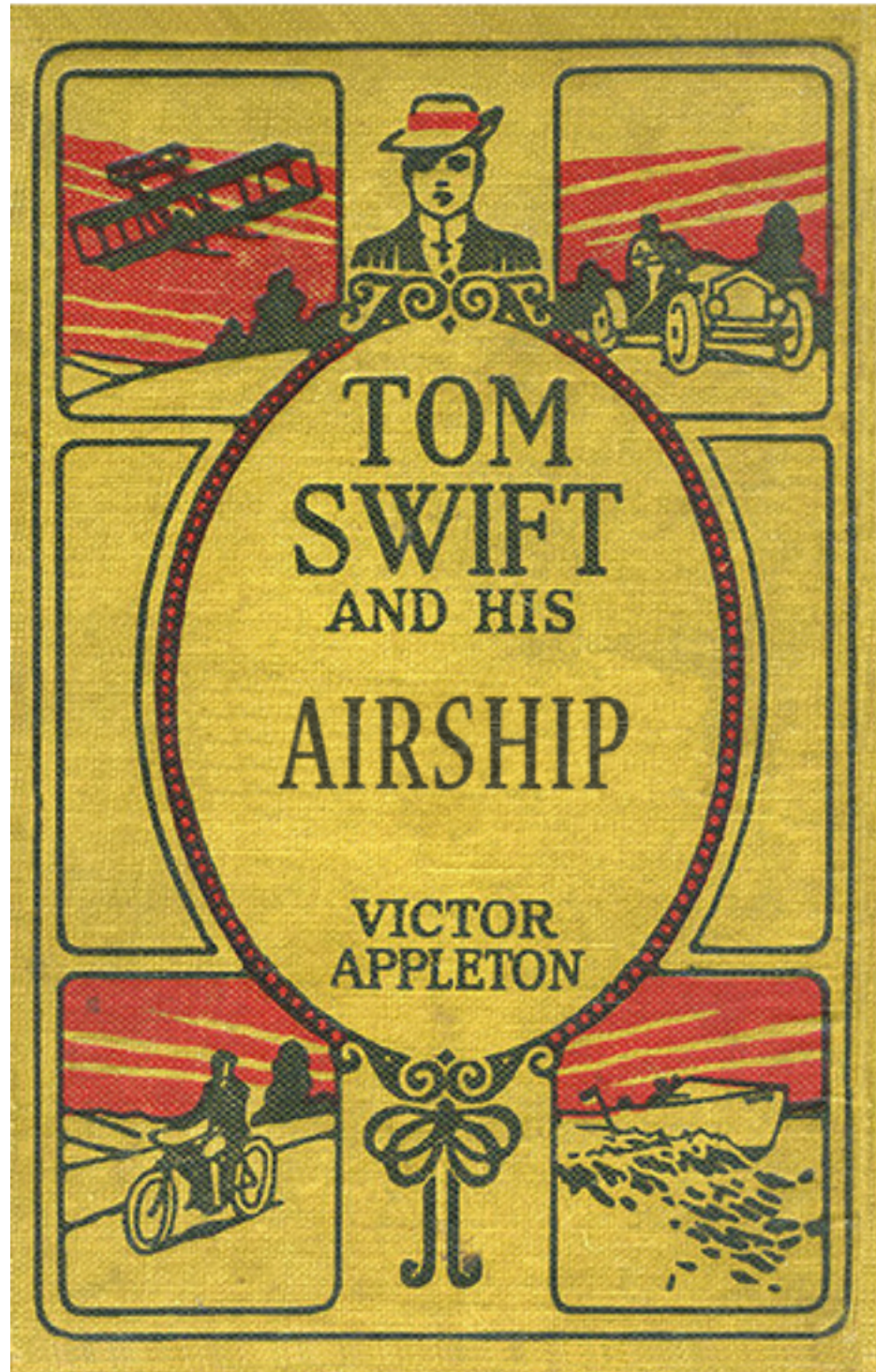
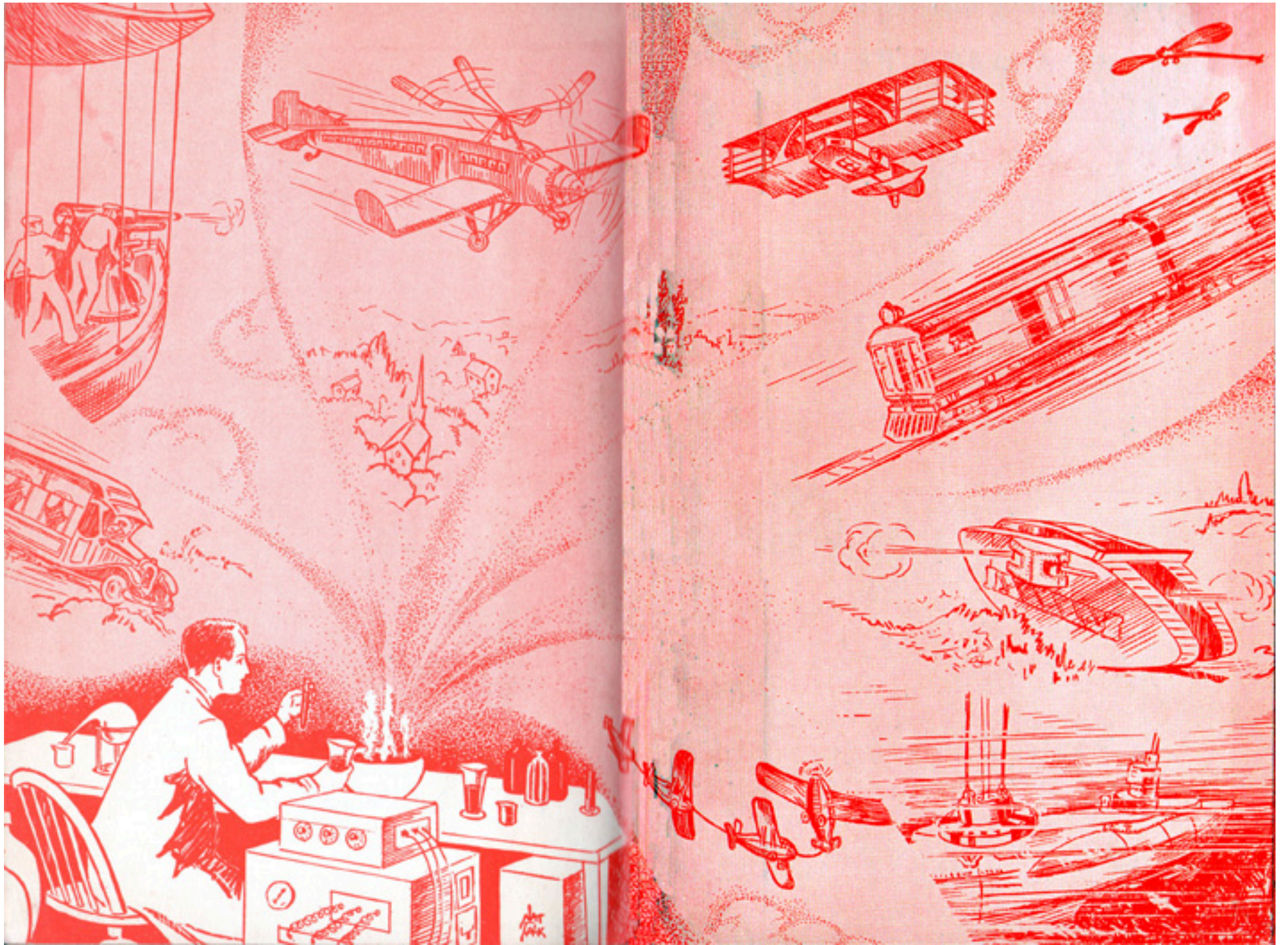
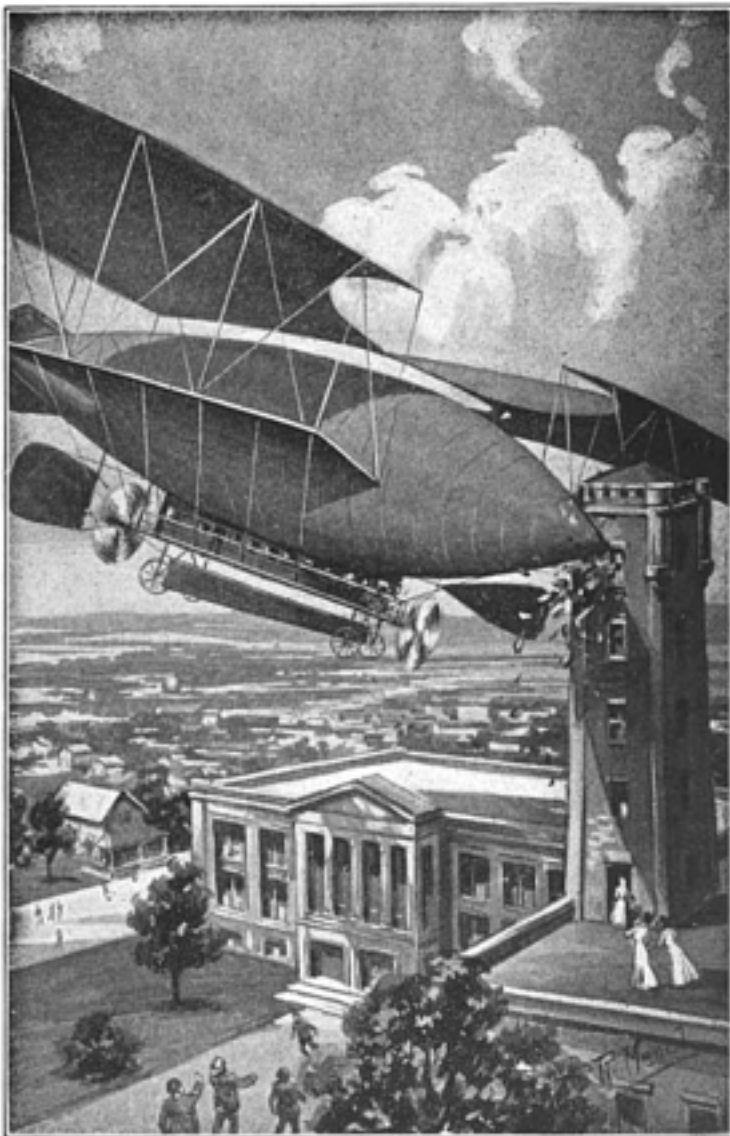


TOM SWIFT

His Airship







Straight at the tower rushed the *Red Cloud*, and hit it a glancing blow. Page 33

TOM SWIFT AND HIS AIRSHIP

OR

THE STIRRING CRUISE OF THE RED CLOUD

BY

VICTOR APPLETON

AUTHOR OF "TOM SWIFT AND HIS MOTORCYCLE," "TOM SWIFT AND HIS MOTORBOAT," "TOM SWIFT AND HIS SUBMARINE BOAT," ETC.

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THE TOM SWIFT SERIES

TOM SWIFT AND HIS MOTORCYCLE
Or Fun and Adventure On The Road

TOM SWIFT AND HIS MOTORBOAT
Or the Rivals of Lake Carlopa

TOM SWIFT AND HIS AIRSHIP
Or the Stirring Cruise of the Red Cloud

TOM SWIFT AND HIS SUBMARINE BOAT
Or Under the Ocean For Sunken Treasure

TOM SWIFT AND HIS ELECTRIC
RUNABOUT
Or the Speediest Car on the Road

(Other volumes in preparation)

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Tom Swift and His Airship

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Foreword... The Story So Far

Tom Swift, son of Barton Swift, lives with his father and a motherly housekeeper, Mrs. Baggert, in a large house on the outskirts of the town of Shopton, in New York State. Mr. Swift's considerable wealth comes from his many inventions and patents.

Tom had followed in his father's footsteps and, by the age of eighteen, had already taken out several patents.

Tom's first adventure saw him obtaining a motorcycle from the eccentric Mr. Damon who had, on doctor's advice, purchased it to "get out in the air a bit." His inability to control the thing led to him crashing it into a tree in front of the Swift home. Tom and the man had become friends and the motorcycle was purchased by Tom. He made many improvements to it and used it to help capture thieves who had stolen one of his father's secret models just before the older Swift could patent it.

Shortly before this story opens the youth came into possession of a motorboat that had been used by the aforementioned criminals. As told in the second volume of this series, entitled "Tom Swift and His Motorboat," Tom purchased it at auction when its rightful owner decided to sell it in favor of a newer boat.

Tom spend many days repairing and improving the motor and the overall boat before taking his father and

best friend, Ned Newton, on a trip to the southern end of Lake Carlopa and to a hotel where his father could rest.

Tom ran afoul of his nemesis, Andy Foger—a squint-eyed bully and braggart—whose father had bought that ungrateful son a larger boat. A race, threats and slight fisticuffs followed. One day Andy disappeared on "a trip" just so happening on the very day that Tom's boat, the *Arrow*, had been stolen.

In his search, Tom again ran into the patent model thieves: Ferguson Appleson, Amberson Morse, Wilson Featherton—alias Simpson—and Harry Greene—alias Happy Harry—who sometimes disguised himself as a tramp but was, in fact, a double agent.

Tom managed to get his boat back just before the criminals broke into Barton Swift's workshop and stole more of his models and equipment.

Tom outwitted the crooks with the aid of a balloonist he, Ned and Mr. Swift had rescued... a man who also turned out to be a deputy sheriff. His near death experience and rescue had seen him make good friends with Tom. Tom Swift... who now dreamed of the day he might soar high in the sky in a balloon or airship of his own.

Now, to our new story...

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER I

AN EXPLOSION

"ARE YOU ready, Tom?"

"All ready, Mr. Sharp," replied a young man who was stationed near some complicated apparatus. The questioner, a dark-haired man with a nervous manner, leaned over a large tank.

"I'm going to open up the gas now," went on the man. "Look out for yourself. I'm not sure what may happen."

"Neither am I, but I'm ready for it. If it does explode it

can't do much damage."

"Oh, don't think about it exploding. We've had so much trouble with the airship, I hope that nothing goes wrong now."

"Well, turn, on the gas, Mr. Sharp," advised Tom Swift. "I'll watch the pressure gauge, and, if it goes too high, I'll warn you. You can shut it off."

The man nodded. Taking a deep breath, he glanced at the small wrench in his hand, then went to one end of the tank. The youth first looked anxiously at him and then turned his gaze toward a gauge. It appeared to be somewhat like those on steam boilers and had, in fact, come from one.

The young man, our hero Tom Swift, had calibrated it to measure lower pressures. The gauge was attached between a large tank of a special gas and an aluminum, cigar-shaped affair, about five feet long. In line with the main tubing was a small box, inside of which was what Tom hoped would be a giant leap forward in ballooning technology.

It was, however, that very box that kept giving the duo problems.

In seconds they could hear a hissing sound in the small building where the two were conducting an experiment. Tom nodded at the man; hearing the gas transfer safely

from the tank meant much to them. The hissing grew louder.

"Be ready to jump for safety," advised Mr. Sharp.

"I'm ready," answered the lad. "But the pressure is going up very slowly." He tapped the gauge to make sure it was not stuck. "Maybe you'd better turn on more gas."

"I will. Here it comes! Look out now. You can't tell what is going to happen."

With a sudden hiss, as the powerful gas under pressure passed from the tank, through the pipes, and into the aluminum container, the hand on the gauge swept past figure after figure on the dial.

"Shut it off!" cried Tom quickly. "It's coming through too fast! Shut her off!"

The man sprang to obey the command. In his eagerness he knocked the wrench from the tank valve. Stooping to pick it up, he nervously sought to fit the wrench over the nipple of the controlling valve. Then his face seemed to turn white with fear.

"I can't move it, Tom!" John Sharp yelled. "It's jammed! I can't shut off the gas! Run! Get out of here! She'll explode!"

Tom Swift, the young inventor, gave one final look at the gauge. Seeing that the pressure was steadily moving past the red safety line he had painted on the face, tried to

reach and open a stop-cock that would relieve the pressure. One try showed that the valve at his end had jammed too.

Snatching up a roll of blue prints the boy made a dash for the door of the shop. He was only a second behind his companion, and they had barely passed out of the door before there was a loud explosion which shook the building and ground beneath their feet, and shattered all the windows outward and into the yard.

Pieces of wood, bits of metal, and a cloud of sawdust shavings flew out of the door and now-missing windows. This was followed by a cloud of yellowish smoke.

"Are you hurt, Tom?" cried Mr. Sharp. He swung around to look back at the place where their hazardous experiment had been conducted.

"Not a bit! How about you?"

"I'm all right. Just a few glass splinters in my right arm. But it was touch and go! Good thing you had the gauge installed or we'd never have known when to run."

He sighed and seemed to sag a bit. Looking discouraged he said to Tom, "Well, we've made another failure of it."

"Never mind, Mr. Sharp," went on Tom. "I have a feeling that it will be the last mistake. I can see what the trouble is now, and I even know how to fix it. Come on back, and we'll try it again. That is if the tank hasn't blown

up as well."

"No, I that tank is very strong, It should all right. It was our aluminum container that went up, and that's so thin-walled and light it couldn't do much damage. It was the burning gas that expanded so quickly and knocked out the windows. But we'd better wait until some of those fumes escape. They're not healthy to breathe."

As they waited for the cloud of yellowish smoke to blow away, they discussed their project. Sharp ended by saying, "I really wish that you would call me John, Tom. It is my name after all. Mr. Sharp is so—well, formal."

In minutes he and Tom were approaching the shop. In spite of the explosion that had taken place in it, was still intact. Standing outside the doorway they saw an older man coming from a handsome house not far off. The man called out, "Tom, is anyone hurt?"

"No, Dad. We're all right."

"What happened?"

"Well, we had another explosion. We can't seem to get the right mixture of the gas and the activator, but I think we've had the last of our bad luck. We're going to try it again. Up to now the resulting gas has been too strong, the tank too weak, or else our valve control is bad." He explained the stuck valves at both ends.

"Oh dear, Mr. Swift! Do tell them to be careful!" a

woman's voice chimed in, coming across the lawn. "I'm sure something dreadful will happen! My kitchen windows can take no more of the rattling. This is about the twentieth time something has blown up around here, and—"

"It's only the ninth, Mrs. Baggert," interrupted Tom, somewhat indignantly.

"Well, goodness me! Isn't nine almost as bad as twenty? There I was, just putting my bread in the oven," went on Mrs. Baggert, the housekeeper, "and I was so startled that I dropped it, and it landed upside down! Now the dough is all over the kitchen floor. You won't have fresh bread tonight, that is a certainty."

"I'm sorry," answered the youth, trying not to laugh. "We'll see that it doesn't happen again."

"Yes; that's what you always say," rejoined the motherly-looking woman, who had been looking after the interests of Mr. Swift, Tom and their home for ten years.

"Well, we mean it this time," retorted the lad. "We see where our mistake was; don't we, Mr. Sharp?" he winked.

"Um— yes—I think so," replied the other.

"Come on back, and we'll see what damage was done," proposed Tom. "Maybe we can rig up another container, mix some fresh gas, and make the final experiment this afternoon."

"Now do be careful," cautioned Mr. Swift, the famous inventor, once more. "I'm afraid you two have set too high a goal for yourselves this time."

"No we haven't, Dad," answered his son. "You'll see us skimming along above the clouds in no time."

"Humph! If you go above the clouds I won't be very likely to see you, will I? Do go slowly, now. Don't blow the place up again."

Mr. Swift went into the house, followed by Mrs. Baggert, who was continuing to wail about the fate of her bread.

Tom and Mr. Sharp started toward the shop where they had been working. It was one of several buildings built for experimental purposes and patent work by Mr. Swift, near his home.

"It didn't do so very much damage," observed Tom, as he peered in through a window, void of all the panes of glass. "We can start right back in."

"Hold on! Wait! Don't try it now!" exclaimed John Sharp, who generally talked in short, choppy sentences. Though abbreviated, they said all he meant. "The fumes of that gas aren't good to breathe. Wait until they all blown away. It won't be long. Ten minutes. It's safer."

He began to cough and choking from the pungent fumes, and Tom felt an unpleasant tickling sensation in

his throat.

"Take a walk around," advised Mr. Sharp. "I'll sit under that tree. Got to check over the blue prints. Let's have 'em."

Tom handed over the roll he had grabbed up when he ran from the shop just before the explosion took place. While his companion spread them out on his knees as he sat against a nearby tree, Tom walked toward the rear of the large yard. It was enclosed by a high board fence, with a locked gate. Tom, unlocked the fastenings and stepped out into a broad, green meadow at the rear of his father's property. As he did so he saw three boys about his age running toward him.

"Hello!" exclaimed our hero. "There's Andy, Sam and Pete I wonder what they're running this way for?"

On the trio came, increasing their pace as they caught sight of Tom. Andy Foger, a red-haired and squint-eyed lad, a sort of town bully with a rich and indulgent father, was the first to reach the young inventor.

"How—how many were killed?" panted Andy.

"Shall we go for doctors?" asked Sam Snedecker.

"Can we see the place?" blurted out Pete Bailey. He had to sit down on the grass, he was so winded.

"Killed? Doctors?" repeated Tom, clearly much puzzled. "What are you guys driving at, anyhow?"

"The big explosion. Wasn't there a lot of people killed in the explosion we heard?" demanded Andy, in eager tones.

"Not a one," replied Tom.

"There was an explosion!" exclaimed Pete. "We heard it, and you can't fool us!"

"And we saw smoke," added the Snedecker boy.

"Yes, there was a small explosion," admitted Tom, with a smile, "but no one was killed or even hurt. We don't let such things happen in our shops."

"Nobody got killed?" repeated Andy questioningly, the disappointment evident in his tone.

"Nobody hurt?" added Sam, and he also seemed sad that there had been no loss of life.

"All our run for nothing," continued Pete, still on the ground, pugging in disgust.

"Then what happened?" demanded the red-haired boy, as if he had a right to know. "We were walking along the lake road, and we heard an awful racket. If the police come out here, you'll have to tell what you're up to, Tom Swift." He spoke defiantly.

"I've no objection to telling you *or* the police," replied Tom. "There was an explosion. My friend, Mr. Sharp, the balloonist, and I were conducting an experiment with a new kind of gas, and it was too strong, that's all. An

aluminum container blew up, but no real damage was done. We are both safe, in case you were going to ask."

"Humph! What you making, anyhow?" demanded Andy, and again he spoke as if he had a right to know.

"I don't see how it's any of your business," Tom came back at him sharply. "But, since everyone will know fairly soon, I may as well tell you. We're building an airship."

"An airship?" exclaimed Sam and Pete in one breath.

"An airship?" queried Andy, and there was a sneer in his voice. "Well, I don't think you can do it, Tom Swift! You'll never build an airship; even if you have a balloonist to help you! A failed one at that. You had to rescue him so he can't be very good!"

"I won't, eh?" and Tom was a little nettled at the sneering manner of his rival and at the boy's mean words about John Sharp.

"No, you won't! It takes a smarter fellow than you to build an airship. I bet I could beat you at it myself."

"You think you could, eh?" asked Tom who had now mastered his emotions. He wouldn't let Andy make him angry. "Maybe you can beat me at racing, too?" he went on. "If you think so, bring out your *Red Streak* and I'll try the *Arrow* against her. I beat you twice, and I can do it again! Plus, I had to fix your boat when you broke it."

This unexpected taunt disconcerted Andy. It was the

truth. More than once Tom and his motorboat proved more than a match for the squint-eyed bully and his boat.

"Tell him, Andy," advised Sam, in a low voice. "You can beat him. Don't take any of his guff!"

"I don't intend to," spluttered Andy. "Maybe you did beat me in the races. My motor wasn't working right," he conceded, "but you can't do it again. Anyhow, that's got nothing to do with an airship. I'll bet you can't make one!"

"I don't bet," replied Tom calmly, "but if you wait a few weeks you'll see me in an airship. Then, if you want to race your *Red Streak* against that, I'll accommodate you. Or, if you want to enter into a competition to build a dirigible balloon or even an airplane I'm willing. But, you'd have to actually built it. No running to your father for money to buy one. That's my deal!"

"Huh! Think you're smart, don't you? Just because you helped save that balloonist from being killed when his balloon caught fire," went on Andy, admitting the truth behind Mr. Sharp's rescue. "You'll never build an airship!"

"Of course he won't!" added Sam and Pete, standing beside their crony, to whom they were indebted for many automobile and motorboat rides.

"Just wait," advised Tom, with a tantalizing smile. "Meanwhile, if you want to try the *Red Streak* against the *Arrow*, I'm willing. I have an hour or so to spare."

"Aw, keep still!" muttered Andy uncomfortably. Tom's defeat of Andy's speed boat by his much smaller and less powerful one was a sore point with the bully. "You just wait, that's all. I'll get even with you!"

"Look here!" cried Tom, suddenly. "You always say that whenever I get the best of you. I'm sick of hearing it. I consider that a threat, and I don't like it. If you don't watch what you say, you'll have trouble with me, and at no very distant date!"

Tom, with flashing eyes, and clenched fists, took a step forward. Andy and his friends shrank back.

"Don't be afraid of him," advised Sam in a shaky voice. "We'll stand by you, Andy."

"I ain't afraid," muttered the red-haired lad, but he began to move off. "You just wait, I'll fix you," he added to Tom. The bully was plainly in a rage.

The young inventor was about to reply when the gate opened, and John Sharp stepped out.

"The fumes have all cleared, Tom," he said. "We can go in the shop, now."

Tom snapped his fingers at the retreating trio who reacted to the noise as if it had been a gunshot. Without further notice of Andy, Tom turned around and followed the aeronaut back to the enclosed yard.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER II

NED SEES MYSTERY MEN

"WHO WERE those fellows?" asked the balloonist, of his companion.

"Oh, some chaps who think we'll never build our airship, John. Andy Foger, and his crowd. You saw them at the boat races several weeks ago."

"Well, we'll show them that we can," rejoined the man. "I've just thought of one point where we made a mistake. Your father suggested it to me. We need a needle valve in the gas tank and the activator box. Then we can control

the flow of vapor to a finer degree. That big gate valve is just not right."

"Of course!" cried Tom. "Why didn't I think of that? Let's try it." And the pair hurried into the machine shop, eager to make another test. They hoped would be more successful.

Tom went off to locate the necessary valves from spares kept in one or another of the work sheds on the Swift property.

The young inventor—for Tom Swift was entitled to that title, having patented several machines—lived with his father, Barton Swift, on the outskirts of the small town of Shopton, in New York State. Mr. Swift was quite wealthy, having amassed a considerable fortune from several of his patents, as he was also an inventor. Tom's mother had been dead since he was a small child. Along with Mrs. Baggert, the housekeeper, there was also an aged engineer, named Garret Jackson, who attended to the engine and boilers that operated machinery and apparatus in several small shops that surrounded the Swift homestead; for Mr. Swift did most of his work at home.

Tom eventually had to, as the engineer for his assistance in locating two of the needle-type valves. Garret dug through a large box and soon came up with valves of the proper size and gave them to Tom.

"I'd appreciate having those back once you get your experiments over and done with, Tom. I will need them when I do an overhaul of the old boiler next month. Bought them specially for that."

Tom promised to return them within the next few weeks. He returned to meet up with John Sharp at the work shop.

As related previously, Tom, his father and Ned Newton had a most thrilling adventure while they were piloting their way down the lake when they saw a balloon on fire, with a man clinging to the trapeze in the air overhead. They managed to save the fellow's life, after a strenuous endeavor. The balloonist, John Sharp, was destined to play quite a part in Tom's life.

John Sharp was more than an aeronaut—he was the inventor of an airship—in truth, he had plans drawn for the more important parts, but he had struck a "snag of clouds," as he expressed it, and could not make the machine work.

His falling in with Mr. Swift and his son seemed providential. Tom and his father were immediately interested in the project for navigating the upper air. They made a complete study of John's plans, and were a fair way to having the difficulty solved.

His airship was primarily an airplane, but with a large aluminum container, shaped like a cigar and filled with a

secret gas. This gas was made partly of hydrogen, being very light and powerful. It was while testing the effect of this gas in a small model of the aluminum container that they suffered their first explosion.

It had been one of several, the one this day having been the latest. Tom kept reminding the balloonist that with each set back, they were eliminating certain difficulties.

After the first explosion, Tom gave a good study of the properties and mixture of the gases. Two days later he devised a metal box filled with shredded metals such as aluminum, brass, copper and zinc. As the gas mixture from John's special storage tank flowed through them, a series of chemical reactions took place, the effect of which was to both buffer the vast majority of explosive volatility of the hydrogen while helping to fully combine the other gases.

In the end, it made the gas only about a tenth as explosive yet increased its lifting ability about ten percent. The only thing Tom was unable to overcome was that the gas became unstable above a certain pressure, and that led to the most recent explosion.

John had been flabbergasted at the results of Tom's 'activator' box, as he had dubbed it. After his fiery crash on Lake Carlopa he was more than a little wary of how flammable the hydrogen was.

Now the airship seemed almost a finished thing. But a

few details remained to be worked out, and Mr. Swift and his son felt that they could master these.

So it was with a feeling of elation that the young inventor followed John into the shop.

"Do you think we'll get back on the right track if we put the needle valves in?" asked Tom, as he noted with satisfaction that the damage from the explosion was not great.

"I'm sure we will," answered the aeronaut. "Now let's make another model container, and try the gas again."

They set to work, with Mr. Swift helping them occasionally, and Garret Jackson, the engineer, lending a hand whenever he was needed.

All afternoon work on the airship progressed. They all wanted to be sure that the large envelope, or aluminum container, would do its work properly, as this would hold them in the air and prevent accidents in case of a problem with the engine or propellers.

The airplane part of the airship was all but finished, and the motor, a powerful machine, of new design, built by Mr. Swift, was ready to be installed.

All that afternoon Tom, his father and John Sharp labored in the shop. As it grew dusk there sounded from the house the ringing of a bell.

"Supper time," remarked Tom, laying aside a wrench. "I

wish Mrs. Baggert could wait about an hour. I'd have this valve nearly done, then."

But the housekeeper was evidently not going to wait. Her voice called out to supplement the bell.

"Supper! Sup-per!" she called. "Come now, Mr. Swift; Tom, Mr. Sharp! I can't wait any longer! The meat and potatoes will be spoiled!"

"I suppose we'd better go in," remarked John, with something of a sigh. "We can finish tomorrow."

The shop, where certain parts of the airship were being made, was doubly locked. Jackson the engineer, who was also a sort of watchman, was asked to keep guard, for fear of a reappearance of the gang of unscrupulous patent thieves who had stolen from them before and who had escaped from custody during a recent great storm. They were still in the minds of Mr. Swift and his son.

"And give an occasional look in the shed, where the airplane is," advised John. "It wouldn't take much to damage that, now."

"I'll pay particular attention to it," promised the engineer. "Don't worry, Mr. Sharp."

After supper the three gathered around the table on which were spread out sheets of paper, covered with intricate figures and calculations, which Mr. Swift and the balloonist went over with care. Tom was examining some

blue prints which gave a sectional view of the proposed ship, and was making some measurements when the doorbell rang. Mrs. Baggert ushered in Ned Newton, the best friend of the young inventor.

"Hello, Ned!" exclaimed Tom. "I was wondering what had become of you. Haven't seen you in a dog's age."

"That's right," admitted Ned. "We've been working late nights at the bank. Getting ready for the annual visit of the examiner. Well, how are things going, and how is the airship?" for, of course, Ned had heard of that.

"Oh, pretty good. Had another explosion today, I suppose you heard."

"No, I hadn't."

"I thought everyone in town had, by now. Andy Foger and his two cronies were on hand, and they usually tell all they know."

"Oh, Andy! He makes me sick! He was scooting up the street in his auto just as I was coming in, honk-honking his horn to beat the band! You'd think no one ever had an auto but him. He was going far too fast."

"Wait until I get in our airship," predicted Tom. "Then I'll show you what speed is!"

"Do you really think it will go fast?"

"Of course it will! Fast enough to catch Amberson

Morse and his crowd of scoundrels if we ever get on their track."

"I thought they were in jail," replied Ned, in some surprise. "Weren't they arrested after they stole your boat?"

"Yes, and put in jail, but they managed to escape. Now they're free to make trouble for us again."

"Are you sure they're out of jail?" asked Ned quietly. Tom noted that his chum's face wore an odd look.

"Sure? Of course I am. But why do you ask?"

Ned did not answer for a moment. He glanced at Tom's father, and the young inventor understood. Mr. Swift's long years of brain work and seclusion had made him nervous. He had a fear of Morse and his gang, for they had made trouble for him in the past. Tom appreciated his chum's hesitancy, and guessed that Ned had something to say that he did not want Mr. Swift to hear.

"Come on up to my room, Ned. I've got something I want to show you," exclaimed Tom after a pause.

As the two lads left the room, Tom glanced at his father. Mr. Swift was so engrossed in making some calculations regarding wind pressure, that it is doubtful if either of the men were aware that the boys had gone.

"Now what is it, Ned?" demanded our hero, when they were safe in his room. "Something's up. I can tell by your

manner. What is it?"

"Maybe it's nothing at all," went on his chum. "If I had known that those men had escaped from jail, I would have paid more attention to what I saw tonight as I was leaving the bank to come here."

"What did you see?" demanded Tom, and his manner, which had been calm, became somewhat excited.

"Well, you know I've been helping the chief teller straighten up his books," went on the young bank employee, "and when I came out tonight after working for several hours, I was glad enough to hurry away from the 'slave-den,' as I call it. I almost ran up the street, not looking where I was going. Just as I turned the corner, I bumped into a man."

"Nothing suspicious or wonderful in that," commented Tom. "I've often run into people."

"Wait," advised Ned. "To save myself from falling I grabbed the man's arm. He did the same to me, and there we stood for a moment, right under a gas lamp. I looked down at his hands, and I saw that on the little finger of the left one there was tattooed a blue ring, and—"

"Happy Harry—the tramp!" exclaimed Tom, now much excited. "That's where he wears a tattooed ring!"

"That's what I thought you had told me," resumed Ned, "but I didn't pay any attention to it at the time, as I had no

idea that the men were out of jail."

Tom had been made privy to the fact that Harry Greene, alias Happy Harry the tramp, was a member of the gang of thieves, as well as being a government agent who had managed to gain the confidence of the gang members. Tom still had some small doubts about the man's actual allegiance, but gave him the benefit of the doubt and kept his identity secret, even from Ned and his own father.

"Well, what else happened?" inquired Tom

"Not much more. I apologized to the man, and he to me, and we let go of each other."

"Are you sure about the ring on his finger?"

"Positive. His hand was right in the light. But, that isn't all. I hurried on, not thinking much about it, when, I saw another man step out of the dark shadows of Peterby's Grocery just beyond the bank. The man must have mistaken me for someone else, for he spoke to me."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me a question. It was: 'Any chance tonight?' "

"What did you tell him?"

"Well, I was so surprised that I didn't know what to say, and, before I could get my wits together the man had seen his mistake and hurried away. He joined the man I had collided with, and the two took off into the darkness. But

not before a third man had come across the street, from in front of the bank, and hurried off with them."

"Well?" asked Tom, as his chum paused.

"I don't know what to think," resumed Ned. "These men were certainly acting suspiciously. Now that you tell me the Amberson Morse gang is not locked up—well, it makes me feel that these could be some of their crowd."

"Of course they are!" declared Tom positively. "That blue ring proves it!"

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that," declared Ned. "The man certainly had a blue ring tattooed on his finger—the same finger where you say Happy Harry had his. But what would the men still be doing in this neighborhood? They certainly would have headed far away from here, unless they are after more of your dad's things."

"No, I don't believe they are after any of Dad's inventions this time. But I tell you what I do believe."

"What?"

"Those men are planning to rob the Shopton Bank, Ned! You need to notify the officers. That Morse gang is one of the worst in the country," and Tom, much excited, began to pace the room. Ned, who had not dreamed of such an outcome to his narrative, looked startled.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER III

WHITEWASHED

"LET'S TELL your father, Tom," suggested Ned, after a pause. "He'll know what to do."

"No, I'd rather not," answered the young inventor quickly. "Dad has had trouble enough with these fellows, and I don't want him to worry any more. Besides, he is working on a new invention, and if I tell him about the Happy Harry gang it will make him miserable with worry."

"What invention is he planning now?"

"I don't know, but it's something important by the way he keeps at it. Something for the government I believe, so he can't tell me anything. He hardly has time to help Mr. Sharp and me on the airship. No, we'll keep this news from Dad for now."

"Then I'll inform the bank officials, as you suggest. If they require more information about the gang, could you come down?" Tom nodded his head in agreement. Ned continued, "If the place was robbed they might blame me if they found out I had seen the men a failed to tell them."

"Well, that gang would only be too glad to have the blame fall on someone else."

"I'll telephone to the president on my way home," decided Ned, "and he can notify the watchman at the bank. But do you really expect to have your airship in shape to fly soon?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Oh, yes. Now that we have found out our mistakes about the gas, the rest will be easy."

"I think I'd like to take a trip in one myself, if it didn't go too high," ventured Ned. He was a bit afraid of heights.

"I'll remember that, when we have ours completed," promised his chum, "and I'll take you for a spin."

The boys talked for perhaps an hour longer, mostly about the airship. It was the latest mechanical device in which Tom was interested and naturally, foremost in his

thoughts.

Before Ned went home he first telephoned the bank president about having seen the suspicious men. That official thanked his young employee, and said he would take all necessary precautions. The telephone call was not made until Mr. Swift had left the room and was out of hearing. Tom was determined that his father should have no unnecessary worry about the unscrupulous men. As it was, the news that the gang was out of jail had caused the aged inventor some alarm.

It was not without some anxiety that Tom arose the next morning, fearing he would hear news that the bank had been broken into. But no such alarming report circulated in Shopton. In fact having made some inquiries that day of Ned, he learned that no trace had been seen of the mysterious men. The police had been on the lookout, but they had seen nothing of them.

"Maybe they weren't the same ones after all," suggested Ned, when he paid Tom another visit the next night.

"Well, of course it's possible that they weren't," admitted the young inventor. "I'd be very glad to think so. Even if they were, your encounter with them may have scared them off; and that would be a good thing."

The next two weeks were busy ones for Tom and John Sharp. Aided occasionally by Mr. Swift, and with Garret Jackson to lend a hand whenever needed, the aeronaut

and the owner of the speedy *Arrow* made considerable progress on their airship.

"What is your father so busy over?" asked Mr. Sharp one day, when the new aluminum gas holder was about completed.

"I don't know," answered Tom, and not wanting to mention secret or government project, went on vaguely. "He doesn't seem to want to talk about it, even to me. He says it will revolutionize travel along a certain line, but whether he is working on an airship that will rival ours, or a new automobile, or some improvement to locomotives, I can't make out. He'll tell us in good time. But when do you think we will finish the—well, I don't know what to call it—I mean our airplane?"

"Oh, less than a month now. You know, we haven't a name for it. We'll need to christen it after it's completed. Now, if you'll tighten up some of those bolts I'll get the gas generating apparatus ready for another test."

The new airship was built from the designs John Sharp had shown to Tom and his father soon after his thrilling rescue from the blazing balloon over Lake Carlopa. The general idea of the airship being similar to an airplane, but in addition to the shortened, there was an aluminum, cigar-shaped tank, holding a new and very powerful gas. It would make the craft so light that it would be able to keep the ship afloat even when not in motion.

Two sets of planes were used, bringing the airship into the biplane class. There were also two large propellers, one in front and the other at the rear of the body.

Tom and John build these by carefully gluing many different layers of wood— a "built up" as they are called— to make them stronger. Each spanned eight feet in diameter, and were powered by a twenty-cylinder, air-cooled, motor, running at the rate of fifteen hundred revolutions a minute. When operated at full speed, the airship was capable of making eighty miles an hour, even against a moderate wind.

The main body was constructed so that it could be sealed to keep in breathable air even at considerable heights. It was outfitted as any car might be, but with additional amenities to keep several travelers comfortable during prolonged voyages. Everything was arranged around a small living room. The engine and other apparatus, including that for generating the gas, were located in a separate compartment.

It had been three-quarters built in less than a month by the combined work of Tom and Mr. Sharp. There were sleeping accommodations for five persons, a small kitchen where food could be prepared, and several easy chairs where the travelers could rest in comfort while skimming along high in the air, traveling as fast as the fastest railroad train.

There was room enough to carry stores for a voyage of a week or more, and enough gas could be manufactured aboard the ship, in addition to that already in the aluminum envelope, to sustain the ship for about two weeks.

The engine, steering apparatus and the gas machine were within easy reach and control of the pilot, who sat in a small room in the "bow" of the ship. The same electric stove used to warm the interior of the car also provided the means for cooking the food.

While there was still much to do to finish the craft, it had taken shape quickly.

The airship could be launched either by starting it along the ground, on rubber-tired wheels as is done in the case of the ordinary airplane, or it could be lifted by the gas, just as is done with a balloon. In short, there were many novel features about the ship.

Computations done by Tom indicated that it would be able to climb using the lifting gas alone at a rate of one hundred feet per minute. Using the rolling take-off method it could achieve more than four times that ascent rate.

The gas test took place a few days later. Success showed that the young inventor and Mr. Sharp had made no mistake this time. The needle valves controlling the powerful vapors worked perfectly.

"Well," remarked John, one afternoon, "I think we should finish putting the ship together this week and next, Tom, and have a trial flight. We will need a few more aluminum bolts, though. If you don't mind you might jump on your motorcycle and run to Mansburg for them. Merton's machine shop ought to have some."

Mansburg was the nearest large city to Shopton, and Merton was a machinist who frequently did work for Mr. Swift.

"All right," agreed Tom. "I'll start now. How many will you need?"

"Oh, a couple of dozen. Make it three dozen."

Tom started off, wheeling his cycle from the shed where it was kept. As he passed the building where the big frame of the airship, with the planes and aluminum bag had been assembled, he looked in.

"You'll soon be flying through the clouds," he remarked, speaking to the apparatus as if it could understand. "I guess we'll smash some records, too, if that engine Dad built works as well when it's installed as it does now."

Tom purchased the bolts and was on his way back with them when something went wrong with his motorcycle just as he passed through one of the outlying streets of Mansburg. He got off to adjust it, finding that it was only a trifling matter which he soon put right. He was aware of

a man standing, observing him. Without looking up at the man's face, the young inventor felt unpleasantly aware of a sharp scrutiny. He could hardly explain it, but it seemed as if the man emanated evil intentions toward him. It was not altogether unexpected on Tom's part when he looked up and saw a familiar face staring at him. It was Amberson Morse, the leader of the gang of men who had caused such trouble for him.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" asked Morse, an ugly scowl on his face. "I thought I recognized you." He moved nearer to Tom, who straightened up, and stood with the motorcycle between them.

"Yes. It's me," admitted the lad.

"I've been looking for you," went on Morse, his eyes narrowing. "I'm not done with you yet, nor your father, either."

"Aren't you?" asked Tom, trying to speak coolly though his heart was beating much faster than usual. Morse had spoken in a threatening manner. Tom glanced up and down the street and saw that it was deserted.

"No, I'm not," snapped the man. "You got me and my friends in a lot of trouble, and—"

"What? You didn't get half what you deserved!" burst out Tom, indignant at the thought of what he and his father had suffered at the hands of the gang. "You ought

to be in jail now, and if I could see a policeman, I'd have you arrested for threatening me!"

"Right! I suppose you think you know lots about the law," sneered Morse. "Well, I tell you one thing, if you make any further trouble for me, I'll—"

"I'll make all the trouble I can!" cried Tom, and he boldly faced the angry man. "I'm not afraid of you!"

"You should be!" and Morse spoke in a growling and vindictive manner. "We'll get even with you yet, Tom Swift. In fact I've a good notion now to give you a good thrashing for what you've done."

Before Tom was aware of the man's intention, Morse had stepped quickly into the street, reached over the motorcycle, and grasped him by the shoulder. He gave Tom a vicious shake.

"Take your hand off me!" cried Tom, who was hampered by having to hold up his heavy machine.

"I will when I've given you what I owe you!" retorted the scoundrel. "I'm going to have satisfaction now if I never —"

At that instant sound of a rattling and bumping came from down the street the. Tom looked up quickly and saw approaching a rattletrap of a wagon, drawn by a big, loose-jointed mule, the large ears of which were flapping to and fro. The animal was advancing rapidly, in response

to blows and words from the colored driver, and, before the uplifted fist of Morse could fall on Tom's head, the outfit was opposite them.

"Hold on dar, mistah! Hold on!" cried the colored man in the wagon. "What are yo' doin' to mah friend, Mistah Swift?"

"None of your business!" snapped Morse. "You drive on and let me manage this affair if you don't want trouble! Who are you anyhow?"

"Why doan yo' know me?" asked the colored man, at whom Tom looked gratefully. "I's Eradicate Sampson, an' dish yeah am mah mule, Boomerang. Whoa, Boomerang! I reckon yo' an' I better take a hand in dis argument."

"Not unless you want trouble!" cried Morse.

"I doan mind trouble, not in de leastest," answered Eradicate cheerfully, reaching into the wagon and taking out a long, jagged stick. "Me an' Boomerang has had lots of trouble. We's used to it. No, Mistah Man, you'd better let go o' mah friend, Mistah Swift, if yo' doan want trouble yo' se'f." He swung the stick, menacingly.

"Drive on, and mind your business!" cried Morse, now unreasonably angry. "This is my affair," and he gave Tom another shake.

Tom was not going to submit tamely, however. He shifted his weight and now had one hand free. He raised it

to strike Morse, but the latter let go of Tom's shoulder and grasped at the fist the young inventor had raised. Then, with his other hand, the scoundrel seemed about to hit Tom.

"Break away fum him, Mistah Swift!" directed the colored man. "Yo' can fight him, den!"

"He'll have trouble doing that," sneered Morse.

"Not ef I help him," answered Eradicate promptly, as he dropped his stick and reached into the body of his ramshackle vehicle.

"Don't you interfere with me!" stormed the man.

An instant later Tom broke away from his tormentor, and laid his motorcycle on the ground, in order to have both hands free for the attack.

"Think you're going to escape, do you?" cried Morse, as he started toward Tom, his eyes blazing. "I'll show you who you're dealing with!"

Tom lashed out a fist and caught the older man on the chin, staggering him. Morse stepped back and shook his head.

"Yes, an' I reckon I'll show yo' suffin yo' ain't lookin' fer!" suddenly cried Eradicate.

With a quick motion he picked up a pail of whitewash from his wagon. With sure aim, he emptied the contents

of the bucket over Morse, who was ready to make another rush at Tom. The white fluid spread over the man from head to foot, enveloping him as in a white shroud, and his advance was instantly checked.

Rad then stepped closer and swung the bucket. It only connected slightly with Morse's head, but the man went backwards and was soon sitting in a puddle of whitewash.

"Dar! I reckon dat's de quickest whitewashin' job I done in some time!" chuckled Eradicate, as he grasped his long handled brush, and stood by Tom, ready for a renewal of the hostilities on the part of Morse. "De bestest whitewashin' job I done in some time; yais, sah!"

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER IV

A TRIAL TRIP

THERE WAS no fear that Amberson Morse would return to the attack. He was partially blinded by the whitewash which ran in his eyes. He was fortunate that the mixture had been slaked, so it did not seriously burn him. He grouped blindly about, pawing the air with his outstretched hands.

"You wait! You wait! You'll suffer for this outrage!" he spluttered, as soon as he could free his mouth from the thick fluid. Then, wiping it from his face, with his hands,

as best he could, he stood and shook a fist at Tom. "I'll pay you and that black rascal back!" he cried. "You wait!"

"I hopes yo' pays me soon," answered Eradicate, "'cause as how dat whitewash was wuff twenty-five cents. Now I got t' go git mo' to finish doin' a chicken coop I'm wurkin' on. Whoa, dar Boomerang. Dere ain't goin' t' be no mo' trouble I reckon."

Morse did not reply. He had been most unexpectedly repulsed, and, with the whitewash dripping from his garments, he turned and fairly ran toward a strip of woodland that bordered the highway nearby.

Tom approached the handyman, and held out a welcoming hand.

"I don't know what I'd done if you hadn't come along, Rad," the lad said. "That fellow was dangerous, and this was a lonely spot to be attacked. Your whitewash came in mighty handy."

"Yais, sah, young Mistah Swift, dat's what it done. I knowed I could use it on him, ef he got too obstreperous, an' dat's what he done. But I were goin' to fight him wif mah buckit an bresh, ef he'd made any more trouble."

"Oh, I think we have seen the last of him for some time," said Tom, but he looked worried. It was evident that the Happy Harry gang was still hanging around the neighborhood of Shopton. The fact that Morse was bold

enough to attack our hero in broad daylight showed that he felt little fear of the authorities.

"Ef yo' wants t' catch him, Mistah Swift," went on Eradicate, "yo' kin trace him by de whitewash what drops offen him," and he pointed to a trail of white drops which showed the path Morse had taken. "He'll be a drippin' least anudder half hour."

"No, the less I have to do with him the better I like it," answered the lad. "But I can't thank you enough, Rad. You have helped me out of trouble several times now. You put me on the trail of the men in the deserted mansion, you warned me of the log Andy Foger placed across the road, and now you have saved me from Morse."

"Oh, dat's nuffin, Mistah Swift. Yo' has shua done lots fo' me. 'Sides, mah mule, Boomerang, is entitled t' de most credit dis heah time. I were comin' down de street, on mah way t' a whitewashin' job, when I seen yo', an yo' lickitysplit machine," as Eradicate called the motorcycle. "I knowed it were yo', an' I didn't laik de looks o' dat man. Den I see he had hold o' you, an' I t'ought he were a burglar. So I yelled t' Boomerang t' hurry up. Now, mostly, when I wants Boomerang t' hurry, he goes slow, an' when I wants him t' go slow, he runs away. But dis heah time he knowed he were comin' t' help yo', an' he certainly did leg it, dat's what he done! He run laik he were goin' home t' a stable full o' oats, an' dat's how I got

heah so quick. Den I t'ought o' de whitewash, an' I jest used it."

"It was the most effective weapon you could have used," said Tom, gratefully.

"Deed no, Mistah Swift, I didn't hab no weapon," spoke Eradicate earnestly. "I ain't eben got mah razor, 'case I left it home. I didn't hab no weapon at all. An ma stick din't seem no good fer da job. I jest used de whitewash, laik yo' seen me."

"That's what I meant," answered Tom, trying not to laugh at the simple man's misunderstanding. "I'm ever so much obliged to you, just the same, and here's a half dollar to pay for the whitewash."

"Oh, no, Mistah Swift, I doan want t' take it. I kin make mo' whitewash."

But Tom insisted, and picked up his machine to sprint for home. Eradicate started to tell over again, how he urged Boomerang on, but the lad had no time to listen.

"But I didn't hab no weapon, Mistah Swift, no indeedy, none at all, not even mah razor," repeated Eradicate. "Only de pail ob whitewash. That is, lessen yo' calls mah buckit a weapon."

"Well, it's a sort of one," admitted Tom, with a laugh as he started his machine. "Come around next week, Rad. We have some dirt eradicating for you to attend to."

"Deed an' I will, Mistah Swift. Eradicate is mah name, an' I eradicates de dirt. But dat man such did look odd, wif dat pail o' whitewash all ober him. He shua did look most extraordinarily. Gidap, Boomerang. See if yo' can break some mo' speed records now."

But the mule appeared to be satisfied with what he had done, and, as he rode off, Tom looked back to see the colored man laboring to get the sleepy, animal started.

The lad did not tell his father of the adventure with Morse, but he related the occurrence to John. Sharp.

"I'd like to get hold of that scoundrel, and the others in the gang!" exclaimed the balloonist. "I'd take him up in the airship, and drop him down into the lake. He's a bad man. So are the others. Wonder what they want around here?"

"That's what's puzzling me," admitted Tom. "I hope Dad doesn't hear about them or he will start to worry. And it could interfere with his new invention ideas."

"He hasn't told you yet what he's engaged in inventing, has he?"

"No, and I don't like asking. He said the other day, though, that it would rival our airship, but in a different way."

"I wonder what he meant?"

"It's hard to say. Dad can be a little cryptic sometimes.

But I don't believe he can invent anything that will beat our ship, even if he is my own father, and the best inventor in the world," said Tom, half jokingly. "Well, I got the bolts, now let's get to work. I'm anxious for a trial trip."

"No more than I am. I am anxious to see if my ideas work out in practice as well as they do in theory."

For a week or more Tom and John labored on the airship, with Mr. Jackson to help them. Ned dropped by on Saturday to help with lifting the wings into place and to assist with hoisting the motor, with its twenty cylinders, and getting it bolted to the aluminum mounts on the frame.

"That's not as heavy as I imagined," Ned commented once the job was complete.

"No. It isn't." Tom replied. "Dad had the cylinder heads cast from an aluminum alloy. It's almost twice as strong as aluminum alone, and weighs half that of cast steel."

The rudders, one to control the rise and fall of the craft, and the other to direct its flight to the right or left, were attached, and the steering wheel, as well as the levers regulating the motor were put in place before Ned headed for home that evening.

"About all that remains to be done now," said the aeronaut that night, as he and Tom stood in the big shed,

looking at their creation, "is to fit up the car, and paint it."

"Can't we make a trial trip before we complete everything for a long flight?" asked the young inventor.

"Yes, but I wouldn't like to go out without painting the ship. Some parts of it might rust if we get into the moist, cloudy, upper regions."

"Then let's paint it tomorrow, and, as soon as it's dry we'll have a test."

"All right. I'll mix the paint the first thing in the morning."

It took two days to paint the machine, for much care had to be used. When it was finished Tom looked admiringly up at it.

"We ought to name it," suggested John, as he wiped away a bit of paint from the edge of one window.

"Absolutely," agreed Tom. "And I have the very name for her—*Red Cloud!*"

"*Red Cloud?*" questioned John.

"Yes!" exclaimed Tom, with enthusiasm. "The big, aluminum gas container is red, and we hope to go above the clouds in it. Why not *Red Cloud?*"

"That's what it will be!" conceded the balloonist. "If we had a bottle of milk, or something like that, I'd christen it."

"We ought to have a young lady to do that part," suggested Tom. "They always have young ladies to name ships and to bless all who sail on them."

"Thinking of any particular young lady?" asked John softly as the pair climbed up onto the scaffolding surrounding the front end of the machine.

Tom blushed as he replied, "Oh no—of course that is—well—Oh, hang it, christen it yourself, and leave me alone," he finished.

"Well, in the absence of Miss Mary Nestor, who I think, would be the best one for the ceremony," said Mr. Sharp, with a twinkle in his eyes, "I christen thee *Red Cloud*," and with that he sprinkled some water on the pointed nose of the red aluminum gas bag.

"*Red Cloud* it is!" cried Tom, enthusiastically. "And, tomorrow we'll see what it can do."

The weather was magnificent on day of the test. The fact that an airship was being constructed in the Swift shops had been kept as secret as possible, but many in Shopton knew of it because Andy Foger had spread the news.

"I hope we won't have a crowd around to watch us go up," said Tom, as he and John went to the shed to get the *Red Cloud* ready for the trial. "I don't want to have them laugh at us if we fail to get off the ground."

"Don't worry. We'll go up all right," declared Sharp.

"The only thing I'm at all worried about is our speed. I want to go fast, but we will not be able to until our motor gets 'broken in.' But we'll certainly rise."

The gas set-up had already been started, and the vapor was hissing inside the big aluminum holder. It was decided to try to go up under the lifting power of the gas alone. The Swift property had no airstrip and there was hardly room around the shops for a good start.

When enough of the lifting vapor had been generated to make the airship slightly buoyant, the big doors of the shed were opened, and Tom and John, with the aid of Garret and Mr. Swift, shoved it slowly out.

"There it is! There she comes!" cried several voices outside the high fence that surrounded the Swift property. "They're going up!"

"Andy Foger is in that bunch," remarked Tom with a grim smile. "Now I *really* hope we don't fail."

"We won't. Don't worry," advised John.

The shouts outside the fence increased. It was evident that quite a crowd of boys, as well as men, had collected, though it was early in the morning. Somehow, news of the test had leaked out.

Tom shut off and disconnected the hose from the gas generator in the shed. From this point on, the apparatus inside the craft would be used to generate any needed

lifting gases. He opened the outside door to the compartment holding the ship's equipment and set all the necessary valves. Soon, he and John verified that gases were being sent to the lifting container.

The ship continued to get lighter and lighter as more gas was generated. It was held down by ropes fastened to stakes driven in the ground so it would not get away until the pilots were ready. John entered the big car.

"Come on, Tom," the aeronaut called. "We're almost ready to fly. Will you come too, Mr. Swift and Garret?"

"Some other time," promised the aged inventor. "It looks as though you were going to succeed, though. I'll wait, however, until after the test before I venture."

"How about you, Garret?" asked Tom of the engineer, as the young inventor climbed into the car.

"The ground is good enough for me," was the answer, with a smile. "Broken bones don't mend so easily when you're past sixty-five."

"But we're not going to fall!" declared John. "All ready, Tom. Cast off! Here we go!"

The restraining ropes were quickly cast aside. Slowly at first, and then with a bit more speed as though feeling more and more sure of herself, the *Red Cloud* arose in the air like a gigantic bird with scarlet plumage. Up and up it went, higher than the house and the big shed where it had

been built—higher, higher, higher!

"There she is!" cried the shrill voices of the boys in the meadow, and the hoarser tones of the men mingled with them.

"Yes!" called Tom softly to the balloonist as they completely cleared the tops of the trees. "We're off!" and he leaned out the open window and waved to his father and Garret.

"I told you so," spoke John confidently. "I'm going to start the propellers in a minute."

"Oh, dear me, goodness sakes alive!" cried Mrs. Baggert, the housekeeper, bustling from the house and wringing her hands. "I'm sure they'll fall!"

She looked up apprehensively, but Tom only waved his hand to her, and threw her a kiss. Clearly he had no fears, though this was the first time he had ever been in an aircraft of any sort. John Sharp was as calm and collected as an ocean captain making his hundredth trip across the Atlantic.

"Throw on the main switch," he called to Tom, and Tom, moving to amidships in the car, did as directed. John set several levers, adjusted some valves, and then, with a rattle and bang, the huge, twenty-cylinder motor started.

It took only a moment for it to start running smoothly.

John pulled a lever to close off the muffler bypass—which needed to be opened to start the engine—and then gave it a bit more fuel. It rumbled, more quietly than before, and sped up. John grasped the steering wheel. Then, using a clutch mechanism similar to an automobile he threw the two propellers into gear. They began to whirl around rapidly.

"Here we go!" cried Tom, and, sure enough, the *Red Cloud*, now several hundred feet in the air, shot forward. It felt like a boat on the water, only with such a smooth, gliding, easy motion that it was like being borne along on a cloud.

"She works! She works!" cried the balloonist. "Now to try our elevation rudder," and, as the *Red Cloud* gathered speed, he tilted the small elevator flaps which sent the craft up or down.

The next instant the airship was pointed upward at an angle toward the clouds, and scooted along at swift speed.

From below came the admiring cheers of the crowd of boys and men. Everyone seemed happy for Tom and John, with the exception of one red-haired bully and the sinister man lurking in a nearby grove of trees: Amberson Morse!

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER V

COLLISION COURSE

"SHE SEEMS to work," observed Tom, looking from where he was seated near some electrical switches, over to John Sharp.

"Of course she does," replied the aeronaut. "I knew it would. I wasn't quite sure that it would scoot along like it is. We're making pretty good speed, but we'll do better when the motor gets a couple dozen hours on it and you've had the chance to tune it."

"How high up are we?" asked Tom.

The balloonist glanced at several gauges near the

steering wheel. One gauge used the changes in air pressure that came from differences in altitude to provide a rough estimate of height. It had arrived from the manufacturer calibrated to sea level, which was fine for most purposes. It was required that a quick arithmetic sum be computed to reduce the overall number from a known starting altitude in order to know how far above a current location you might be.

"A little short of three thousand feet," he answered. "Do you want to go higher?"

"No—no—I guess not," was Tom's answer. He was feeling a little light headed and found it becoming more of a chore to breath normally.

"Don't get alarmed," called Mr. Sharp quickly, noting that his companion was in distress because of the high altitude. "That always happens to persons who go into the thin air for the first time, especially if you go up quickly. Your body hasn't the time to adjust. It is easier for people who climb mountains, at least until they get above about five thousand feet or more feet. Breathe as slowly and as deeply as you can, and swallow frequently. That will relieve the pressure on your ear drums. I'll bring the ship lower for a little while, until you adjust."

Tom did as he was advised, and the aeronaut, pushing the elevator control to a forward position, sent the *Red Cloud* on a downward slant. In just a thousand feet lower altitude, Tom started to feel relieved, both because the action of swallowing equalized the pressure on the ear

drums—which had both reduced his hearing and caused painful pressure to build inside—and because the airship was soon in a more dense atmosphere with a higher concentration of life-giving oxygen.

"How are you now?" asked the man of the lad, as the craft was again on an even keel.

"All right," replied Tom, briskly. "I didn't know what ailed me at first."

"I was troubled the same way when I first went up in a balloon," commented Mr. Sharp. "I propose that we should outfit this fine craft with a cylinder or two of compressed air with a high level of oxygen."

Tom agreed. "It will come in handy if we need to go to even higher altitudes, and it will make any passengers more comfortable. So, what do we do now?"

"We'll run along for a few miles, at an elevation of about five hundred feet, and then we'll go to within a hundred feet of the earth and see how the *Red Cloud* behaves under different conditions. Take a look below and see what you think of it."

Tom looked down through one of several plate glass portholes in the floor of the car. He gave a gasp of astonishment.

"Why! We're right over Lake Carlopa!" he stated.

"Of course we are," admitted John Sharp with a laugh. "And I'm glad to say that we're better off than when I was last over this same body of water," and he could scarcely repress a shudder as he thought of his perilous position

hanging on for dear life below a blazing balloon.

The lake was spread out below the navigators of the air like a mirror of silver in a setting of green fields. They were heading almost due north and Tom could see the winding river that flowed into the top part of the lake. From this altitude he noted towns, villages, and even the haziness in the air that indicated the distant, industrial city of Ticonderoga. Interspersed here and there with broad farms or patches of woodlands where forests had been cleared. He had a real bird's-eye view of a stretch of country.

"This is great!" he exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "I wouldn't miss this for the world!"

"Oh, you haven't begun to see things yet," replied Mr. Sharp. "Wait until we take a long trip. This ship is behaving so much better than I dared to hope. Well, we're five hundred feet high now, and we'll run along at this elevation for a while. Sing out if you see anything interesting."

Objects on the earth became more distinct now, and Tom could observe excited throngs running along and pointing upward. He wished that he had thought to bring his binocular glasses from his motorboat. "Then," he thought, "I'd really be able to see things!"

They were several miles from Shopton by this time, and the machinery was running smoothly. The huge motor, with its many cylinders was purring like a big cat and providing a soothing vibration through the floor.

"We could have lunch up here, if we'd brought along anything to eat," observed Tom.

"Yes," agreed his companion. "But I think we had better go back now. Your father may be anxious. Come here and take the controls for awhile, Tom, and I'll show you how to steer. We'll start by going down a short distance."

Tom slid into the control seat. He was already familiar with the many controls having been responsible for installing many of them. He pressed the wheel forward to shift the elevator, and the *Red Cloud* headed earthward. John had Tom bring the craft around in a lazy circle and had the youth take them up and down a few times, like an airborne rollercoaster. Tom said, afterward, that it was like guiding a fleecy cloud through the skies.

"Point her straight for Shopton," requested John, when he was certain that Tom was on his way toward mastering the various wheels and levers.

"Straight ahead she is," answered the lad, imitating a sailor's reply. "Oh, but this is great, John! It beats even my motorboat!"

"It goes considerably faster, at any event," remarked his friend. "Keep her steady now, while I take a look at the engine. I want to be sure it doesn't run hot."

He went aft where all the machinery in the car was located, and Tom was left alone in the small pilot room. He felt a thrill as he looked down at the earth beneath him, and saw the crowds of wonder-gazers pointing at the great, red airship flying high over their heads. Rapidly the

open fields along the lake's shore slipped by, giving place to a large city.

"Rockmond," murmured Tom, as he noted it. "We're about fifty miles from home, but we'll soon be back in the shed at this rate. We certainly are skipping along. A hundred and fifty feet elevation," he went on, as he looked at a gauge and performed the calculation. "I wonder when I'll ever get used to going several miles up in the air?"

He shifted the rudder a bit, to go to the left. The *Red Cloud* obeyed promptly, but the next instant he heard and felt something snap. Tom was startled and looked around. He could see nothing wrong in his room, but a moment later the airship dipped its nose toward the earth. Then it seemed to increase its forward speed. A few seconds later, it was rushing straight for a tall, ornamental tower that rose from one corner of a large building.

"John! Mr. Sharp!" cried the lad. "Something has happened! We're heading for a tower!"

"Steer to one side!" called the balloonist as he tried to get forward.

Tom tried but found that the controls had jammed. The horizontal rudder would not work, nor would the elevator. The craft was getting nearer with every minute to the structure of brick and mortar.

"We're going to have a collision!" shouted Tom. "I'm shutting off the power!" He disconnected the main switch.

The two propellers which had been whirling around so swiftly that they looked like blurs of light came to a rapid

halt. John came rushing forward, and Tom relinquished the steering wheel to him.

But it was too late. Though moving at a slower rate, the *Red Cloud* continued its course straight at the tower. A moment later came the impact, a glancing blow, but one that smashed the forward propeller, breaking off both blades. The nose of the aluminum gas container knocked off a few bricks from the tower, and then, the ship came to a halt and slowly settled to the flat roof of the building.

"We're smashed!" cried Tom, with something like despair in his voice.

"Nothing! Don't worry! Could have been worse! Not the first time I've had an accident. It's only one propeller, and I can easily make another," said John, in his quick, jerky sentences that seemed to be more prevalent in times of stress. He allowed some of the gas to escape from a relief valve in the container, making the ship less buoyant so that it remained on the roof.

The aeronaut and Tom climbed out of the car to determine if any further damage had been done. They were just congratulating themselves that the aft controls seemed to be the extent, when, from a hatchway in the roof there came a procession of young ladies led by an elderly matron wearing spectacles. She had a very determined, bristling air.

"Well, I *must* say, this is a *very* unceremonious proceeding!" exclaimed the spectacled woman. "Pray, gentlemen, to what are we indebted for this— honor?"

"It was an accident, ma'am," replied Mr. Sharp, removing his hat, and bowing. "A mere accident!"

"Humph! I *suppose* it was an accident that the tower of this building was damaged, if not *absolutely* loosened at the foundations. You will *have* to pay the damages!" She sharply punctuated several of her words. Then turning, and seeing about twenty of her young ladies standing behind her on the flat roof—each young lady eying with astonishment, mixed with admiration, the airship—the elderly one added, "Ladies! To your rooms at *once*! How *dare* you leave without permission?"

"Oh, Miss Perryman!" exclaimed a voice. The sound of its owner startled Tom. "Mayn't we see the airship? It might be useful in studies!"

Tom looked at the young lady who had spoken. "Mary Nestor!" he exclaimed.

"Tom—I mean Mr. Swift!" she rejoined with a surprised but happy smile. "How in the world did you get here?"

"I was going to ask you the same question," retorted the lad. "We flew here."

"Young ladies! Silence!" cried Miss Perryman, who was evidently the principal of the school. "The *idea* of any one of you *daring* to speak to these—these *persons*—without my permission, and without an introduction!"

The woman took a disapproving look at both the airship and at the tower, "I shall make them pay *heavily* for damaging my seminary," she added, as she strode toward Mr. Sharp.

"To your rooms at *once!*" Miss Perryman ordered again, but not a young lady moved.

The airship and its aviators were too much of an attraction for them.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER VI

GETTING OFF THE ROOF

FOR A FEW minutes John Sharp was so engrossed with looking underneath the craft trying to ascertain the condition of various planes and braces, that he had paid little attention to the old maid school principal, after his first greeting. But Miss Perryman was not a person to be ignored.

"I want payment for the *damage* to the tower of *my* school," she went on. "I could also *demand* damages for *trespassing* on my roof, but I will *refrain* in this case.

Young ladies, will you now go to your rooms?" she demanded.

"Oh, please, let us stay," pleaded Mary Nestor, beside whom Tom now stood. "Perhaps Professor Swift will provide us a lecture on clouds and air currents and—and such things as that," the girl went on slyly, smiling at the somewhat embarrassed lad.

"Ahem! If there is a *professor* present, perhaps it might be a good idea to absorb *some* knowledge," admitted the old maid. Unconsciously, she smoothed her hair and settled her gold spectacles straighter on her nose. "Professor, uh, Swift was it? I will delay collecting damages on *behalf* of the Rockmond Seminary for Young Ladies while you deliver your lecture on air currents," she went on, addressing herself to Mr. Sharp.

"Oh, I'm not the professor," he said quickly. "I'm the professional balloonist, trapeze artist and parachute jumper. I give exhibitions at county fairs. Leap for life, and all that sort of thing. I guess you mean my friend, Tom. He's smart enough for a professor. Invented a lot of things. Umm—how much is the damage?"

"What? Not a true professor?" cried Miss Perryman indignantly. "Why I understood from Miss Nestor that she called someone professor."

"I was referring to my friend, Mr. Swift," said Mary. "His father's a professor, anyhow. Isn't he, Tom? I mean

Mr. Swift!"

"He has a teaching degree, but he never uses it," was the lad's answer.

"Ha! Then I have been *deceived!* There is no professor present!" and the old maid drew herself up as though hoping to punishing someone. "Young ladies, for the *last* time, I *order* you to your rooms," and, with a dramatic gesture she swept her arm out, pointed to the hatch through which the procession had come.

"Say something, Tom—I mean Mr. Swift," appealed Mary in a whisper. "Can't you give some sort of a lecture? The girls are just crazy to hear about the airship, and this ogress won't let us. Say something!"

"I—I don't know what to say," stammered Tom.

But he was saved the necessity for just then several women, evidently other teachers, came out on the roof.

"Oh, an airship!" exclaimed one. "How lovely! We thought it was an earthquake, and we were afraid to come up for quite a while. But an airship! I've always wanted to see one, and now I have an opportunity. It will be just the thing for my physical geography and natural history class. Young ladies, attention, and I will explain certain things to you."

"Miss Delafield, do you understand enough about an airship to lecture on one?" asked Miss Perryman smartly.

"Enough so that my class may benefit," answered the other teacher, who was quite pretty.

"Ahem! That is sufficient, and a *different* matter," conceded Miss Perryman. "Young ladies, give your undivided attention to Miss Delafield, and I trust you will profit by what she tells you. Meanwhile I wish to have conversation concerning *damages* with the persons who so unceremoniously visited us. It is a shame that the pupils of the Rockmond Seminary should be disturbed at their studies. Sir, I *will* talk with you," and the principal pointed a long, straight finger at Mr. Sharp.

"Young ladies, attention!" called Miss Delafield. "You will observe the large red body at the top, that is—"

"I'd rather have you explain it," whispered Mary Nestor to Tom. "Come on. Let's slip around to the other side. May I bring a few of my friends with me? We can't bear Miss Delafield. She thinks she knows everything. She won't see us if we slip around."

"I will be delighted," replied Tom, "only I fear I may have to help Mr. Sharp out of this trouble."

"Don't worry about me, Tom," said the balloonist, who overheard him. "Let me do the explaining. I'm an old hand at it. Been in trouble before. Many a time I've had to pay damages for coming down in a farmer's cornfield. I'll attend to the lady principal, and you can explain things to the young ones," and, with a wink, the aeronaut stepped

over to where Miss Perryman, in spite of her prejudice against the airship, was observing it curiously.

Happy of the chance to talk to his young lady friend, Tom slipped to the opposite side of the car with her and a three of her close friends. There Tom told how the *Red Cloud* came to be built, and of his first trip in the air.

On the opposite side, Miss Delafield lectured to the entire school on aeronautics, as she thought she knew them. Tom overheard several incorrect points and whispered something to Mary. She giggled and nodded.

Mary stepped around to stand at the rear of the group listening to Miss Delafield. She raised a hand and was recognized.

"Miss Delafield? You said that the aluminum container was much too heavy to provide any lift, and that they should be using fabric."

The would-be lecturer nodded. "That is precisely what I said."

"Well then, what would you use to seal the inside and outside of such a fabric container. I refer to the need to completely seal the lifting gas inside and the outer air out." She stood there in silence waiting for the woman to come up with an answer.

Finally, and after a full minute, Mary continued. "The only thing that might provide such sealing capabilities

would be natural rubber. If my math is correct, that would make for a gas bag that is heavier than Mr. Swift's thin aluminum one. I am correct in my math, aren't I?" she asked with greatly feigned innocence.

Miss Delafield was totally perplexed. She "um'd" and "er'd" and then had to sit down, she had become so flustered. Mary returned to Tom, absolutely beaming.

Mr. Sharp evidently did know how to "explain" matters to the irate principal. In a short while, she was smiling. By this time Tom had about finished his little lecture, and Miss Delafield had recovered to near the end of hers. The entire school of girls was grouped about the *Red Cloud*, curiously examining it, but Mary Nestor and her friends probably learned more than any of the others. As the others departed, Mary told Tom that she had been attending the school in Rockmond for about two weeks; since the fall term began.

"Momma and Poppa feel that my senior year in school should be filled with good thoughts and philosophy and positive influences. I hope you can come around often, or I will most likely go absolutely crazy here. And— I would dearly like to see you again, Tom."

"What a good fortune it was that we were forced to smash into that tower, *and* that you were below there, studying," said the boy to the girl.

"I'm afraid I wasn't doing much studying," she

confessed. "I had just a glimpse of the airship through the window, and I was wondering who was in it, when the crash came. Miss Perryman—she is boring but is nothing if not brave—started for the roof, and we girls all followed her. How are you going to get the ship down?"

"I'm afraid it is going to be quite a job," admitted Tom ruefully. "Something went wrong with the machinery, or this never would have happened. As soon as Mr. Sharp has settled with your principal, we'll see what we can do."

"I guess he's settled it now," observed Miss Nestor. "Here he comes."

The aeronaut and Miss Perryman were approaching together, and the old maid did not seem half so angry as she had been.

"You see," Mr. Sharp was saying, "it will be a good advertisement for your school. Think of having the distinction of having harbored the powerful airship, *Red Cloud*, on your roof. You might even advertise to prospective pupils that the school will be visited at least once next year. Hmm?"

"I never thought of it in *that* light," admitted the principal. "Perhaps you are right. I *shall* put it in my next catalog."

"And, as for damages to the tower, we will gladly pay you fifty dollars," continued the balloonist. "Do you agree

to that, Mr. Swift?" he asked Tom. "I think your father, the *professor*, would call that fair."

"Oh, as long as this airship is *partly* the property of a *professor*, perhaps I *should* only take twenty-five dollars," put in Miss Perryman. "I am a *great* admirer of professors—I mean in a *strictly* educational sense," she went on, as she detected a tendency on the part of some of the young ladies to giggle.

"No, fifty dollars will be about right," went on Mr. Sharp, pulling out a well-filled wallet. "I will pay you now. If the damage is substantial, it may well be a week or more before we can bring it down."

"And if you will *wait* I will give you a receipt," continued the principal, evidently as much appeased at the mention of a professor's title, as she was by the money.

"We're getting off cheap," the balloonist whispered to Tom, as the head of the seminary started down the hatch to the classrooms below.

"I only hope it will turn out as easy getting out of that difficulty as it will be to get off the roof," replied the lad.

"Don't worry. Leave that to me," the aeronaut said. It took a lot to ruffle Mr. Sharp.

With a receipt in full for the damage to the tower, and expressing the hope that, some day, in the near future,

Professor Swift would do the seminary the honor of lecturing to the young lady pupils of his inventions, Miss Perryman bade Mr. Sharp and Tom goodbye.

"*Young* ladies, to your rooms!" she commanded. "You have learned *enough* of airships, and there may be some *danger* getting this one off the roof."

"Would you like to take a ride in it?" Tom asked Mary Nestor.

"Yes, Tom. I would," she answered daringly. "It's better than a motorboat. Do you know when?"

"Some day, when we get more expert in managing it," he replied, as he shook hands with her. Their fingers lingered together a few extra seconds and Tom felt his heart race. Mary excused herself and returned below.

"Now for some hard work," went on the young inventor to Mr. Sharp when the roof was cleared of the last of the teachers and pupils. But the windows with a view of the airship on the roof were soon filled with eager faces, while in the streets below a crowd had gathered, offering all manner of suggestions.

"Oh, it's not going to be such a task," said Mr. Sharp. "First we will repair the rudder and the machinery. I'm fairly sure that we had one or two cables come apart. The new propeller will need to wait. Then we'll simply generate some more gas, rise into the skies and fly home."

"But the broken propeller?" objected Tom.

"We can fly with one nearly as well as we can with two, but at less than half speed. The two of them act in balance, so we will run the motor much slower. Don't worry. We'll come out all right," and the balloonist assumed a confident air.

As they began assessing the damage, Tom was thinking of the mechanics necessary to overcome the propeller balance problems. He had already noticed that with both turning in the same direction of rotation, the cabin seemed almost eager to rotate away from that direction.

They discussed the matter and came up with the idea that one propeller rotating in one direction and the other rotating in the opposite direction would soon fix that tendency. Tom described how a simple reversing gear could be affixed to the rear drive shaft to accomplish the task. They were able to hitch a ride from a passing truck that was headed to Shopton.

It was not so difficult a problem as Tom had imagined to put the machinery in order. A simple break in a cable had cut off the working of the rudder and wrapped around the cable to the elevator. They changed out the two other control cables having found that at least one other showed signs of unusual wear. Tom easily saw that this occurred in places where the cables ran through small holes in the wood or metal bracing of the machine. He

would fix that by inserting small lengths of rubber hose through which the cables would run.

The smashed propeller was unmounted and the gases started. With all the pupils watching from windows, and a new crowd observing from the streets and surrounding country—word of the happening had spread—Tom and his friend prepared to ascend.

There was no wind to impair their flight, so they rose as easily as they had done at the shed at home. In a little while were floating a hundred feet above the school. Tom fancied he could see a certain hand waving to him, as he peered from the window of the car—using the binocular glasses he had remembered to bring from home. He could plainly see many hands in one of the larger school windows, but since there were so many pretty girls doing the same thing, it was hard to see how Tom might pick out any certain one.

The airship was now afloat and clear of all buildings and trees. Starting the motor, Mr. Sharp found that even with one propeller the *Red Cloud* did fairly well, making good speed.

"Now for home to repair everything. Then we'll be ready for a longer trip," the aeronaut said to the young inventor, as they turned around, and headed off into the wind, while hundreds below them cheered.

From their height and position, Tom could not see the

tentative kiss blown in his direction by a pretty girl from New York City.

"We ought to carry spare propellers if we're going to smash into school towers," remarked Tom. "I seem to be a sort of bad luck."

"Nonsense! It wasn't your fault at all," John said warmly. "It would have happened to me had I been steering. But we will take an extra propeller along after this."

An hour later they dropped their altitude and landed gently in front of the big shed. The *Red Cloud* was safely housed. Mr. Swift was just beginning to get anxious about his son and his friend, and was glad to welcome them back.

"Now for a big trip, in about a week!" exclaimed John Sharp enthusiastically. "You'll come with us, won't you, Mr. Swift?"

The inventor slowly shook his head. "Not on a trip," he said. "I may go for a trial spin with you, but I've got an extremely important a matter under way. I won't be able to venture on a long trip," and he turned away without explaining what it was.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER VII

ANDY TRIES A TRICK

WITHOUT LOSING any time, the young inventor and the aeronaut began to repair the damage done to the Red Cloud by colliding with the tower. The most important part to reconstruct was the propeller, and Mr. Sharp decided to make two instead of one.

Tom's tasks included the rubber protective tubes, called grommets, that would minimize cable rub. That complete, lubricated and tested, he arranged a safety mechanism so that the rudder could not become jammed again if one

cable broke. He also arranged a second set of cables along the other side of the aircraft as a spare. These could be quickly attached to the control wheel and levers in an emergency. Once Tom finished his simple but effective anti-jam device, the balloonist saw it, causing him to compliment Tom.

"That's worth patenting," he declared. "I advise you to take out papers on that."

"It seems such a simple thing," answered the youth. "And I don't see much use of spending the money for a patent. Dad's last one cost him almost one hundred dollars between the forms and the lawyers. Airships aren't likely to be so numerous that I could make anything off that patent."

"You take my advice," insisted John turning Tom so he could look the younger man in the eyes. "Airships are going to be used more in the future than you have any idea of. You get that device patented. If you don't make all your money back in under two years I'll pay the whole thing back to you."

It turned out that Tom did patent the system, and, not many years afterward he was glad that he had. It brought him enough of an income to let him attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and to get married and start a family.

It required several days' work on the *Red Cloud* before

it was in shape for another trial. During the hours when he was engaged in the big shed helping Mr. Sharp, the young inventor spent many minutes picturing a certain fair face.

"She promised to go for a ride with me," mused the lad. "I hope she doesn't back out. But I'll need to learn more about managing the ship before I venture with her in it. It won't do to have any accidents then. There's Ned Newton, too. I must take him for a trip in the clouds. Guess I'll invite him over some afternoon and give him a private view of the machine when we get it in shape again."

About a week after the accident at the school Mr. Sharp remarked to Tom one afternoon, "If the weather is good tomorrow, we should try another flight. Do you suppose your father will come along?"

"I don't know," answered the lad. "He seems so engrossed in something. It's unusual, too. Generally, he tells me what he is working on. I guess he will say something about it when he gets ready."

"Well, if he doesn't feel just like coming, don't argue him. He might be nervous about going up while the ship is new, I don't want any nervous passengers aboard. We can't get back down fast enough if they panic, and I can't give them my attention and look after the running of the machinery."

"I was going to propose bringing a friend of mine over

to see us make the trip tomorrow," went on the young inventor. "Ned Newton—you know him. He'd like a ride."

"Oh, Ned's all right. Unless he's known to have problems with heights or enclosed spaces, let him come along. We won't go very high tomorrow. After a trial rise using just the gas, I want to find a smooth field or a wide road and bring the ship down to the ground, then try for a takeoff solely by means of the lift ability of the wings. Oh, yes, bring your friend along."

Ned was delighted to receive Tom's invitation the next day. Though a little dubious about trusting himself in an airship for the first time, he consented to go with his chum. He got a half-day holiday from the bank, and, shortly after lunch went to Tom's house.

"Come out to the shed and take a look at the *Red Cloud*," Tom proposed. "Mr. Sharp isn't quite ready to start yet, so I'll explain some things to you."

The big shed was deserted when the lads entered, so they climbed to the loft where they were on a level with the big, red aluminum tank. Tom began with a description of the machinery, and Ned followed him with interest.

"Now we'll go down into the car or cabin," continued the young navigator of the air, "and I'll show you what we do when we're touring amid the clouds."

As they started to descend the flight of steps from the

loft platform, a noise on the ground below attracted their attention.

"Guess that's Mr. Sharp coming," said Ned.

Tom leaned over and looked down. An instant later he grasped the arm of his chum, and motioned to him to keep silent.

"Take a look," whispered the young inventor pointing down.

"Andy Foger!" exclaimed Ned, peering over the railing.

"Yes, and Sam Snedecker and Pete Bailey are with him. They sneaked in when I left the door open. What do they want?"

"Up to no good, I'll bet," commented Ned.

"Listen."

Tom and Ned listened intently. Though the trio on the ground below them did not speak loudly, their voices came plainly to the listeners.

"Let's poke a hole in their gas bag," proposed Sam. "That will make them think they're not so smart as they pretend."

"Now, we can't do that," answered Andy.

"Why not?" declared Pete.

"Because the bag's away up in the top part of the shed,

and I'm not going to climb up there."

"You're afraid," sneered Sam.

"I am not! I'll punch your face if you say that again! Besides the thing that holds the gas is made of aluminum, and we can't make a hole in it unless we take an axe, and that makes too much noise."

"We ought to play some sort of a trick on Tom Swift," proposed Pete. "He's too cocky!"

Tom shook his fist at the lads on the ground, but of course they did not see him.

"I have it!" came from Andy.

"What?" demanded his two cronies.

"We'll cut some of the guy wires from the wings and rudders. That will make the airship collapse. They'll think the wires broke from the strain. Take out your knives and saw away at the wires. Hurry, or they'll catch us."

"Let's stop them," Ned whispered to Tom, "Come on down, and give 'em a trouncing."

Tom hesitated. He looked quickly about the loft, and then a smile replaced the frown of righteous anger on his face.

"I have a better way," he said.

"What is it?"

"See that bundled tarp?" and he pointed. Ned nodded. "It's full of a lot of wood shavings, sawdust, straw and a lot of soot and lampblack that we used in mixing some paint. Help me sweep the whole pile down on their heads, and make them wish they'd stayed away from this place."

"Good!" exclaimed Ned, chuckling. "Give me a hand."

The two lads carried the bundle over and peered down. The red-headed, squint-eyed bully and his chums had their knives out, and were about to cut some of the important guy wires, when, at a signal from Tom, he and Ned dropped one side of the tarp and sent a big pile of the dirt, sawdust and lampblack down toward the heads of the conspirators. The pile of refuse spread out slightly and ended up right on the heads of the trio. They were looking up, having heard a noise, and received most of it in their faces.

In an instant the white countenances of the lads were changed to black with thousands of bits of wood and straw sticking out all over them. Then came a series of howls.

"Ow! Who did that?"

"I'm blinded! The shed is falling down!"

"Run!" screamed Andy. "It's an explosion. We'll be killed!"

At that moment the big doors of the shed were thrown

open, and Mr. Sharp came in. He jumped back in astonishment at the sight of the three grotesque figures, their faces black with the soot, and their clothes covered with sawdust and shavings, rushing wildly around.

"That will teach you to come meddling around here. Andy Roger!" cried Tom.

"I—I—you—you—Oh, wait until—I—you—" spluttered the bully, almost speechless with rage. Sam and Pete were wildly trying to wipe the stuff from their faces, but only made matters worse. They were so startled that they did not know enough to run out of the opened doors.

John Sharp closed their escape route and stood watching.

"Got anything else you want to add to all this?" he called up to Tom and Ned.

"I have it!" cried Tom, and remembering Rad's treatment of Amberson Morse with the whitewash, he grabbed a bucket of red paint that had been used to give the airship its brilliant hue. Running to the end of the loft Tom stood for an instant over the trio of lads who were stumbling around looking for a way to get out of the shed.

"Here's another souvenir of your visit," shouted the young inventor, and he poured the bucket of red paint down on the conspirators. This completed the work of the dirt and soot. A few seconds later, each of them looking

like a stage Indian's bad makeup, the trio dashed to the side door and tried to get out. Bumping and grabbing each other in their attempt to exit through the narrow door at the same time, they finally managed to leave the shed. Running off, they shed shavings, sawdust and lampblack at every step, and from their clothes and hands and faces dripped the carmine paint.

"Better have your pictures taken!" cried Ned, peering from an upper window.

"Yes, and send us one," added Tom, joining his chum.

Andy looked back at them. He dug a mass of red paint from his left ear, removed a mass of soot from his right cheek and shook his fist. He cried out in a rage, "I'll get even with you yet, Tom Swift!"

"You only got what was coming to you," retorted the young inventor. "The next time you come sneaking around this airship, trying to damage it, you'll get worse, and I'll have you arrested. Or, don't you remember that Mr. Sharp is a deputy sheriff? You've had your lesson, and don't forget it."

The red-haired bully, with greatly-enhanced red hair now, had nothing more to say. There was nothing he could say.

Accompanied by his companions, he made a beeline for the rear gate in the fence, and darted across the meadow.

Tom and Ned came down from the loft where they were congratulated by John.

"If they come back, I will use my authority and arrest them," he promised.

"I have the feeling they won't try anything again. Not too soon that is. Let them go for now," Tom told him.

Tom, Ned and John opened the big shed doors and stood, listening to the noises of the escaping trio. They smiled at the sight of the three boys.

They were all sorry enough looking specimens, but it had been entirely their own fault.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER VIII

WINNING A PRIZE

"WELL, TOM," stated John Sharp, after the trio had run away. "Looks as if you had had an exciting time here."

"No, those fellows had all the excitement," declared Ned. "We had the fun." And the two boys proceeded to relate what had taken place.

"Tried to damage the airship, eh?" asked Mr. Sharp. "I wish I'd caught them at it! But perhaps you handled them as well as I could have done."

"I guess so," assented Tom. "We must see if they did cut

any of the wires."

But the young inventor and his pal had acted too quickly, and nothing had been done to the *Red Cloud* except a small splatter of red paint on one window. It was soon wiped off.

A little later the airship was pulled out of the shed and made ready for a trip. The gas-only ascension was first tried. Ned and Mr. Swift were passengers with Tom and John. Mr. Swift had relented and come along at the last minute. He had run into a problem that he needed time to think about and saw the trip as a good diversion.

The machine went about a thousand feet up in the air, and then was steered in various directions to the no small delight of a small crowd that gathered in the meadow back of the Swift property; it only required the sight of the airship looming its bulk above the fence and buildings to attract a throng from nearby homes. This time, however, Andy Foger and his cronies were not in the audience. They were probably too busy removing the soot and red paint.

Although it was the first time Mr. Swift had ever been in an airship, he showed no great astonishment. In fact he seemed to be just looking out the window, thinking deeply on some subject not connected with aeronautics. Tom noticed the distraction of his father and shook his head. Clearly the inventor was not his usual self.

As for Ned, his delight knew no bounds. At first he was a bit apprehensive as the big ship went higher and higher, but soon lost his fear and enjoyed the experience as much as did Tom. The young inventor was busy helping Mr. Sharp manage the machinery, rudders, wing surfaces and motor.

They flew around over the lake for several miles. Tom was wishing they might pay another visit to the Rockmond Seminary, but Mr. Sharp, after completing several maneuvers designed to test the steering qualities of the craft, headed toward shore.

"We'll land in that meadow and try taking back off using the wing lift," he said. For this test it was deemed best for Mr. Swift and Ned to stay on the ground, as there was no telling just how the craft would behave with the heavier load. Tom's father was very willing to get out and took one of the foldable chairs on which to sit while they waited. Ned would have gladly remained, but Tom took him to the side and asked that Ned watch out for Barton Swift.

With the two propellers whirring at a tremendous speed—in their opposing directions—and all the gas out of the aluminum container, the *Red Cloud* trundled forward, running over the level ground of the meadow, where a starting course had been laid out.

"Clear the track!" cried Mr. Sharp, as he saw the crowd closing up in front of him. Men, boys, several girls and

women that had gathered suddenly made a living lane. Between them shot the craft. Then, when sufficient speed had been obtained, Tom pulled the lever of the elevator surface. The tail of the craft went down and the nose of the *Red Cloud* pointed up as the wind struck the slanting surface of the wings. A moment later it had cleared the ground and was sailing high above the heads of the throng.

"That's the stuff!" cried Mr. Sharp. "It works as well that way as it does with the gas! Not as handy as vertical ascent, but effective."

Higher and higher it went, and then coming to level flight, the craft flew a series of maneuvers, darting about like a bird, and going around in huge circles.

"Start the gas machine, and we'll come to rest in the air," said the balloonist, and Tom did so. As the powerful vapor went through Tom's activator box and filled the container above them, the ship acquired buoyancy and there was no need of going at high speed in order to sustain it. The propellers were slowed and then stopped, and the *Red Cloud* floated two thousand feet in the air, just below some fleecy, white masses from which she took her name.

The demonstration was a great success. The propellers set in motion, and the ship was again sent forward. By means of the wings and rudders a perfect landing at a

forward speed of about twenty miles per hour was made in the meadow a short distance from the starting point. The crowd cheered, and Mr. Swift rose from his chair.

He shook both their hands and congratulated them. Ned was all smiles as they climbed back into the *Red Cloud* and headed back to the Swift property.

"Now I'm ready to go on a long trip any time you are, Tom," said the aeronaut that night.

"We'll fit up the car and get ready," agreed the youth. "How about you, Dad?"

"Me? Oh, well—that is, you see—hmm, I'll think about it," and Mr. Swift went to his own room, carrying with him a package of papers containing intricate calculations.

Tom shook his head but said nothing. He could not understand his father's conduct.

Work commenced the next day to fit up the car, or cabin, of the airship so that several persons could live, eat and sleep in it for two weeks. The third day after this task had started, the day's mail brought an unusual communication to Tom and Mr. Sharp. It was from an aero club of Gloversville, a city about a hundred miles to the southwest of Shopton. It stated that a display and competition for airplanes and dirigible balloons was to be held two weeks later. The affair was designed to further interest in the sport and to demonstrate what progress

had been made in the art of conquering the air. Prizes were to be given, and the inventors of the *Red Cloud* were invited to compete.

"Shall we go in for it, Tom?" asked the balloonist.

"I'm willing if you are."

"Then let's do it. We'll see how our craft shows alongside of others. I know a little something of this club. It is all right, but the exposition of aircraft is likely to be a small one. Once I gave a balloon exhibition for them. The managers are good men. Well, we'll have a try at it. Won't do us any harm to win a prize. Then for a long trip!"

Since it was not necessary to have the cabin completely outfitted in order to compete for the prize, work in that direction was suspended for the time being. With the free time, more attention could be paid to the engine, the wings and rudders. Some changes and improvements were made and, a week later the *Red Cloud* departed for Gloversville. As the rules of the contest required three passengers, Ned Newton was taken along. Mr. Swift having arranged with the bank president—a fairly close friend—so that the lad could have a few days off.

The night before departure, Tom had pulled out all twenty of the spark plugs and had cleaned them and reset the spark gap. He also pulled out the oil filtration system he had built for use with his motorboat. He drained, filtered and then refilled the crankcase of the giant

engine. He was certain this would serve to speed up their craft and make it much less likely they might "foul" a plug during the race.

The *Red Cloud* arrived at the carnival grounds in the evening. They were slightly delayed on the trip by a broken cog wheel in Tom's propeller rotation gears, which was mended in mid-air using one of several spares. As the three fliers approached the field, they saw a small machine flying around the grounds.

"Look!" cried Ned excitedly. "What a strange airship."

"That's a monoplane," declared Tom, who was getting to be quite an expert.

"Yes, the same kind that was used to cross the English Channel," interjected John. "Built by a French fellow named Bleriot. They're too uncertain for my purposes. Make one small error and you crash. No good in rough winds. I suppose they are all right under certain conditions."

Hardly had he spoken than a puff of wind caused the daring pilot of the monoplane to swerve to one side. He had to make a quick descent—so rapid was it, in fact, that the tips of one of his wings hit the field and was smashed.

"It'll take him a full day to repair that," commented the aeronaut dryly. "At least he lived through that."

The *Red Cloud* created a sensation as she slowly settled

down in front of the big tent assigned to her. It was easily the best one at the carnival, so far, though the managers said other "exciting" machines were on the way.

The exhibition opened the next day, but no flights were to be attempted until the day following. Two more aircraft arrived: a large triplane; and a dirigible balloon. There were many visitors to the ground, so Tom, Ned and John were kept busy answering questions put by those who crowded into their tent. Toward the close of the day a fussy little Frenchman entered. Making his way to where Tom stood, asked:

"Air you ze ownair of zis machine?"

"One of them," replied the lad.

"Ha! Sacre! Zen I challenge you to ze race. I have a monoplane zat is ze swiftest evaire! One thousand francs will I wager you, zat I can fly higher and farther zan you."

"Shall we take him up, Mr. Sharp?" asked Tom.

"We'll race with him, after we get through with the club race," decided the aeronaut. "But not for money. Even though a thousand francs is about ten and a half dollars, it's against my principles. I don't believe your father would like it. Racing for prizes is a different thing."

"Well, we will devote ze money to charity," conceded the Frenchman. This was a different matter, and one to which Mr. Sharp did not object, so it was arranged that a

race would take place after the regular one.

That night was spent in getting the *Red Cloud* in shape for the contests of the next day. She was "groomed" until every wire was taut and every cog, lever and valve working perfectly. Ned Newton helped all he could.

Tom was certain they would emerge victorious. Suffice it to say that the *Red Cloud* easily distanced the big dirigible from which much had been expected. It was a closer contest when they were pitted against the large triplane that had also won its first race. Tom's airship won and presented with the prize, a fine silver cup.

The available entrant selection was a small one—this being just the first event of its sort—so no other craft in a class with the *Red Cloud* had been entered. Tom and John had to be content with the one race they won. There were other contests among monoplanes and biplanes, and the little Frenchman won two races.

"Now for ze race wis ze monstaire balloon of ze rouge color!" he cried, as he alighted from his monoplane while an assistant filled the gasoline tank. "I will in circles go around you, up and down, zis side zen ze ozzer, and presto! I am back at ze starting place, before you have begun. Zen charity shall be all ze richair!"

"All right, wait and see," said Tom, easily. Though he showed much confidence he asked John in private, just before the impromptu contest, "Do you think we can beat

him?"

"Well," said the aeronaut, shrugging his shoulders, "you can't tell much about the air. His machine certainly goes very fast, but too much wind will hinder him, while it will only help us. And I think," he added looking at the sky, "that we're going to get a breeze."

It was arranged that the *Red Cloud* would start from the ground, without the use of the gas, so as to make the machines more even. At the signal off they started, the motors making a great racket. The monoplane with the little Frenchman in the seat got off the ground first.

"Ah, ha!" he cried gaily, "I leave you in ze rear! Catch me if you can!"

"Don't let him beat us," implored Ned.

"Can't you speed her up any more?" inquired Tom of Mr. Sharp.

The aeronaut nodded grimly, and turned more gasoline into the twenty-cylinder engine. Like a flash the *Red Cloud* darted forward. But the Frenchman also increased his speed and did, as he promised, circle around the bigger machine. But when he tried to repeat that feat he found that he was being left behind.

"That's the stuff! We're winning!" yelled Tom, Ned joining in the shout.

At John's request, Tom began feeding the gases into the

lifting container. Not enough for buoyancy but sufficient to provide lift for more than half the airship's weight. This allowed the propellers to provide more speed.

They soon were flying along at almost fifteen miles per hour faster than the monoplane. Then came a gust of wind. The monoplane had to descend, for it was in danger of turning upside down. Still the plucky Frenchman was not going to give up. He flew along at a lower level.

John opened up the *Red Cloud's* engine to full speed, and it was the big machine which now sailed around the other.

"I protest! I protest!" cried the Frenchman, above the sounds of his motor. "Ze wind is too strong for me!"

John could see the man's face and his moving jaw and believed he knew what the man might be saying. He said nothing, but, with a queer smile on his face he sent the airship down toward the earth. A moment later he was directly under the monoplane. Then, quickly rising he fairly caught the Frenchman's machine on top of the gas container, the bicycle wheels of the monoplane resting on the surface.

So swiftly did the *Red Cloud* fly along that the monoplane was unable to fly away from it, much to the chagrin of the French navigator.

"A trick! A trick!" he cried. "Eet is not fair!"

Dropping down, John let the little monoplane to proceed under its own power, while he raced on to the finish mark, winning, of course, by a large margin.

"Ha! A trick! I race you tomorrow and again tomorrow!" cried the beaten Frenchman as he landed and jumped from his airplane.

"No, thanks," answered Tom. "We've had enough. I guess charity will be satisfied."

The little Frenchman was a good loser, and paid over the money that was to be given to the Gloversville Hospital by the air show organizers.

Great interest had been generated so, at the request of the carnival committee, John Sharp and Tom gave an exhibition of high and long flights the next day. They created no little astonishment by their daring feats.

"I think we have good reason to be proud of our ship," remarked John that night. "We won the first contest we were ever in, and beat that speedy monoplane. No small feat as they are very fast."

"Wait until we go on our trip," added Tom, as he looked at the cup they had won. None of them realized what danger they were to meet in the flight before them.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER IX

A RUNAWAY AUTO

HAD THE BUILDERS of the *Red Cloud* desired, they could have made considerable money by giving further exhibitions at the Gloversville Aero Carnival, and at others which were to be held in the near future at adjoining cities. The fame of the new machine spread quickly, and there were many invitations to compete for prizes as well as many requests for rides.

But Tom and Mr. Sharp wished to try their skill in a long flight, so at the close of the Gloversville exhibition

they started for Shopton, arriving there without mishap (though Tom more than half hoped that they might happen to strike the tower of a certain school.)

The first thing to be done was to complete the outfitting of the cabin. No berths had yet been put in, and these were the first items installed after the *Red Cloud* was in her shed. The electrical heating and cooking apparatus was fitted in along with some additional machinery, tanks for carrying water, and chemicals for making the gas.

Mr. Swift and Garret Jackson assisted by bringing out the many boxes of provisions, various measuring instruments and other supplies that were stowed in the proper places. The cabin was filled almost to its capacity. Particular attention had been paid to the ship proper, and every portion was gone over until John was sure it was in shape for a long flight.

"Now the question is," he said to Tom one evening, "who shall we take with us? You and I will go, of course, but I'd like one more. I wonder if your father can't be induced to accompany us? He seemed to like his trial trip."

"I'll ask him tomorrow," said the lad. "He's very busy tonight. If he doesn't care about it, maybe Garret Jackson will go."

"Hmmm? Perhaps not. He's too timid."

"I'd like to take Ned Newton, but he can't get any more time away from the bank. I guess we'll have to depend on Dad."

But, to the surprise of Tom and John, the inventor shook his head when the subject was broached to him next day.

"Why won't you go, Dad?" asked his son.

"I'll tell you," replied Mr. Swift. "I've been keeping it a secret until I had made some real advances in what I am trying to develop. I don't want to go because I am on the verge of perfecting a new apparatus for submarine boats. It will revolutionize travel under the water, and I don't want to leave home until I finish it and get it off for patent. There is another point to be considered. The government has offered a prize for an underwater boat of a new type, and I wish to try for it."

"So that's what you've been working on, eh, Dad?" asked his son.

"That's it, and, much as I should like to accompany you, I don't feel free to go. My mind would be distracted, and I need to concentrate on this invention. It will produce the most wonderful results, I'm sure. Besides, the government prize is not a small one. It is fifty thousand dollars for a successful boat."

Mr. Swift told a few things more about his submarine,

but he needed to keep many aspects secret.

"Well," remarked Mr. Sharp, somewhat dubiously, "I wonder who we can get to go? We need someone besides you and me, Tom."

"I suppose I could get Eradicate Sampson, if someone could look after his mule Boomerang," replied the lad with a smile. "I don't know—"

At that instant there was a tremendous racket outside. The loud chuff-puffing of an automobile could be heard, but that noise was mingled with the crash of wood, and the whole house seemed jarred and shaken.

"Is it an earthquake?" exclaimed Mr. Swift, springing to his feet, and rushed to the library windows.

"Something's happened!" cried Tom.

"Maybe an explosion of the airship gas!" yelled John, making ready to run to the balloon shed. But there was no need. The crashing of wood ceased, and, above the chuff-puffing of an auto could be heard a voice exclaiming, "Oh! Bless my very existence! Bless my cats and dogs! Good gracious! But I never meant to do this!"

Tom, his father and Mr. Sharp rushed to the double doors that opened on the veranda. On the porch, having run up the steps and tearing away part of the railing, was a large touring car. Sitting at the steering wheel in a dazed manner was Mr. Wakefield Damon.

"Bless my gasoline pedal!" he went on feebly. "I have truly done it now!"

"What's the matter?" cried Tom, hastening up to him. "What happened? Are you hurt?"

"Hurt? Not a bit of it! Bless my moonstone! It's the most lucky escape I ever had! But I've damaged your porch and haven't done my machine any good in the bargain. Do you see anything of another machine chasing me?"

Tom looked puzzled but glanced up and down the road. Far down the highway could be discerned a cloud of dust, and, from the midst of it came a faint "chug-chug."

"Looks like an auto down there," he said.

"Thank goodness! Bless my trousers, but I've escaped 'em!" cried the eccentric man from whom Tom had purchased his motorcycle.

"Escaped who?" asked Mr. Swift.

"Those men. They were after me. But let me get out and explain. Dear me! However will I get my car off your porch?" and Mr. Damon seemed quite distressed.

"Never mind," answered Tom. "We can manage that. Tell us what happened."

"Exactly," replied Mr. Damon, growing calmer, "Bless my shoe buttons, but I had a fright. Two of them, in fact.

"You see," he went on, "I was out partly on pleasure and partly on business. The pleasure consisted in riding in my auto. You know that my physician recommended it for my health. The business consisted in bringing a large amount of cash to the Shopton Bank. I deposited it all right, but, as I came out I saw some men hanging around. I didn't like their looks, and I saw them eyeing me rather sharply. I thought I had seen them before and, sure enough I had. Two of the men belonged to that Happy Harry gang!"

Tom made a quick motion of a caution, pointing to his father, but it was not necessary. Mr. Swift was absentmindedly calculating something on a piece of paper he had taken from his pocket, and had not heard what Mr. Damon said. The latter, however, knew what Tom meant and went on more cautiously.

"Well, I didn't like the looks of these men. I saw them sizing me up, evidently thinking I had drawn money out instead of putting it in. I decided to give them the slip. I got in my auto, but I was startled to see them get in their own car. I headed for here as I was coming to pay you a visit anyhow, and the mysterious men kept after me. It became a regular race. I put on all the speed I could and headed for your house, Tom. I was certain you would help me. I went faster and faster, but so did they. They were almost up to me, and I was just thinking of slowing down to turn in here, when I lost control of my machine, and—well, I did turn in here, but not exactly as I intended.

Bless my trousers! I came in with rather more of a rush than I expected. It was awful—positively awful, I assure you. You've no idea how nervous I was. But I escaped those scoundrels and they rushed on when they saw what I had done—smashed your porch railing."

"Probably they thought you'd smash them," observed Tom with a laugh. "But why did they follow you?"

"Can't imagine! Haven't the least idea. Bless my spark-plug, but they must have imagined I had money. Anyhow I'm glad I escaped them!"

"It's lucky you weren't hurt," said John Sharp.

"Me? Bless my existence! I'm always having narrow escapes." Mr. Damon caught sight of the *Red Cloud* which was standing in front of the big shed. "Bless my heart! What is *that*?" he added.

"Our new airship," answered Tom proudly. "We are just planning a long trip in it, but we can't find a third member of the party to go along."

"A third member!" exclaimed Mr. Damon. "Do you really mean it?"

"We do."

"Bless my liver! Will you take me along?"

"Do you mean *that*?" asked Tom in turn, foreseeing a way out of their difficulties.

"I certainly do," answered the eccentric man. "I am very interested in airships. I've wanted to ride in one for several years but thought I had no chance. I would prefer to die up in the clouds as any other way. Certainly I prefer that to being smashed up in an auto. Will you take me?"

"Of course!" cried Tom heartily, and John nodded his assent.

Tom drew Mr. Damon to one side where his father would not overhear them. "We'll discuss the trip in a few minutes," the lad said. "Tell me more about those mysterious men, please."

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER X

A BAG OF TOOLS

WAKEFIELD DAMON glanced at Mr. Swift. The inventor was oblivious to his surroundings, and was busy figuring away on his paper. He seemed even to have forgotten the presence of the eccentric automobilist and his errant auto.

"I don't want father to hear about the men," went on Tom in a low tone. "If he hears that Happy Harry and his confederates are in this vicinity he'll worry, and that doesn't agree with him. "Remembering his own run in with Amberson Morse, he asked, "Are you sure the men

you saw are the same ones who stole the turbine model?"

"Very certain," replied Mr. Damon. "I had a good view of them as I came out of the bank. I was surprised to see them, until I remembered that they had escaped jail."

"But do you think they pursued you because of money?"

"Bless my pocketbook! I can't say. Perhaps they weren't after me at all. I may have imagined it, but they certainly hurried along in their auto as soon as I left the bank. I'm glad I deposited it before I saw them. Maybe they were simply in a great hurry and were going the exact direction I was. I was so nervous that I couldn't steer straight. It's too bad, the way I've damaged your house."

"That doesn't matter right now. But how about the trip in the airship? I hope you meant it when you said you would go."

"Of course I did. I've never traveled in the air, but it can't be worse than my experience with my motorcycle and this auto. At least I can't run up any stoop, can I?" and Mr. Damon looked at Mr. Sharp.

"No," replied the aeronaut, as he scratched his head, "I guess you'll be safe on that score. You won't even have to drive the *Red Cloud*; Tom and I will take care of that. But I hope you won't get nervous when we reach a great height."

"Oh, goodness no. I've been to New York and to the top

floor of the Singer building and that's over six hundred feet tall! I will calm myself with the reflection that I can't die but once," and with this philosophical reflection Mr. Damon went back to look at the auto.

"Well, you'd better make arrangements to go with us then," went on Tom. "Meanwhile I'll see to getting your car down. You'll want to send it home, I suppose?"

"No, not if you'll keep it for me here. The fact is that all my family are away, and will be for some time. I won't have to go home to notify them. That's a good thing, as my wife is high strung and nervous, and might object if she heard about the airship. I'll just stay here if you've no objection, until the *Red Cloud* sails, if 'sails' is the proper term."

" 'Sails' will do very well," answered John. "But, let's see if Tom and I can't get that car down. Perhaps Mr. Damon would like to go in the house and talk to your father," he said, noticing that Mr. Swift had left the porch.

The eccentric man was happy not to be on hand when his car was eased down from the veranda. He quickly disappeared into the house. Tom and John, with the aid of Garret Jackson, moved the auto from its position. They also had to take down the rest of the broken railing which Garret promised to have repaired in the next day or two. The machine was stored in the shed formerly occupied by the airship, and Mr. Damon would have no further

concern about it until they all returned from their trip through the air.

"It will fool those men if I mysteriously disappear," he said when they came back into the house. "Bless my hat band, but they'll wonder what became of me. We'll just slip off in the *Red Cloud*, and they'll never be the wiser."

"I'm not too sure about that," commented Tom. "I believe they are keeping pretty close watch on this house, and I don't like it. They are up to some mischief. I think the bank authorities should have the local police locked them up. They are escaped criminals after all. I think I'll telephone Ned about it."

He did so and his friend, in turn, notified the bank watchman. But the next day it was reported that no sign of the men had been seen. Later it was learned that an auto answering the description of the one they were in, had been seen heading south, many miles from Shopton.

The work of preparing the *Red Cloud* for their long trip was all but completed. It had been moved close to the shed while a few more adjustments were made to the machinery.

"Bless my eyebrows!" exclaimed Mr. Damon a few days before their start, "but I haven't asked where we are bound for. Where are we going, anyhow, Mr. Sharp?"

"We're going to try and reach Atlanta, Georgia," replied

the balloonist. "That will make a fairly long trip, and the winds at this season are favorable for a voyage in that direction."

"That suits me quite well," declared Mr. Damon. "I'm ready and anxious to start."

It was decided to give the airship a few more short trips around Shopton before setting out to see how it behaved with the car more heavily loaded than before. With this in view a trip was made to Rockmond with Mr. Swift, Mr. Damon and Ned, in addition to John and Tom, on board. At Tom's somewhat blushing request, a stop was made near the Seminary. When the pupils came trooping out, the young inventor asked Mary Nestor if she didn't want to take a little flight.

The school principal bustled out to raise objections, but Barton Swift headed her off introducing himself. She was so impressed that an actual "professor" stood in front of her that she simply waved a hand in agreement when asked for permission.

Mary, along with two pretty companions, climbed rather hesitatingly into the car. No great height was attained, but the girls were thrilled to see the surrounding area from an altitude greater than the roof of their school. After their first alarm, they really enjoyed the spin in the air with Tom proudly presiding at the steering wheel. Knowing how important it was to Tom to be seen in a

good light, John quickly relinquished control to him just after lift off.

Tom was rewarded with quick hugs and thanks from the girls, but seemed to have the greatest reaction to his brief contact with Mary.

Three days later, all was in readiness for the trip to Atlanta. Mr. Swift was again invited to go, both Tom and John urging him, but the inventor said he must stay at home and work on his submarine plans.

The evening before the start, when the aeronaut and Tom were giving a final inspection to the craft by the big shed, John exclaimed, "I'm a real dunce Tom. I believe you'll have to take a run into town."

"What for?"

"To pick up that kit of special tools I ordered. We might need it to make repairs. There are some long-handled wrenches, spare levers, and a couple of braces and bits. Harrison, the hardware dealer, ordered them for me from New York, and they were to be yesterday afternoon, but I forgot them. Take your backpack with you, and you can carry them on your motorcycle. I'm sorry to have forgotten it, but—"

"That's all right, John, I'd just as soon go. It will make the time pass more quickly. I'll start now."

An hour later, having received the rather large bundle

of tools, Tom packed them in his pack and started back toward home. As he swung around the corner where Ned's bank was located, the motorcycle motor began to stutter and misfire. Tom dismounted to adjust the carburetor and had completed the work when Andy Foger and his associate Sam came down the street. They stopped at the sight of Tom.

"There he is now!" exclaimed Sam, just loud enough for Tom to hear.

"Let's get him!" proposed Andy. "Now's our chance to get even for throwing that paint and soot on us."

Tom heard their words. He was not afraid of both the lads. Although each one matched him in size and strength, Tom knew they were cowards.

"If you're looking for any trouble I can accommodate you," he said, coolly and took a step toward the pair.

"Come on, Andy," urged Sam. But, Andy hung back. Perhaps he didn't like the way Tom squared off. The young inventor had let down the rear brace of his motorcycle—a recent improvement he had made that allowed the motorcycle to stand on its own instead of needing to lean against a tree, fence or building. Now that he was not obliged to hold it, he had both hands free.

"We ought to lick him good and proper," growled the squint-eyed lad but remained in his position. He was

eyeing Tom with a combination of malice and fear.

"Well, why don't you step up?" invited Tom. He motioned Andy to come forward, which the bully refused to do.

Tom moved around the motorcycle. He was now clear of it and a few feet closer to Andy and Sam. As he moved away from the machine, the pack full of tools fell to the ground. The tools fell out with a clatter and a thud when the pack came open. It happened right under a street lamp, and the glitter of the long-handled wrenches and other implements caught the eyes of Andy and his crony.

"Huh! If we fought you, maybe you'd use some of them on us," sneered Andy, glad of an excuse not to fight.

Tom quickly picked up his pack, shut it and set it behind the motorcycle, but he was aware of the close scrutiny of the two vindictive lads.

"I don't fight with such things," he said, somewhat annoyed. "I leave the cheating to people like you, Andy Foger. Cowards and bullies who can't stand up for themselves but need weak-minded pals like Sam, there, to help them fight. Stand on your own and fight me like a man!"

"What you doing around the bank at this hour?" asked Sam, taking a step back from Andy, eager to change the subject. "First thing you know the watchman will order

you to move on. He might think you are a suspicious character."

"The same to you," retorted Tom, "Two shady characters always get more attention than a single person. I'm going to ride on now, unless you want to have a further argument with me."

"You'd better be careful how you hang around a bank," added Andy now looking as if he would rather run from a fight with the young inventor than stick around. "The police are on the lookout here. There've been some mysterious men seen about."

Tom did not care to go into that, and, seeing that the two bullies had lost all desire to attack him, he mounted his motorcycle, put up the brace and started the machine.

"Goodbye," he aimed the front wheel at the cowardly pair and let the machine move forward as if to hit them. Both boys sprang back and turned to run. Tom glided past as a distance and called to Andy and Sam, "Take care or we *will* have that fight!" The two cronies did not reply.

"I hope I didn't damage any of the tools when I let them fall that time," mused the young inventor as he rode away. "The way Sam and Andy stared at them it would seem as if I had a load of weapons in the bag! They certainly took good note of them."

As Tom slowed and turned the corner he looked back

and saw, still standing in front of the bank, the two cronies now deep in conversation.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XII

THE *RED CLOUD* DEPARTS

"WELL, DAD, I wish you were going along with us," said Tom to his father next morning. "You don't know what you're going to miss. A fine trip of several hundred miles through the air, seeing wonderful sights, and experiencing new sensations. You could bring your notebooks and do some work on the way," he added trying to head off one of the objections he knew his father would raise.

"Yes, I wish you would reconsider your decision and accompany us," added Mr. Damon. "I would enjoy your

company."

"There's plenty of room. We can carry six persons with ease," said John.

Mr. Swift shook his head, and smiled. "I have too much work to do here at home," he replied. "Perhaps I'll be able to astound you with something when you come back. I have nearly perfected my latest invention."

There was no combating such a resolution as this, so Tom and the others considered his decision to be final.

The airship was ready for the start, and everyone had gone to bed and then arisen earlier than usual. The bag of tools, for which Tom had gone to town, was stowed in a small nook built for that purpose, and the last of the supplies were taken abroad. A quick series of final tests were made of the various apparatus, the motor had been given a trial run—disconnected from the propellers.

Satisfied, the balloonist announced, "Well, Tom and Mr. Damon, we had better begin to think of starting. We've had breakfast, and there's no telling where we will eat lunch."

"Bless my stomach! Don't you talk that way!" exclaimed Mr. Damon. "You make me exceedingly nervous. Why shouldn't we know where we are going to eat lunch?"

"Oh, I meant we couldn't tell over just what part of the United States we will be when lunchtime comes,"

explained the aeronaut.

"Ah, that's different. Bless my pocket knife, but I thought you meant we could be dashed to pieces, and incapable of eating anything."

"Hardly," remarked John, laughing. "The *Red Cloud* is a very safe airship. Get aboard, if you please."

Tom and Mr. Damon entered the car. It was resting on the ground, on the small wheels used to roll along when the gas inflation method was not used. Because they did not want to take the time to roll the vessel out to a nearby meadow, it had been decided to rise in the air by means of the powerful vapor. Filled with the gas, the ship was swaying slightly and tugging at the restraining cables.

As Tom and Mr. Damon entered the cabin a dilapidated wagon, drawn by a bony mule, drove into the Swift yard. Tom did not need to hear the man's voice, calling, "Whoa, dar, Boomerang!" to tell him that his friend Eradicate Sampson was on hand. As for Eradicate, as soon as he saw the great airship, which he had never before beheld fully rigged, all ready for a flight, his eyes became big with wonder.

"Is dat yo' flyin' machine, Mistah Swift?" he asked.

"That's it, Rad," answered Tom. "Do you want to come and take a ride with us?"

"Me? Good golly! No indeedy," and the cleaner and

whitewasher edged slightly away, as if the airship might suddenly grow a pair of hands and grab him. "No indeedy I doan! I come t' do a little whitewashin' an' when I do dat I'se be on mah way. But dat's a pow'ful fine ship; it shua is!"

"You really ought to come and try a flight, Eradicate," added Mr. Damon. "I'll look after you."

"No, sah, an' doan take it da wrong way, but I'd 'preciate it if yo' all doan try t' tempt me dat way," spoke Eradicate. But he took a closer look and saw that the craft was stationary, so he left the safety of his wagon and ventured closer. Gingerly he put out one hand and touched the framework of the wheels, just forward of the cabin. The black man grasped the timber, and lifted it slightly. To his astonishment the whole front of the airship tilted up. As the lifting gases were already in he red container, it was so light that a child could have lifted it.

But Eradicate did not know this. Wonderingly he looked at the great bulk of the ship, looming above him, then he glanced at his arm. Once more, noting that the attention of his friends was elsewhere, he lifted the craft. Then he cried "Look heah, Mistah Swift! Look! No wonder day calls me Sampson. I done lifted dis monstrousness airship wif one hand, See, I kin do it! I kin do it!"

Once more he raised the *Red Cloud* slightly, and a

delighted grin mixed with a look of awe spread over his face.

"I suppose you'll give up whitewashing and join a circus as a strong man, now," observed John, with a wink at his companions.

"Dats what I will!" announced Eradicate proudly. "I never knowed I was dat strong, but o' course I allers knowed I had *some* muscle. Golly, I must hab growed strong ober night! Now, Boomerang, yo' shua has got t' look out fo' yo' sef, or I'll jest lift you up, an' sit yo' down on yo' back, I shua will," and the man, feeling his biceps, walked over to where the mule stood, with its eyes closed.

"I guess you can cast off, Tom," called John, as he entered the car. "We won't go up very far at first, until Mr. Damon gets used to the thinner air."

"Bless my soul, but I believe I'm getting a shade nervous," announced the eccentric man. "Bless my liver; I hope nothing happens."

"Nothing will happen," John assured him. "Just keep calm. When it feels as if the bottom is dropping out of everything, you'll soon get over it. Are you casting off those ropes, Tom? Is all clear?"

"All but the bow and stern lines."

"You attend to the bow line, and I'll go to the stern," John told him.

"Goodbye, Tom," called Mr. Swift, reaching out to shake hands with his son. "Drop me a line when you get a chance."

"Oh, Tom, do be careful," implored Mrs. Baggert, her kind face showing her anxiety. "May I kiss you goodbye?"

"Of course," answered the young inventor, though the motherly housekeeper had not done this since he was a little boy. She had to stand on a soapbox to reach Tom's face, and, when she had kissed him she said, "Oh, I'm so worried! I just know you'll be killed, risking your lives in that terrible airship!"

"Ha! Not a very cheerful view to take, madam," observed Mr. Damon from the door of the cab. "Don't hold that view, I beg of you. Bless my eyeballs, but you'll see us coming home, covered with glory and star dust."

"I'm sure I hope so," answered Mrs. Baggert, laughing a little in spite of herself.

The last ropes were cast off. John started the gases flowing to force more vapor into the red aluminum container. This had the effect of rendering the airship more buoyant, and it tugged and strained harder than ever at the ropes.

Goodbyes were shouted as the airship lifted into the air, and John started the motor, to warm it up before the propellers were thrown into gear. The twenty cylinders

began making a terrific racket, as the muffler was open. Tom, looking down, saw Boomerang awaken with a jump. The mule was frightened and started off on a quick walk, pulling the rickety, old wagon along behind him.

Eradicate, who had been feeling his muscle since he discovered what he *thought* was his marvelous strength, saw what was happening.

"Whoa, dar, Boomerang!" he shouted. Then, as the tailboard of the wagon swung past him, he reached out and grabbed it. Perhaps he thought he could bring the runaway mule up standing, but, if he did, he was grievously disappointed. Boomerang pulled his master along the gravel walk, and kept moving in spite of Eradicate's command to "whoa, dar!"

It might have gone hard for him, had not Garret Jackson, the engineer, run in front of Boomerang and caught the animal. Eradicate picked himself up, and gazed sadly at his arms.

Then, John closed the bypass on the muffler and deadened the noise of the powerful motor. Tom, looking at a gauge, noted that their height was already seven hundred feet. "High enough!" called John. They looked at their passenger. Mr. Damon, in spite of his resolution, was getting pale.

The gas was shut off, the propellers thrown into gear, and, with a rush the *Red Cloud* shot toward the south.

They swung around and soon passed back over the Swift homestead, and high above the heads of the crowd that had gathered to witness the start.

The eventful voyage of the air had begun.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XII

SOME STARTLING NEWS

"THERE THEY GO," remarked Mrs. Baggert to Mr. Swift, as she strained her eyes toward the sky, wiping a small tear from her right eye. Against the blue of the sky, the airship was now only a large, dark spot.

"Yes, and a fine start they made," replied the inventor. "I almost wish I had accompanied them, but I must keep working on my new invention."

"I do hope nothing will happen to them," went on the housekeeper. "I declare, though, I feel just as if something

is going to happen."

"Nervousness, pure nervousness," commented Mr. Swift. "Better take a little—er—I suppose catnip tea would be good."

"Catnip tea! The very idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Baggert. "That shows how much you know about nervousness, Mr. Swift," and she seemed a little indignant.

"Ha! Hum I Well, perhaps catnip tea isn't be the thing. But don't worry about Tom. I'm sure he can look after himself. As for John Sharp he has made too many ascensions to run into any unnecessary danger."

"Nervous!" went on the housekeeper, who seemed to resent this state being applied to her. "I'm sure I'm not half as nervous as that Mr. Damon. He gives me the fidgets."

"Of course. Well, I must get back to my work," said the inventor. "Ah, are you hurt, Eradicate?" he went on, as the black man came back, driving Boomerang, who had been stopped just before reaching the road.

"No, Mistah Swift, I ain't exactly damaged, but mah feelin's is shua hurt."

"How's that?"

"Well, I thought I had growed strong in de night, when I lifted dat airship, but when I went to stop mah mule I couldn't do it. He won't hab no respect fo' me now."

"Oh, I wouldn't let that worry me," commented Mr. Swift, and he explained to Eradicate how it was that he had so easily lifted the end of the buoyant ship, which weighed very little when filled with gas.

The man proceeded with his work of whitewashing, while the inventor went to his library, puzzling over tables of intricate figures. Mrs. Baggert was in the kitchen, sighing occasionally as she thought of Tom, whom she loved almost as a son, when two men came up the walk and knocked at the side door. Mrs. Baggert was somewhat surprised to see Chief of Police Simonson and Constable Higby.

"They probably came to see the airship start," she thought, "but they're too late."

"Ah, good morning, Mrs. Baggert," greeted the chief. "Are Mr. Swift and his son about this morning?"

"Mr. Swift is in his library, but Tom is gone."

"He'll be back though, won't he?" asked Constable Higby quickly—too anxiously, Mrs. Baggert thought.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "He and—"

"Just take us to see Mr. Swift," interrupted the chief, with a look of caution at his aide. "We'll explain matters to him."

Wondering what could be the mission of the two officers, Mrs. Baggert led them to the library.

"It's queer," she thought, "that they don't ask something about the airship. I suppose that was what they came for. But maybe it's about the mysterious men who robbed Mr. Swift."

"Ah, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" asked the inventor, as he rose to greet the officials.

"Ahem, Mr. Swift. Ahem—er—that is—well, the fact is, Mr. Swift," stammered the chief, "we have come upon a very painful errand."

"What's that?" asked Tom's father. "I haven't been robbed again, have I?"

"There has been a robbery committed," spoke the constable quickly.

"But you are not the victim," interposed the chief.

"I'm glad of that," said Mr. Swift.

"Where is your son, Tom?" asked the head of the Shopton police force, sharply.

"What do you want with him?" inquired the inventor, struck by some strange tone in the other's voice.

"Mr. Swift," went on the chief, solemnly, "I said we came upon a very painful errand. It is painful, as I have known Tom since he was a little boy. But I must do my duty, no matter how painful it is. I have a warrant for the arrest of your son, Thomas Swift, and have come to serve

it. I need not tell you that it is your duty to give him up to us—the representatives of the law. I call upon you to produce your son."

Mr. Swift staggered to his feet.

"My son! You have come to arrest my son?" he stammered.

The chief nodded grimly.

"On what charge?" faltered Tom's father.

"On a charge of breaking into the Shopton National Bank last night, and stealing seventy-five thousand dollars!"

"Seventy-five thousand dollars! Tom accused of robbing the bank!" faltered Mr. Swift.

"That is the charge, and we've come to arrest him," broke in Constable Higby.

"Where is he?" added the chief.

"This charge is false! Absolutely false!" shouted the inventor.

"That may be," admitted the chief shaking his head. "But the charge has been made, and we hold the warrant. The courts will settle it. We must now arrest Tom. Where is he?"

"He isn't here!" cried Mr. Swift, and there was a note of triumph in his voice. "Tom sailed away not half an hour

ago in the airship *Red Cloud!* You can't arrest him!"

"He's escaped!" shouted the constable. "I told you, chief, that he was a slippery customer, and that we'd better come before breakfast!"

"Shut up!" commanded the chief testily. "So he's foiled us, eh? Run away when he knew we were coming? I think that looks like guilt, Mr. Swift."

"Never!" cried the inventor. "Tom would never think of robbing the bank. Besides, he has all the money he wants. The charge is preposterous! I demand to be confronted with the proof."

"You shall be," answered Chief Simonson. "If you will come to the bank you can see the rifled vault, and hear the testimony of a witness who saw your son with burglar tools in his possession last night. We also have a warrant for Mr. Wakefield Damon. Do you know anything of him?"

"He has gone with my son in the airship."

"Ha! The two criminals have escaped together!" cried the chief. "But we'll nab them if we have to scour the whole country. Come on, Higby! Mr. Swift, if you'll accompany me to the bank, I think I can give you all the proof you want," and the officials, followed by the amazed and grief-stricken inventor, left the house.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XIII

MR. DAMON FINDS DANGER

THE SENSATION of the voyagers in the airship, who were flying along over the country surrounding Shopton, were not very different than when they had undertaken their trial flights. In fact Mr. Damon was a little disappointed after they had waved their farewells to Mr. Swift and Mrs. Baggert.

"I declare I'm not at all nervous," he remarked, as he sat in an easy chair in the enclosed car or cabin, and looked down at the earth through the plate-glass windows in the

floor. "Just a trifle winded is all."

"I thought you'd be all right once we got started," commented John. "Do you think you can stand going a bit higher?"

"Try it," suggested the eccentric man. "Bless my watch chain but, as I said, I might as well die this way as any other. Hitting a cloud bank is easier than trying to climb a tree on a motorcycle, eh, Tom?"

"Very much so, Mr. Damon," conceded the young inventor with a laugh.

"Oh, we'll not attempt any cloud heights for a day or two," went on John Sharp. "I want you to gradually get used to the rarefied atmosphere, Mr. Damon. Tom and I are getting to be old hands at it. But, if you think you can stand it, I'd like to go up about a thousand feet higher."

"Make it two thousand, while you're at it," proposed the odd character. "Might as well take a long fall as a short stumble."

The elevation was directed to send the *Red Cloud* to a greater height while she was still skimming along like some great bird. Of course the desired elevation could have been obtained by forcing more gas from the machine into the big, red container overhead, but it was decided to be as sparing of this vapor as possible, since the voyagers did not want to descend to get more material in case they

used up what they had. It was just as easy to rise by properly working the rudders, when the ship was under propeller power.

With the great propellers fore and aft making about a thousand revolutions a minute the craft slanted up toward the sky.

The ship was not being run at top speed as John did not care to force it. Plus, there was no need for haste. Long distance, rather than high speed, was the aim of this first important flight.

Tom was at the control wheel. With his hand on the lever controlling the elevation rudder, he kept watch of the face of Mr. Damon, occasionally noting what height the gauge registered. He fancied he saw the cheeks of his friend growing pale. When a height of fifty-five hundred feet was reached he gave a quick yank to a lever and the put the airship on a level keel.

"Are you distressed, Mr. Damon?" he asked.

"Ye—yes, I—I have—some—some difficulty in breathing," was the answer.

Tom gave his friend the same advice the aeronaut had given the lad on his first trip, and the eccentric man soon felt better.

"Bless my buttons!" he ventured to explain. "But I feel as if I had lost several pounds of flesh, and I'm glad of it."

John was busy performing a slight adjustment to the motor, and Tom was in sole charge of navigating the airship. He had lost any nervous feeling that first possessed him and was becoming quite an expert at meeting various currents of wind encountered in the upper regions.

Below, the voyagers could see the earth spread out like a great map. They could not tell their exact location now, but by calculating their speed, which was about thirty miles an hour, Tom figured out that they were above the town of Centreford, near where he had been attacked once by the model thieves.

For several hours the airship kept on her way, maintaining a height of about a mile, for it was found that Mr. Damon could accommodate himself to that height.

Soon, they were passing near to the capital city of Albany. By using Tom's binocular glasses the travelers could see crowds on the earth watching their progress in the air. Though airships, dirigible balloons and airplanes are getting fairly common now, the appearance of one as novel and as large as the *Red Cloud* could always be depended upon to attract attention.

"Well, what do you say to something to eat?" proposed John, coming into the main cabin. "It's twelve o'clock, though we can't hear the factory whistles up, here."

"I'm ready, anytime you are," called Tom, from the pilot

house. "Shall I cook grub, John?"

"No, you manage the ship, and I'll play cook. We'll not get a very elaborate meal this time, as I shall have to pay occasional visits to the motor. One or two cylinders aren't running quite to my liking."

The electrical stove turned on, and some vegetable soup and small steaks were put on the fire. The smells wafted through the cabin and had everyone salivating with hunger.

In spite of the fact that the day was a warm one for October, it was actually quite cool in the cabin until the stove took away the chill. The temperature at their altitude was more than a dozen degrees less than that of the ground below them.

At times, the ship cooled even more as it passed through little wisps of vapor... clouds in the making.

"Isn't this wonderful!" exclaimed Mr. Damon, as he sat in an easy chair, eating his food. "To think that I have lived to see the day when I can take my lunch a mile in the air, in a craft flying along like a bird. Bless my knife and fork but it certainly is wonderful."

John relieved Tom at the wheel while the young inventor ate, and then they switched again so John could attend to the motor. Within the hour he had made adjustments that satisfied him. Taking control again,

John increased the speed a bit, the balloonist wanting to see what the motor could accomplish under a heavy load.

They dropped several hundred feet about an hour later to duck under a particularly large cloud. This made it warmer so Mr. Damon, who was a great lover of fresh air, decided to go out on the platform to the left of the cabin. This platform, and a similar one at the right, was railed to prevent accidents. A fine view could be had from them much better than through the floor windows of the car.

"Be careful of the propeller," advised Tom, as his friend went outside. "I don't believe your arm is long enough to be hit by the blades, but don't take any chances."

"Bless my pocket handkerchief, indeed I'll not," came the answer. "But I think I shall wrap up my throat in the scarf I brought along. I am subject to neuralgia, and the breeze may bring on an attack of it."

Wrapping along, woolen scarf about his neck, the eccentric man ventured out on the open platform. Just forward of it, but sufficiently far enough out of reach, was the front propeller whirring around at swift speed.

Tom, with his eye on the various gauges and the compass, was steering the airship. He glanced at Mr. Damon, who appeared to be enjoying the view from the platform. For an instant the eyes of the lad were taken from the form of his friend.

He looked back suddenly, his attention attracted by a smothered cry. He was horrified by what he saw.

Mr. Damon was leaning far over the edge of the railing, with nothing between him and the earth a thousand feet below. He seemed to lose his balance and toppled forward, doubled-up on the iron pipe railing, his hands hanging limply over. Then, as Tom cried to John to shut off the motor, he saw that Mr. Damon's red scarf had wrapped around the railing. If the man didn't fall completely over and plunge to his death, he would certainly choke to death.

"Hurry! Hurry, John!" yelled Tom, not daring to let go the steering wheel, for fear the ship would encounter a treacherous current and tilt. "Hurry to Mr. Damon!"

"What's the matter?" asked the balloonist rushing forward.

Tom pointed. "He's dead—or unconscious—hanging over the railing. He seems to be slipping! Hurry, or it will be too late!"

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CHAPTER XIV

ANDY GIVES A CLUE

WHILE MR. SWIFT followed the chief of police and the constable to the town hall, his mind was filled with many thoughts. All his plans for revolutionizing submarine travel were, of course, forgotten. He was only concerned with the charge that had been made against his son. It seemed incredible, yet the officers were not ones to make such a joke.

The chief and constable had driven from town in a carriage, and they now invited the inventor to ride back

with them.

"Do you mean to tell me a warrant has actually been sworn out against my son, Chief?" asked the father, when they were near the town hall.

"That's just what I mean to say, Mr. Swift. The judge has signed it and, I'm sorry to say, that I have to serve it."

"Huh! Don't look like you was goin' to serve it," remarked the constable. "He's no good. He skipped out."

"That's enough, Higby!" demanded on the chief. "Keep a civil tongue in your head. I'll catch them. Get em both. Even if they have escaped in an airship with their booty, I'll nab 'em. I'll have a general alarm sent out all over the country in less than an hour. They can't stay up in the air forever."

"A warrant for Tom—my son," murmured Mr. Swift, as if he could not believe it.

"Yes, and for that Damon man, too," added the chief. "I want him as well as Tom, and I'll get 'em."

"Would you mind letting me see the warrants?" asked the inventor, and the official passed them over. The documents were made out in regular form, and the complaints had been sworn to by Isaac Pendergast, the bank president.

"I can't understand it," went on Tom's father. "Seventy-five thousand dollars. It's incredible! Why!" he suddenly

exclaimed, "it can't be true. Just before he left, Mr. Damon—"

"Yes? What did he do?" asked the chief eagerly, thinking he might secure some valuable evidence.

"I believe I'll say nothing until I have seen the bank president," replied Mr. Swift, and the official was obviously disappointed.

The inventor found Mr. Pendergast, and some other bank officials in the town hall. The financiers were rather angry when they learned that the accused persons had not been caught, but the chief said he would soon have them in custody.

"In the meanwhile,, and before I close out my own account with you, will you kindly explain, what this means?" asked Mr. Swift of the president.

"You may come and look at the looted vault, if you like, Mr. Swift," replied Mr. Pendergast. He knew that loosing Barton Swift's account would be an even greater loss than the robbery. "It was a very thorough job, and will seriously cripple the bank."

There was no doubt that the vault had been forced open. The locks and bars were bent and twisted as if by heavy tools. Mr. Swift made a careful examination, and was shown the money drawers that had been smashed.

"This was the work of experts," he declared.

"Exactly what we think," said the president. "Of course we don't believe your son was a professional bank robber, Mr. Swift. We have a theory that Mr. Damon did the real work, but that Tom helped him with the tools he had. There is no doubt about it."

"What proof have you to accuse my son?" burst out the inventor. "Why have you any more cause to suspect him than any other person in town? Why do you fixate on him, and Mr. Damon? I demand to know."

"Mr. Damon's eccentric actions for a few days past, and his well-known oddity of character make him an object of suspicion," declared the president in judicial tones. "As for Tom, we have, I regret to say, even better evidence against him."

"What is it? What? Who gave you any clues to point to my son?"

"Do you really wish to know?"

"I certainly do," was the sharp reply. Mr. Swift, the police and several bank officials were now in the president's office. The latter pressed an electric bell, and, when a messenger answered, he said, "Send young Foger here."

At the mention of this name, Mr. Swift started. He well knew the red-haired bully was an enemy of his son. Andy entered, walking rather proudly at the attention he

attracted.

"This is Mr. Swift," said the president.

"Yeah, I know him," blurted out Andy but he could not bring himself to look Mr. Swift in the eyes.

"You will please tell him what you told us," went on Mr. Pendergast.

"Well, I seen Tom Swift hanging around this bank with burglar tools in his possession last night, just before it was robbed," exclaimed the squint-eyed lad triumphantly.

"Hanging around the bank last night with burglar tools?" repeated Mr. Swift, in dazed tones.

"That's right," from Andy.

"How do you know they were burglar tools?"

"Because I saw 'em!" cried Andy. "He had 'em in a pack on his motorcycle. He was standing at the corner, waiting for a chance to break into the bank, and when me and Sam Snedecker saw him. He pretended to be fixin' his machine. Then the bag of burglar tools fell off and I seen 'em! That's how I know."

"And you're sure they were burglar tools?" asked the chief, for he depended on Andy to be his most important witness.

"Sure I am. I seen a picture of burglar tools once, and the ones Tom had was just like 'em. Long-handled

wrenches, brace an' bits, an' all. He tried to hide 'em, but me an' Sam was too quick for him. He wanted to fight me, too."

"No doubt you deserved it," murmured Mr. Swift. "But how do you know my son was waiting for a chance to break into the bank?"

"'Cause, wasn't it robbed right after he was hangin' around here with the burglar tools?" inquired Andy, as if that was unanswerable.

"What were you hanging around here for?" Mr. Swift demanded quickly.

"Me? Oh, well... me an' Sam was here for... I mean we was out takin' a walk. That's all."

"You weren't here to rob the bank yourselves?" went on the inventor, keenly.

"Of course not," roared the bully, indignantly. "I ain't got no burglar tools."

Andy related more information along the same line, but his testimony of having seen Tom near the bank with a bag of odd tools could not be shaken.

Sam Snedecker was called in after Andy, and told substantially the same story, but was more polite than Andy had been.

Mr. Swift could not understand it. He knew nothing of

Tom being sent for the tools, and had not heard any talk at home of the bag of implements ordered by the balloonist. Still, he knew Tom had nothing to do with the robbery, and he knew his son had been at home all the night previous. But the inventor had one question yet to ask.

"You say you also suspect Mr. Damon of complicity in this affair?" he went on, to the chief of police.

"We sure do," replied Mr. Simonson.

"Then can you explain?" inquired the inventor, "how it is that Mr. Damon has on deposit in this bank a large sum. Would he rob the bank holding his own funds?"

"We are prepared for that," declared the president. "It is true that Mr. Damon has about ten thousand dollars in our bank, but we believe he deposited it only as a ruse, so as to cover up his tracks. It is a deep-laid scheme, and his escaping in the airship is part of it. I am sorry, Mr. Swift, that I have to believe your son and his accomplice guilty, but I am obliged to. Chief, you had better send out a general alarm. The airship ought to be easy to trace."

"I'll telegraph at once," said the official.

"And you believe my son guilty, solely on the testimony of these two boys. One who, as is well known, is his enemy?" asked Mr. Swift.

"The clue they gave us is certainly most important," said

the president. "Andy came to us and told what he had seen, as soon as it became known that the bank had been robbed."

"And I'm going to get the reward for giving information about the robbers, too!" cried the bully.

"And, I'm going to have my share!" insisted Sam.

"Oh, then there is a reward offered?" inquired Mr. Swift.

"Five thousand dollars," answered Mr. Pendergast. "The directors, all of whom are present save Mr. Foger, Andy's father, met early this morning, and decided to offer that sum."

"And I'm going to get it," announced the red-haired lad again.

Mr. Swift was much downcast. There seemed to be nothing more to say except to notify the bank president that he wanted to close his account. "If you blindly believe this young thug, then I will not have you in control of my money. As I am certain you will beg off on account of the missing money, I will not insist in taking my funds in cash, I will return on Monday to pick up a bank draft for the full amount of my account!"

That said, Mr. Swift left the bank. Mr. Pendergast was speechless. He looked around at the other bank men in the room. They, too, were badly shaken. Mr. Swift's

deposits accounted for almost ten percent of all the money the bank had on deposit.

Being a man unversed in the ways of the world, he did not know what else to do. He returned home.

When Mrs. Baggert was made told the news, she was indignant.

"Our Tom a thief!" she cried. "Why don't they accuse me and Mr. Jackson and you? The idea! You ought to hire a lawyer, Mr. Swift, and prosecute those men for slander."

"Do you think it would do any good?"

"I certainly do. Why, they have no evidence at all! What does that mean, sneaking Andy Foger amount to? Get a lawyer, and have Tom's interests looked after."

Mr. Swift, glad to have someone share the responsibility with, felt somewhat better when a well-known Shopton attorney assured him that the evidence against Tom was of such a flimsy character that it would never hold in a court of justice.

"But they have warrants for him and Mr. Damon," bemoaned the inventor.

"Very true, but it is easy to swear out a warrant against any one. It's a different matter to prove a person guilty."

"Can they arrest my son?"

"Yes—if they catch him. However, we can soon have

him released on bail."

"It's disgraceful," said Mrs. Baggert.

"Not at all, my dear madam, not at all. Good and innocent persons have been arrested. It happens practically every day. The police, with little to go on quite often take the word of someone and perform the arrest. As it often turns out, the person informing on the other is frequently the actual guilty party. It will not surprise me at all if it should happen that young Foger is found to have had a hand in this affair."

"They are going to send out a general alarm for my son," said Mr. Swift.

"Yes, but I fancy it will be some time before they catch him and Mr. Damon. Assuming that the airship holds together, I can't think of a better way to keep out of the clutches of the police, and their silly charges," chuckled the lawyer. "Now don't worry, Mr. Swift. I will have a chat with the judge who signed the warrant to see how strongly he feels it is. My bet is that he was given few facts and signed it to avoid having to deal with the wrath of the bankers. It will all come out right."

The inventor tried to believe so. Though he knew his son was innocent, it was difficult to see, within the next few days, big posters on all the vacant walls and fences, offering a reward of five thousand dollars for the arrest of Tom Swift and Wakefield Damon, who were charged with

having flown away in an airship with seventy-five thousand dollars of the bank's money.

"I guess Tom Swift will wish he'd been more decent to me when I collect that money for his arrest," said Andy to his crony, Sam, the day the bills were posted.

"Yes, but I get my share, don't I?" asked Sam.

"Sure," answered the bully. "I wish they'd hurry up and arrest him."

Within the next few days the country was covered with posters telling of the robbery and the reward, and police officials in cities large and small, and in towns and villages, were notified by telegraph to arrest and capture, at any cost the occupants of a certain large, red airship.

Mr. Swift, on the advice of his lawyer, sent several telegrams to Tom, apprising him of what had happened. The telegraph company was asked to rush the telegrams to the first city when word came in that the Red Cloud had landed.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XV

FIRED ON

TOM'S EXCITED call to the aeronaut, alerting him to Mr. Damon's predicament, was answered immediately. John Sharp jumped forward from the motor compartment. On his way past a group of the electric switched, he yanked one out, stopping the machinery and the great propellers. Then he leaped out on the platform.

Something else happened. Just before the accident to the eccentric man, John had shut the gas system off to test the wings at altitude, making the airship an airplane

instead of a dirigible balloon. Consequently, as soon as the forward motion ceased the great ship began falling.

"We're sinking!" cried Tom, forgetting for a moment that he was not in his motorboat.

"Tilt your elevator up, and glide downward as slowly as you can!" directed John. "I'll start the engine again as soon as I rescue him," for it was risky to venture out on the platform with the propeller whirring and the airship moving forward at speed.

John was soon at Mr. Damon's side. He saw that the man was unconscious, whether from fright or from choking could not then be determined. There was, however, no sign of a wound.

Once he unwound the scarf from the neck of the unconscious man and pulled Mr. Damon back onto the platform, it was no easy task to carry the heavy body of Mr. Damon off the platform, but the aeronaut was a muscular individual. His long career hanging from a trapeze at great heights stood him in good stead.

He half carried, half dragged the unconscious man into the cabin. After placing the man in one of the chairs he returned to the platform to retrieve the scarf. Next he started the motor and turned on the gas system so that the airship would soon float in space without motion.

"You needn't steer now, Tom," said the balloonist. "Just

give me a hand here."

"Is—is he dead?" inquired the lad, his voice faltering.

"No, his heart's beating. I can't understand what happened."

John was something of a field medic and doctor having trained as one during an enlistment in the Army. A small box of medicines had been brought along in case of emergencies. With the *Red Cloud* now lazily floating in the air—once they had buoyancy, John asked Tom to stop the motor—John set about restoring Mr. Damon to consciousness.

It was not long after the administration of smelling salts that the man opened his eyes. The color that had left his cheeks came back, and, after a drink of cold water he was able to sit up.

"Did I fall?" he asked. "Bless my very existence, but did I tumble off the airship?"

"No," replied Tom, "though you came pretty near it. How do you feel? Were you hurt?"

"Oh, I'm all right now—just a trifle dizzy. And, my neck is quite sore. But I thought sure I was a goner when I fell over the platform railing," and Mr. Damon could not repress a shudder. John opened one bottle and gave his "patient" a little medicinal brandy. His patient was soon able to stand and move about.

"How did it happen?" inquired the balloonist.

"I don't know," answered Mr. Damon. "I was out on the platform looking at the view, and thinking how much better my neuralgia was, with the scarf on. Suddenly the wind whipped loose one end of the scarf, and, before I knew it the cloth had begun to fall over the side. I jumped forward but—" he stopped and then seemed to remember what had happened. "Ah, yes. I tripped over my own clumsy feet and was tossed against the railing, which I managed to grab, and then I lost my senses. It's a good thing I wasn't whirled around the propeller."

"It's a good thing you weren't tossed down to the earth," commented Tom, shivering as he thought of his friend's narrow escape.

"I became unconscious, partly because the wind was knocked from me as I hit the platform railing," went on Mr. Damon, "and partly from fright, I think. But I'm all right now, and I'm not going out on that platform again with a loose scarf on."

"I wouldn't go out at all again, if I were you. Of course, I'm used to dizzy heights," spoke Mr. Sharp.

"Oh, I'm not normally so easily frightened," declared Mr. Damon. "If I'm going to be a balloonist, or an aeroplanist I've got to get used to certain things. I'm all right now," he repeated brushed down his jacket and straightened his tie. It was some time, however, before

Tom got over the fright his friend had caused him.

They spent that night moving slowly south. In the morning found they had covered another hundred miles, not having run the ship to anything more than one-quarter speed. Breakfast was served above the clouds. The night sleeping at altitude had done wonders. Mr. Damon found that he could stand the great height with comfort.

For three days after the start, the travelers proceeded slowly along. They were totally unaware of the sensation which their leaving, conjointly with the bank robbery, had caused, not only in Shopton but in other places.

"We're over a good sized city," announced Tom, on the noon of the third day. "Perhaps it's Poughkeepsie. Suppose we drop down, and leave some message? Dad will be anxious to hear from us."

"Good idea," John commented. "Down it is. Shift the controls."

Tom proceeded to do so. While Mr. Damon relieved him at the wheel—he had been instructed in how to keep the airship on any course once set—the young inventor prepared a message to his father. It was placed in a weighted envelope together with a sum of money. The person picking it up was requested to send the letter as a telegram, retaining the remaining money for his trouble.

As the ship got lower and lower over the city the usual

crowds could be seen congregating in the streets, pointing and gazing upward.

"We're creating quite a stir," observed Tom.

"More than usual, it seems," added Mr. Sharp, peering down using the binocular glasses. "I declare, there seems to be a police parade under way."

"That's right," put in Mr. Damon. A squad of uniformed officers, some on horseback, could be seen hurrying along the main street, trying to keep pace with the slow-moving airship.

"They're looking at us through telescopes," called Tom. "Guess they never saw a balloon down this in this town. If we wanted to, we might put on quite a show for them."

Nearer and nearer to the city dropped the *Red Cloud*. Tom was about to go to the railing and let the weighted envelope drop, when they all spotted several puffs of white smoke coming from the upraised arms of several of the law officers. It was followed by vicious, zipping sounds about the cabin of the ship, the windows of which were open. Then came the reports of several rifles.

"They're firing at us!" yelled Tom.

"So they are!" cried Mr. Sharp. "They must be crazy! Can't they see that we're not a bird."

Another volley was directed at the airship, and several bullets struck the big aluminum gas holder glancing

blows. A quick look upward showed that the container had not been punctured.

"Here! Quit that!" yelled Tom, leaning out of the window. "Are you crazy?"

"They can't hear you," called Mr. Sharp. "Get you head back inside!"

A third volley was fired, and this time several persons other than police officers seemed to be shooting at the airship. Revolvers as well as rifles were being used.

"We've got to get out of this!" shouted Mr. Sharp, as a bullet passed up through the floor and embedded itself in the ceiling uncomfortably close to his head. "I can't imagine what's gotten into the people. Send her up, Tom!"

He quickly shifted the elevation rudder, and gave more gasoline to the motor. Propellers spinning, the *Red Cloud* soared majestically aloft.

Tom had not dropped his message, concluding that citizens who would fire on travelers of the air for no reason would not be likely to accommodate them in the matter of sending messages.

The craft flew rapidly upward, but before it was beyond rifle shot another bullet penetrated the wood floorboards and sent some splinters flying around the cabin.

While Mr. Damon resumed the control position, Tom and John made a complete inspection of the lower side of

the gas container. While no holes could be seen, they both realized that they were vulnerable. Even with its reduced volatility, the gas could still be ignited with a sufficient spark.

"Whew! That was a narrow escape!" exclaimed Mr. Sharp when they met back in the control room. "What in the world can those people be up to, anyhow?"

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XVI

OVER A FIERY FURNACE

DOWN BELOW, the aeronauts could see the crowd, led by the police, scurrying to and fro. Many individuals beside the officers appeared to be holding weapons. From the puffs of smoke that spurted out, it was evident that more shots were being fired. But the bullets could do no more harm, and the *Red Cloud's* rapidly revolving propellers soon had them beyond the center of the city.

"Well, if that isn't the limit!" cried Tom. "They must have mistaken us for a German war balloon, about to drop

bombs on them."

"Bless my liver!" exclaimed Mr. Damon, "I believe you're right. What do you say, Mr. Sharp?"

The veteran balloonist took a careful look over the craft before replying. Then he spoke, "It couldn't be that," and he shook his head, as if puzzled. "They must know no foreign airship would try any trick like that. Beside, if by some remote possibility they did imagine it, there would be soldiers shooting at us instead of the police. As it was, the whole population seemed anxious to bring us down."

"And they nearly did," added Mr. Damon. "If they had shot a few holes in the gas bag where would we be?"

"We should remain right in the air," answered the balloonist. "It would take several volleys of bullets to damage our aluminum container. It is in sections and when one, or even five compartments for that matter, are pierced, there is enough gas in the others to hold us up. The real danger would be from a military shell of larger caliber, and possibly one coated with phosphorus. The fiery hot tip of such a bullet might set the gas aflame."

Mr. Damon looked slightly frightened at this bit of news. "Is that very likely?" he inquired.

"Not very. So the people down there could not have damaged us much, even if they had shot a lot of holes in us. Even without the gas container we can keep flying as

long as we are constantly moving forward. Our wings will serve their purpose. Of course someone could damage us, and maybe put some of our machinery out of business with a very lucky shot, and that would be a serious thing. But what puzzles me is why they fired at us at all."

"It couldn't be out of pure mischief, could it?" Tom asked.

"Hardly. If we were in a savage country I could understand the natives firing at some such object as this airship, but the people of that city must have known what our craft was. They probably have read something about it in the newspapers. To deliberately fire on us, with the chance of disabling or even killing us, seems worse than barbarous."

"Well, we won't give 'em another opportunity," commented Mr. Damon.

"No, indeed. Not this city, but who knows what we might find in any other city or town? We may be fired at the next village we sail over."

"Then we steer clear of towns," advised Tom.

"Impossible, Tom. unless we put out over the ocean we have to pass over some. Before we do, I'd like to solve this mystery."

The day passed without further incident, though they did not go low enough down over any city to drop any

messages. It was decided that it would not be safe.

"We'll take a chance at night," suggested Tom, and that evening, approaching a good-sized town in the dusk, several of the weighted envelopes were dropped overboard. Doubtless the people walking along the street, must have been startled by hearing something fall with a "thud" at their feet. They were probably also startled to look up and see a great, ghostly shape moving in the air. But there was no shooting.

Eventually, a few individuals that had not heard of the arrest warrant dutifully took some of the messages to their local telegrapher. Three of these reached Mr. Swift in Shopton. But he could not answer them for the airship kept on the move.

Several nights were spent floating in the air with the engine stopped, and the *Red Cloud* floating lazily along as the gentle winds shifted. One night was spent anchored—if by "anchorage" you considered a tall tree to which a tether was attached to be such.

They set down onto the ground for an hour so Tom and John could make repairs to the aluminum tank using a special metal putty John had brought along. They quickly elevated back above the trees. As they did their floating that night above a sparsely settled part of the country, if the lights of the airship *were* seen from below, the farmers doubtless took them for some new stars or,

possibly, a comet.

"Now then for a fast, straight run!" cried Tom the next morning after breakfast had been served, and the big twenty-cylinder motor was running. "We'll be able to make the turn over Atlanta today, and then head for home, won't we, John?"

"Well, we *could* do it, Tom," was the answer, "but I like this mode of traveling so that I would like to lengthen our voyage. Instead of turning around at Atlanta, what do you say to making for Key West below Florida, and then starting back? That will be something of a trip. The *Red Cloud* is behaving much better than I hoped she would."

"I'm willing to go further if Mr. Damon is."

"Oh, bless my shoe strings, I'm game!" exclaimed the eccentric man. "I always did want to go to Key West, anyhow."

The craft was speeding along at a fast clip, and lunch that day was served almost three miles in the air. Then, wanting to test the gliding abilities of the airship, Tom sent it down on a long slant, with the propellers stationary. Only the shifting of wing surfaces and rudders were used in controlling it.

As the craft fairly slid down through the sky like a sled on a hill of fleecy snow, Tom, who was peering ahead, cried out "I say! It looks as if we were going to run into a

thunderstorm!"

"How's that?" inquired John, poking his head into the main compartment.

"He says there's a big storm ahead," repeated Mr. Damon, "and he's right. I see a big bank of dark clouds, and there is a roaring in the air."

John, who had been making some adjustments to the motor, went forward to take a look. The *Red Cloud* was swiftly gliding downward on its slant, straight toward a dark mass of vapor. It seemed to be rolling first one way, and then another while, as Mr. Damon had said, there was a low rumbling coming from it.

"That doesn't look like a thunderstorm," spoke the balloonist, with a puzzled air.

They all regarded the dark mass intently for a few seconds. Tom brought the airship back to level flight, and it was now moving forward under its own momentum. It was headed for the clouds, if that's what they were, though losing speed slowly.

"We'll have to start the motor!" exclaimed John. "We don't want to run into a storm if we can help it, though I don't ever remember seeing a cloud build up like that."

"There's another thing. It's getting warm," announced Tom, and he let go of the steering wheel for a moment while he took off his coat.

"That's what it is," agreed Mr. Damon, who also divested himself of his garments. "Bless my spark plug, but it's like a hot July day suddenly. No wonder there's a thunderstorm ahead."

Then John glanced to the ground and uttered a cry. "That's no storm!" he fairly shouted. "It's a big forest fire! That's smoke we see! We must get out of this. Turn around Tom, while I start the engine. Quickly! We must get above or around it!"

He fairly leaped for the motor, and Tom and Mr. Damon could hear him turning the levers and wheels, ready to start. But before the power plant started, something happened. There was a sound as of some great, siren whistle blowing, and with a howl of the onrushing air, the *Red Cloud* was fairly sucked forward toward the fire.

"Start the motor! Start the motor, John!" cried Tom.

"I'm trying to, but something seems to be the matter."

"We're being drawn right over the fire!" yelled Mr. Damon. "It's getting hotter every minute! Can't you do something?"

"You take the wheel," called the balloonist to Mr. Damon. "Try to steer around just as if you were driving an auto once we start the engine. Tom, come here and give me a hand. The motor has jammed!"

The young inventor sprang to obey. Mr. Damon, his face showing the fear he felt, grasped the steering wheel. The airship was now only two thousand feet high, but instead of resting motionless in the air held up by the gas in the container, she was being pulled forward right toward the heart of the mass of black vapor. It could now be seen was streaked with bright tongues of flame.

"What's making us move ahead if the motor isn't running?" asked Tom, as he bent over the machine.

"Suction—draught from the fire!" explained John. "Heated air rises very fast and that leaves a vacuum. The cold air around the fire rushes in. It's carrying us with it. We'll be right over the fire in a few minutes if we can't get this motor going! I can't see what might be the matter."

"Can't we steer to one side, as it is?"

"No. We're right in a powerful current of air, and steering won't do any good. We are traveling at the same speed as the inrush of air so the rudders won't work. Until we have some motion of our own, that is. Turn the gasoline lever on a little more, and see if you can get a spark."

Tom did so, but no explosion resulted. The twenty cylinders of the big engine remained mute. The airship was gathering speed, sucked onward and downward as it was by the draught from the fire. The roaring was very distinct now, and the crackling of the flames could be

heard plainly. The heat grew more intense.

Frantically Tom and John labored over the motor. With the perverseness usual to gas engines, it had refused to work at a critical moment.

"What shall I do?" cried Mr. Damon from his position in the pilot seat. "We seem to be heading right for the midst of it?"

"Pull back and slant the elevation rudder," called Tom. "Tilt the nose up. We might gain some altitude. It will be cooler the higher we go. Maybe we can float over it!"

"You'd better go out there," advised John. "I'll keep at this motor. Go up as high as you can. Pump more gas into the container. That will help raise us, but maybe not quick enough. The gas doesn't work as well when heated. It gets too thin. I'm afraid we're in for it," he added grimly.

Tom sprang to relieve Mr. Damon. The heat was now intense. With each passing second the *Red Cloud* moved closer to the blazing forest, which seemed to cover several square miles.

Great masses of smoke and ash mixed with pieces of charred and blazing wood carried up by the great draught circled around the ship. Several of them came to rest on the outside of the cabin, and Tom was worried that one might start a fire on the wooden outer skin. He needn't have worried as only a few seconds passed by before each

piece was hurled away from and above the airship by the howling winds.

The *Red Cloud* was being pulled toward the middle of the fire by the strong suction.

Tom yanked back on the elevation rudder, and the nose of the craft pointed upward. But it still moved downward and a moment later the travelers felt as if they were over a fiery furnace.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XVII

"WANTED FOR ROBBERY!"

CHOKING AND gasping for breath even with all of the windows closed, and feeling as if they could not stand the intense heat more than a moment longer, the young inventor looked at Mr. Damon. Death seemed ready to reach out and grasp them all. The mass of heated air was so powerful that it swung and tossed the *Red Cloud* about as if it were a wisp of paper.

"We must do something!" cried Mr. Damon, beginning to take off his collar and vest. "I'm choking!"

"Lie down in the bottom of the car," suggested John. "The smoke is much thinner there."

The eccentric man, too startled now to use any of his "blessing" expressions, did so.

"Can't you start the motor?" called out Tom frantically, as he stuck to his post, with his hand on the steering wheel and the elevation lever pulled back as far as it would go.

"I've done my best," answered the balloonist, coming forward and gasping as he swallowed some smoke. "I'm afraid—afraid it's all up with us. We should have steered clear of this from the first. My goodness, how it roars!" He seemed to be a defeated man.

The crackling and snapping of the flames below them grew louder. They were fed on the dry wood which had received no rain had wet for many weeks. Up swirled the dark smoke-clouds, growing hotter and hotter all the while as the craft came nearer and nearer to the center of the conflagration.

"We must rise higher!" cried Tom. "John, you take the controls. I will go back and turn on the gas system to full power. We have to over fill the container. That will carry us up!"

"Yes, it's our only hope," muttered John taking the seat. "We must go up, but the gas doesn't generate very fast

when there's too much heat."

Tom ran to the back compartment and twisted open all of the valves. He could hear the gas mixture hissing through his activator box and from that out to the aluminum container. "If we only had some way to cool the container. We're bound to have to stay over this fiery pit for some time yet," he thought.

As if to answer his prayers, a bold of lightning streaked downward less than a mile away. The enormous heat had flung enough particulates into the air to cause the higher elevation clouds to begin discharging. In less than a minute, the lightning was accompanied by a torrential rain. It was mostly hissing and evaporating before it reached their altitude, but enough did drop onto the aluminum tank. In another minute Tom could feel the aircraft beginning to rise.

"We're going up a little!" whispered Tom hopefully, as he glanced at a gauge near him. "We're fifteen hundred feet now, and we were only twelve awhile ago."

He moved forward to tell John and Mr. Damon.

"Good! Take back over, please. Keep the elevation as it is and try to gently steer us to the left. I'll see what I can do with the motor," advised the balloonist. "It's our only hope," and he hurried into the engine room. Like the other parts of the cabin, it was now murky with choking vapor and soot.

Suddenly the elevation gauge showed that they were falling. The airship was going down.

"What's the matter?" called Mr. Damon, from the cabin floor.

"I don't know," answered Tom, "unless the rudder has broken."

He peered through the haze. No, the big elevation rudder was still in place, but it seemed to have no effect on the shim.

"It's a down draught!" cried John. "We're being sucked back down. It won't last but a few seconds. I've been in 'em before."

He seemed to have guessed rightly, for, the next instant the airship was shooting upward again, and relief came to the aeronauts, though it was not much. The outside temperature was almost unbearable, and inside was not much better.

"Lighten ship!" sung out John. "Toss over all the things you think we can spare, Tom. Some of the cases of provisions—we can get more if we need 'em. The canned foods will be heaviest. We must rise, and the gas isn't working fast enough!"

There was no need for the young inventor at the steering wheel now, for the craft simply could not be guided. It was swirled about this way, and that, by the

currents of heated air.

Tom began to toss some of the boxes of food overboard. In a minute, he was choking too hard to continue, having only managed to push out three boxes.

"I'll help you," gasped Mr. Damon, and while he and Tom tossed from the cabin windows some of their stores, John was frantically endeavoring to make the motor start.

It was slow work, but by the time they had pushed out almost six hundred pounds of supplies, the ship their situation improved. Slowly, so slowly that it seemed an age, the elevation pointer went higher and higher on the dial.

"Sixteen hundred feet!" sung out Tom, pausing for a look at the gauge and to take a few breaths. "That's the best yet!"

The heat was felt less now, and every minute was improving their situation. Slowly the hand moved. The gas was being made in larger quantities now that the heat was less. The rain had continued to fall and its cooling properties aided by drawing away heat from the gas container.

Ten minutes more of agony, and their danger seemed to be about over. They were still above the burning area, but sufficiently high so that only stray wisps of smoke enveloped them.

"Whew! But that was the worst ever!" cried Tom, as he sank exhausted on a bench, and wiped his perspiring face. "We sure were in a bad way!"

"I should say so," agreed John, coming back forward for a moment. "If we don't get a breeze we may have to stay here for some time."

"Why, can't you get that motor to work yet?" asked Mr. Damon. "Bless my gaiters, but I'm all in, as the boys say."

"I'll have another try at it now," replied John. He gave a rueful chuckle. "Probably it will work fine now, after we're out of danger without any help from it."

His guess proved correct. In a few minutes the motor coughed once, backfired and then started. The propellers revolved and the *Red Cloud* swiftly moved out of the fire zone.

When they had placed about twenty miles between themselves and the fire, John had Tom disengage the propellers and let the craft float along. "Now we'd better take account of ourselves, our provisions, and the ship," said John. They were all much relieved and refreshed to be back at five thousand feet where the air was clean and cool. "I don't believe the craft is damaged any, except some of the wing and tank braces may be warped from the heat. As for the provisions, you threw over a lot, didn't you, Tom?"

"Well, I had to."

"Yes, I guess you did. Well, we'll need to make a landing. I am amazed at the amount of lift the gases have been able to give us. It has to be your activator, Tom. Nothing else could account for it. Without that activator box, we probably would have been pulled into the flames and to our deaths!"

"Do you think it will be safe to land?" asked Mr. Damon anxiously. "We might be fired upon again."

"Oh, I don't believe there is much danger of that. But I'll take precautions. I don't want a big crowd around when we come down, so we'll pick out a secluded place and land just at dusk. In the morning we can look over the ship, and then go to the nearest town to buy provisions. After that we can continue our journey, and we'll steer clear of forest fires after this."

"And people who shoot at us," added Mr. Damon.

"Yes. I wish I knew what that was all about," and once again came that puzzled look to the face of the balloonist.

The airship gently descended that evening onto a large level field, a smooth landing being made. Just before the descent Tom used his binocular glasses to look all around the area and located, about two miles from the spot they selected for an "anchorage," a good-sized village.

"We can get provisions there," he announced.

"Yes, but we must not let it be known what they are for," said John, "or we'll have the whole population out here. I think I have a good plan. Tom, you and Mr. Damon go into town and buy the things we need. I'll stay here with the airship, and check it all over. Hopefully, you can arrange to have the stuff carted out here in the morning, and left at a point about a quarter of a mile away. Then we can carry it to the ship. In that way no one will discover us, and we'll not be bothered with curiosity seekers."

This was voted a good idea, and, when the landing had been made, and a hasty examination showed that the ship had suffered no great damage from the passage over the fire, the young inventor and Mr. Damon started off.

They soon found a good road leading to town and tramped along it in the early evening. The few persons they met paid little attention to them, save to bow in a friendly fashion, and occasionally wish them a good evening.

"I wonder where we are?" asked Tom, as they hurried along.

"In some southern town, to judge by the accents of the people, and the number of colored individuals we've met," answered Mr. Damon.

"Let's ask," suggested Tom.

"No. That is sure to announce to them that we're strangers, and they may ask a lot of questions."

"Oh, I guess if it's a small place they'll know we're strangers soon enough," commented Tom. "But when we get to the village itself we can read the name on the store windows."

A few minutes later found them in the midst of a typical southern town. It was Berneau, North Carolina, according to the signs, they saw.

"Here's a restaurant," called Tom, as they passed a neat-appearing one. "Let's go inside and get some dinner before we buy our supplies."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Damon. "Bless my flapjacks, but I am beginning to feel very hungry."

The eating place was a good one, and Tom's predictions about they're being taken for strangers was verified. No sooner had they given their orders than the pretty girl who waited on the table remarked, "Ah reckon yo' all are from th' no'th; aren't yo'?" She smiled, as she spoke, and Tom smiled back as he acknowledged it.

"Have you a paper—a newspaper I could look at?" he asked.

"Ah guess Ah can find one," went on the girl. "Ah reckon yo' all are from N' York. N' Yorkers are so desperant bent on readin' th' news." Her tones indicated a

fairly poor upbringing and probable lack of formal education.

"Yes, we're from New York," was Tom's reply, opting not to elaborate on exactly where in New York that might be.

The young inventor rapidly scanned the pages of the newspaper. Something on the front page caught his eye. He turned it so Mr. Damon could read it.

WANTED FOR ROBBERY! BANK LOOTERS ESCAPE IN RED AIRSHIP—FIRED AT BUT DISAPPEARS

"Jumpin' Jehosophat!" exclaimed Tom softly. "What on earth can this mean? We're accused of having robbed the Shopton Bank of seventy-five thousand dollars the night before we left, and to have taken it away in the *Red Cloud*. There's a general alarm out for us! This is awful!"

"It's preposterous!" burst out Mr. Damon. "I'll have my lawyers sue this paper. Bless my stocks and bonds, I!"

"Not so loud," cautioned Tom, for the pretty waitress was watching them curiously. "Read this, and then we'll decide what to do. But one thing is certain, we must go back to Shopton at once to clear ourselves."

"Oh, my!" murmured Mr. Damon, as he read the article rapidly. "Now we know why they fired at us. They hoped to bring us down, capture us, and get the five thousand dollars reward!"

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XVIII

BACK FOR VINDICATION

TOM GLANCED around the restaurant. There were few persons in it save himself and Mr. Damon. The pretty waitress was still regarding the two curiously.

"We ought to take that paper along with us, to show to John," said Tom, in a low voice to his friend. "I haven't had time to take it all in myself, yet. Let's go. I've had enough to eat, haven't you?"

"Yes. My appetite is gone now."

As they rose to pay their check the girl advanced.

"Can you tell me where I can get a copy of this paper?" asked Tom, as he laid down a generous tip on the table, for the girl. Her eyes opened rather wide.

"Yo' all are fo'gettin' some of yo' money." she said, in her broad, southern tones. Tom thought her the prettiest girl he ever seen, excepting Mary Nestor.

"Oh, that's for you," replied the young inventor. "It's a tip. Don't you get them down here?"

"Not very often. Thank yo' all. But what did yo' all ask about that paper?"

"I asked where I could get a copy of it. There is something in it that interests me."

"Yes, an' Ah reckon Ah knows what it is," exclaimed the girl. "It's about that airship with th' robbers in it!"

"How do you know?" inquired Tom quickly, and he tried to seem cool, though he felt the hot blood mounting to his cheeks.

"Oh, Ah saw yo' all readin' it. Everybody down heah is crazy about it. We all think th' ship is comin' down this way, 'cause it says th' robbers was intendin' to start south befo' they robbed th' bank. Ah wish Ah could collect that five thousand dollars. If Ah could see that airship, I wouldn't work no mo' in this eatin' place. What do yo' all reckon that airship looks like?" and the girl gazed intently at Tom and Mr. Damon.

"Why, bless my—" began the eccentric man, but Tom broke in hurriedly, "Oh, I guess it looks like most any other airship," for he feared that if his companion used any of his odd expressions he might be recognized. Tom was not sure whether or not a description of himself, Mr. Damon and John Sharp was given.

"Well, Ah shua wish I could collect that reward," went on the girl. "Everybody is on th' lookout. Yo' all ain't see th' airship; have yo' all?"

"Where can we get a paper like this?" asked Tom, again, not wanting to answer such a leading question.

"Why, yo' all is shua welcome to that one," was the reply. "Ah guess Ah can affo'd to give it to yo' all, after th' generous way yo' all behaved to me. Take it, an' welcome. But are yo' all shua yo' are done eatin'? Yo' all left lots."

"Oh, we had enough," replied Tom hurriedly. His sole aim now was to get away—to consult with John, and he needed the paper to learn further details of the astonishing news. He and his friends accused of looting the bank, and taking away seventy-five thousand dollars in the airship! It was incredible! A reward of five thousand dollars offered for their capture! They might be arrested any minute, yet they could not go on without buying some provisions. What were they to do?

Once outside the restaurant, Mr. Damon and Tom walked swiftly on. They came to a corner with a street

lamp, and the young inventor paused to scan the paper again. It contained quite a full account of the affair.

The story was told of how the bank had been broken into, the vault rifled and the money taken. The first clue, it said, was given by a youth named Andy Foger who had seen a former acquaintance hanging around the bank with burglar tools.

Tom recognized the description of himself as the "former acquaintance," but he could not understand the rest.

"Burglar tools? I wonder how Andy could say that?" he asked Mr. Damon.

"Wait until we get back, and we'll ask John Sharp," suggested his companion. "This is very strange. I am going to sue someone for spreading false reports about me! Bless my ledgers, why I have money on deposit in that bank! To think that I would rob it!"

"Poor Dad!" murmured Tom. "This must be hard for him. But, what about ordering food? Maybe if we buy any they will trail us, find the airship and capture it. I don't want to be arrested, even if I am innocent, and I certainly don't want the airship to fall into the hands of the police. They might damage it."

"We must go see Mr. Sharp," declared Mr. Damon, and they hiked quickly back to where the *Red Cloud* was

concealed.

To say that the balloonist was astonished is putting it mildly. He was even more excited than was Mr. Damon.

"Wait until I get hold of that Andy Foger!" he cried. "I'll make him sweat for this! I see he's already laid claim to the reward," he added, reading further along in the article. "He thinks he has put the police on our trail."

"So he seems to have done," added Tom. "The whole country has been notified to look out for us," the paper says. "We're likely to be fired upon whenever we pass over a city or a town."

"Then we'll have to avoid them," declared the balloonist.

"But we must go back," declared Tom.

"Of course. Back to be vindicated. We'll have to give up our trip. My! But this is a surprise!"

"I don't see what makes Andy say he saw me with burglar tools," commented Tom, with a puzzled air.

John thought for a moment. Then he exclaimed "It was that bag of tools I sent you after—the long wrenches, the pliers, and the brace and bits. You—"

"Of course!" cried Tom. "I remember now. The bag dropped and opened, and Andy and Sam saw the tools. But the idea of taking them for burglar tools!"

"Well, I suppose the burglars, whoever they were, did use tools similar to those to break open the vault," put in Mr. Damon. "Andy probably thought he was a smart lad to put the police on our track."

"I'll put him on the track, when I return," declared John. "Tie him to it and let a train run over him! Well, now, what's to be done?"

"We've need to have food," suggested Tom.

"Yes, but I think we can manage that. I've been looking over the ship, as best I could in the dark. It seems to be all right. We can start early in the morning without anyone around here knowing we paid their town a visit. You and Mr. Damon go back to town, Tom, and order some stuff. Have the man leave it by the roadside early tomorrow morning. Tell him it's for some traveling convoy who will stop and pick it up. Pay him well, and tell him to keep quiet, as it's for an auto racing party. That's partly true. We're going to race home to vindicate our reputations. I think that will be all right."

"The man may get suspicious," said Mr. Damon.

"I hope not," answered the balloonist. "We've got to take a chance, anyhow."

The plan worked well, however. The storekeeper promising to have the supplies on hand at the time and place mentioned. He winked as Tom asked him to keep

quiet about it.

"Oh, I know yo' automobile fellers," he said with a laugh. "You want to get some grub on the fly, so you won't have to stop, an' can beat th' other fellow. I know you, fer I see them automobile goggles stickin' out of your pocket."

Tom and Mr. Damon each carried a pair to use when the wind was strong, but the young inventor had forgotten about his. They now served him a good turn for they turned the thoughts of the storekeeper into a new channel. Tom gave the man a "knowing" smile and let it go at that. After paying for the things that he and Mr. Damon could not carry, they left the store.

The aeronauts passed an uneasy night. They raised their ship high in the air, anchoring it by a rope to a big tree, and they turned on no lights, for they did not want to betray their position.

They descended an hour before it was to become daylight, and hurried to the place where the provisions were left. They found their supplies safely on hand. Carrying them into the airship, they prepared to turn back to Shopton.

As the ship rose high in the air a crowd of black laborers passing through a distant field; they saw it. At once they raised a commotion, shouting and pointing to the wonderful sight.

"We're discovered!" cried Tom.

"No matter," answered John. "We'll soon be out of sight, and we'll fly high the rest of this trip."

Tom looked down on the fast disappearing little hamlet, and he thought of the pretty girl in the restaurant.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XIX

WRECKED

WITH HER NOSE pointing north, the *Red Cloud* swam along through the air. Those on board were thinking of many things, but chief among them was the unjust accusation that had been made against them by an irresponsible boy—the red-haired Andy Foger. They read the account in the paper several times, each seeking to learn new things from it.

"It's just a lot of circumstantial evidence, that's what it is," said Tom. "I admit it might look suspicious to anyone

who didn't know us, but Andy Foger has certainly done the most mischief by his conclusions. Burglar tools! The idea!"

"I think I shall sue the bank for damages," declared Mr. Damon. "They have injured my reputation by making this accusation against me. Anyhow, I'll certainly never do any more business with them, and I'll withdraw my ten thousand dollars deposit, as soon as we get back."

"John doesn't seem to be accused of doing anything at all," remarked Tom, reading the article for perhaps the tenth time. "It barely mentions him."

"Oh, I guess I'm a sort of general all-around bad man, who helped you burglars to escape with the booty," answered the balloonist, with a laugh. "I expect to be arrested along with you two. Might lose my deputy sheriff badge and all."

"But must we be arrested?" inquired Tom anxiously. "I don't like that idea at all. We haven't done anything."

"Here's my plan," went on John. "We'll get back to Shopton as quickly as we can. We'll arrive at night so no one will see us, leave the airship in some secluded spot, and go to the police and explain matters. We can easily prove that we had nothing to do with the robbery. Why we were all home the night it happened! Mr. Swift, Mr. Jackson and Mrs. Baggert can testify to that."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Damon. "I guess they can. Bless my bank book, but that seems a good plan. We'll follow it."

Proceeding on the plan which they had decided was the best one, the *Red Cloud* was sent high into the air. It traveled high enough that, at times, it was above the clouds. Though this was their highest-ever altitude at almost seventeen thousand feet, and this caused some little discomfort at first, especially to Mr. Damon, they soon became used to it. It had the advantage of concealing them from any persons below who might be on the lookout.

"We don't want to be shot at again," explained John. "That isn't altogether healthy, and not very safe. If we keep high up they can't see us much less shoot at us. They'll take us for some big bird. Then, too, we can go faster at higher altitudes."

"I suppose there will be another alarm sent out, from those field workers having sighted us," ventured Tom.

"Oh, yes, but those fellows were so excited they may describe us as having horns, hoofs and a tail, and their story may not be believed. I'm not worrying about them. My chief concern is to drive the *Red Cloud* for all she is worth. I want to explain some things back there in Shopton."

As if repenting of the way it had misbehaved over the forest fire, the airship was now swishing along at high

speed, the motor humming contentedly.

Seated in the cabin the travelers would have really enjoyed the return trip had it not been for the accusation hanging over them. The weather was fine and clear, and as they skimmed along, now and then coming out from the clouds, they caught glimpses below them of the land over which they were traveling. They had a general idea of their location, from knowing the town where the paper had given them such astounding news, and it was easy to calculate their progress.

After running about a hundred miles or so, at high speed John found it necessary to slow down the motor, as some of the bearings were heating. Still this gave them no alarm, as they were making good time. They came to a stop that night, and calculated that by the next evening, or two at the latest, they would be back near Shopton.

But they did not calculate on an accident.

One of the cylinders on the big motor cracked as they started up next morning. For some hours they had to hang in the air, suspended by the gas in the container, while John and Tom took off the damaged part and put in a spare one. It was relatively easy as the cylinders had cast separately and attached individually to the crankcase. They did not have all of the tools necessary so it took longer than they expected. It was dusk when they finished, and too late to start up. They remained hovering

about in the same place until the next day.

Morning dawned with a hot humidity, unusual at that time of the year, but partly accounted for by the fact that they were still within the influence of the southern climate. With a 'whizz' sound, the big propellers were set in motion, and, Tom at the wheel, the ship resumed its journey. The air was still thin—being about three miles in the air—but they were able to make good time.

"It's becoming cooler up here," remarked Tom, as he shifted the wheel and rudder a bit in response to a gust of wind, that heeled the craft over.

"Yes, I think we're going to have a storm," remarked John, eyeing the clouds with a professional air. "We may run ahead of it, or right into it. We'll go down a bit, toward night, when there's less danger of being spotted and shot."

So far on their return trip, they had not been low enough during daytime to be in any danger from persons who hoped to earn the five thousand dollars reward.

The afternoon passed quickly, and it got dark early. There was a curious hum to the wind. Hearing it, John began to go about the ship, seeing that everything was tied down.

"We're going to have a blow," he remarked, "and a heavy one, too. We'll have to make everything snug, and

be ready to go up or down, as the case calls for."

"Up or down?" inquired Mr. Damon.

"Yes. By rising we may escape the blow, or, by going below the strata of agitated air, we may escape it."

"How about rain?"

"Well, you can get above rain, but you can't get below it, with the law of gravitation working as it does at present. How's the gas system, Tom?"

"Seems to be all right," replied the young inventor, who had relinquished the wheel to the balloonist.

They ate an early lunch, and hardly had the dishes been put away before there came a mutter of thunder and they spotted a low-flying bank of clouds. A little later there was a dull, red illumination amid the rolling masses of vapor.

"There's the storm alright, and she's heading right this way," commented John.

"Can't we avoid it?" asked Mr. Damon, anxiously.

"We could if I knew how high it was, but I guess we'll wait and see how it looks as we get closer."

The airship was flying on, and the storm, driven by a mighty wind, was rushing to meet it. Already there was a sighing, moaning sound in the wire and wooden braces of the *Red Cloud*.

Suddenly there came such a blast of wind that it heeled

the ship over on her side.

"Shift the equilibrium rudders!" shouted John to Tom, turning the wheel and various levers over to the lad. "I'm going to get more speed out of the motor!"

Tom acted just in time, and after bobbing about like a cork on the water for a moment, the ship was righted and sent forging ahead under the influence of the propellers.

This was neither too much nor too soon as all power and speed were necessary to even partially overcome the force of the wind that was blowing right against the *Red Cloud*. With the winds coming from the east, Tom tried turning to head into the gale. It proved no better than heading north, so Tom turned back onto their course.

Of course they might have turned and flown along with it, but they wanted to go north, not west—they wanted to face their accusers.

After the first fury of the blast had spent itself, there came a deluge of rain along with a dazzling glare of lightning and a bursting crash of thunder.

In spite of the gale buffeting her, the airship was making good progress. The skill of Tom and the balloonist was never shown to better advantage. All around them the storm raged, but the craft kept on her way through it. Nothing could be seen but pelting sheets of water and swirling mist, yet onward the ship was driven.

The thunder was deafening, and the lightning nearly blinded them, until the electric lights were switched on, flooding the cabin with radiance. Inside the car they were snug and dry, though the pitching of the craft was like that of a big liner in the trough of the ocean waves.

Tom, not fully accustomed to the violent rocking, began to feel vaguely motion sick. His head felt light and his stomach about ready to give back his lunch. He took a sip from a canteen and closed his eyes for a minute. It helped.

"Will she weather it, do you think?" called Mr. Damon, in the ear of John, shouting so as to be heard above the noise of the elements, and the hum of the motor.

The balloonist nodded.

"She's a good ship," he answered proudly. "She'll hold."

Hardly had he spoken when there came a crash louder than any that had preceded it, and the flash of rosy light that accompanied it seemed to set the whole heavens on fire. At the same time there was violent shock to the ship.

"We're hit! Struck by lightning!" yelled Tom.

"We're falling!" cried Mr. Damon an instant later as his stomach registered the drop.

John looked at the elevation gauge. The hand was slowly swinging around. Down, down dropped the *Red Cloud*. She was being roughly treated by the storm.

"I'm afraid we're too damaged to fly, fellows. In a few minutes we will be wrecked!" said the balloonist in a low voice, scarcely audible above the roar of the tempest. Following the great crash had come a comparatively light bombardment from the sky artillery.

"Use your gliding skills, Tom," called John, a moment later. "We may fall, but we'll land as softly as possible."

The wind, the rain, the lightning and thunder continued. Down and down sank the ship. Its fall was somewhat checked by the rudder Tom swung into place, and by setting the wing controls at a different angle. The motor had been stopped, and the propellers no longer revolved. In the confusion and darkness it was not safe to run forward too quickly, with the danger of colliding with unseen objects on the earth.

They tried to peer through the windows, but could see nothing. Tom switched off the inside lights so that he could better see outside the airship.

It helped. He took a quick glance at the altitude gauge and did the math in his head to determine how high above the ground they were he realized that they had no good idea of their location, so could only guess that they must be less the five hundred feet above the ground.

Whatever condition that might prove to be, it would be the place they would land.

A moment later, as they each stared ahead with fear in their eyes, there came a shock and the feeling they were bouncing back upward. The ship trembled from end to end and settled back to the earth.

"We've landed!" cried Tom, as he yanked back on the levers. The airship came to a stop.

"Now to see where we are," said John grimly after taking a deep breath, "and see how badly we are damaged."

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XX

TOM GETS A CLUE

THE THREE TRAVELERS hurried out of the cabin of the now stationary airship; out into the pelting rain that lashed into their faces by the strong wind. Tom was the first to emerge.

"We're on something solid!" he cried, stamping his feet. "A rock, I guess."

"Gracious, I hope we're not on a rock in the midst of a river!" exclaimed Mr. Damon. "Bless my canoe, though! The water does seem to be running around my ankles."

"There's enough rain to make water run almost up to our necks," called Mr. Sharp, above the noise of the storm. "Tom, can you make out where we are?"

"Not exactly. Is the ship all right?"

"I can't see very well, but there appears to be a hole in the gas container. A big one, too, or we wouldn't have fallen so quickly."

The plight of the travelers was anything but enviable. They were wet throughout, for it needed only a minute of exposure to the pelting storm to soak them. They could not tell, in the midst of the darkness, where they were, and they almost feared to move in case they might be on top of some rock or precipice over which they might tumble if they took a false step.

"Let's get back inside the ship," proposed Mr. Damon. "It's warm and dry there, at all events. Bless my umbrella, I don't know when I've been so wet!"

"I'm not going in until I find out where we are," declared Tom. "Wait a minute, and I'll go in and get an electric flash lantern. That will show us." The lightning had ceased with the great crash that seemed to have wrecked the *Red Cloud*. The rain still kept up, and there was a distant muttering of thunder, but it was so black that had not one of the lights in the main room the airship been faintly glowing they could hardly have found the craft had they moved ten feet away from it.

Tom soon returned with the portable electric lamp, operated by dry batteries. He flashed it on the surface of where they were standing, and uttered an exclamation.

"We're on a roof!" he cried.

"A roof?" repeated Mr. Damon. "How very odd."

"Yes, the roof of some large building, and what you thought was a river is the rain water running off it. See!"

The young inventor held the light down so his companions could observe the surface of that upon which the airship rested. There was no doubt of it. They were on top of a large building.

"If we're on a roof we must be in the midst of a city," objected Mr. Damon. "But I can't see any lights around, and we would see them if we were in a city, you know."

"Maybe the storm knocked out the local electricity system," suggested Mr. Sharp. "That often occurs."

"I know one way we can find out for certain," went on Tom.

"How?"

"Start up our search lamp, and play it all around. We can't make sure how large this roof is in the dark, and it's risky trying to trace the edges by walking around."

"Yes, and it would be risky to turn on our searchlight," objected John. "People would see it, and there'd be a

crowd up here in less than no time, storm or no storm. No, we've got to keep dark until I can see what's the matter. We must leave here before daylight."

"Suppose we can't?" asked Mr. Damon. "The crowds will be sure to see us then, anyhow."

"I am pretty sure we can get away," was the opinion of the balloonist. "Even if we must make a patch from scrap wood and screws, we can generate enough gas to partly sustain us until we are under powered flight. Since we are still an airplane, this roof being flat might make a good place to start from. No, we can leave as soon as this storm lets up a little."

"Then I'm going to have a look and find out what sort of a building this is," declared Tom, and while John began a survey as well as he could in the dark, the young inventor proceeded cautiously to map out the extent of the roof.

The rain was not coming down quite so hard now, and Tom found it easier to see. Mr. Damon, finding he could do nothing to help, went back into the cabin, blessing himself and his various possessions at the queer predicament in which they found themselves.

Flashing his light every few seconds, Tom walked on until he came to one edge of the roof. It was very large, as he could judge by the time it took him to traverse it. There was a low parapet at the edge. He peered over, and an expanse of dark wall met his eyes.

"Must have come to one side," he reasoned. "I want to get to the front. Then, maybe, I can see a sign that will tell me what I want to know."

He turned to the left, and soon came to another parapet. It was higher and ornamented with terracotta bricks. This was the front. As Tom peered over the edge of the little raised ledge, hundreds of electric lights came on. The city electricity plant was being repaired. Tom saw flashing below him one of those large signs made of incandescent lights. It was in front of the building. As soon as he saw the words Tom knew where the airship had landed. For what he read was:

MIDDLEVILLE ARCADE

Tom gave a strangled cry.

"What's the matter?" called John.

"I've discovered something," answered Tom, hurrying up to his friend. "We're on top of the Middleville Arcade building."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that we're not so very far from home, and in the midst of a fairly large city. But it means more than that."

"What?" demanded the balloonist, struck by an air of excitement about the boy. As Tom stood in the subdued glow of the lights from one of the airship's cabin windows,

all the others having been darkened as the storm slackened, his, eyes shone brightly.

"This is the building where Amberson Morse, one of the gang that robbed Dad, once had an office," went on Tom eagerly. "That was brought out at the trial. And it's the place where they used to do their conspiring. Maybe some of that gang is here now, laying low."

"Well, if they are, we don't want anything to do with them," said John. "I can't arrest them. Besides I've found out that our ship is all right after all. We can proceed in about ten minutes. There is only a small leak in the gas container. It was a valve on the gas generator system that was melted by the lightning, and I've replaced it."

"I want to see if I can get any trace of the rascals. Maybe I could learn something from the janitor of the Arcade about them. The janitor is probably here."

"But why do you want to get any information about that gang?"

"Because," answered Tom. At that moment, Mr. Damon began climbing down from the cabin of the airship. Tom moved forward and whispered the remainder of the sentence into the ear of the balloonist.

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed John, in a tense whisper. Tom nodded vigorously.

"But how can you enter the building?" asked the other.

"You can't drop over the edge."

"Down the hatch," answered Tom. "There must be one on the roof. They have to come up here at times. We can force the lock, if necessary. I want to enter the building and see where Morse had his office." he spotted it and pointed it out to John.

"All right. Go ahead. I'll engage Mr. Damon here so he won't follow you. It will be great news for him. Go ahead."

Under pretense of wanting the help of the eccentric man in completing the repairs he had started, John Sharp took Mr. Damon back into the cabin. Tom, getting a big screwdriver from an outside toolbox, approached the nearby hatch on the roof. He could see it looming up in the semidarkness, a low metal box covering a stairway that led down into the building. The door was bolted from the inside. Tom forced the lid up with a pry bar. It soon popped open and he felt justified.

A few minutes later, cautiously shining his light around, like a burglar he thought, he was prowling around the corridors of the office structure.

Was it deserted? That was what he wanted to know. He knew the office Morse had formerly occupied was two floors from the top. Tom descended the staircase, trying to think up some excuse to offer in case he met the watchman or janitor. But he encountered no one.

As he reached the floor where he knew Morse and his gang were known to gather, he paused and listened.

At first he heard nothing. Then, as the sound of the storm became less he believed he heard the murmur of voices.

"Suppose it should be some of them?" whispered Tom.

He went forward, pausing at almost every other step to listen. The voices became louder. Tom was now nearly at the office, where Morse had once had his quarters. Now he could see it, and his heart gave a great thump as he noticed a light shining through the etched glass window in the door.

He could read the name on the door. "Industrial Development Company." That was the name of the fake concern headed by Morse. As Tom looked he saw the shadows of two men cross over the ground glass.

He heard harsh laughter coming from behind the door.

"Someone's in there!" he whispered to himself. He could now hear the voices much plainer. They came from the room, but he could not distinguish them as belonging to any of the gang with whom he had come in contact, and who had escaped from jail.

The low murmur went on for several seconds.

He could make out no words. Suddenly the low, even mumble was broken. Someone cried out "There's got to be

a divvy soon. We can't stand around letting Morse hold that whole seventy-five thousand any longer. He'd as soon skip out on us as look at us! I'm going to get what's coming to me, or—"

"Hush!" someone else cried. "Be quiet!"

"No, I won't! I want my share. I've waited long enough. If I don't get what's coming to me inside of a week, I'll go to Cragmont myself and make Morse pay up. I helped on the job, and I want my money!"

"Will you be quiet?" pleaded another, and, at that instant Tom heard someone's hand on the knob. The door opened a crack, letting out a pencil of light. The men were evidently coming out.

Tom did not wait to hear more. He had a clue now, and, running on tiptoes, he made his way to the staircase and out of the hatch on the roof.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XXI

ON THE TRAIL

"WHAT'S THE matter, Tom?" asked John, as the lad came hurrying along the roof, having taken the precaution to fasten the hatch door as well as he could. "You seem excited."

"So would you, if you had heard what I did."

"What? You don't mean that some of the gang is down there?"

"Yes, and what's more I'm on the trail of the thieves who robbed the Shopton Bank of the seventy-five

thousand dollars!"

"You don't mean it!"

"I certainly do."

"Then we'd better tell Mr. Damon. He's in the cabin."

"Of course. I'll tell him. He's as much concerned as I am. He wants to be vindicated. Isn't it great luck, though?"

"But you haven't caught the men yet. Do you mean to say that the same gang—the Happy Harry crowd—robbed the bank?"

"I think so, from what I heard. But come inside and I'll tell you all about it."

"Suppose we start the ship first? It's ready to run. There wasn't as much the matter with it as I feared. The storm is over now, and we'll be safer up in the air than on this roof. Did you get all the information you could?"

"All I dared to. The men were coming out, so I had to run. They were quarreling, and when that happens among thieves—"

"Why... honest men get their dues, everyone knows that proverb," interrupted Mr. Damon, again emerging from the cabin. "But bless my quotation marks, I should think you'd have something better to do than stand there talking proverbs."

"We have," replied John quickly. "We're going to start the ship, and then we have some news for you. Tom, you take the steering wheel, and I'll start the gas machine. We'll rise to some distance before starting the propellers, and then we won't create any excitement."

"But what news are you going to tell me?" asked Mr. Damon. "Bless my very existence, but you get me all excited and then you won't gratify my curiosity."

"In a little while we will," responded John. "Lively now, Tom. Someone may see this airship on top of the building, as it's getting so much lighter now, after the storm."

The outburst of the elements was almost over and Tom, taking another look over the edge of the roof, could see persons moving about in the street below. The storm clouds were passing and a faint haze showed where a moon would soon make its appearance. This would expose the craft so oddly perched upon the roof. There was need of haste.

Fortunately the *Red Cloud* could be sent aloft without the use of the propellers, for the gas would serve to lift her. It had been found that lightning had struck the big, red aluminum container, but the shock had been a comparatively slight one. As the tank was insulated from the rest of the ship no danger resulted to the occupants. A small rent was located in one of the gas compartments, and a larger one in another. The small one had been

repaired. All of the others remained intact, and, when an increased pressure of the vapor was used in the good compartments, the ship was almost as buoyant as before.

The three travelers hurried into the cabin, John still dripping from the rain. With Tom and John managing the machinery, the craft slowly rose. It was a good thing that they lifted off when they did. As they reached a few hundred feet above the roof, the moon suddenly shone from behind a bank of clouds and would most certainly have revealed their position to persons in the street. As it was several were attracted by the sight of some great object in the air. They called the attention of others to it, but by the time glasses and telescopes had been brought to bear, the *Red Cloud* had slipped, silently, far away.

"Dry clothes now, some hot drinks, and then Tom will tell us his secret," remarked John, and, with the great ship swaying high above the city of Middleville Tom told what he had heard in the office building.

"They are the thieves who looted the bank, and caused us to be unjustly accused," he finished. "If we can capture them we'll get the reward, and turn a neat trick on Andy Fogger and his cronies."

"But how can you capture them?" asked Mr. Damon. "You don't know where they are."

"Perhaps not where Morse and the men who have the money are. But I have a plan. It's this. We'll go to some

quiet place, leave the airship, and then inform the authorities of our suspicions. They can come here and arrest the men who still seem to be hanging out in Morse's office. Then we can get on the trail of this Cragmont, who seems to be the person in authority this time, though I never heard of him before."

"He seems to have the money, according to what one of the men in the office said, and he's the man we want."

"Cragmont!" exclaimed Mr. Damon. "Yes, Cragmont. The name is so familiar to me. Hmmm. Cragmont may be the real head of the gang."

He stood there looking thoughtful.

"Ha! I have it!" cried Mr. Damon suddenly. "I wonder I didn't think of it before. Cragmont is the headquarters, not the head of the gang!"

"What do you mean?" asked Tom, much excited.

"I mean that there's a town called Cragmont about fifty miles from here. That's what the fellow in the office meant. He is going to the town of Cragmont and make Morse pay up. That's where Morse is! That's where the gang is hiding! That's where the money is! Hurrah, Tom, we're on the trail!"

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XXII

SHERIFF ON BOARD

MR. DAMON'S announcement surprised Tom and John. They had supposed that the reference to Cragmont was to a person, and never dreamed that it was to a locality. But Mr. Damon's knowledge of local geography stood them in good stead.

"Well, what's the first thing to do?" asked Tom, after a pause.

"The first thing would be to go to Cragmont, or close to it," remarked John. "In what direction is it, Mr. Damon?"

"Northwest from where we were. It's a county seat, and that will suit our plans admirably, for we can call on the sheriff for help. He is an acquaintance and should give us the benefit of the doubt."

"That is if we locate the gang," put in Tom. "I fancy it will be no easy job, though. How do we go about it?"

"Let's first get to Cragmont," suggested the balloonist. "We'll select some quiet spot for a landing, and then talk matters over. We may stumble on the gang, just as you did, Tom, on those men in the office."

"No such good luck, I'm afraid."

"Well, I think we'll all be better for a little sleep," declared the eccentric man. "Bless my eyelids but I'm tired out."

As there was no necessity for standing watch with the airship so high up as to be almost invisible and no breeze to blow them around. They all turned in and were soon sleeping soundly, though Tom had hard work at first to compose himself. He was excited at the prospect of capturing the thieves, recovering the money for the bank, and clearing his good name as well as those of his friends.

In the morning, maps were consulted and a set of calculations were made to enable the travelers to tell when they would reach a point directly over the small city of Cragmont. With the skill of the veteran balloonist to aid

them, this was accomplished. The airship was headed in the proper direction, and about ten o'clock, having made out by using the binocular glasses that there was plenty of uninhabited land about the city, the craft was sent aloft again, before anyone might catch sight of it. It was their intention to not land until after dark, as they wanted to keep their arrival quiet. There were two reasons for this. One was that the whole country was eager to arrest them, to claim the reward offered by the bank, and they did not want this to happen. The other reason was that they wanted to go quietly into town, tell the sheriff their story, and enlist his aid.

All that day the *Red Cloud* maneuvered above and through the masses of fleecy clouds several miles above the earth. A position was maintained, as nearly as could be judged by instruments and occasional sightings, over a patch of woodland where John had decided to land, as there were several large clearings in it. Back and forth above the clouds, out of sight, the airship drifted. When she got too far off her position, Tom brought her back to the right spot by means of the propellers.

It was tedious waiting, but they felt it was the only thing to do. Tom and John busied themselves with adjustments to several pieces of apparatus that needed it. Nothing could be done toward repairing the hole in the aluminum container until a shop or shed was reached, but the ship really did not need these repairs right away. Mr. Damon

was fretful, and "blessed" so many things during the course of the day that there seemed to be nothing left. Lunch and dinner occupied some of the time, really good meals being served by Tom who was temporarily acting as cook. They anxiously waited for darkness, when they could descend.

"I hope the moon isn't too bright," remarked John, as he went carefully over the motor once more. If they needed to make an escape he did not want it to balk again. "If it shines too much it may expose us."

"But a little light would be a fine thing, and show us a good place to land," argued Tom.

Fortune seemed to favor the adventurers. There was a hazy light from the moon, which was covered by swiftly moving dark clouds now and then, a most effective screen for the airship. Its great, moving shape, viewed from the earth, resembled nothing so much as another one of the clouds.

They made a good landing in a little forest glade, the craft under the skillful guidance of John and Tom, coming down nicely.

"Now for a trip to town to notify the sheriff," said John. "Tom, I think you had better go alone. You can explain matters, and Mr. Damon and I will remain here until you come back." He held up a hand to stop Tom's protest which he knew would come. "I know that Mr. Damon is

the one who knows this sheriff, but if there comes the need to run away I am afraid that Mr. Damon would either be quickly caught or would hinder you. Or both. I believe what you had best do, would be to get the sheriff to help you locate the gang of bank robbers. They're in this vicinity and he ought to be able, with his deputies, to find them."

"I'll ask him," replied Tom. Mr. Damon insisted on writing a brief letter to the sheriff to explain their situation.

Tom slid it into his shirt pocket and set off.

It was a lonely walk into the city from the woods where the airship had landed, but Tom did not mind it. Reaching Cragmont thirty minutes, he inquired about the way to the home of the sheriff, for it was long after office hours. As he walked along the streets he overheard many people discussing the appearance of the airship that morning. "So, we were spotted after all," he mused. He was glad they had planned to land after dark, for more than one citizen was regretting that he had not had a chance to get the five thousand dollars reward offered for the arrest of the passengers in the *Red Cloud*.

Tom found the sheriff, Sam Durkin by name, a genial personage. At the mention of the airship the official grew somewhat excited.

"Are you one of the fellows that looted the bank?" he

inquired, when Tom told him how he and his friends had arrived at Cragmont.

The young inventor denied the charges, and handed the sheriff the letter from Mr. Damon.

"I heard that a Mr. Damon was involved, but I didn't want to believe it was old Wakefield. Nice feller. Okay young man. I owe him a great debt. Tell me what this is all about."

Tom told his story. He ended up with a request for the sheriff's aid, at the same time asking if the officer knew where such a gang as the Happy Harry one might be in hiding.

"You've come just at the right time, young man," was Sheriff Durkin's answer. He had immediately warmed to the youth when he was assured of the honesty of Tom's statements. "I've been on the point for the last week, of raiding a camp of men who have settled at a disused summer resort about ten miles from here. I think they're running a gambling game. But I haven't been able to get any evidence, and every time I sent out a posse someone warns the men, and we find nothing wrong. I believe these men are the very ones you want. If we could only get to them without their suspecting it, I think I'd have them dead to right."

"We can do that, Sheriff."

"How?"

"Go in our airship! You come with us, and we'll put you right over their camp, where you can drop down on their heads."

"Good land, I never rode in an automobile even, let alone an airship!" went on the officer. "I'd be scared out of my wits, and so would my deputies."

"Send the deputies on ahead in autos," suggested Tom. "They can park a way off and walk in from all directions. Surround the bad guys and wait until you land."

The sheriff hesitated. Then he slapped his thigh with his big hand.

"By golly! I'll go with you!" he declared. "I'll try capturing criminals in an airship for the first time in my life! Might even become famous. Lead the way, young man!"

An hour later Sheriff Durkin was aboard the *Red Cloud*, and plans were being talked of for the capture of the bank robbers, or at least for raiding the camp where the men were supposed to be.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XXIII

ON TO THE CAMP

"YOU SURE HAVE got a fine craft here," remarked Sheriff Durkin, as he looked over the airship after Tom and his friends had told of their voyage. "It will be quite up-to-date to raid a gang of bank robbers in a flying machine, but I guess it will be the only way we can catch those fellows. Now I'll go back to town, and the first thing in the morning I'll round up my posse and start it off. The men can surround the camp, and lay quiet until we arrive in this ship. Then, if we can send them some sort of signal—" he looked at Tom who nodded, "so when we descend

on the heads of the scoundrels, right out of the sky so to speak, my men can close in and bag them all."

"That's a good plan," commented John, "but are you sure these are the men we want? It's pretty vague, I think, but of course the clue Tom got is pretty slim, just the name Cragmont."

"Well, this is Cragmont," went on the sheriff, "and, as I told your young friend, I've been trying for some time to bag the men at the summer camp. They number quite a few, including many character that seem to be tramps. He comes into town every few days, wanders around like he's lookin' for something, then disappears. "

At the mention of the tramp, Tom looked meaningfully at John and Mr. Damon. They nodded to him, so he told the sheriff about Happy Harry's involvement in a couple other capers. Tom didn't mention the possibility of the man being a double agent.

"Even if those men don't do anything worse, they run a gambling game there. I'm pretty sure. If the bank robbers are in this vicinity, they're in that camp. Of course all the men there may not have been engaged in looting the vault, and they may not all know of it, but it won't do any harm to round up the whole bunch."

After a tour of the craft, and waiting to take a little refreshment with his new friends, the sheriff left, promising to come back by 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning.

"Let's go to bed," suggested John, after a bit. "We've got hard work ahead of us tomorrow."

They were up early, and, in the seclusion of the little glade in the woods, Tom and John went over every part of the airship.

The sheriff arrived about six o'clock, and announced that he had started the posse off through the woods to surround the camp; in all he had twenty-five men.

"They'll be in position at noon," Mr. Durkin said, "and will close in when I give the signal. They will be lookin' up at this airship so I'll fire two shots out the window. We go down and they come in. Oh—I heard just before I came here that there are some new arrivals at the camp."

"Maybe the men I overheard talking in the office," suggested Tom. "They probably came to get their share. Well, we must swoop down on them before they have time to distribute the money and get away."

"That's right!" agreed the county official. Mr. Durkin was even more impressed by the airship in the daytime than he had been at night. He examined every part, and when the time came to start, he was almost as unconcerned as any of the three travelers who had covered many hundreds of miles in the air.

"This is certainly great!" cried the sheriff, as the airship rose swiftly under the influence of the powerful gas.

As the craft went higher and higher, his enthusiasm grew. He was not the least afraid, but then Sheriff Durkin was considered by all to be a fearless individual under all circumstances. That's why they elected him sheriff.

"Bring her a little off to the left," the officer advised Tom who was at the steering controls. "The main camp is right over there. See the smoke from their fire? How long before we will reach it?"

"We can get there in about fifteen minutes, if we run at top speed," answered the lad, his hand on the switch that controlled the motor.

"No use burning up the air. We need to sneak up on them. Besides, my men have hardly had time to surround the camp. It's in deep woods. If I were you I'd rise up out of sight and then get right over it. Then, when it's noon you can drop down, I'll fire the signal and the fun will commence—that is, fun for us, but not so much for those folks, I fancy," and the sheriff smiled grimly.

The sheriff's plan was a sound one. The ship climbed silently to a height of over a mile and Tom positioned it as nearly as possible over one spot. The camp.

Shortly before twelve, the sheriff having checked the weapons he brought with him, gave the signal to descend. Tom closed off the valve from the gas generating system and opened the relief valve at the top of the largest gas compartment. Down shot the *Red Cloud* dropping swiftly

when the gas was allowed to escape. As the neared the signal point, the upper valve was closed and a bit more gas sent back to the container. *Red Cloud* slowed a bit.

"Are we all ready?" ask the sheriff, looking at his watch.

"All ready," replied John.

"Then here goes," went on the officer, drawing his revolver, and firing two shots out the window.

Two shots from the woods below answered him. Faster dropped the Red Cloud toward the camp of the criminals.

"Take her down, boys. We've got 'em!"

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RAID

"LOOK FOR a good place to land!" cried John to Tom. "Any small, level place will do. Turn on the gas full power as soon as we get to one hundred feet. When we feel the first contact, shut it off and open that relief valve again. Then jump out and we'll give them a hand in the fight!"

"That's right," cried the sheriff. "Fight's the word! They're breaking from cover now," he added, as he looked over the side of the cabin from one of the windows. "The rascals have taken the alarm!"

The airship was descending toward a little glade in the woods surrounding the old picnic ground. Men, mostly of the tramp sort, could be seen running to and fro.

"I hope my deputies close in promptly," murmured the sheriff. "There's a bigger bunch there than I counted on."

From the appearance of the gang rushing about it seemed as if there were at least fifty of them. Some of the fellows caught sight of the airship, and, with yells, pointed upward.

Nearer and nearer to the earth settled the Red Cloud. The criminals in the camp were running wildly about. Several groups of them darted through the woods, only to come hurriedly back out where they called to their companions.

"Ha! My men are right on the job!" exclaimed the sheriff. "They are turning the rascals back!"

Some of the men were so alarmed at the sight of the great airship settling down on their camp, that they could only stand and stare at it in awe. Others were gathering sticks and stones as if for resistance, and a few could be seen to have weapons.

Off to one side was a small hut, rather better than the rest of the tumbledown shacks where the tramps lived. Tom noticed this, and saw several men gathered near it. One was familiar to the lad. He called the attention of Mr.

Damon to the fellow.

"Do you know him?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Bless my very existence! If it isn't Amberson Morse! One of the gang!" cried the eccentric man.

"That's what I thought," agreed Tom. "The bank robbers are here," he added, turning to the sheriff.

"If we only recover the money we'll be doing well," remarked John.

Suddenly there came a shout from the fringe of woods surrounding the camp, and an instant later there burst from the bushes a number of men.

"My posse!" cried the sheriff. "We ought to be down now!"

The airship was a hundred feet above the ground now, and Tom, opening wider the gas outlet, sent the craft more safely down. Just as it touched the earth, out leaped the sheriff.

"Give it to 'em, men!" he shouted.

With a yell his men responded, and fired a volley in the air.

"Come on, Tom!" called John. "We'll make for the hut where you saw Morse."

"I'll come too! I'll come too!" cried Mr. Damon, rushing along as fast as he could, a seltzer bottle in either hand.

Tom's chief interest was to reach the suspected bank robbers. He dashed through the woods toward the hut near which he had seen Morse. He and John reached it about the same time. As they came in front of it out dashed Happy Harry, the tramp. He was followed by Morse and the man named Featherton. The latter carried a black valise.

"Drop that!" shouted John.

"Drop nothing!" yelled the man.

"Go on! Go on!" urged Morse. "Run to the woods! We'll deal with these fellows!"

"Oh, you will, eh?" shouted Tom, and remembering his football days he made a feint and dive between Morse and Happy Harry for the man with the bag, which he guessed contained the stolen money.

Tom made a good tackle, and grabbed Featherton around the legs. They went down in a heap, with Tom on top. Our hero was feeling about for the valise, when he felt a stunning blow on the back of his head. He turned over quickly to see Morse in the act of delivering a second kick. Tom grew faint, and dimly saw the leader of the gang reach down for the valise.

This gave our hero sudden energy. He was not going to lose everything, when it was just within his grasp. Conquering his feeling of dizziness by a sheer willpower,

he scrambled to his feet, and made a grab for Morse. The latter fended him off, but Tom came savagely back at him, all his fighting ire up.

Tom managed to get one hand on the handle of the bag.

"Let go!" cried Morse, and he tried to deal Tom a blow in the face. Tom ducked back but began to lose his balance. He held on grimly to the bag. Because Morse would not let go, this pulled Tom back upright where he took a swing of his own at the man.

It caught Morse on the nose. One hand shot to his face while the other held onto the bag he shared equally with the young inventor. Suddenly, he aimed a cowardly kick for Tom's crotch. At the same time he endeavored to twist the valise loose from Tom's hold.

The kick missed but Tom almost lost his grip. At that moment there was a curious hissing sound, and a stream of frothy liquid shot over the lad's head right into the face of the man, blinding him.

"Ha! Take that! And more of it!" shouted Mr. Damon, and a second stream of seltzer squirted into the face of Morse.

With a yell of rage he let go his hold of the satchel, and Tom staggered back with it. He saw Mr. Damon rushing toward the now disabled leader, playing both bottles of seltzer on him. Then, when all the liquid was gone the

eccentric man began to beat Morse over the head and shoulders with the heavy bottles until the scoundrel begged for mercy.

Tom was congratulating himself on his success in getting the bag when Featherton rushed at him.

"I'll take that!" he roared. Wheeling Tom around, and at the same time striking him full in the face, the ugly man made a grab for the valise.

His hand had hardly touched it before he stiffened, his eyes rolling upward in his head and he went down like a log. Tom looked up. He saw John standing over the prostrate tramp wielding a length of wood. Harry had been cleanly knocked out.

"Are you all right, Tom?" asked the balloonist.

"Yes—trifle dizzy, that's all—I've got the money!"

"Are you sure?"

Tom opened the valise. A glance was enough to show that it was stuffed with bills.

Featherton showed signs of coming to so John, with a few turns of a rope he had brought along, soon secured him. Morse was too exhausted to fight more and was quickly trussed to Featherton.

The other members of the Happy Harry gang had escaped.

Meanwhile the sheriff and his men were having a fight with the crowd of tramps, but as the posse was determined and the criminals mostly of the class known as "hobos," the battle was not a very severe one. Several of the sheriff's men were slightly injured, however, and a few of the tramps escaped.

"A most successful raid," commented the sheriff, when quiet was restored, and a number of prisoners were lined up, all tied securely. "Did you get the money?"

"Almost all of it," answered Tom, who, now that Morse and Featherton were securely tied, had busied himself, with the aid of John and Mr. Damon, in counting the bills. "Only about two thousand dollars are missing. I think the bank will be glad enough to charge that to profit and loss."

"I guess so," added the sheriff. "I'm certainly much obliged to you for the use of your airship. Otherwise the raid wouldn't have been successful. Well, now we'll get the prisoners to jail." He promised to wire Shopton to tell them of the capture of the criminals by Tom and his friends.

While the sheriff and his men took the others, Morse and Featherton were placed in the airship. Under guard of the sheriff and two deputies, were taken to the county seat.

"Now for home!" cried Tom, when the prisoners had

been disposed of. "Home to clear our names and take this money to the bank!"

"And receive the reward," added John, with a smile. "Don't forget that!"

"Oh, yes, and I'll see that you get a share too, Mr. Durkin," went on Tom. "Without your aid we never would have gotten these men and the money."

"Oh, I guess we're about even on that score," responded the official. "I'm glad to break up that gang."

The next morning Tom and his friends started for home in the *Red Cloud*.

They took with them evidence as to the guilt of the two men—Morse and Featherton. The men confessed that they and their pals had robbed the bank of Shopton the night before Tom and his friends sailed on their trip. In fact that was the object for which the gang hung around Shopton. After securing their booty they had gone to the camp of the tramps at Cragmont, where they hid. But what Tom had overheard had been their undoing. The men who arrived at the camp just before the raid were the same ones the young inventor heard talking in the office building. They had come to get their share of the loot, which Morse held, and with which he tried so desperately to get away.

An hour into their flight back to Shopton, Mr. Damon

called out from the main compartment. "Oh. Tom? John? Could you please come back here. I believe we may have a rather nasty problem."

Alarmed, Tom headed back while John took over the controls.

Tom entered the room and immediately saw the source of Mr. Damon's distress. He was sitting on the floor pointing to one of the storage cabinets at the side of the room. Acrid smoke was pouring from the closed cabinet and had begun to fill the room.

Grabbing a towel from the kitchen area and covering his mouth, Tom yelled to Mr. Damon, "Get out on the observation platform, Now!"

While the older man got back to his feet and strove to follow Tom's order, the inventor yelled to John, "Fire! We've got a fire in the cabin!" He started to choke on the fumes, and the smell that came through the cloth he held told him more than he might find if he opened the cabinet.

"John! Acid! Fumes! Close the door and open your windows."

Tom took a few seconds to soak his towel with some water from the sink and put it back across his nose and mouth. His eyes were starting to burn from the corrosive fumes.

Morse and Featherton were choking on the fumes, but Tom could spare no time to attend to them. He dared to move to the cabinet and slowly opened the door.

Great clouds of smoke and fumes rolled out, but he could see through greatly-squinted eyes a large glass container laying on its side. Its contents had spilled. This was the source of the fumes.

Taking a breath through his makeshift mask, Tom pulled the towel away from his face, reached out with it and grabbed the container and quickly stepped to the nearest window.

He didn't have the luxury of time to open the glass. He smashed the window open with the container and then tossed it through. It tumbled down and away from the Red Cloud, trailing smoke.

Tom went to the door on his side of the cabin and flung it open. He lurched out onto the platform and took in huge gulps of fresh air. In moments he had recovered, although his lungs, lips, eyes and nose stung.

It took only a minute to return to the cabin and open all of the windows to air the place out.

Morse and Featherton were conscious but coughing in great convulsions.

He took a clean towel from the cupboard under the sink, soaked it in water, and used it to wipe the faces and

exposed skin of their prisoners.

Mr. Damon ventured in and assisted while Tom went to the forward door and opened it. He told John what had occurred.

"That's sabotage!" John cried out. "We carry no acids on the ship. None!"

He disengaged the propellers so they would hover and went back to the main cabin with Tom.

"It looks like one of your gang tried to get rid of us, Morse," Tom said facing the still-coughing man. "Almost succeeded in killing you as well. Quite a thing that honor among thieves."

It took an hour to clean up the cabin before they continued on. The only residual problem was the coughing that came from their prisoners.

None of the three aeronauts felt very bad about the thieves' predicament.

TOM SWIFT and His Airship

CHAPTER XXV

ANDY'S REWARD

FLYING SWIFTLY through the air the young inventor and his two companions were soon within sight of Shopton. As they approached the town from over the lake, and a patch of woods, they attracted no attention until they were near home, and the craft settled down easily in the yard of the Swift property.

Mr. Swift beamed when he caught sight of his son, and Mrs. Baggert's welcome was scarcely less warm than that of Mr. Swift. John Sharp and Mr. Damon were also made to feel that their friends were glad to see them safe again.

Tom thought it best to not mention the evident sabotage attempt. He knew that it would only serve to worry the inventor further. He would bring it to the attention of the police later.

"We will go at once and see Mr. Pendergast, the bank president," declared Mr. Swift. "We must take the money to him, and demand that he withdraw the offer of reward for your arrest."

"Yes," agreed Tom. "And that reward will go to someone besides Andy Foger."

There was considerable disbelief on the part of the bank clerks when our hero and his friends walked in carrying a heavy black bag. But they could only conjecture what was in the wind, for the party was immediately taken to the office of the president.

News of the arrests had not made its way to Mr. Pendergast and he was so startled that he hardly knew what to say when Tom, aided by John, told his story. But the return of the money, with documents from Sheriff Durkin certifying as to the arrest of Morse and Featherton soon convinced him of the truth of the account.

"It's the most wonderful thing I ever heard," said the president.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked Mr. Damon. "You have accused Tom and myself of being

thieves, and—"

"I apologize—I apologize most humbly!" exclaimed Mr. Pendergast. "I also—"

"What about the reward?" went on Mr. Damon. "Bless my bank notes, I don't want any of it, for I have enough, but I think Tom and John and the sheriff are entitled to it."

"Certainly," said the president, "certainly. It will be paid at once. I will call a meeting of the directors. In fact they are all in the bank now, save Mr. Foger, and I can reach him by telephone. If you will just rest yourselves in that room there I will summon you before the board, when it convenes, and we will be most happy to pay over the five thousand dollars reward. It is the most wonderful thing I ever heard of—most wonderful!"

In a room adjoining that of the president, Tom, his father and Mr. Damon waited for the directors to meet. Mr. Foger could be heard entering a little later.

"What's this I hear, Pendergast?" he cried, rubbing his hands. "The bank robbers captured, eh? Well, that's good news. Of course we'll pay the reward. I always knew my boy was a smart lad. Five thousand dollars will be a tidy sum for him. Of course his chum, Sam Snedecker is entitled to some, but not much. So they've caught Tom Swift and that rascally Damon, eh? I always knew he was a scoundrel! Putting money in here as a ruse!"

Mr. Damon heard, and shook his fist. "I'll make him suffer for that," he whispered.

"Tom Swift arrested, eh?" went on Mr. Foger. "I always knew he was a bad egg. Who caught them? Where are they?"

"In the next room," replied Mr. Pendergast, who loved a joke almost as well as did Tom.

"Call the police. We have them in chains! And, my son did it all!" Mr. Foger crowed, unaware of what he was being made to look like.

"Foger? You are a fool when it comes to your son. Oh, Tom Swift *is* in the next room, and he will get to face his accuser. Call your son and get him here immediately!"

Twenty minutes later the door of the conference room opened and Mr. Pendergast came to the room where Tom and his party were waiting and invited them to follow him to the conference chamber.

"Please wait here another minute while I have you officially announced," he stated and walked through a large wooden door.

"Gentlemen. Foger. We have incontrovertible proof that the charges made by Foger's son are nothing but a pack of lies." He looked meaningfully at Mr. Foger who only sat there, ramrod straight and looking at the table before him.

"They may come in now," added the president, sending Ned Newton in to summon Tom, Mr. Swift and Mr. Damon, who filed out before the board of directors.

Ned tried to explain to Tom how he had insisted that the young inventor had to be innocent, but Tom cut him off with, "If you had pushed it too far you might have lost your job. Don't worry, Ned. It all is turning out fine."

"Gentlemen," began the president as they entered the big room, "I have the pleasure of presenting to you Mr. Thomas Swift, Mr. Barton Swift and Mr. Wakefield Damon. I also have the honor to announce that Mr. Thomas Swift and Mr. Damon have been instrumental in capturing the burglars who recently robbed our bank. I am also happy to add that young Mr. Swift and Mr. Wakefield Damon have, this very morning, brought to me all but a small part of the money stolen from us. Which money they succeeded in securing after a desperate fight."

"A fight partly with seltzer bottles," interrupted Mr. Damon proudly. "Don't forget them."

"Partly with seltzer bottles," conceded the president with a smile. "After the fight they succeeded in getting the money back. Here it is, and I now suggest that we pay Tom the reward we promised."

"What? Reward? Pay *them*? The money back? Isn't my son to receive the five thousand dollars for helping to inform as to the identity of the thief?" demanded Mr.

Foger.

"Hardly," answered Mr. Pendergast dryly. "Your son's information was very wrong. The tools he saw Tom have in the bag were airship tools, not burglar's. And the same gang that once robbed Mr. Swift, robbed our bank. Tom Swift captured them, and is entitled to the full reward. He is here as a hero. Your idiot of a son only saw an opportunity to get his nemesis into trouble."

Mr. Foger was heard to mutter something, but was cut off by Pendergast. "Shut up! Another word against Swift or in favor of your boy and I'll have you off the bank board! You get that insolent boy in here at once. And," he said in a menacing tone, "you'll say nothing about the change in situation. I want that pleasure."

Mr. Foger moved to a phone on a side table and made the call.

"Now, gentlemen. With position on the board comes the responsibility of making good all losses. We will each be required to cover our percentage of the loss. And, I tell you this. I am perfectly glad to do this!"

"So am I," came in a chorus from most the others seated at the table.

"But—er—I understood that my son—" stammered Mr. Foger, who did not at all relish having to see his son lose the reward.

"It was all a mistake listening to your son and his crony," commented Mr. Pendergast. He looked around the table. "Gentlemen, is it your desire that I write out a check for young Mr. Swift?"

They all voted in the affirmative, even Mr. Foger being obliged to do so, much against his wishes. He was a very chagrined man.

Andy marched into the room a few minutes later with Sam in tow. He walked right up to Mr. Pendergast and was about to speak when he caught sight of Tom and Mr. Damon. "Caught those bank robbers did you? Well, I'm here to get my reward."

Mr. Pendergast looked at the squint-eyed youth and the turned to Tom. "Would you like to give him the reward, personally, Tom?"

Tom walked over to Andy. "You lied to these people. And, your lies almost cost me, Mr. Damon and our friend John Sharp our lives."

Everyone in the room could see how difficult it was for Tom to keep his tone cool and even.

"Oh, yeah? Well, you got what you had coming. I seen you with your burglar tools. I know you had something to do with this." Andy turned back to the bank president. He held out a hand.

"So, gimme my reward."

"I get my share, too. Remember," squeaked Sam.

Tom tapped Andy on the shoulder, and when the boy turned around, Tom aimed and connected a roundhouse punch right in the middle of Andy's nose.

Tom then turned to Sam, "Do you want *your* share now, Sam?" he asked, almost sweetly.

"N—n—no. You get away from me." Sam all but ran from the room.

Tom now turned to Mr. Foger who sat motionless. "Your son is a bully and a coward and a liar, sir. The sooner you take charge of him, the less likely he is to get another punch."

"And," added one of the board members who really did not like Mr. Foger, "the less likely he is to end up in prison!"

"Hmmm. Well. Now that that is out of the way, I hope that our good friend Barton Swift will reconsider closing his accounts with this bank," He smiled hopefully at the inventor.

"We'll see," Mr. Swift told him. "We'll just see." And, turning to face his son, he winked.

Word was telegraphed at once to all the cities where reward posters had been displayed, recalling the offer and stating that Tom Swift and Mr. Damon were cleared. John Sharp had never been accused.

"Well, let's go home," suggested Tom when he had the five-thousand-dollar check in his pocket. "I want another ride in the *Red Cloud* as soon as it's repaired."

"So do I!" declared Mr. Damon.

"And I want to go up as well," Mr. Swift said to his son.

The eccentric man and Mr. Swift walked on ahead. Once they reached the Swift home, Tom strolled down toward the dock. He felt in the mood to take a short trip in his motorboat.

He was out on the lake thinking about the adventure they had all just completed and wondered whether he, John, Mr. Damon and his father might all go on an extended trip very soon. "A lot depends on how Dad is making out with his latest invention," he thought.

Tom reached home in a very pleasant frame of mind later that afternoon. Things had turned out much better than he thought they would.

A few weeks later the two bank robbers, who were found guilty, were sentenced to long terms. To ensure their arrival at the state prison, a guard detail of federal marshals was sent to transport them. They did not escape.

Their companions were not captured.

Tom sent Sheriff Durkin a share of the reward, and then invested his own share in bank stock, after giving some of the money to John. Mr. Damon refused to accept any.

As for Mr. Swift, once he saw matters with Tom straightened out, he resumed his secret work on his invention. Within weeks he announced success and started work on a new project, a submarine boat, his son helping him.

Tom saw nothing of Andy Foger or his two friends for many weeks. It was just the way Tom wanted it.

He alternated his spare time for the next few months between trips in the airship with John, running around Lake Carlopa in his motorboat with John or Ned or sometimes both, and frequently riding his motorcycle to a city an hour away and visiting a certain young lady from the Rockmond Seminary.

I think we all can guess her name by this time. Now, for a while, we will take leave of Tom Swift and his friends, trusting to meet them again.

THE END

Tom Swift will next be seen in his forthcoming story

TOM SWIFT and HIS SUBMARINE BOAT

A new adventure for today's science minded boys.

This story will be available from all reputable booksellers and may be borrowed from most public libraries.