Elmer, pointing across the broad surface of the hill.

The three young aviators stood quite spellbound for a moment, witnessing a new and novel spectacle. The top of the knob was covered with a great growth of dried-up weeds, fine and fibrous. From time to time, as the branches dropped away from the parent stem, they had rolled or were blown part way down the hill.

Great masses in the aggregate had lodged on shelves and crevices among the rocks. Now the sweep of the strong breeze had suddenly arisen and the suction of the hot, swirling air moved these accumulations. They blew over each other and together. Gaining a momentum, here and there rounded masses began to wad up and grow as they progressed in their mad course.

“I have heard of those,” said the young airman. “They are called tumbleweeds.”

“Snowballs!” shouted the excitable Hiram. “Look at that now!”

A blast of hot air sent a perfect shower of sparks and smoking filaments over the brow of the hill. These ignited the rolling spheres, some of which had become gigantic globes. At one time over a hundred of the strange, rolling balls were set aflame.

“Fireworks!” added Elmer. “It’s a pretty sight, but—
whoof!”

A great sphere, all ablaze, landed against the speaker, burst like fluffy thistle down, and scorched him slightly.

“All aboard!” ordered Dave, sharply. “Don’t waste a second, fellows!”

“Yes, high time, I’m thinking,” declared Hiram, making a run for some cooking utensils he had been using in preparing their lunch.

The *Comet* as usual was in perfect shape for a speedy flight. Dave, at the pilot post, his assistants in their accustomed places, a touch of the self-starter sent them off on a sharp tangent away from the hill and across the tinder-like fields of weeds.

“Just in time,” spoke Hiram, as they arose to a higher level, above the crest of the hill. “There’s a grand sight for a fellow, if there ever was one.”

Each of the aviators was enwrapped in the vivid panorama beneath them. Far as they could look—south, north, and west—acres and miles of flame-swept surface greeted their vision. By this time the sparks had ignited the swamp. A solid wall of flame seized upon the dry stalks with a roar. The hill was now the center of a glowing caldron of fire.

“That was pretty quick,” remarked Dave. “We were

lucky to get warning in time.”

In places where little thickets beneath them were burning, entire sight of the ground was shut out for the heat or smoke. They were now too high for the heat or smoke to reach them. The fire, however, was of considerable extent, and even on the distant horizon there seemed no end or beginning to the great conflagration.

They passed over a long lake. It was shallow, but at that spot the body of water had presented a barrier to the immediate forward progress of the flames.

“See,” spoke Hiram, “the fire is eating around the edges of the lake to the other side. Dave,” he suddenly shouted, “there’s a house!”

“Yes, and it’s on fire, too,” echoed Elmer.

The lake was about half a mile wide. Its beach was lined with clumps of flags and reeds. These had fed the flames around the body of water in two directions. At the south end of the opposite shore of the lake, the fire had entirely surrounded a small, cultivated patch with a rude log cabin in its center. This structure was blazing fiercely. To the west and the far north the fire was sweeping in giant strides, licking up everything that came in its path.

There was just one space between the onrushing and the backing up section of the conflagration. This was a little stretch of beach. As they approached it, the young aviator made a veer with the biplane that told his companions of a sudden change of purpose.

“What is it, Dave?” asked Elmer, quickly.

“Don’t you see?” replied Dave. “There are a woman and child down there.”

“Gracious!” shouted Hiram—“why, so there are! She’s running for her life! No, she’s stopped. Now she’s stepped into the water. She’s wading in. Dave, Dave, do something!”

It was truly an exciting situation. All three of the boys now saw in plain view the forlorn fugitives of the fire. A woman, terrified and frantic, was visible. She carried a young child in her arms. Apparently she had just come from the burning cabin.

Behind her a rushing wall of fire pursued. West and north a half-circle of solid flame told her of impending doom. She ran out into the lake, but there she faltered, not ten feet from shore. It seemed that she realized that she could not get far enough beyond the fringe of flags to escape the fire, and she stood rooted to the spot in helpless despair.

“We have a bare five minutes before the flames reach her,” said Dave, his tone a trifle strained and unsteady, but determined. “Fellows, we must take her aboard.”

“Can we land all right?” questioned Elmer.

“We’ve got to, even at a risk,” replied Dave.

“It means a big added weight,” suggested Hiram. “Something has got to go out.”

“Lighten up the best you know how,” directed Dave rapidly.

It was no careless trick to land. Dave strained every sense and nerve to carry out the projected rescue safely. Hiram and Elmer knew the part expected of them. The former reached back in the pocket, or compartment, containing their equipment and supplies.

“Help me, Elmer,” he said hastily. “Toss it out,” and he dragged a can of water within reach, and his

companion sent it whirling over the edge of the machine.

Two out of four heavy rods, duplicates of a part of the steering outfit, followed, then a large bag of sugar. Hiram selected from the food supply articles that could be readily replaced at the first town they might reach.

“That will do,” he announced, just as the *Comet* sailed downward, struck the ground, and glided to a stop.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRAMP MONOPLANE

Instantly Hiram leaped from the machine, Elmer following him. The woman had waded to a rocky reef coming up out of the water. There she had sunk, throwing her apron over her head and clasping her babe close to her breast.

She had not seen the airship. In fact, it was all the boys could do to keep their eyes clear from smoke and cinders. Hiram ran straight out into the water.

“Get up, lady, quick,” he cried, touching her arm. “We have come to get you out of here.”

The woman shrieked in alarm, but dropped the covering from her face. Her brain was reeling, it seemed, and her senses were benumbed by all the strange happenings about her.

“Help me, Elmer,” directed Hiram, and together they drew her out of the water and led her up to the biplane. She stared at it blankly.

“I—I don’t understand,” she said, and swayed in a lost manner, as if she was about to swoon.

“Get her in, quick!” ordered Dave, with a glance ahead of them as a rain of sparks flew over and past the machine.

The woman was now almost passive in the hands of her helpers. They got her into the seat Elmer usually occupied, while he climbed over into the space to its rear. Hiram got aboard. Then the *Comet* shot up into the air.

The woman turned pale and shrank back. She clung

to her little child and stared wildly about her.

“Don’t be afraid, lady,” spoke Hiram, soothingly. “It’s all right. There is no one else around here; is there?”

“Not a soul,” gasped the woman, faintly. “I was alone—all alone,” she continued in a dreary tone. “Oh, it was awful, awful! I feared I would never see my husband again.”

“May I ask where he is?” pressed Hiram.

“He went to Doubleday to get some winter supplies,” explained the woman. “It takes three days. I hope he got there safely.”

The pilot of the *Comet* and Elmer were able to hear all that was said as their comrade patiently drew out her story. The burned cabin was the only habitation in the wilderness district.

“How far away is this Doubleday?” inquired Hiram.

“It is about a hundred miles,” she explained; “nearly south of here. There’s a sort of trail to follow through the valleys, but I guess it’s all burned over.”

“Of course we will take the lady to Doubleday, Dave?” suggested Hiram.

“Yes, we must do that,” replied the young airman.

Twenty miles covered, the *Comet* passed the extreme southern limit of the fire. There was a full moon, and as darkness came on Dave was able to still keep track of the landscape.

It was not quite nine o’clock in the evening when some scattering land lights showed in the distance.

“That must be Doubleday,” spoke Hiram.

“I think it is,” said the woman. “I have been there

only once or twice with my husband. That little cluster of lights, I think, is the town tavern.”

It was in the center of a vacant square back of this rambling old frontier building, that Dave brought the *Comet* to a halt. He left Hiram and Elmer with the machine. The woman took leave of them with grateful tears in her eyes.

“I hope my husband has not started back for home,” she said, anxiously—“I hope he wasn’t caught in the fire.”

When they got around to the front of the inn, Dave inquired for her of the landlord as to her husband. Abel Lyme, she said, his name was.

The tavern keeper said he was stopping there, but was probably just then at the general store. His wife was so anxious, she could not wait for his return. The young airman wished to secure some supplies to make up for what they had been obliged to throw out of the *Comet*. Both went over to the store.

It took Dave half an hour to get through with his business, ordering the goods he bought sent at once up to the tavern. It took him half an hour longer to get rid of the husband of the woman they had rescued. The grateful fellow, poor as he was, paid hardly any attention to the loss of his home. He was so thankful that the lives of his wife and child were saved, so overcome with admiration of the daring exploit of Dave and his comrades, that he overwhelmed the young aviator with offers of reward clear down to his last dollar. On his return to the inn Dave found his faithful assistants guarding the biplane and waiting for orders.

“What’s the programme?” inquired Hiram briskly, but stretching himself as if a good nap would not be

unwelcome.

“It’s a fine night for traveling,” remarked the pilot of the *Comet*; “but it has been rather a hard day for us. Every hour counts, of course, but I think we may do all the better work for a little rest. Three or four hours sleep will make us fresh for a non-stop moonlight run about midnight.”

“That haymow over there strikes my fancy,” announced Elmer.

“All right,” replied our hero. “Take your turn. You, too, Hiram. I’ll stay on guard duty till you spell me. I expect some supplies from the general store here.”

“I reckon they’re coming now,” said Hiram. “I’ll stay and help you get them aboard.”

A man with a loaded pushcart came into view from the front of the tavern. He was noticed by the landlord, who talked with him and then kept up with him until they neared the two young aviators.

“Why,” exclaimed the tavern keeper, with a stare at the *Comet*, “came back, did you?”

“Eh?” spoke Hiram—“came back from where?”

“S-st!” warned Dave, in an instant making a broad guess, at least canvassing a quick suspicion that came into his mind. Then he addressed the landlord with the words: “We need some store supplies, and we’ll be very much obliged if you will allow us to anchor here for a few hours.”

“Sure, sure,” answered the man readily. “This is an airship, really and true; isn’t it now?” and the speaker walked clear around the machine, inspecting it in open-mouthed wonder.

“Well, well, what a contrivance. I’ve seen pictures of these affairs. That’s how I knew what it was when you flew over the town just after dusk.”

“H’m!” whispered Hiram, nudging his companion secretly. “I see.”

Dave “saw,” too. An airship had sailed over a few hours previous! As the young aviator well knew, it was not the *Comet*. Naturally, it might be some one of the other contestants in the great race around the world. Thinking of his enemies, however, Dave was wise enough to remain wary until he was sure of the identity of the machine referred to by the inn-keeper.

“Where’s the man that came here about an hour ago?” questioned the landlord, looking over the young airmen and beyond them.

Dave gave his hand a vague swing westward and skywards.

“Yes,” nodded the man, “I saw you go that way. Landed on Lookout Hill, didn’t you? The man who came here to have his bottle filled said so. He asked me if I had seen any other airships around here. There’s a good many of you for such a light little machine as that of yours.”

The young airman let the landlord do most of the talking, replying evasively. Some others, attracted by curiosity, approached the spot. It was getting late, however, and nobody stayed long.

“Let’s see, where is Lookout Hill from here?” Dave asked carelessly of the man with the pushcart, after the inn-keeper had gone away.

“That’s it,” said the man, pointing. “Where some one’s got a campfire, it looks. See, right through the

trees yonder, beyond the creek.”

“Oh, yes,” replied Dave. “Here’s a dollar for getting here so promptly with those goods, and helping us.”

“Now then, Hiram,” said our hero, as the supplies were placed in the biplane and they found themselves alone, “it is you and I for a council of war.”

“I understand,” nodded his lively assistant—“you mean about the other airship?”

“Just that. One arrived here to-night, as you know.”

“The landlord mistook our machine for the one he saw.”

“Yes, and spoke of a man who came here later from the machine that passed over the town,” added Dave. “That light the other fellow showed us is probably the campfire at the landing place of the airship. I am going to find out who is in charge of it, friend or foe.”

“Supposing it’s the pirate tramp we saw at Winnipeg?” propounded Hiram.

“Then we know our danger. They evidently are not aware that we are here. You stay on guard here. It can’t be more than two miles to that campfire. I will be back soon.”

“Going to spy on them?” suggested Hiram.

“Yes. I will be back and report just as soon as I find out who these airmen are,” responded Dave.

He gave his comrade definite orders to arouse Elmer if anything suspicious occurred, and to give an alarm at the tavern if help was necessary. Then Dave started out on his lonely expedition.

Our hero knew nothing of the traversed route leading to Lookout Hill. Fortunately the fire glow in the distance

continued.

Dave followed a regular road. A lateral path led in the direction of the hill. Arrived at its base, he made his way up one side.

“There is the campfire,” mused the young airman, as he passed through a thicket on a level with the glow ahead of him. “Ah, just in time.”

Dave caught hold of a bush and took a downward swing. He saved himself a good hard fall, however, by clinging to the bush. The whole face of the plateau he found was full of treacherous pits. He proceeded slowly and cautiously now.

A fringe of bushes surrounded the spot where the campfire was. Dave crept to their edge. One glance with the radius of the dying glow of the fire showed him an interesting picture.

At one side stood a monoplane. Its dark color and a peculiar arrangement of the planes enabled our hero to recognize it at once.

“It is Hiram’s pirate tramp machine, sure enough,” reflected Dave, “and the men.”

One of these was walking up and down in something of a rage, it seemed. Propped up against a tree trunk was a second man, clasping a bottle. This latter person was swaying as he sat. His eyes blinked. There was a vacant expression to his face.

“It’s all right,” he was saying, in a maudlin state. “Want to sleep.”

“It’s all wrong, you mean!” raved the other man. “I want to tell you one thing! I shan’t lose a chance of a thousand dollars to humor a worthless, irresponsible reprobate like you. I simply won’t stand it.”

“Then—he! he! sit down,” chuckled the other—“like I do.”

“I’m through with you,” cried his companion, in tones of positive fury, and shaking his fist at the other. “I’ll get the *Comet* alone. Sleep, you loafer, and when you wake up find your way back to Winnipeg on foot as best you can.”

The speaker seized the half-filled bottle and dashed it to pieces on the nearest rock.

“All right,” mumbled the sitter. “Get some more.”

“Bah, you wretch!” shouted his comrade, and he gave the swaying, helpless man a kick that sent him onto his side with a groan.

“I’ll make it alone,” Dave heard the man mutter.

The young aviator knew his bearings now. There was not the least doubt in the world that these two men were new emissaries of Wise through the villain, Vernon. They had been hired to locate and destroy the *Comet*.

CHAPTER XV

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Our hero had accomplished his mission. He had learned all that he had come to Lookout Hill to find out. The two men and their mysterious machine had been located. Their connection as accomplices of Dave's enemies was positive.

"Here is something to think over before we make a definite move," reflected the young aviator. "These fellows will, of course, hear about us if they go back to the town, which they probably will do. Then it will be a new, closer chase."

The professional curiosity of the pilot of the *Comet* held him to the spot momentarily. He made a detour of the campfire. His object was to inspect the monoplane.

A score of ideas crowded Dave's thoughts. He might tell his story to an officer of the town, possibly have the tramp airship and its crew arrested, or at least detained. Again, he might quietly start up the *Comet*, strike a new route, and count on outdistancing all pursuers.

Dave glided along in the shelter of the underbrush until he came up directly to the monoplane. A near glance told him that it was a superb machine. Whoever the airmen hired by the wily Vernon were, they thoroughly understood their business, that seemed sure.

The young aviator was so engrossed in his inspection of the machine, thinking so fast as to what was best to do, that he was taken all unawares as some one nearly ran upon him. It was the man he had just seen at the campfire.

"Hello, who are you?" shot out the man, and he

paused not five feet from the young airman and looked him over from head to foot.

“I heard of your machine and came to take a look at it,” replied Dave, on his guard and watching his challenger closely, for he had a bad face.

“Oh, you did?” said the fellow, moving a step nearer. “That’s a strange jacket you wear. Why, you’re an airman yourself and—you’re Dashaway!”

The man was too quick for Dave. As he spoke he made a deft spring. It showed that he was a natural acrobat. His grip on Dave’s arm was like iron.

“Let me go. Suppose I am?” demanded our hero, struggling.

“Well, then I have a little business with you,” coolly answered his captor. “Oh, you’re Dashaway. I saw you twice in Winnipeg. Come on. Tom! Tom!” he called out loudly, to his companion, as he found himself unable to budge his prisoner, although he weighed nearly double what Dave did.

The man near the campfire neither responded nor stirred. He was past helping his comrade. There was a reason why the young airman was able to make so sturdy a resistance. His free hand clutched a sapling right at hand. His foot he had twisted in among the network of strong roots.

The combatants stood directly at the edge of one of the pits that honeycombed the plateau. Its edge crumbled as the man gave Dave a jerk.

“Look out!” cried our hero, “if you don’t want both of us to get a tumble.”

“You come on,” ordered his captor, savagely. “I’ll stand no fooling. Come—on!”

He gave Dave a terrific jerk. It was so forceful that our hero's grasp of the tree tore loose, and he toppled over. In doing so his assailant lost his balance. He stumbled over Dave's entangled foot. In some astonishment the young aviator found the fellow had completely disappeared as he got to his feet.

"He's done for himself, sure enough," said Dave, and he peered down into the pit. It was about twenty feet deep. He heard a groan. Then he traced a rustling about. His eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, Dave was finally enabled to make out his enemy trying to climb up the steep sides of the pit.

The roots he clutched at gave way in his grasp and a shower of dirt and gravel drove him back. The young aviator discerned that the man was not seriously hurt. He realized also that sooner or later his enemy would manage to get out of the pit. If not at once, at least when his now helpless comrade came to himself, the man would be rescued.

"He is just where I want him," thought the young aviator. "It won't do to leave him the machine."

Dave walked up again to the flying machine. He soon estimated its condition and capacity. He found it to be a capable piece of mechanism.

"Hi, stop—Oh, thunder!"

This was shouted out after the runaway as the machine lifted into the air, Dave at the helm. Its rightful pilot spoke, but, his call barely completed as he grasped at the edge of the pit, down he slid again to its bottom.

Fifteen minutes later the machine dropped to earth in the field behind the inn at Doubleday, not a hundred feet from the *Comet*. Hiram came running towards it.

“You, Dave?” he called out cautiously.

“With company,” answered Dave promptly.

“Gracious! It’s the pirate tramp, isn’t it?” cried the astonished Hiram. “Why, what does it mean? How did you manage it?”

“Don’t ask any questions just now,” responded the young airman. “Wake up Elmer.”

“We’re going to get out of here?”

“Quick as we can. There’s a reason.”

Hiram bolted for the haymow. Elmer very shortly came up to the spot where Dave stood.

“For mercy’s sake, two of them!” he exclaimed, rubbing his eyes and staring in surprise at the captured airship.

“Yes, this is the pirate,” explained the young pilot. “The fellows who ran it tried to follow us from Winnipeg. Turn about is fair play, fellows. Some of the same gang stole our machine near Washington for a bad purpose. We will retaliate by borrowing theirs now for a good purpose.”

“Yes,” put in Hiram, with animation, “get them and the machine safely out of harm’s way.”

“I intend to,” said Dave. “You’ll have to fly the craft, Hiram.”

“I reckon I can do it,” asserted Hiram promptly. “What’s your idea, Dave?”

“A two hours’ flight, due west. Then we will hold a new council of war. We had best not delay. I don’t know how soon the fellow who runs that craft may be on our trail.”

No one appeared to observe or hinder the airship boys as they made their preparations to resume their journey. The pilot of the *Comet* gave his trusty assistant explicit orders as to what was required of him.

The biplane started first from the ground. In the clear moonlight its course was not difficult to follow. Soon the leader and its consort were started on a steady course, due west. Hiram was in gay humor. Dave had explained the details of his encounter with the enemy, and the new pilot of the pirate airship chuckled as he drove it forward.

The incident had fully awakened Elmer, and Dave found him good lively company. There was a rare spice of adventure in the incident of the night.

“You handled things just grand,” voted Dave’s enthusiastic admirer. “I wonder how those fellows are feeling just about this time?”

It was after midnight when the young aviator directed his companion to take the distance record.

“Ninety-seven miles,” reported Elmer.

“I guess that will do,” said our hero. “We are going to land.”

A pleasant stretch of forest glade looked inviting. The *Comet* came to anchor. In about ten minutes the other machine made an easy descent almost at the side of the *Comet*.

“Well done, Hiram,” commended his friend, warmly. “Your lessons under old John Grimshaw are bringing famous results.”

“Glad you think so,” answered Hiram, with affected indifference, but he looked both pleased and proud.

“It’s about midnight,” said Dave. “We will turn in soon as we can, fellows. I will take the first watch.”

“Going to stay here until daylight?” inquired Hiram.

“Yes, and for a good breakfast,” replied the young airman. “We need the rest, and there is little likelihood of our enemies catching up with us now.”

“I should say not,” echoed Hiram with a chuckle.

“No, you have spiked their guns for keeps, Dave,” added Elmer.

It was a little later than sunrise when Hiram, on the last watch, woke up his comrades. He had a fire of twigs going.

“Coffee on the boil, fellows,” he announced cheerily; “ham done to a turn, and the bread being a little dry I thought we would have some buttered toast.”

“Hurrah!” shouted the hungry and jubilant Elmer. “I feel as if I could eat a horse.”

“Yes, this brisk Canadian air certainly gives a fellow a great appetite,” declared Dave.

“Next town we stop at,” spoke Hiram, “I want to get some pancake flour. I’ve been just hankering for some old fashioned flapjacks. I’ve got a griddle among the traps, and I know I can turn out some elegant pancakes.”

“This is good enough for anybody,” insisted Elmer, his teeth deep in a piece of luscious ham cooked to a turn.

“Say,” spoke Hiram a few minutes later, “I strolled around the end of that grove of trees yonder before I woke you up. There’s a road just beyond them, and there’s a town not half a mile away.”

“Is that so?” questioned the young aviator. “That suits my plans precisely.”

“How is that?” asked Elmer.

“I will show you after breakfast,” replied Dave.

He got a pad of writing paper from the supply aboard the biplane. Dave was busy writing for some time. Then he got the repair outfit of the *Comet*.

“Come on, you can help me,” he said to Hiram and Elmer.

The young airman partially upset the captured airship. His comrades very soon understood what this manœuvre meant. Dave removed a dozen or more screws and bolts. Then he unhinged alternate struts and set to work on the engine. The parts removed were stored aboard of the *Comet*.

“I guess that will cripple the craft enough to serve our purpose,” said Dave. “I don’t want to be a vandal and wholly destroy as pretty a machine as this is.”

“Can’t afford to take any risks with the bad crowd trying to break us up though,” reminded Hiram.

“I don’t intend to,” answered Dave. “It will take a long trip clear back to Winnipeg to replace those parts. If those fellows we left back at Doubleday come on after the machine, it will be fully a week before they can think of taking up the chase again.”

“By that time we will have reached Alaska; won’t we, Dave?” queried Elmer.

“And far beyond, if we fill the schedule blocked out,” replied the young pilot of the *Comet*. “I’ll be back soon, fellows.”

Dave lined the grove of trees and was soon lost

beyond it to the present sight of his friends. In about half an hour he reappeared, walking briskly.

“It’s all right,” he reported. “Get the *Comet* in trim.”

“Going to start up, eh?” remarked Elmer.

“We had better, I think, to avoid complications,” said Dave. “The town beyond here has a telephone service probably, running to Doubleday. The note I wrote told of the dismantled machine here. It also explained enough to warrant a ’phone call, explaining about it, sent to Doubleday. Those Winnipeg fellows can get their machine by coming for it.”

“You mean what is left of it,” corrected Hiram.

“I hired a boy I met to take my note to the postmaster of the town near here,” explained the young aviator. “I think I have been as fair all around as we can afford to be under the circumstances.”

“That’s right,” assented Hiram, with vigor, and Elmer echoed the sentiment.

“The coast is clear—as far as Sitka, anyhow,” proceeded the young airman. “And now, fellows,” he added briskly—“business, strictly business.”

CHAPTER XVI

A SIBERIAN ADVENTURE

“Brrr-rr!” chattered Hiram Dobbs, with a shiver. “I say, Dave, have we got to stand this much longer?”

“I sincerely hope not,” replied the young pilot of the *Comet*, in a really concerned tone. “I hoped to outride the storm. But it appears to me the snow is coming down thicker and faster every minute.”

“I’m just about drifted in,” piped up Elmer.

The scene was a vast void, a chaos. The three young airmen were much in the situation of a ship driven before a blinding gale in unknown, fog-covered waters. All bearings were lost. The angle glide was obscured with snow; Dave resembled a great white statue. The biplane was the rushing center of large driving flakes whirling in eddies all about them.

They had run thus for nearly an hour, but now the machine, staunch and reliable as it was, threatened to depart from its usual good conduct record. The planes were crusted and over-weighted. The bulk of snow Hiram and Elmer tried to dislodge from other parts of the machine was duplicated before they could go the entire rounds.

There had been several ominous creaks. Once the *Comet* struck an air pocket. Through some deft but dangerous skidding the pilot evaded this peril. A sudden change in the wind almost precipitated a new catastrophe.

“I don’t know what we are going to strike,” said our hero; “but we’ve got to make a landing. No machine could stand much more of this.”

“Good,” cried Hiram heartily, as the *Comet* made a rapid dive that was nearly a somersault. “It’s solid land all right. I was afraid it might be water, and a ducking just now—brrr—rr!”

When Dave had told his friends way back in Canada that their motto must be “business, strictly business,” he and they had set themselves zealously to work to carry out the sentiment. Dave was an expert airman. The *Comet* was a noble machine of its type. They had met with “good luck,” too, Hiram had insisted. The biplane crossed the vast stretch of Canadian wilderness without a mishap.

At Sitka no new trap nor harmful attempt on the part of their enemies had confronted them. A government official had been deputized by telegraph from Washington to receive and identify the contestants as they arrived. The crew of the *Comet* were proud and happy to learn that they were the first on the scene.

They rested a day at Sitka. Dave realized that the hardest part of the route lay before them. It was no easy task to pilot a course past Cape Prince of Wales, across Bering Strait and make sure of reaching Stamavoie, a point in Kamchatka where arrangements had been made for gasoline and other supplies.

Elmer had started keeping what he called a “log.” During the ensuing six days he had some odd and spirited incidents to record. They had left the mild fall weather behind them and encountered genuine wintry blasts. The expert young pilot took no unnecessary risks. Their stops were frequent, and for the most part fortunately they managed to land near settlements or habitations. Dave had to accommodate the machine to new wind conditions. He and his friends suffered a good deal with the cold. It was now late afternoon, and

according to calculations and the charts they were traversing Siberian territory.

The storm had not abated one whit as all three of the boys left the biplane. They found themselves ankle deep in a soft clinging snow.

“We can’t stay here,” said the young aviator.

“Hardly,” replied Hiram, “unless we want to see the machine and all hands covered up in a snowdrift within an hour.”

“We have lost our exact reckoning,” added Dave, “and no landmarks to go by. We are somewhere between Zashiversh and Virkni. Probably we have landed on what is known as the Nijni steppe. It is something of a barren waste, if I remember right, but dotted here and there with stations and a few little farms.”

“Wish we could find one of them,” grumbled Hiram, good naturedly.

“No chance of supper if we don’t,” observed Elmer.

“See here, fellows, we’ll push the machine along, anyway, and see what we come to,” remarked Dave. “Any shelter is better than this all out of doors position. Even a stretch of timber or the side of a hill would seem homelike just now.”

“It’s better to keep moving, anyhow,” declared Hiram, stamping his feet vigorously. “This will be a big thing to tell about if we ever get home again, fellows.”

“Steady,” ordered Dave, and he slowed up the biplane, the wheels of which ran along pretty lightly, deep as the snow was. “The ground is changing. Stop the machine. I’ll prospect a bit ahead.”

In addition to the enveloping gloom of the storm, it

had begun to get dusk. Dave proceeded alone. He discovered that the ground was rough and rising. Then he ran against a tree, and clearing his sight of the obstructing snowflakes he made out that they had come upon a little stretch of timber.

“Come on, but cautiously,” he called back to his comrades.

The *Comet* was pushed along and halted between two heavily needled trees, affording it considerable shelter. Hiram gave a shout of delight as he discovered a spot where the ground was almost bare. A double row of immense fir trees formed a protecting canopy for several yards.

“Come in out of the wet, Dave!” shouted Elmer, in a jolly tone, joining Hiram, and all hands shook the snow from their garments.

“Shelter, plenty of fuel and a chance for a warm meal,” observed Hiram with satisfaction. “Here’s some good bits of wood,” and he began gathering up pieces of dead branches with which the spot was littered.

“I’ll get a lantern,” said Dave, moving over towards the biplane.

“This is not half bad,” declared Elmer, assisting his comrade in gathering up the loose fuel.

“Say, what’s that?”

Hiram spoke in a startled tone. He dropped his armful of wood and stood stock still. Elmer edged nearer to him.

An ominous sound had greeted their hearing. It was a howl near at hand, sharp and resonant. Then it was repeated. Staring in the direction from which the sounds came, Hiram jumped back, shouting out

sharply:

“It’s wolves! Dave, look out! Elmer, grab a club! Quick! Here they come!”

Scurrying forms came flying into the tree-formed arcade. The outlines were dim, but none the less threatening and terrifying. Hiram had grabbed up a heavy piece of wood. Elmer was no coward, and did not lose his nerve. He armed himself speedily as his comrade had done, and ranged himself by his side.

“It’s wolves,” declared Hiram—“two, three, half a dozen of them. Stand steady”—whack!

Fiery-eyed, red-tongued, seeming to skim the ground, the foremost animal of an alarming pack came flying towards the boys. Hiram had struck out. The blow was aimed with all his strength and skill. It sounded like a hammer landing hard on a thick metal ball.

The animal fell back to all fours and limply turned to one side. Two others leaped boldly over its slinking body.

“Strike your hardest,” puffed and panted Hiram. Whack! whack! One of the new combatants of the boys limped off with a shattered paw. The other, infuriated with pain from a terrific clip across the jaws, made direct for Elmer. Its claws clutched its prey by the shoulders. Its distended mouth sought the lad’s throat.

Once, twice, thrice the billet of wood in the grasp of Hiram arose and descended. The wolf dropped away, dripping with blood, but Elmer was saved from its murderous fangs.

“They’re coming,” he cried “A half dozen of them! Oh, good! It’s all right now.”

Over the imperilled lads and beyond them, and

squarely into the faces of the howling pack, a great glare suddenly shot out. Dave had caught the situation at Hiram's first outcry. He could not in a hurry reach the armament of weapons carried by the *Comet*. The big reflector lantern, however, was kept always in a handy spot, especially at nightfall. Dave had secured this. Lighting it as he ran, he flared its broad beams, focused to a dazzling brilliancy. The wolves, blinded and affrighted, drew off with sullen, menacing growlings.

"Light the fire. It will be an added safeguard," ordered the young airman rapidly, and he moved in a circle, swinging the lantern glow continuously.

Hiram hurriedly got leaves, chips and branches together in a heap. He flared a match and ignited it.

"Those animals have given us up as hard cases, I guess," observed Elmer, with a laugh, half nervous, but quite triumphant.

"We must draw the machine closer to us," suggested Dave. "Help me, Elmer."

The campfire began to blaze, Dave, with the lantern, ventured as far as the spot where the *Comet* was. With the aid of his companion the biplane was wheeled a few yards along the arcade, where it seemed they must make a camp, at least until the storm abated.

Hiram was getting ready to secure some food and cooking utensils from the machine, when he paused, bent his ear, and his face expressed a new alarm.

"Hark!" he cried out sharply. "What was that?"

CHAPTER XVII

A GRATEFUL FRIEND

The oncoming night in the dreary solitude with which the young airmen were environed seemed filled with alarms. All three listened intently.

At a further distance away than at the first, the renewed howling of the wolves broke forth. The pack seemed to have chanced upon some new trail of prey.

“Why,” Hiram was the first to break the thrilling silence, “do you hear that, fellows?”

“Sleigh bells!” cried Elmer, instantly.

“Yes, and I hear the neighing of horses,” added our hero. “More than one. Listen!”

Muffled yet unmistakable, the sound of sleigh bells jangling sharply broke upon the air. There followed loud echoing neighs. Then there rose a sudden scream.

“Oh, Dave!” gasped Hiram, “it was a human voice! A man’s scream, I’ll wager! There it is again!”

“One of you keep with me,” shouted Dave, in an urgent tone. “This way!”

Seizing the reflector lantern, the young aviator dashed along the arcade. It was Hiram who first heeded his order. He had grabbed up the heaviest club at hand. At the end of the arcade Dave halted for a moment, confused by the blinding snow eddies and the dim obscurity.

“That way, straight ahead,” panted the wrought up Hiram, as another wild scream rang out.

It was mingled with the echoes of the sleigh bells in

quite another direction. It was mixed with the baying and howls of the wolves nearer at hand.

The pilot of the *Comet* dashed on. The snow was deep and clogging. Hiram labored at his heels. The eye of light showed nothing until they had gone nearly fifty feet. Then its rays illumined a startling picture.

Upon the snow, lying upon heavy fur robes, was a man. Supporting himself upon one elbow, he was slashing about him with a short, horn-handled, thick-bladed knife. Around him more than a dozen wolves were seeking to spring upon and disable him. The minute the light dazzled the ravenous pack, they drew away, baffled.

The rescued man was clad in heavy furs. His cap, the gloves he wore, his whole equipment indicated comfort and wealth. He seemed to take in the situation at a glance. As he struggled to his feet, a motion of his hand showed deep gratitude.

He shuddered as he bent his ear to catch the retreating bayings of the wolves. Just a faint echo of the sleigh bells was now audible. A look of satisfaction came into the man's face as he discovered this. He spoke some words in a language the young airmen could not understand. Dave pointed to the campfire, and the man bowed. Then Hiram helped him pick up the scattered sleigh robes. Dave leading the way, all hands started for the arcade.

"Who is he?" whispered the curious Elmer to Hiram, as the trio came within the radius of the cheery blaze he had built up with great armfuls of wood.

"Russian, I guess," replied Hiram. "He can't tell us, though, for we don't understand him."

"Did the wolves attack him?"

“It looks that way. I think the horses got frightened and ran away. They seemed to have tipped him and the sleigh robes over into the snow. I tell you, we reached him just in time, or those hungry brutes would have had him.”

The rescued man came up to the fire, removing his gloves and extending his chilled hands towards the grateful blaze. One coat sleeve had been ripped from end to end in his encounter with the wolves, his face bore a deep scratch. Otherwise he seemed uninjured from his recent thrilling experience.

He glanced strangely and then with interest at the three boys in turn. He stared hard as his eye fell upon the biplane. His glance lingered upon it in a puzzled, studious way. Finally he turned to its pilot, and extended his hands upwards, as if imitating a bird flying. Dave nodded.

Then the man spoke. From the deep gutturals, mingled long drawn out words and “skis.” Dave decided that he was speaking in the Russian tongue, and shook his head. More mellow and natural sounding, some words followed which Dave took to be French. He smiled, but showed that he did not yet understand.

“It is English, then?” spoke the man, with very fair pronunciation.

“Yes, English—American,” replied Dave, pleased to be understood. “We stopped our airship here on account of the storm.”

“It is so?” answered the man. “A few versts further, and you would have reached the station. That is Mokiva. I am the superintendent. You shall come there to share the best I have. You have saved my poor life.”

And then quite solemnly the man went the rounds.

He shook each of his young friends by the hand, looking them steadily in the eyes.

Hiram hurried up the meal, got some hot coffee ready, and passed it around. It warmed up, and acted as an excellent accompaniment to some canned pork and beans, some toasted cheese, and plenty of crackers.

The glow of the fire was penetrating and comforting. They were seated on the thick, heavy robes. Hiram was quite jolly over their pleasant situation.

The rescued man had to talk slowly and pick his words to make them understand him. He told them that his name was Adrianoffski. He was a trader, and lived at Mokiva, about twelve miles distant. He had been at another station across country, and had started to return home, not dreaming that he could not reach it before dark. The unexpected snowstorm had overtaken him, and the wolves had gotten after the sleigh. The tragic climax had been averted by the prompt action of Dave Dashaway.

It more than compensated the boys for their trouble as they got better acquainted with the man. It seemed that he had agents, friends, and trading stations, all through Russia and in several Asiatic countries. With some of these he only exchanged goods, while others he owned.

At the end of two hours the interested young airmen had learned more of real geography right on the spot than they had ever picked up at school.

The storm let up finally. An adverse wind, however, had set in.

“I hardly think we had better risk the hard work and danger of a run to-night,” our hero advised his helpers. “We are fairly comfortable here.”

“That’s right,” assented Elmer, who had been enjoying it immensely, writing up his “log.” “We’ll have great fun when we get home in some snug and cozy corner, telling our friends of what a real snowstorm is.”

“There’s something!” exclaimed Dave, suddenly, starting up from his resting place on the robes.

“Why, it’s another sleigh!” cried Hiram. “If they see our fire, whoever is coming, we will have some more company.”

“Ah, it is well,” broke in Adrianoffski, his eyes brightening. “I much thought they would seek me.”

The speaker reached inside his heavy coat and drew out a whistle, and proceeded to blow on this. It was so small that the boys were fairly amazed at the shrill, clear, far-reaching sound it made. The Russian sent out a dozen or more calls. They seemed timed to some rhythmic signal, for as the boys listened there was a response.

Going to the end of the arcade, they noticed lights approaching. These outlined three horses attached to a sleigh bearing lamps. The vehicle came directly up to them and halted. Two men leaped from the sleigh and approached their employer with pleased words.

“My horses ran home, as I thought they would,” Adrianoffski explained to the boys, after conversing with his servants in their native dialect. “My people at once started out to find me. Ah, this is excellent. You shall partake of the best at Mokiva this night.”

“We would be glad to go with you,” said Dave, “but we dare not leave our machine unguarded.”

“Unguarded?” repeated the Russian with forcefulness. “My friends, you know not the fidelity of

these, my people. They shall remain here all night, and your airship shall be guarded as though it were pure gold. Fear nothing, these men are trusty and tried.”

A thought of all Adrianoffski might tell them of practical details of their route ahead, induced the young airman to agree to his wishes. He made sure that the Russian instructed his servants as to due watchfulness in their vigil. It was understood that they should be brought back to the camp very early in the morning. Then the boys, muffled up in cold-defying fur robes, took a real bracing Russian sleigh ride.

They found that the station comprised two large warehouses. In one of these Adrianoffski had his living quarters. They were comfortable, even luxurious. Nothing would do but that another meal should be served. Then the host of the airship boys took them to his office and library combined.

Our hero had explained at the camp on the steppe about their proposed race around the world. Adrianoffski was deeply interested. He had a large globe showing the world, and he made Dave indicate the route they had come, and the proposed one ahead. In turn, with considerable pride he showed red crosses he had made in red ink all over European and Asiatic Russia, Persia, Turkey and Northern Africa.

“I have learned something of many languages and peoples,” he said. “As you see, I have posts or stations all over this part of the world. You saved my life. Let me direct you to good friends, who will surely cherish you for that kindly act.”

Dave passed his finger over that part of the globe marked Thibet. For a long time he questioned the trader.

“There is a wonderful city there, called Lhasa,” observed the young airman. “You know of it?”

“I know of it,” assented Adrianoffski—“ah, well, indeed. It is here, a few versts only from Lhasa, that my trusted partner, Ben Mahanond Adasse, has his great depot. He trades solely in Thibet. You would go there?”

“To Lhasa, yes,” answered Dave.

“Impossible!” exclaimed the Russian, with almost startling force. “My son, you know not what you say. Lhasa—it is the city of mystery, the sacred metropolis of the tried and chosen. For an outsider to appear at its gates is capture—life imprisonment. For a foreigner to penetrate to its secret recesses, is sure death.”

“But your partner, this Ben Mahanond Adasse?” questioned the young aviator, “I could visit him without risk?”

“With certain welcome,” promptly responded Adrianoffski. “He is powerful, he is favored. He could protect you. But go no further than his home, lest you go to your doom. As to my partner—see, I give you a talisman, a token.”

The Russian removed from his finger a large seal ring, and pressed it into the hand of Dave Dashaway.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN STRANGE LANDS

Dave and his boy friends had no cause to regret their meeting with Adrianoffski. Their stay at the trading station, brief as it was, had given new impetus and encouragement to the expedition. The Russian gave them points as to their route that enabled them to save time and distance. Besides that, he named places where they might stop and be assured of friendly and helpful service from his agents.

“I tell you, meeting Mr. Adrianoffski was fine luck,” said Hiram, enthusiastically, one morning, as they started up for the day’s flight. “We are pretty sure to reach Lhassa without much trouble; aren’t we, Dave?”

“To reach its vicinity, you mean,” corrected the young airman. “I am greatly depending on this Ben Mahanond Adasse to whom our Russian friend has directed us.”

They had left the severe wintry blasts behind them two days flight out of Mokiva. While the weather was not at all summery, the milder climate as they proceeded southward was in pleasing contrast to what they had endured in the bleak and barren solitude of Siberia.

So far everything had gone pretty close to the schedule the pilot of the *Comet* had laid out when they left Washington. They reached stations as planned. There was no trouble in securing gasoline and other supply stores. Then, too, there were pleasant breaks in their arduous flights. The ring Adrianoffski had given Dave acted magically when shown at depots along the route to which he had directed him.

It was at Kolyvan that a full day's stop had to be made. There were some machine repairs necessary. Through telegrams and newspapers the airship boys were able to glean some information as to their competitors in the race. Out of the twelve that had started only four had reached Sitka. The closest rival was machine number seven, reported at that point six hours after the *Comet* had left.

The machine crossed Thibetan territory about noon time. Dave was able to determine this from charts, points given by Adrianoffski, and the contour of the district. It was an interesting panorama they viewed all the rest of that day. They passed over great camel trains traversing the barren plains. They had a chance to see the native yaks, trained to perform all the duties of horses. The extensive lamaseries, or monasteries, some of them built on the very apex of well-nigh inaccessible cliffs, amazed them.

The *Comet* was viewed by gaping groups whenever they passed over a settlement. Dave had a town called Zirva for his evening destination. It was near here that Ben Mahanond Adasse had his trading station. The young air pilot calculated upon arriving after dark. It might interfere with his plans to have the *Comet* publicly seen so near to the sacred city of mystery.

"Judging from the landmarks described by Mr. Adrianoffski," said Dave, towards the middle of the afternoon, "I think we are quite near to Zirva."

"That is the trading post of his partner?" spoke Hiram.

"Yes," nodded the young aviator. "Those glittering spires and domes in the distance must be Lhasa. We must look for a secure and secluded landing place."

This they found soon afterwards. It was at the edge of a rugged hill. Beyond it were some straggling settlements, but the *Comet* was screened from these as it approached the hill from the east.

“I don’t care about attracting the attention of the natives,” explained our hero. “They are quite fanatical, and have probably never seen an airship before. They might think it some demon of the air, or an infernal machine come to destroy their gods and temples.”

“Yes, I think myself we had better keep in the background as much as we can,” agreed Hiram. “It would be a pity to have a mishap now, with the hardest part of the route covered.”

“But how are you going to locate this Adasse?” inquired Elmer.

“According to what Mr. Adrianoffski told us,” replied Dave, “his station cannot be more than a few miles from here.”

“What’s your plan about finding him, Dave?” asked Hiram.

“Why, as soon as it gets dusk I will venture down into the valley there. You two will stay here on guard. Keep ready for a quick flight, if any of the natives discover the machine.”

The trio enjoyed the luxury of a grateful rest on the ground while they conversed. Hiram, speedy to recuperate and always active, strolled away from his comrades. He looked out over the country. Then he became interested in watching a man just below the point where the *Comet* had landed.

“Say fellows,” he observed briskly, coming back to his friends; “if you want to see something queer just take a

peep over the edge of that rock yonder.”

“What is it, Hiram?” inquired Elmer.

“You have to come with me to find out,” was the reply. “I can’t imagine what a funny old fellow down below there is up to.”

“All right, we’ll take a look,” said Dave.

“There he is,” pronounced Hiram, after the others had followed him a little distance, and he pointed past a shelving rock.

On the level of the valley below a native was squatted before a flat boulder. He held in his hand a comical metal object with an ivory handle. He seemed turning the handle. The boys, even at the distance they were, could hear a click-clack sound, apparently proceeding from the device.

“Say, whatever is that contraption?” asked the puzzled Hiram.

“Looks like a cross between a nutmeg grater and a music box,” suggested Elmer.

Dave ventured no opinion. Like the others he continued to watch the curious pantomime of the native. The lips of the man moved incessantly, making a dull monotonous drone. Finally he placed the device on the stove before him and closed his eyes.

His body swayed and he flung his arms aloft. Then he bent his forehead clear to the ground. All the time he kept up a steady monotone.

Finally he arose to his feet and picked up a knapsack and a long, sharp-pointed spear. He was about to resume his way. Just then a huge bird resembling an eagle, only snowy white, sailed down from a tree on the

hillside. It swooped over the boulder and made a peck at its surface. The next moment it soared aloft, the trinket in its bill.

The native uttered a wild, frantic shriek. Of a sudden he was transposed into a being denuded of reason. As the bird flew up over the crest of the hill, the man cast himself prostrate on the ground; writhing there in agony. Beating his head with his hands, his face distorted, he acted like some person in a fit.

“Well, that’s something odd to see,” began Hiram — “what is it, Dave?”

The young airman had watched the course of the thieving bird, eagle, macaw, crow, or whatever it was. He saw the bird sail along until its glance fell upon the biplane. Then it dropped to one of the wings. The bauble retained in its bill, it walked over to one of the seats, dropped its prize, and began pecking at the seat cushions.

Our hero was on his feet in an instant of time. He ran towards the machine, intent on scaring away the predatory intruder. Dave had picked up a stick. This he hurled at the bird. It gave a sullen croak and took to wing, disappearing on the other side of the hill.

The young airman was curious and interested enough to lean over into the body of the machine and secure the object dropped by the bird. He was viewing it critically and with some comprehension of its use, when his comrades joined him.

“What is it, Dave?” queried Hiram eagerly. “That old fellow below yonder is tearing up the ground and rolling all about in a fearful fashion.”

“I know what it is,” pronounced Dave, “and I think we had better get it back to its owner and save some

mischievous for him. This is what is called a prayer mill. See, this handle turns a silken scroll on a reel all covered with queer-looking characters. These represent the prayers the Thibetans make to their great idol, Da-Fan-Jan. The priests supply them to the worshippers. They are highly prized. I have read about them, and have seen pictures of these queer prayer mills, as they call them."

"You're not going down there to give it back to the native; are you?" asked Hiram; in some surprise, as Dave looked about him to discover the easiest way of descending the hillside.

"Yes, I think I had better," was the reply. "You don't know how these superstitious people value such charms. This prayer mill may have been cherished in that man's family for centuries. It is regarded an heirloom, and the person losing it probably thinks he is condemned if he does not recover it."

Our hero hurried his steps. Descending the hillside alone he chanced to glance at the native. The man had now arisen to his feet. All his violent manner had disappeared. His face wore a look of sullen despair.

He had taken his spear and fastened its end stoutly under an edge of the boulder in a slanting position. Its keen point showed breast high. The man had retreated some twenty feet. There he stood posed for a run. Dave recalled something he had read of the hari-kari of the rude Asiatic tribes. Suicide, swift and terrible, was the rule where some great loss, disgrace, or bereavement unsettled the mind.

"He means to impale himself with all his force on that spear point and end his life," decided the young aviator. "Hoi-hoi!"

Just in time did Dave distract the native from his

tragic purpose. He fairly tumbled down the hill as the man, running at full speed, had almost reached the waiting instrument of death. Dave's shout made him waver. As he dangled the prayer mill towards the wretched man, the latter came to a pause like a statue.

The eyes of the native were glued to the amulet as if he was fascinated. To his overheated fancy Dave possibly suggested some "white god" sent from the clouds to restore the precious prayer mill.

The young airman came directly up to the native and extended the trinket. The dark, bony hand of the devotee reached out and clasped it. He burst into tears, kissed it, caressed it. He thrust it into his bosom, and raising his arms in wild gyrations began a shrill, joyful chant.

When it was concluded he cast himself on the ground. Crawling abjectly he embraced Dave's knees. He lifted his eyes in gratitude.

A stout steel chain bearing at one end a serviceable watch and at its other the ring Adrianoffski had given Dave, met the glance of the grateful suppliant.

"Oi-e! oi-e!" he suddenly shouted. His fingers touched the ring. His eyes, showing an intelligence he could not express, rested on the face of the young aviator.

CHAPTER XIX

STRANGE COMPANIONS

Our hero was not slow in discovering that the native saw something in the ring he wore which centered his attention and interest. As Dave smiled and looked upon him in a friendly way, the man showed less strangeness and timidity.

He touched the ring now and arose to his feet. He again touched the ring and then two of his fingers. Dave fancied that he understood his companion. He believed that the man wished to inform him that there was another ring—two rings, both alike.

Then the native again inspected his restored prayer mill. He gazed at it fondly, with a great smile of joy. He pointed at the spear and shuddered and shrank away from it. Then he fairly beamed on the young airman. He dropped to the ground and placed Dave's foot on his neck. He acted as if he wanted his new friend to know that he was his slave for life.

After the man had gone through all these manœuvres Dave held up the ring. The native made a motion to describe a long flowing beard. Adrianoffski wore such and doubtless his partner did also. Now our hero felt certain that not only was the ring familiar to the native, but likewise that he was telling that its duplicate belonged to Ben Mahanond Adasse, and that he knew the merchant.

“Where?” spoke Dave, and exhausted his pantomimic skill in trying to express the word in signs. He pointed first in one direction and then in the other. His companion followed every gesture he made intently, seeming anxious to understand what he meant.

The man pointed to the southwest, and moved his finger along the horizon. He tried to express distance. The young aviator by signs conveyed the idea that he wished to see the owner of the other ring, the man with long flowing beard.

The native nodded a dozen times with intelligence and satisfaction. He promptly took up his knapsack and spear and faced about, posed to assume the part of a guide.

The pilot of the *Comet* did not wish to leave his friends without apprising them of his intentions. He motioned to the native to remain where he was. He then went up the hillside about half way. He knew that his comrades could now hear him.

Dave in a sing-song voice, so as not to make the native suspect that he was speaking to anybody, managed to tell Hiram and Elmer as to his plans. When he came back to the valley the man started away and Dave followed him.

It was not more than three miles from the hill that they began to near a high enclosure. It was formed of high, thick stakes driven close together, and was a kind of palisade. The native halted at its rear. He selected one knotted stake and ran up it with the agility of a monkey. He disappeared on the other side. Then there was the sound of a metal latch moving, and a section of the palisade opened. Dave's guide pulled him inside a yard. He led the way to a flat, broad building that filled all the front of the place. They entered a room dimly lighted, piled high with furs, pelts and wicker boxes of merchandise. It was a great warehouse, the young airman surmised, stored with rich silks from Persia, teas from China, ivory and oils from India, and miner's supplies for the secret, guarded gold mines of Thibet.

When they came to a door with a sash in its upper part, Dave glanced curiously through this window. The front of the building was open. Upon platforms there were displayed in great confusion all kinds of goods. A noisy throng was bartering and bustling about, as if it was some street fair. Beyond them were rude wooden wheeled vehicles, and yaks, camels, and even bison, used as beasts of burden.

Rude and uncultured as the native was, his loyalty to Dave seemed to arouse some instinct of caution. He motioned his companion to remain where he was, and passed out into the emporium. In a very few minutes he returned with a long-bearded man. Dave noted his resemblance in feature and dress to Adrianoffski.

“It is Mr. Adasse?” spoke Dave.

The merchant bowed assentingly, but stared wonderingly at his visitor. It appeared that few persons foreign to the country ventured thus far into Thibet.

“I came from Mr. Adrianoffski,” explained Dave. “He gave me this ring,” and our hero exhibited the object in question.

“Ah, then, you must be a very good friend,” exclaimed the Russian, his face brightening into a warm welcome at once. “My poor roof, as was his, is yours.”

Adasse led Dave to a far end of the house, where there was a comfortable room. Its owner spoke English quite as well as his partner. He told his guest that he would get through his trading as quickly as possible, and return to entertain him.

This did not occur for nearly an hour. It was dusk by then, lamps were lit, curtains drawn, and two native servants brought in an appetizing meal.

All this time the native to whom Dave had restored the prayer mill lay down upon a mat in the room. Adasse explained to his guest that the man was named Faiow. He was a trusted agent, sometimes employed by Adasse in making sales to persons in Lhasa.

The young airman found Adasse to be quite as kindly disposed towards him as Adrianoffski had been. Dave inquired closely as to Lhasa and its mysteries. Finally he made up his mind to implicitly trust his host.

From an inner pocket Dave drew a photograph. It was the one furnished to him at Washington by Miss Edna Deane. The picture of her missing brother.

“I have come a long distance to find this man,” said Dave. “He is an explorer, detained in Lhasa.”

“You expect to find him!” exclaimed Adasse, in a startled tone. “Ah, my friend, you seek death in even speaking of it, should one of the faithful hear you. Many rash explorers and adventurers have ventured to pass the gates of Lhasa. They have never returned.”

The speaker as well as the young airman started as a voice behind them uttered a sharp intelligent sound. It proceeded from Faiow, who, unheeded by them, had been moving about the room. Looking up, Dave saw the man with his eyes fixed upon the photograph.

“Speak to him,” said Dave, quickly. “I believe that picture suggests something to him.”

Adasse directed some questions in the native tongue to Faiow, and there was quite a colloquy between them. Then the Russian turned to his guest with the words:

“He knows the man. He has seen him.”

“Where? when?” inquired Dave, eagerly.

“He does not tell. He says he will take you where you, too, may see him.”

“Take me into Lhasa?” asked Dave, wonderingly.

“Yes. His gratitude towards you is almost fanatical. Let me question further.”

It was at the end of a second conversation with the native that Adasse imparted some new information to the young aviator.

“Faiow has the right of entry to Lhasa as a trader,” he explained. “Once a week he carries dates boiled in wild honey to the great temple of Oi-Fou-Jan. It is there that he has seen a man, a stranger, the face in that picture. He says there are several of these intruders in the city. They have been imprisoned in strong dungeons, or given menial work to do for the priests. The grand Llama will not permit them to be executed, for the blood of such is believed to profane the sacred city.”

“But how will it be possible for me to visit the city?” inquired our hero.

“Faiow will arrange all that, he says,” replied Adasse. “You wish to know where your friend is?”

“Yes,” nodded Dave.

“He promises to show you. No outsider is allowed to enter the city gates unveiled. He says it is better to go now. He will provide you with a garb like his own. Weekly he carries two bags of dates boiled in honey to the city priest. You will help him, appearing as his servant. You will probably pass muster. But, if you are suspected, it will mean sure death.”

“I am ready to take the risk,” pronounced the young airman, resolutely.

It was half an hour later when Dave started for the sacred city with the native. Each carried a bag, each wore the native costume, and each was veiled.

The pilot of the *Comet* knew that his fellow aviators would take good care of the biplane. He was anxious primarily to find out where young Deane was imprisoned. He did not understand the Thibetan tongue, and therefore could not converse with his guide. He felt sure, however, that he could rely on the fidelity and intelligence of Faiow.

They reached the gates of the city in about two hours. Faiow and his companion were admitted without challenge. Dave was filled with interest at all the strange sights he viewed. Immense temples and queerly constructed stores and houses were on every hand. A busy populace filled the lighted streets. Faiow finally reached a temple, in front of which was a great squat idol, its feet alone ten feet across. Its hideous head reached up nearly to the roof of a high, broad, stone pillar-shaped structure.

In front of it Faiow halted. He touched the arm of his companion to attract his attention, and pointed to the roof of the building. This was guarded with a sort of railing. At intervals along this lamps were burning.

Ever and anon a bird resembling a stork would light on the railing. A man approached them, bearing on the end of a golden rod a fragment of food. He would feed this to a bird, and then go to another of his feathery visitors.

The young airman thrilled, as in the full flare of the many lights he closely studied the face of this strange hermit aloft. Even at that distance he was able to observe that the lone roof sentinel was not a native.

“It is my man,” spoke the young pilot of the *Comet* to himself. “I have found the missing Morris Deane!”

CHAPTER XX

RESCUED

The native uttered a low, warning sound, and touched the arm of the young aviator. Dave was absorbed in studying the singular being on the roof of the structure, but at a glance he saw a street guard approaching. He knew that the movements of his companion urged him not to arouse any suspicion. He followed him as he turned away.

Our hero took a final view of the pillar-like building and its surroundings. He tried to fill his mind with landmarks so he could locate it again. Not, however, by the land route. Dave Dashaway realized that the biplane must play a part in his plans if he hoped to succeed in the rescue of young Deane.

“What does it mean—the strange situation of my friend?” was Dave’s first question, after he and his guide had returned to the trading post.

Adasse spoke for a long time in his native tongue to Dave’s guide. Then he explained:

“Your friend is a perpetual prisoner on the roof where you saw him.”

“But for what purpose?” inquired our hero.

“A true devotee must not touch an evil bird; it is contagious, they think, nor a sacred bird either,” continued the Russian; “it is sacrilege. The duty of your friend is to keep the unclean birds away from the sacred pillar in the daytime. At night he feeds the sacred birds with honeyed dates. They know the food is awaiting them and come nightly.”

“He is there alone, then?” asked Dave.

“He lives always on duty on that roof,” replied Adasse. “There, I suppose, he has a shelter of some kind, probably a tent. There is a grating in the roof. Through this his food is probably passed to him. Beyond it and around the pillar are constantly armed guards.”

“You have done a great deal for me,” said Dave gratefully. “I must leave you now.”

“I shall forget all you have told me,” observed the Russian, significantly; “except that it has been pleasant to entertain a friend of my partner. There is nothing I may do for you?”

“There is this,” replied the young aviator—“Mr. Adrianoffski has given me the address of an agent fifty miles west of here. I wish you would explicitly direct me to him.”

After receiving and memorizing his information, Dave proceeded at once to rejoin his friends. The native insisted on going with him as far as the hill. When they parted he handed Dave a basket bag. Then through signs and grimaces he tried to indicate the gratitude he felt towards the restorer of his precious prayer mill.

It must have been after midnight when Dave reached the summit of the hill. He found Hiram seated near the *Comet*, armed with one of the rifles the machine carried. Elmer lay asleep on the ground.

“All safe and sound, eh?” commended the young airman, in a pleased tone.

“Yes, we haven’t been discovered or visited,” reported his loyal assistant. “We began to wonder what kept you away so long, though.”

“Wake up, Elmer, and I’ll tell you both all about it,”

announced Dave.

His two friends listened with the intensest interest to his narrative. Hiram glanced curiously at the basket bag as Dave spoke of it.

“Wonder what’s in it?” questioned Elmer.

“I’ll find out,” suggested Hiram.

It proved to contain over a dozen packages. These were wicker covered porcelain jars. Removing their covers, Hiram smacked his lips with satisfaction as he sampled their contents.

“Say,” he gloated, “just sample these dainties! Why, it beats homemade molasses candy all hollow!”

All hands did some “sampling.” They found preserved ginger, honeyed dates, some melon rind finely flavored—in fact a series of native confections as toothsome as they were rich and novel.

“What’s the programme now, Dave?” inquired Hiram, the spell of feasting concluded.

“Morris Deane, of course,” responded the young airman, promptly.

“To-night; right away?” asked Elmer.

“We must lose no time getting on our route,” replied our hero. “It seems to me that we have been most fortunate in meeting the people who have assisted us so grandly in locating the man we are after. I feel positive I can find the structure where I saw Deane. Its roof is large enough for a safe descent. Get ready, fellows.”

“Say, it will be a great feather in your cap if you get this Mr. Deane safely away from there; won’t it, Dave?” spoke Hiram.

“I hope to do just that,” replied the pilot of the *Comet*,

confidently. "You can imagine what joy his friends will feel to have him restored to them."

"Especially that pretty little miss who drove up to the hangar near Washington in that automobile, Dave," suggested Elmer, mischievously.

The *Comet* was in starting trim, and the young aviators took their places. The air and the breeze showed ideal conditions for an easy flight.

There was clear moonlight, but Dave counted on the city being asleep. As he neared it, however, the bright lamps on the top of towers and temples caused him to take to a high area to avoid being discovered.

Circle after circle he described in a narrowing course, at last making sure that he had located the structure he had visited with the native. He indicated this to his comrades. All of them were infused with suspense and expectation.

The expert young aviator hovered over the structure. He estimated time, distance and risks. The *Comet* made a superb dip. It skimmed the parapet of the pillar and landed silently on the roof. In doing so, however, one of its wings tipped over one of the many ornate lamps lining the sides of the enclosure.

Dave sprang from the machine, his eye fixed on a small skin tent at one corner of the roof. Glancing within it, he saw lying upon a mat the man the native had pointed out to him six hours previous. Our hero seized his arm and shook him.

"Quick Mr. Deane!" he called out. "We are friends—friends from your people."

Startled and confused at the suddenness of the waking up, the pillar sentinel sprang to his feet. He

seemed about to rush towards the grating in the roof to sound an alarm.

“Look, look,” continued Dave, rapidly, producing the picture of Edna Deane. “It is your sister! She sent this as a token! Quick, now!”

“Dave, make haste!” called out Hiram, sharply. “There’s something wrong!”

The young airman almost dragged the bewildered captive across the roof. He acted in a great hurry, for something had emphasized Hiram’s warning cry. A series of yells rang through the grating in the roof. Beyond it a man was dancing up and down in frantic state of excitement.

The pilot of the *Comet* at once decided that this must be some watchman or sentinel. He had discovered the arrival of the airship. Now he was shouting out the news of his discovery, probably to others within the structure.

Another cause of alarm was an incipient blaze directly on the roof. The lamp that the wing of the biplane had overturned had spilled its contents. The oil had ignited, some rugs had taken fire, and the blaze had caught a canopy near by. The *Comet* itself was menaced by the rising blaze. Dave reached the machine and gave rapid orders to his assistants.

“Get in, quick!” he directed his companion, but the rescued captive was too overcome to act for himself. Hiram helped pull him over into his own seat, vacating this and getting into the storage space behind it.

Dave got to the pilot post at once, and glanced back. Elmer was flapping back the encroaching flames with a robe. Just then the grating in the roof was unlocked. Up through it came a dozen native guards.

But for the fact that these men were so startled at the unusual scene presented to them, the *Comet* and its passengers might never have left the mystic city of Lhasa. Thrown off their mental balance by a sight of the unfamiliar machine, the guards stood staring helplessly about and then rushed forward to extinguish the fire on the roof.

“That was a tight squeeze,” gasped Hiram Dobbs.

“We’re safe—grand!” cried the relieved Elmer.

The man they had rescued shrank back as the *Comet* arose like some great bird. Just then the loud brazen notes of an alarm bell sounded out. Then some shouts followed the speeding biplane. Leaving a vast turmoil behind them, the airship boys glided off into space, over the city, past its outer walls, making straight west for the haven of safety Dave had in view.

The young airmen did not attempt to converse with the rescued Deane. The latter, thin, pale and weak, was overcome with the excitement of the past few minutes. He sat like one in a daze, staring in marvelling wonder at the receding landscape. He made no move when Elmer belted him into the seat. He could not yet realize his removal from the wretched post of servitude which he had lately filled.

It was a lucky thing for our hero that Ben Mahanond Adasse had given him explicit directions as to the trading post fifty miles away from Lhasa, where Adrianoffski had another partner. It saved time and enabled a direct route, and two hours later the *Comet* descended to the ground in an open space behind a warehouse on the edge of a native settlement.

“Look after our friend and keep a sharp lookout,” Dave directed his assistants, and left the machine and

walked around to the front of the building nearby.

There were no lights or signs of habitation about the place. The young aviator seized a weighted cord suspended from a hook near the entrance to the building. He swung this time and again against the door.

A gleam of light soon showed, and the door was unbarred. A man wearing a fez appeared, a suspicious blink in his sleepy eyes. He stared challengingly at the disturber.

“You are Talzk Prevola?” inquired our hero, at once.

“An English!” exclaimed the man. “I am he whom you bespeak. But what of you?”

Dave produced the signet ring. As before along the journey its magical effect was immediate.

“It is from Adrianoffski,” said the trader. “You are welcome. Enter, my son. The place is yours.”

Dave was sure that the man was Prevola, and he was just as certain that he could be trusted implicitly. He briefly spoke of his acquaintance with Mr. Adrianoffski and the claim he held upon his confidence and gratitude.

“I have a friend,” explained our hero, “who must be conveyed quickly and safely to the nearest railroad point in Russia. He must be taken out of Thibet speedily and secretly.”

“The order of my friend’s friend is law with me,” declared Prevola, gravely. “You but speak, I obey.”

“I will shortly return,” said Dave, and he went out to the biplane and approached it.

“I wish to have a talk with you,” he said to Morris

Deane. "Help him out, Elmer."

The rescued young man was assisted from the machine. Our hero linked his arm in Deane's in a friendly, reassuring way. He led him to where a pile of wood lay and made him sit down beside him.

"Mr. Deane," he said, gently, "you understand that we are friends sent to rescue, to save you?"

"I am just trying to comprehend it all," was the reply, in a wavering tone of voice. "It seems incredible, astounding," and the speaker passed his hand over his face in a vague manner.

"Try and realize it all," urged the young airman, "for time is precious." And then our hero told all that there was to tell.

Each succeeding moment Morris Deane seemed to take in more clearly the extraordinary disclosures the young pilot had to make.

"I never dared dream of escape, of a rescue," spoke Deane. "And you and your friends have done this noble act! Can I ever show my gratitude? Think of it, that hopeless life at Lhasa, and now freedom—freedom!"

The speaker threw up his hands in an ecstatic way. He looked at his rescuer with tears in his eyes.

"Yes," replied the young airman, "it is freedom—your anxious father—your devoted sister—a fortune awaiting you and—home!"

CHAPTER XXI

WAR

“What was that, Dave?” asked Hiram Dobbs.

“War,” replied the young pilot of the *Comet*, and he used the word very seriously, “we have taken the wrong course, but there’s no going back now.”

The champion biplane was sailing over a broad, deep valley two hours after dusk. Everything was in brisk going trim. The days that had elapsed since the rescued captive, Morris Deane, had been cared for by the young airmen had passed pleasantly. They had crossed Russia, had reported at Teheran, had seen some of the wonders of Arabia, and now were traversing Turkish territory.

The affairs of young Deane had been adjusted with supreme satisfaction for our hero. It warmed his loyal heart to think that through the unselfish efforts of the crew of the *Comet*, the brother of Edna Deane was now speeding safely and comfortably on his way to those who had mourned him.

The trader friend of Adrianoffski had done everything in his power to make sure the homeward journey of the fugitive. The young airman had insisted on paying him liberally for his cooperation. He had arranged so that Morris Deane could be provided with money current in the different countries through which he must pass. The trader was to convey Deane out of Thibet concealed in a cart carrying merchandise. He was to be provided with a disguise. Until he passed the Russian frontier and was placed upon a train bound for St. Petersburg, two trusty agents were to accompany and protect him.

The boys felt happy over all this. They had lost little

time and gained some experience in doing a humane act. Then the regular schedule of progress was resumed. Now, as noted, Hiram had put a startling question. The pilot of the *Comet* had responded with an ominous assertion.

When Hiram had asked: "What was that?" a sudden glare in the distance followed by a harsh, detonating crash had caused his sudden query.

Our hero had explained that it was "War." He intimated further that this was a possible menace to their expedition, in that they might not retrace the route they had come.

"I hoped to keep out of the Turkish trouble," proceeded the young airman; "but we must take the edge of it, I fear. You know we passed over a great military camp just before dusk."

"Yes, and they sent a brisk volley after us," reminded Hiram.

"Without calculating the way the *Comet* can fly," added Elmer, with a chuckle.

"We had better keep at a pretty high level just the same," observed Dave. "I will be glad when we get out of these intricate mountain ranges. Then we can see what is ahead of us and get our bearings."

Just then another explosion sounded. It was mingled with a series of minor reports, echoing from past the ridge of hills to the East.

"That sounded like a powder mill blowing up, followed by a lot of musket shots," suggested Hiram.

"I have no doubt that it was a bomb," replied Dave. "Fighting is going on somewhere beyond us."

For some time echoes of near explosions reached the airship boys. Then there was a lapse into silence. The contour of the country changed and the hills lessened, and at length a level expanse spread out before them.

They could make out lights scattered all over the area. Here was a settlement, beyond it a town. Then in the distance they noticed what the young aviator decided to be a camp. Still farther beyond, flashes and booms apprised him that some kind of a combat was going on.

“We had better get out of this,” remarked the young pilot.

“O-oh!” fairly shouted Hiram, in spellbound wonder.

Of a sudden, from the direction of the camp, there shot up a broad, dazzling beam of radiance. It moved steadily, broadened and began to sweep the western horizon. Slowly traversing the sky, the sharp rays focused upon an object speeding through the air. A further sweep, and a duplicate for just an instant was framed by the piercing glow.

“A searchlight!” cried the startled Elmer.

“And two airships,” added Hiram. “Dave, what are we going to do?”

The young airman’s active brain was busy. He fancied he took in the situation. They were passing over a camp. Ahead of them was a walled town, now being attacked. The two airships to the west were probably bomb-carrying machines, stealing over the enemy to drop death-dealing projectiles into the midst of their camp.

“Dave,” whispered Elmer, almost too excited to speak, “we have been seen!”

This was true. A lateral sweep of the searchlight

brought the *Comet* into clear view. The operator of the great eye of radiance focused the piercing rays directly upon the *Comet*. Then, sweeping along, for an instant only they showed an airship almost directly over the craft of the young aviators.

“Another one,” cried Hiram sharply—“ugh!”

He shivered. All hands felt a jar, an impact. They heard a distinct whiz.

“Something was dropped!” pronounced Elmer, hoarsely. “There!”

Directly beneath them some descending object reached the ground. There were a thousand darting sparks of fire, then a tremendous boom.

“An airship from that camp,” said Dave, rapidly. “They took us for one of the enemy! We must get out of range! Hold steady, fellows!”

The pilot of the *Comet* knew that the moment had arrived for prompt, expert tactics. There might be as swift machines as his own among the war craft in action, but he doubted if any of them was constructed to take the higher level the *Comet* could attain. The machine made a superb shoot on a sharp tangent. Its progress was so rapid that it almost took away the breath of the excited crew. Again the groping searchlight sought to reveal the situation aloft.

“Hurrah—safe! beat! They’re not even in the race,” crowed the jubilant Elmer.

The sweeping glow showed the machine that had dropped a bomb towards a supposed rival fully a thousand feet below the *Comet*. Now its pilot put on full speed. Out of range of camp, town and the firing limit the splendid biplane sailed.

Two days later, none the worse for their unique experience, the airship boys arrived at Cairo. The *Comet* seemed to be no particular novelty to the crowd which greeted its arrival in the center of a great public square. They greeted the machine and its crew, however, with cheers. Dave left the machine in charge of his assistants, who were kept busy answering questions from the curious bystanders.

It was nearly an hour before Dave returned. He arrived seated on a wagon containing new fuel and food supplies for the *Comet*.

“Going to make any kind of a stop here, Dave?” inquired Hiram.

“Not a minute longer than it is necessary,” was the speedy reply. “We are third in the race, fellows, and that means no delay.”

“Yes,” nodded Elmer excitedly, “a man in the crowd speaking English said he knew we were one of the machines in the international race, and that two others had reported here at Cairo and had left again.”

“That is true,” answered the young airman. “Number seven is three days ahead of us, number eleven, six hours. Help get things in order, fellows. We can’t afford to lose any time now.”

When the *Comet* started up again the cheers and good wishes of the crowd were renewed. Dave made a fifty-mile run, came down in a lonely spot, and at once brought out the route charts.

“Look here, fellows,” he said, his finger tracing a course across the map; “there are three routes to choose from. From Morocco, the Azores, or Senegal; the Cape Verde Islands, St. Paul Island, and Cayenne. Those are the routes most talked about at the start. They are

avored because they are the farthest north and the most direct. I have a better, a least safer, idea.”

“I’ll warrant you have, Dave, if it’s to be found,” declared Hiram.

“What is it?” inquired Elmer.

“The objection to those routes,” explained the young airman, “is that the water stretches are of wide extent. What I dread most is the fear of being caught away from land.”

“Is there a shorter route than those you speak of?” asked Hiram.

“Yes, there is,” asserted Dave.

“What is it?”

“Egypt, the Sahara Desert, the French Congo, Ascension Island, St. Helena, Trinidad, Rio Janeiro, and we are on American soil.”

“Capital!” cried Hiram.

“I wouldn’t lose an hour, Dave,” advised Elmer, with real anxiety. “Ever since we found out that there are two of the crowd ahead of us, it seems as if I’d be willing to sleep in the seat in the machine all the way to get ahead of them.”

It was a warm, clear day when the *Comet* came to a rest at the city of Mayamlia, in French Congo. Looking back over the ten days consumed in making the run across Egypt, through Fezzan, the width of the great desert, over darkest Africa, and into the Soudan, the airship boys had viewed a country never before thus inspected by an aerial explorer.

“Baked, boiled, and soaked,” was the way Hiram put it, good-naturedly, but very grimly.

“And sandstorms and deluges,” added Elmer, with a grimace.

The flight had certainly been a hardy but instructive one. More than once the adventurous young aviators had a thrilling experience amidst unfamiliar air conditions. Twice they had been discovered in temporary camps by natives. The watchfulness and skill of their pilot had baffled efforts at capture.

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“Just to think,” said Hiram, gazing longingly at the ocean—“just a bit of water to cover, and we are on home territory.”

“Yes,” smiled our hero, “it looks nice and easy on the map. Remember one thing, though, fellows: here at Mayamliá we take in full supplies. The food and fuel will be easy as far as Helena or Trinidad. Between those points and the final flight to Rio, though, the gasoline supply is what we must look out for.”

“We’re going to make it—I feel it in my bones!” crowed the optimistic Hiram Dobbs.

CHAPTER XXII

LOST IN THE AIR

“This is serious, fellows,” spoke Dave. “Get ready for the worst.”

“What is the worst?” inquired Elmer Brackett.

“A sudden drop. You had better have the breeches buoys ready.”

“Oh, Dave!” cried Hiram Dobbs, in actual distress. “You don’t mean to say that the brave old *Comet* is going back on us just as it looks as though the home stretch is right ahead of us?”

“It’s the fog, fellows,” explained Dave. “We have beaten around in it for twelve hours, until I feel certain we are all out of our course. In a word, we are lost.”

“Lost in the air!” exclaimed Hiram—“who’d ever have thought of it!”

“Yes, just like a ship in strange waters,” said Dave. “If we were not so far from the mainland we left last week, there might be some hope. According to my calculation, we have missed St. Helena. If that is true, we can count on no land this side of Trinidad.”

“That must be hundreds of miles away,” remarked Hiram.

“Worse than that,” declared Elmer, who was pretty well posted on chart and “log” details. “If the fog would only lift!”

“That is our only hope,” declared Dave. “I do not wish to alarm you, fellows; but we must face the music like men. I don’t believe the *Comet* will last out six hours.”

“As bad as that?” said Hiram, in a subdued tone.

“Yes,” asserted the young airman. “If we could sight some ship I would not hesitate to descend upon its deck. This fog, of course, shuts out any chance to depend on that. The trouble is with our wires. That strain we had in last night’s wind seems to have played havoc with the entire steering gear.”

“Can’t it be fixed?” inquired Elmer, anxiously.

“Not while we’re flying,” replied Dave. “You know, the post is really a lever and the wheel a handle. The cloche, or bell-like attachment that runs to the warping wires, has got out of kilter. You know, the steering post is made of one-inch, twenty-gauge steel tubing. At the lower end of this is a fork made of pieces of smaller tubing, bent and brazed into place. The fork forms part of the universal joint on which the post is mounted. From this run the warping wires through pulleys to the elevators.”

Hiram nodded intelligently at this technical explanation. Elmer, too, understood what their pilot wished to convey to them.

“Some of the tubing is loose,” continued the young airman. “I have felt it vibrate for the past hour. If any part gives way, and a puff of wind should come up, we will lose all control of the steering gear.”

“The mischief!” ejaculated Hiram, who always got excited readily. “We’re in a bad fix; aren’t we?”

“Bad enough to keep on a low level, for fear we may turn turtle at any moment,” declared Dave.

The young aviator had not misstated conditions. The situation was a critical one, and he had known it for some time. Even now, as they made a straight volplane,

there was an ominous creak in the tubing joints, and the machine wobbled.

“Fellows, she’s going!” declared our hero. “We’ve got to drop or take a risk of a sudden plunge that may end everything.”

The *Comet* had no float attachment. Hiram got the breeches buoys and the life preservers ready. The fog was so heavy they could not see the sky above nor the sea beneath them. Dave allowed the machine to drift on a long, inclined dip. Something snapped. The *Comet* wavered from side to side but did not upset. There was a second sudden jar.

“Get ready. It’s a sure drop, any way we manage it,” shouted Dave.

All hands were ready to leap from the machine when it struck. Suddenly Dave shut off the power at a contact. The machine grated, ran on its wheels, and came to an astonishing but substantial standstill.

“Dave, Dave,” cried the delighted Hiram, springing out. “Land, solid land!”

“It can’t be! Must be a rock!” gasped Elmer, unbelievably.

“Whoop! hurrah!” yelled Hiram. “Oh, glory!”

Dave’s young assistant acted mad as a March hare. He could not help it. He sang and danced. Then he reached down and grabbed up handfuls of the light sand at his feet, and flung it joyously up in the air as if it were grains of precious gold.

“Sure as you live,” exclaimed the bewildered Elmer. “It’s solid land—oh, what luck!”

The young aviator was filled with surprise and

satisfaction. Such rare good fortune seemed incredible. He stood still, not caring if it was a sand bank or a desert island. They had escaped a fearful peril—and the *Comet* was safe.

“Who cares for the fog. Why, if it’s only a ten foot mud bank we’re so glad nothing else matters much just now,” declared the overwrought Hiram.

“It’s something better than that,” responded our hero brightly, all buoyed up now after the recent heavy strain on nerve and mind. “We must have landed on some island not down on the chart.”

“Let us explore,” suggested the impetuous Hiram.

“Let us eat first,” added the hungry Elmer. “It’s brought back my appetite, after that big scare.”

Dave went all over the machine, more with the sense of touch than actual eyesight inspection in that enveloping fog. He came back to his comrades not a whit discouraged.

“How is it, Dave?” asked Hiram.

“I can’t tell exactly,” was the reply. “Some of the tubing is loose and the gear is out of center. With what tools we have and duplicate parts, we may be able to fix things up good enough to carry on to the South American coast.”

“Let’s do it, then,” suggested the eager Elmer. “Those other fellows may get the biggest kind of a lead on us while we are delaying here.”

“They are probably having troubles of their own,” remarked Dave. “It would be impossible to do anything in this fog. Besides, it will take us at least a day to repair the *Comet*. We might just as well take a resting spell and a bite to eat.”

The food supply aboard the biplane was abundant, but no attempt was made to cook a meal. The airship boys indulged in a lunch composed of crackers, cheese and some lemonade, in the manufacture of which beverage Hiram had become something of an expert.

“I say,” he suddenly exclaimed, ten minutes later, as he bolted a mouthful of cracker—“look there!”

The speaker pointed, and all hands arose to their feet. In the far distance a growing yellow glow began to diffuse itself over the western sky. As suddenly and completely as the dense fog had come down upon them earlier in the day, a grand clearing up transpired.

“Why, it’s just like the rolling up of a curtain,” cried Elmer.

The airship boys stood viewing a swift panorama. Vague shapes and outlines began to stand out before their vision. The blue sky showed to their left, the ocean at quite some distance. The sinking sun sent up its radiant beams and they made out that they were on an island.

Its rounding end was disclosed as they swept the scene with interested glances. Little patches of forest and grassy plain showed.

“Why, a famous camping spot,” spoke the elated Hiram.

“How lucky we didn’t miss it,” added Elmer.

The young pilot could now inspect the *Comet* more clearly. He reported his conclusions after going over every part of the machine.

“I think time and patience will fix things up,” he announced.

“How much time?” inquired Hiram.

“I hope not a great lot of patience,” said Elmer, with a longing thought of the home mainland.

“There will be some brazing and hammering to do,” explained Dave. “We will have to build a fire. It will soon be dark and we must wait for daylight. Now then, fellows, don’t waste any nerve force worrying. What we lose to-day we’ll try to make up for when we get started again. We will find a good camping spot, have a pleasant evening, and a full night’s sleep. That will put us in fine trim for real business in the morning.”

“Begone dull care,” sang Hiram, in a jolly tone. “We’ll forget that we’re circling the globe for one ten hours, and be common, everyday boys out on a picnic lark, and report for duty in the morning.”

“There’s an inviting spot,” observed Dave, pointing to a copse on a little rise in the near distance.

Before dusk the airship boys had gotten the *Comet* safely placed, blankets out, a campfire built, and were settled down comfortably for the evening. There was nothing to indicate that the island was inhabited with wild beasts. It seemed to be a little emerald patch set down in the ocean, a sort of lost Crusoe reef, too small to have a name or a place on the marine charts.

One by one the boys drifted into slumberland. It must have been nearly midnight when Hiram and Elmer awakened to find Dave shaking them vigorously.

“Get up, fellows,” directed the young airman. “Something’s going on that we have got to investigate.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BLAZING BEACON

“What’s the trouble now, Dave?” speedily inquired Hiram, getting to his feet and Elmer after him.

“No trouble at all, I fancy,” was the reply; “quite the contrary, in fact. Look there.”

The young pilot of the *Comet* pointed across country towards the beach. Where a hill ran up to a sharp promontory jutting out over the ocean, a bright light showed.

“Why,” cried Hiram, “it’s a blazing heap of some kind. Looks as if it was up off the ground.”

“Yes, and it doesn’t burn like wood or oil. Notice the smoke and the way the flames leap up in the air? What do you suppose it is, Dave?” inquired Elmer.

“I can’t imagine, unless it is some beacon,” replied the young aviator.

“We can soon find out,” declared Elmer. “Wait a minute.”

The speaker ran to the biplane. He soon returned, his telescope in hand. This he leveled at the distant glow.

“You’re right, Dave,” he announced excitedly. “It’s a beacon, sure, and it’s pitch, sure. See for yourself.”

“Yes,” assented the young aviator, levelling the glass. “There is no doubt that it is a signal of some kind. I can make out the skeleton legs of some kind of a brazier.”

Hiram came in for a show at the spyglass. His decision enforced that of his friends.

“What will we do—investigate?” he asked of their

leader.

“We must do that,” replied Dave. “It can’t be very far away.”

“What will we do with the machine?” questioned Hiram, who did not relish being left behind.

“We can roll it to the beach and keep it with us,” explained Dave. “Come on.”

“Maybe this is an inhabited island after all,” suggested Elmer. “I’d like to know. We don’t want to run into cannibals and have them roast us.”

The airship boys got ready to leave their temporary camp. They gained the beach, where progress was level and clear for the *Comet*. The blazing beacon was an excellent guide, and they neared it rapidly. When they came to the foot of the hill, they discovered a deep embrasure in its surface.

“Run the machine in there,” directed our hero. “Nobody is likely to disturb it before we return.”

It was with a good deal of curiosity and excitement that the boys ascended the hill. That gained, Dave took a broad survey of its top. No habitation or person was in view. At the edge of the highest point, commanding an open view of the ocean, was a large brazier, such as is used in light blacksmithing work. Its broad flanging top held a barrel, evidently containing pitch or some readily inflammable material. The fire sent up dense clouds of thick, black smoke. At the same time, however, the bright flames shone far out over the waters with a brilliant glow.

“Queer,” observed Hiram, staring at the brazier with no clue as to the hand that had lighted it.

“Yes, some one started that fire, and quite recently,”

declared Dave.

“I wonder why? And who it could be?” chimed in Elmer.

“We had better set about finding out,” suggested Hiram.

The young airman took the lead in a search for the mysterious owner of the brazier. Finally, as they approached a slight dip in the surface of the ground, he swung his arm back to command a halt.

Where some trees showed, the reflection from the fire outlined a ragged tent made out of a sail. Near it were some boxes and barrels. There was a small table and a stool, a little oil stove, and some cooking utensils.

A hammock swung between two trees. Lying in this, apparently asleep, the curious explorers made out a human form. The young airman waved his comrades back and cautiously approached the unexpected layout before him.

A near glance showed our hero that the occupant of the hammock was a white man garbed in nautical costume. There seemed to be no other person in the vicinity. Dave reached out and gave the hammock a rough swing.

Its occupant must have been a light sleeper. With wonderful suddenness and a sharp yell he bounded from his bed. He was a thin, short man, not weighing more than ninety pounds—so undersized, in fact, as he stood gaping at Dave in open-mouthed wonder, that the latter felt inclined to laugh at the grotesque figure he made.

“Why—where—when!” gasped out the man, and, almost overcome, he could utter no further coherent words.

“Do I happen to come here—and my friends? That beacon directed us; who are you?” asked our hero.

“Shipwrecked mariner,” was the reply, in a mournful tone.

“You are a castaway, then?”

“That’s it—good ship *Flying Scud*, Nantucket. Been here two months. What’s your craft?”

“The airship *Comet*,” replied our hero.

“W-what?” and the man looked astounded and then grinned. He rubbed his eyes to convince himself that he was not dreaming. Then he gazed at Dave in a hurt way, as if he felt that our hero was making fun of him.

“That’s true,” the young airman hastened to say. “Myself and my friends arrived here by accident only a few hours since. The power on our machine gave out, and we landed in the fog, not knowing where and we don’t know now.”

By this time Hiram and Elmer had advanced to the spot. The man scanned them closely. He rubbed his head in a worried, uncertain sort of a way, as if figuring out something that puzzled him. Then he said, after a long pause:

“I was in hopes my beacon had called a ship. Seeing as it isn’t, I suppose there is no chance of my getting away from here?”

“Why not?” challenged Dave, encouragingly. “Did you ever ride in an airship, my friend?”

“No, never saw one. I’ve read about them and have seen pictures of them. To a regular tar, used to solid planks for nigh onto twenty years, those flimsy things don’t appeal, somehow.”

“That’s because you don’t know what real sailing is,” declared Hiram.

“Where is this new-fangled contrivance of yours?” inquired the man, looking into the sky and then all around the hill.

“Come with us and we’ll show it to you,” promised Dave.

“All right. Then I’ll show you my ship.”

“Oh, you have one?” inquired Elmer in surprise.

“What is left of the good old *Flying Scud*, yes,” answered the castaway, mournfully. “You see, friends, she must have struck a reef and sprung a leak. Anyhow, that dark, stormy night when I found myself drifting on her alone, I had to figure out that the captain had given her up as doomed. They had abandoned her in the long boat while I was asleep in the forecastle. Anyhow, when I came on deck, I found the ship deserted. Maybe the crew thought I had been swept overboard. Perhaps they couldn’t find me—you see, I’m so small,” concluded the speaker, plaintively.

“Say, mister, how did you get out of it?” asked the interested Hiram.

“The *Flying Scud* was rolling like a dancing sailor. I thought it was the last of Jabez Hull, yours truly. As she sided over, I strapped a life belt on me and dropped into the sea. Well, to make a long story short, I landed on this island. The next morning I found the old ship a wreck but her bow out of water, down on the beach yonder. She’s been there since. Can’t be budged, can’t be used, but I’ve been breaking her up to build some kind of a craft to get away in. Then, too, I’ve got food and furniture for my camp here. I ain’t much of a ship carpenter and got sort of discouraged, and for a week

I've got busy and burned up a barrel of tar as a beacon."

The boys pulled the *Comet* into view when they reached the spot where they had stowed it. The flare from the beacon enabled a full view of the biplane. It seemed as though Jabez Hull would never cease staring at it. He forgot all about his own forlorn situation in asking half a hundred wondering questions as to the machine and what it could do.

When he led the airship boys down the beach and showed them the wreck, it was their turn to become interested. What pleased the young aviators most of all was the discovery of a small portable forge. This the castaway had removed from the ship to assist in building his boat of escape. This, scarcely begun, was lying on the sand.

"Fellows," said Dave, to his assistants, "this is a great stroke of luck for us. We can repair the machine in a good way, with a forge and tools to help us."

"Yes, and there's a whole tank of gasoline aboard the *Flying Scud*," volunteered Hull.

The boys went back with the castaway to his camp. No one thought of sleeping amid the excitement of the occasion.

"We must get up early in the morning," said Dave. "We must lose no time in starting on our way."

"See here," spoke up the castaway; "I suppose there's no chance of my thinking of having a show to get away from here with you?"

"We shall certainly try to find a place for you," replied Dave, promptly.

"You will?" cried Hull, joyously. "Oh, but that's grand! See here, friend, you know what I'll do if you

fellows get me safely to the American coast?”

“What, now?” questioned Hiram, who liked to hear the odd old mariner talk.

“I’ll give you twenty thousand dollars.”

Our hero said nothing, but Elmer stared hard at the speaker and Hiram nudged him and winked.

“Provided,” continued Jabez Hull—“provided you take my treasure also along in your airship.”

“Your treasure, Mr. Hull?” repeated Dave. “What does it consist of?”

“A keg—yes, friend, probably the most valuable keg in the world. It weighs over fifty pounds, and it’s precious as diamonds. Land me anywhere near to a big city till I realize, and I’ll hand you over twenty thousand dollars in good, solid, hard cash.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HOME STRETCH

“Ready for a start,” ordered Dave.

It was under new and favorable circumstances that the young pilot of the *Comet* spoke the words. The lonely island in the South Atlantic was now a mere fading memory, the many leagues traversed by land and sea lost in the past. The *Comet* and the airship boys were stationed in a field near to a little hostelry on the outskirts of Rio Janeiro.

It was rare good fortune, indeed, that the young adventurers had happened across Jabez Hull. Within twenty-four hours after discovering the shipwrecked mariner the *Comet* was on her way due west, with a new passenger.

The forge, tools and metal material once belonging to the wrecked *Flying Scud* had come in most usefully. Dave knew enough of popular mechanics to utilize them practically. He declared the biplane as solid and perfect, after a careful overhauling and repairing, as when the machine had left the original starting place of the great international race around the world.

The “treasure” of the eccentric Jabez Hull had been taken aboard. It represented a keg sewn up in a coarse canvas jacket. Hiram was alive with curiosity to know what possible material the package could contain to equal in value the vaunted twenty thousand dollars. On that point, however, the castaway had insisted on preserving utter silence.

“I’m a man of my word,” he said, “and that is all there is about it. Land me anywhere on American territory

and I will divide my riches.”

With this the airship boys were forced to be content. Room was made for the precious keg by leaving behind on the island the greater part of the exigency equipment of the *Comet*. The young pilot felt that now all they need fear was the giving out of the gasoline supply. There was plenty of this aboard the wrecked ship, and they managed to find storage for quite an extra supply of it.

It was a daring dash, this final one over leagues of open sea in their frail aircraft. Once begun, however, the airship boys were dauntless and tireless. Fine weather and favorable winds assisted them, and without a single notable mishap they had reached the great Brazilian metropolis.

The young aviator was anxious to get to a telegraph office at once. He left Hiram and Elmer in charge of the *Comet*. Jabez Hull insisted on accompanying him to the city.

“I want to get action on that keg of treasure,” he said. “I know several shipping houses in Rio. I’ll be back here to the airship by noon.”

“Make it noon, sharp,” advised Dave, “for we cannot afford to lose a single second in the race now.”

“I’ll be here on time, don’t you fret,” declared the castaway.

He and Dave parted when they reached the heart of the city. The young airman was back with his friends before noon. He had gotten in touch with Washington. What he learned made him more than anxious to resume the flight.

“We are third, fellows, so far as heard from, I am sorry to say,” he announced to his anxious comrades,

and this put them in a great flutter.

“You don’t mean to say that any of the machines has reached goal?” cried Hiram, his heart sinking to his boots.

“No,” replied our hero; “but number seven was reported at Para yesterday. This morning number two was at Cayenne. They are hundreds of miles nearer home than we are.”

“Then it’s a run day and night from this on,” insisted Hiram, bustling about excitedly.

“It will have to be, if we expect to make good,” said Dave. “Mr. Hull has not returned yet?”

“Not a sign of him,” reported Elmer.

They were all busy for the next hour, getting things in shape for a speedy and sustained flight on the home stretch. Dave glanced at his watch.

“It is after noon,” he observed. “I don’t see how we can afford to wait any longer for Mr. Hull.”

“Why, we simply mustn’t,” declared the impatient Hiram.

“Get ready for a start, then. Here, Elmer,” and Dave wrote a few lines on a card. “Take that to the hotel keeper and tell him to give it to Mr. Hull when he shows up.”

“What were you writing?” inquired Hiram, as Elmer darted away on his mission.

“Directions as to how he can wire us and where he can find us later,” replied our hero.

They waited ten minutes after the return of Elmer, but there were no signs of the missing passenger of the *Comet*. The machine went aloft as if filled with the spirit

that infused its crew. They were soon whizzing on their way north.

“Wonder what our queer shipwreck friend will say when he finds us gone?” inquired Hiram.

“He will understand the urgency of the situation, for I explained it in my note,” said Dave. “He has some money with him, I know, and will doubtless make for Washington at once.”

“I say,” broke in Elmer; “what do you fellows think about this boasted treasure of his?”

“I, for one, don’t think anything about it at all,” responded Hiram, bluntly. “He’s either a dreamer or a skeesicks. His not coming back to us looks as if he had served his purpose in getting to safe territory and has abandoned his old keg.”

“I’d like to know what it holds,” said Elmer.

“Well, it isn’t gold and it isn’t diamonds,” replied Hiram, rather contemptuously. “I noticed in shifting it this morning that its canvas jacket was greasy at one place, just as if the keg was full of oil.”

“Never mind,” spoke Dave. “It will do for ballast till we reach home. Then, if Mr. Hull does not appear, we will have to open the keg and see what is in it.”

The *Comet* made five hundred miles in three laps. Once only, at Caracas, did they have to stop for gasoline. It was early one morning when the *Comet* came to a stop near Belize.

Dave as usual hurried to the nearest telegraph office, and soon had the wires busy. His anxious assistants greeted his return all in a quiver over expected news.

“What have you found out, Dave?” projected Hiram.

“Yes, we’re all on edge to know if there is a chance to get in first,” added Elmer.

“Number seven is two hundred miles ahead of us—just sighted at Vera Cruz,” said the young airman. “No word has been received about number two since our last report.”

“Oh, Dave,” cried Hiram, in a wild fever of longing and suspense, “we’ve just got to reach goal first!”

“We shall make a very hard try, at all events,” replied our hero, doughtily. “Get out the chart, Elmer. We must save every needless crook and turn from this on.”

The eager boys were soon inspecting the chart. Vera Cruz was two hundred miles away. Number seven had over six hours’ lead, estimating the situation on a full speed basis. The young air pilot did some intense calculating. Then he drew his finger across the chart past New Orleans, across Louisiana, and on a line as the crow flies for Washington.

That day was one of the greatest stress for the airship boys. There was no thought of sleep, and they cared little for food. Hiram chattered the greater part of the time. Elmer was so anxious that he was restless and worried. Dave kept at the wheel, grim, determined and persevering.

They ran steadily all the next night. At a little town over the border of Georgia they had to stop for gasoline. The storekeeper from whom they obtained it gave them some information that spurred them up afresh.

“You’re the second in the last three hours,” he informed them.

“You mean the second airship?” inquired Hiram, eagerly.

“Just that. One flew over about daylight.”

“How headed? What did it look like? Where did it go?” In his hurry and eagerness Elmer stumbled over his words recklessly.

The man could not describe the airship, but enough was gathered from him in a general way to give the boys some idea of the course taken by their predecessor.

“It’s number seven, I have every reason to believe,” said Dave, when they started up again.

“Then it will be a close finish,” declared Hiram. “We’ve gained on her a good deal, you see.”

It was superb running for several hours after that. The landscape beneath them, now wild and desolate, seemed to spin along like a rapid panorama. They were traversing an uphill and down dale course, when Hiram suddenly uttered a positive yell.

“Dave, Elmer,” he shouted—“look there!”

“It’s number seven, sure as you live!” echoed Elmer, excitedly.

“I think so, too,” agreed their pilot more quietly, but all his senses were on the keenest alert.

Over beyond a high ridge all hands saw distinctly an airship. Its outline answered to the description of number seven. The way it sailed told that it was an expert racer and under the control of a true professional.

It was lost to view behind a tree-capped ridge. When the *Comet* in its course has got past this obstruction, the airship had disappeared.

“It’s gone, but where?” called out Hiram.

“There it is,” suddenly cried Elmer.

About three miles ahead of them was a little settlement. This side of it a fenced-in farm showed. In the center of its barnyard the airship boys saw the machine that had been sailing aloft a short time previous.

Apparently it had descended on account of some break or accident. There seemed to be no valid reason why it should land at a remote farmhouse.

“Why, there’s trouble,” exclaimed Hiram.

“There surely is,” said the young pilot of the *Comet*, and the trio viewed a somewhat startling spectacle.

The owner of the other airship stood near his biplane. Four men surrounded him. Three of them were armed with guns, and they confronted the airman in a menacing way.

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

The airship boys at once saw that their fellow aviator was in trouble. Our hero made a direct descent. The *Comet* came to a standstill beside the other machine. Its pilot leaped out and approached the group.

Dave at once recognized number seven, and the young man, Pierce, who ran it. He hailed him in a friendly fashion. Then he turned to the four farmers. A frowsy, obstinate-looking old fellow with a pitchfork was evidently the father of the three stalwart youths armed with shotguns. First he regarded the newcomers with surprise, and then suspiciously and with dislike.

“Why, what is the trouble here?” inquired the young airman.

“That’s the trouble,” growled the old man, pointing to a row of upset bee hives and a break in the field fence beyond. “Do you see that horse over there making for the woods? Well, that’s old Snorter, my primest animal. This here young fellow comes down in his b’loon and scares the hoss nigh into fits.”

“Ran out of gasoline and a bolt out of gear,” explained the pilot of number seven.

“You have no right dropping into my yard!” shouted the farmer, wrathfully. “It’s trespassing.”

“That’s right,” drawled the biggest of his sons. “I’m a deputy of the sheriff in this county. You have violated the law. I shall have to take you to Millville to court to answer in an action of wilful trespass.”

“Yes, and I shall insist that you be held in a civil suit

for damages,” declared another of the sons.

Young Pierce cast a hopeless look at his machine and anxiously at Dave. The latter took in the situation at a glance.

“See here, mister,” he said to the old farmer; “we are desperately sorry that this has happened.”

“Yah!” sneered the shrewd old schemer—“money talks.”

“How much?” demanded our hero, without hesitation.

“Well, them bees is a special brood. The hives and the fence ain’t much, but there’s old Snorter. He may wander away and get lost; he may fall into some of those lime pits beyond the timber and get hurt. Then again, he’s so frightened he’ll probably run away at the least scare after this. One hundred dollars, I told this young man here.”

“But I haven’t got it,” cried Pierce. “I offered to give you an order on Washington, and you won’t take it.”

“Not I,” retorted the hard-fisted old fellow. “Cash down on the nail head.”

“I ran short at Savannah,” explained Pierce to Dave. “I fancied I could get through with the twenty dollars I had left, being so near home.”

Dave took out his pocket book. The old farmer’s eyes glistened as our hero handed him five crisp twenty-dollar banknotes.

“Now then, Pierce,” spoke the young airman, “that’s settled. What’s the trouble with your machine?”

It did not take the expert Dave long to find out. Within half an hour he had the faulty gear sound as

ever. The *Comet* had a full supply of gasoline. A transfer of some of it was made to the tanks aboard number seven.

The farmer and his sons, fully satisfied now, stood watching operations. Hiram and Elmer hustled about, giving their leader and his fellow aviator all the help they could.

“Everything is in trim,” announced our hero, finally. “Good-bye and good luck.”

Pierce held the hand so generously extended by Dave in a tremulous grasp. Tears of gratitude and esteem had rushed to his eyes.

“Dashaway,” he said, in a choked, broken voice; “you’re a man, every inch of you!”

Number seven went aloft. Dave called “all aboard!” Hiram pulled his face at the mean-spirited old trickster who had bled them. Elmer shook his fist at the farmer crowd.

“That’s you!” exclaimed Hiram. “Just fitted Pierce out to beat us, and delayed us, besides.”

“Wasn’t it the best kind of fair play?” challenged Dave.

“So good,” declared Elmer; “that I’d almost rather come in second with the big heart you’ve got, than think I’d left a fellow airman in the lurch.”

“Well, it’s a free for all now, I hope,” spoke the anxious Hiram. “When a fellow is so near the winning post as we are, it makes him selfish, I guess. Yes, you did just right, Dave Dashaway; only, if you see some stray tramp limping along, don’t stop to give him a lift.”

Within an hour the advance pilot of the race, number

seven, was nowhere in view. Our hero had made a study of this one close rival in the field as well as repair the machine. He had found out where it was weak and the *Comet* strong. Barring accident, the young pilot of the *Comet* felt sanguine that his machine would reach the winning post first.

The airship boys did some splendid running. They made no stops except for fuel and water. They ate and slept on the wing. Hiram counted the moments and Elmer the miles. At midnight, thirty hours later, they were within two hundred miles of Washington.

It was a momentous climax in their earnest young lives. They had circled the globe. They had overcome every obstacle in their path. They had won, the proud pilot of the *Comet* and his eager assistants hoped and believed.

With a cheer, husky with emotions, seeming to swell up in his heart like a fountain of joy, Hiram Dobbs arose in the machine as it settled down almost at the very spot whence it had started—"oh, almost years before!" Elmer declared.

Dave Dashaway stepped from the machine. The cares, the hardship, the worry, the doubt of long arduous weeks seemed to fall from him like a garment. He gave one vast sigh of relief and satisfaction. Every eye was at once directed towards the club house. Some field men came running from the distant hangars.

"Say," spoke Hiram, with a queer anxious jerk in his voice—"the bulletin board!"

His heart sank as he ran towards it. Elmer followed close on his trail. There were notations opposite the various numbers. Had someone preceded them—had someone won the race?

And then, after a single glance, Hiram threw his cap up in the air, his face beaming, and Elmer grasped his hand, delirious with excitement. Dave, coming up, found them dancing about as if half mad with joy.

For the lines on the bulletin board bore only such notations as these: "Number ten—abandoned at Winnipeg." "Number six—wrecked at Cape Nome." "Number five—abandoned," and others "out of commission."

There were blanks after number seven and number two. As the airship boys stood there, a man came quickly out upon the veranda which held the bulletin board. He cast an excited glance at the travel-worn *Comet*. He waved his hand gaily at the three young champions. Then with a piece of chalk he wrote on the third blank line:

"Number three, Comet; pilot, Dashaway—first."

A date, an hour, a minute, even down to odd seconds followed. The world knew that the airship boys had won the great international prize!

There were so many pleasant and rapidly occurring events transpiring close on the heels of the great race around the world, that for over two weeks our hero and his loyal comrades had a busy, interesting time of it.

Twelve hours after the arrival of the *Comet*, number seven came into the goal. She was a bird with a broken wing. A patched-up plane told of a last dash under decided disadvantages.

"Don't you crow over me, Mr. Dave Dashaway," said the energetic young Pierce, playfully. "I win second prize, all alone by myself. You three have to divide yours. But, better than the international trophy, is the big thing you did for me, and people are going to know

about it, too,” declared Pierce, and he kept his word.

Mr. Brackett was very proud of the son who had “made good” in an exploit calling for more than ordinary ability and grit. To our hero he insisted all the credit was due, and the young airman realized that he had made strong, lifetime friends.

It seemed to the airship boys the very happiest moment of their lives, the day a dainty little miss drove up to the *Comet* hangar, and Miss Edna Deane, with tears of joy and gratitude, and her lovely face fairly glowing, told them what heroes they were.

“My brother is resting with a relative in England,” she narrated. “Father has gone to bring him home. If you are a thousand miles away from Washington when they return, you must promise, all three of you, to come to the family reunion, of which you are surely members, as friends and brothers. Father and brother will have something interesting to say to you. We are very, very grateful—and, oh, so proud of you!”

“It’s worth something to find a little sister like that,” cried Hiram, as their visitor left them, all sunny smiles and happiness.

“‘Something interesting’ means a right royal reward, of course,” spoke Elmer. “Why, fellows, if we keep on, we’ll soon have the capital to start an aero meet all our own!”

It was just a week after that, early one morning, that the airship boys, seated in the aero association club room, were hailed joyously by an unexpected visitor.

“Why, Mr. Hull!” exclaimed Dave, greeting the newcomer warmly.

The shipwrecked mariner looked like a new man. He

wore a spick and span suit, and was cleanly shaven. He seemed well fed and happy.

“Missed you at Rio,” he announced; “but knew you’d do the square thing. Met a chum who financed me, and came on to get my keg.”

“Which is safe and sound in the storage room here,” announced our hero.

“Well, all we’ve got to do is to get it hauled down to a chemical works in Washington to get our money—half of it is yours,” observed the old salt.

“Say, Mr. Hull,” broke in the irrepressible Hiram; “what in the world is in that keg, anyway?”

“Can’t you guess?” asked the old salt.

“We haven’t the least idea, unless it’s grease.”

“Grease! Ha! ha!” laughed the sailor. “Not much, my lad. Give another guess.”

“I don’t see what could be worth such a sum of money as you claim,” returned Hiram, his face showing how puzzled he was.

“You haven’t opened the keg?”

“No,” answered Dave, promptly.

“It ain’t leaked none either?”

“Not enough to count.”

“I am glad o’ that, lads. I wouldn’t want that stuff to git away from me, after all the trouble I had gittin’ it, an’ all the trouble you had carryin’ it so far.”

“But we are wildly excited to know what it is!” cried Hiram. “Please don’t keep us waiting any longer.”

“Hiram has made all sorts of wild guesses,” laughed

Dave. "First he thought you had gold dust—but gold dust isn't greasy."

"No, it ain't gold dust."

"Then what?" pleaded Hiram. "Come, out with it, Mr. Hull."

"Ambergris," promptly replied Jabez Hull. "Found it floating on the water off that island where you met me. I suppose you know it's worth just double pure gold an ounce, and so rare that the price never goes down."

"Well, what next?" asked Hiram, some time later.

"I don't know," answered Dave. But many more adventures were in store for our hero, and what some of them were will be related in the next volume of this series, to be entitled: "Dave Dashaway, Air Champion; Or, Wizard Work in the Clouds."

So we leave our young friends for the present, happy, honored and still ambitious. They had been leaders and heroes in the aviation field. Their efforts had been practical and not reckless. They had shown a new course around the world. They had proven a new possibility in aerial science, and fame and fortune had been the reward of Dave Dashaway and his intrepid airship boys.

THE END

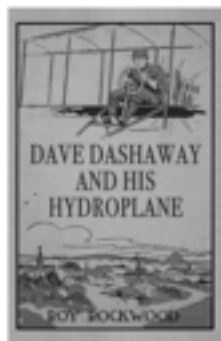
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