HIGH ADVENTURE. III

BY JAMES NORMAN HALL

I

THE winter of 1916–17 was the most prolonged and bitter that France has known in many years. It was a trying period to the little group of Americans assembled at the École Militaire d'Aviation, eager as they were to complete their training, and to be ready, when spring should come, to share in the great offensive, which they knew would then take place on the Western front. Aviation is a waiting game at the best of seasons. In winter it is a series of seemingly endless delays. Day after day, the plain on the high plateau overlooking the old city of V—— was storm-swept, a forlorn and desolate place as we looked at it from our windows, watching the flocks of crows as they beat up against the wind, or as they turned, and were swept with it, over our barracks, crying and calling derisively to us as they passed.

'Birdmen do you call yourselves?' they seemed to say. 'Then come on up; the weather's fine!'

Well they knew that we were impostors, fair-weather fliers, who dared not accept their challenge.

It is strange how vague and shadowy my remembrance is of those long weeks of inactivity, when we were dependent for employment and amusement on our own devices. To me there was a quality of unreality about our life at B——. Our environment was, no doubt, partly responsible for this feeling. Although we were not far distant from Paris, — less than an hour by train, — the country round about our camp seemed to be quite cut off from the rest of the world. With the exception of our Sunday afternoons of leave, when we joined the *boulevardiers* in town, we lived a life as remote and cloistered as that of some brotherhood of monks in an inaccessible monastery. That is how it appeared to me, although here again I am in danger of making it seem that my own impressions were those of all the others. This of course was not true. The spirit of the place appealed to us, individually, in widely different ways, and upon some, perhaps, it had no effect at all.

Sometimes we spent our winter afternoons of enforced leisure in long walks through country roads which lay empty to the eye for miles. They gave one a sense of loneliness which colored thought, not in any sentimental way, but in a manner very natural and real. The war was always in the background of one's musings, and while we were far removed from actual contact with it, every depopulated country village brought to mind the sacrifice which France has made for the cause of all freedom-loving nations. Every roadside café, long barren of its old patronage, was an evidence of the tragic completeness of the sacrifice. Americans, for the most part, are of an unconquerably healthy cast of mind; but there were few of us who could frequent these places light-heartedly.

Paris was our emotional storehouse, to use Kipling's term, during the time we were at B——. We spent our Sun-

day afternoons there, mingling with the crowds on the boulevards, or, in pleasant weather, sitting outside the cafés, watching the soldiers of the world go by. The streets were filled with *permissionnaires* from all parts of the Western front, and there were many of those despised of all the rest, the *embusqués*, as they are called, who hold the comfortable billets in safe places well back of the lines. It was very easy to distinguish them from the men newly arrived from the trenches, in whose eyes one saw the look of wonder, almost of unbelief, that there was still a goodly world to be enjoyed. It was often beyond the pathetic to see them trying to satisfy their need for all the wholesome things of life in a brief seven days of leave; to see the family parties at the modest restaurants on the side streets, making merry in a kind of forced way, as if every one were thinking of the brevity of the time for such enjoyment.

Scarcely a week went by without bringing one or two additional recruits to the Franco-American Corps. We wondered why they came so slowly. There must have been thousands of Americans who would have been, not only willing, but glad to join us; and yet the opportunities for doing so had been made widely known. For those who did come this was the legitimate by-product of glorious adventure and a training in aviation not to be surpassed in Europe. This was to be had by any healthy young American, almost for the asking; but our numbers increased very gradually, from fifteen to twenty-five, until by the spring of 1917 there were fifty of us at the various aviation schools of France. Territorially we represented at least a dozen states, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. There were rich men's sons and poor men's sons among our number; the sons of very old families, and those who neither knew nor cared what their antecedents were.

The same was true of our French comrades, for membership in the French air service is not based upon wealth or family position or political influence. The policy of the government is as broad and democratic as may be. Men are chosen because of an aptitude that promises well, or as a reward for distinguished service at the front. A few of the French *élèves-pilotes* had been officers, but most of them N.C.O.'s and private soldiers in infantry or artillery regiments. This very wide latitude in choice at first seemed 'laxitude' to some of us Americans. But evidently, experience in training war *pilotes*, and the practical results obtained by these men at the front, have been proof enough to the French authorities of the folly of setting rigid standards, making hard-and-fast rules to be met by prospective aviators. As our own experience increased, we saw the wisdom of a policy which is more concerned with a man's courage, his self-reliance, and his powers of initiative, than with his ability to work out theoretical problems in aerodynamics.

It is unquestionably true that many a French *pilote*, with a magnificent record of achievement in war-flying, has but a very sketchy knowledge of motor and aircraft construction. Some are college-bred men but many more have only a common-school education. It is not at all strange that this should be the case, for one may have had no technical training worth mentioning; one may have only a casual speaking acquaintance with motors, and a very imperfect idea of why and how one is able to defy the law of gravity, and yet prove his worth as a *pilote* in what is, after all, the best possible way — by his record at the front.

A judicious amount of theoretical instruction is, of course, not wanting

in the aviation schools of France; but its importance is not exaggerated. We Americans, with our imperfect knowledge of the language, lost the greater part of this. The handicap was not a serious one, and I think I may truthfully say that we kept pace with our French comrades. The most important thing was to gain actual flying experience, and as much of it as possible. Only in this way can one acquire a sensitive ear for motors, and an accurate sense of flying speed: the feel of one's machine in the air. These are of the greatest importance. Once the *pilote* has developed this airman's sixth sense, he need not, and never does, worry about the scantiness of his knowledge of the theory of flight.

Sometimes the winds would die away and the thick clouds lift, and we would go joyously to work on a morning of crisp, bright winter weather. Then we had moments of glorious revenge upon the crows. They would watch us from afar, holding noisy indignation meetings in a row of weather-beaten trees at the far side of the field. And when some inexperienced *pilote* lost control of his machine and came crashing to earth, they would take the air in a body, circling over the wreckage, cawing and jeering with the most evident delight. 'The Oriental Wrecking Company,' as the Annamites were called, were on the scene almost as quickly as our enemies the crows. They were a familiar sight on every working day, chattering together in their high-pitched gutturals, as they hauled away the wrecked machines. They appeared to side with the birds, and must have thought us the most absurd of men, making wings for ourselves, and always coming to grief when we tried to use them.

We made progress regardless of all this skepticism. It was necessarily slow, for beginners at a single-command monoplane school are permitted to fly only under the most favorable weather conditions. Even then, old Mother Earth, who is not kindly disposed toward those of her children who leave her so jauntily, would clutch us back to her bosom, whenever we gave her the slightest opportunity, with an embrace that was anything but tender. We were inclined to think rather highly of our own courage in defying her; and sometimes our vanity was increased by our *moniteurs*. After an exciting misadventure they often gave expression to their relief at finding an amateur *pilote* still whole, by praising his 'presence of mind' in too generous French fashion.

We would not have been so proud, I think, of our own little exploits, had we remembered those of the pioneers in aviation, so many of whom lost their lives in experiment with the first crude types of the heavier-than-air machines. They were pioneers in the fine and splendid meaning of the word — men to be compared in spirit with the old fifteenth-century navigators. We were but followers, adventuring, in comparative safety, along a well-defined trail.

This, at any rate, was Drew's opinion. He would never allow me the pleasure of indulging in any flights of fancy over these trivial adventures of ours. He would never let me set them off against what I liked to call 'the heroic background of Paris.' As for Paris, we saw nothing of war there, he would say, except the lighter side, the home-coming, leave-enjoying side. We needed to know more of the horror and the tragedy of it. We needed to keep that close and intimate to us as a right perspective for our future adventures. He believed it to be our duty as aviators to anticipate every kind of experience which we might have to meet at the front. His imagination was abnormally

vivid. Once he discussed the possibility of 'falling in flames,' which is so often the ghastly end of an airman's career. I shall never again be able to take the same whole-hearted delight in flying that I did before he was so horribly eloquent upon the subject. He often speculated upon one's emotions in falling in a machine damaged beyond the possibility of control.

'Now try to imagine it,' he would say: 'your gasoline tanks have been punctured and half of your *fuselage* has been shot away. You believe that there is not the slightest chance for you to save your life. What are you going to do — lose your head and give up the game? No, you've got to attempt the impossible'; and so on, and so forth.

I would accuse him of being morbid. Furthermore, I saw no reason why we should plan for terrible emergencies which might never arrive. His answer was that we were military *pilotes* in training for combat machines. We had no right to ignore the grimness of the business ahead of us. If we did, so much the worse for us when we should go to the front. But beyond this practical interest, he had a great curiosity about the nature of fear, and a great dread of it, too. He was afraid that in some last adventure, in which death came slowly enough for him to recognize it, he might die like a terror-stricken animal, and not bravely, as a man should.

We did not often discuss these gruesome possibilities, although this was not Drew's fault. I would not listen to him; and so he would be silent about them until convinced that the welfare of our souls and the furtherance of our careers as airmen demanded additional unpleasant imaginings. There was something of the Hindoo fanatic in him; or perhaps it was the outcropping of the stern spirit of his New England forbears. But when he talked of the pleasant side of the adventures before us, it was more than compensation for all the rest. Then he would make me restless and impatient, for I did not have his faculty of enjoyment in anticipation. The early period of training, when we were flying only a few metres above the ground, seemed endless.

II

At last came the event which really marked the beginning of our careers as airmen: the first *tour de piste*, the first flight round the aerodrome. We had talked of this for weeks, but when at last the day for it came, our enthusiasm had waned. We were like little birds, eager to try our wings and yet afraid to make the start.

Now this first *tour de piste* was always the occasion for a gathering of all the classes on the part of the Americans, and there was the usual large assembly when word was passed along that Drew and I were going to 'bump along the ceiling.' The beginners were present to shiver in anticipation of their own forthcoming trials, and the more advanced *pilotes*, who had already taken the leap, to offer the usual gratuitous advice.

'Now remember, son! Don't try to pull any big league stuff. Not too much rudder on the turns. Remember how that Frenchman piled up on the Farman hangars when he tried to bank the corners.'

'You'll find it pretty rotten when you go over the woods. The air currents there are something scandalous!'

'Believe me, it's a lot worse over the fort. Rough? Oh, là là!'

'And that's where you have to cut your motor and dive, if you're going to make a landing without hanging up in the telephone wires.'

'When you do come down, don't be afraid to stick her nose forward. Scare the life out of you, that drop will, but

you may as well get used to it in the beginning.'

'But wait till we see them redress! Where's the Oriental Wrecking Gang?'

'Don't let that worry you, Drew: pan-caking is n't too bad. Not in a Blériot. Just like falling through a shingle roof. Can't hurt yourself much.'

'If you do spill, make it a good one. There has n't been a decent smash-up to-day.'

These were the usual comforting assurances. They did not frighten us much, although there was just enough truth in the warnings to make us uneasy. We took our hazing as well as we could inwardly, and of course with imperturbable calm outwardly; but, to make a confession, I was somewhat reluctant to hear the peremptory, businesslike '*Allez! en route!*' of our *moniteur*.

When it came, I taxied across to the other side of the field, turned into the wind, and came racing back, full motor. It seemed a thing of tremendous power, that little forty-five-horse-power Anzani. The roar of it struck awe into my soul.

'Lordy!' I thought, 'I'm in for it!' and gripped my controls in no very professional manner. Then, when I had gathered full ground speed, I eased her off gently, and up we went, over the class and the assembled visitors, above the hangars, the lake, the forest, until, at the half-way point, my altimeter registered 1000 feet. Out of the corner of my eyes I saw all the beautiful countryside spread out beneath me, but I was far too busily occupied to take in the prospect. I was watching my wings, nervously, in order to anticipate and counteract the slightest pitch of the machine. But nothing happened, and I soon realized that this first grand tour was not going to be nearly so terrifying as we had been led to believe. I began to enjoy it. I even looked down over the side of the *fuselage*, although it was a very hasty glance.

All the time I was thinking of the rapidly approaching moment when I would have to come down. I knew well enough how the descent was to be made. It was very simple. I had only to shut off my motor, push forward with my 'broom-stick,'—the control connected with the elevating planes,—and then wait and redress gradually, beginning at from six to eight metres from the ground. The descent would be exciting, a little more rapid than Shooting the Chutes. Only one could not safely hold on to the sides of the car and await the splash. That sort of thing had sometimes been done in aeroplanes, by over-excited young *pilotes*. The results were disastrous, without exception.

The moment for the decision came. I was above the fort, otherwise I should not have known when to dive. At first the sensation was, I imagine, exactly that of falling, feet foremost; but after pulling back slightly on the controls, I felt the machine answer to them, and the uncomfortable feeling passed. I brought up on the ground in the usual bumpy manner of the beginner. Nothing gave way, however, so this did not spoil the fine rapture of a rare moment. It was shared — at least it was pleasant to think so — by my old Annamite friend of the Penguin experience, who stood by his flag nodding his head at me. He said, '*Beaucoup bon*,' showing his polished black teeth in an approving grin. I forgot for the moment that *beaucoup bon* was his enigmatical comment upon all occasions, and that he would have grinned just as broadly had he been dragging me out from a mass of wreckage. For I was very happy. It was precisely the same quality of happiness which I knew upon a day now some years past. Upon that occasion

I swam, for the first time, to the centre of the old swimming-hole at home, yelled, 'So deep, kids!' to the watchers on shore, and then let down until my feet touched the bottom of that appalling seven-foot abyss.

Drew came in a few moments later, making an almost perfect landing. In the evening we walked to a neighboring village where we had a wonderful dinner to celebrate the end of our apprenticeship. It was a curious feast. We had nothing to say to one another, or, better, we were both afraid to talk. We were under an enchantment which words would have broken. Drew was uneasy. He was not quite sure of me. I was curious to learn how fully his expectations had been realized in his first flight. But he made no confidences, and so, after a silent meal, we walked all the way home without speaking.

III

We started off together on our triangles. That was in April, just passed, so that I have now brought this casual diary almost up to date. We were then at the great school of aviation at A—— in central France, where, for the first time, we were associated with men in training for every branch of aviation service, and became familiar with all types of French machines. But the brevet tests, which every *pilote* must pass before he becomes a military aviator, were the same in every department of the school. The triangles were two cross-country flights of 200 kilometres each, three landings to be made *en route*, and each flight to be completed within forty-eight hours. In addition, there were two short voyages of 60 kilometres each — these preceded the triangular tests — and an hour of flight at a minimum altitude of 6500 feet.

The short voyages gave us a delightful foretaste of what was to come. We did them both one afternoon, and were at the hangars at five o'clock on the following morning, ready to make an early start. A fresh wind was blowing from the northeast, but the brevet *moniteur*, who went up for a short flight to try the air, came back with the information that it was quite calm at 2500 feet. We might start, he said, as soon as we liked.

Drew, in his joy, embraced the old woman who kept a coffee-stall at the hangars, while I danced a one-step with a mechanician. Neither of them was surprised at this procedure. They were accustomed to such emotional outbursts on the part of young aviators who, by the very nature of their calling, were always in the depths of despair or on the furthest jutting peak of some mountain of delight. Our departure had been delayed, day after day, for more than a week, because of the weather. We could not have waited longer. We were so eager to start that we would willingly have gone off in a blizzard.

During the week of waiting we had studied our map until we knew the location of every important road and railroad, every forest, river, canal, and creek within a radius of 100 kilometres. We studied it at close range, on a table, and then on the floor, with the compass-points properly orientated, so that we might see all the important landmarks with the bird-man's eye. We knew our course so well, that there seemed no possibility of our losing direction.

Our military papers had been given us several days before. Among these was an official-looking document to be presented to the mayor of any town or village near which we might be compelled to land. It contained an extract from the law concerning aviators, and the duty toward them of the civilian and military authorities. In another

was an itemized list of the amounts which might be exacted by farmers for damage to growing crops. So much for an *atterrissage* in a field of sugar-beets, so much for wheat, etc. Besides these, we had a book of detailed instructions as to our duty in case of emergencies of every conceivable kind — among others, the course of action to be followed if we should be compelled to land in an enemy country. At first sight this seemed a rather unnecessary precaution; but we remembered the experience of one of our French comrades at B——, who started confidently off on his first cross-country flight. He lost his way and did not realize how far astray he had gone until he found himself under fire from German anti-aircraft batteries on the Belgian front.

The most interesting paper of all was our *Ordre de Service*, the text of which was as follows: —

'It is commanded that the bearer of this Order report himself at the cities of C—— and R——, by the route of the air, flying an avion Caudron, and leaving the École Militaire d'Aviation at A—— on the 21st of April 1917, without passenger on board.

'Signed, Le Capitaine B——
'Commandant de l'École.'

We read this with feelings which must have been nearly akin to those of Columbus on a memorable day in 1492 when he received his clearance papers from Cadiz. 'By the route of the air!' How the imagination lingered over that phrase! We had the better of Columbus there, although we were forced to admit that there was more glamour in the hazard of his adventure and the uncertainty of his destination.

Drew was ready first. I helped him into his fur-lined combination and strapped him to his seat. A moment later he was off. I watched him as he gathered height over the aerodrome. Then, finding that his motor was running satisfactorily, he struck out in an easterly direction, his machine growing smaller and smaller until it vanished in the early morning haze. I followed immediately afterward, and had a busy ten minutes, being buffeted this way and that, until, as the brevet *moniteur* had foretold, I reached quiet air at 2500 feet. This was my first experience in passing from one air current to another. It was a unique one, for I was still a little incredulous. I had not entirely lost my old boyhood belief that the wind went all the way up.

I passed over the old cathedral town of B—— at 4500 feet. Many a pleasant afternoon had we spent there, walking through its narrow, crooked streets, or lounging on the banks of the canal. The cathedral too was a favorite haunt. I loved the fine spaciousness of it. Looking down on it now, it seemed no larger than a toy cathedral in a toy town, such as one sees in the shops of Paris. The streets were empty, for it was not yet seven o'clock. Strips of shadow crossed them where taller roofs cut off the sunshine. A toy train, which I could have put nicely into my fountain-pen case, was pulling into a station no larger than a wren's house. The Greeks called their gods 'derisive.' No doubt they realized how small they looked to them, and how insignificant this little world of affairs must have appeared from high Olympus.

There was a road, a fine straight thoroughfare converging from the left. It led almost due southwest. This was my route to C——. I followed it, climbing steadily until I was at 5000 feet. I had never flown so high before. 'Nearly a mile!' I thought. It seemed a tremendous altitude. I could see scores of villages and fine old châteaux, and great stretches of forest, and miles upon miles of open country in check-

ered patterns, just beginning to show the first fresh green of the early spring crops. At 5000 feet it looked like a world planned and laid out by the best of Santa Clauses for the eternal delight of all good children. .And for untold generations only the birds have had the privilege of seeing and enjoying it from the wing. Small wonder that they sing. As for non-musical birds—well, they all sing after a fashion, and there is no doubt that crows, at least, are extremely jealous of their prerogative of flight. The flocks of them at B—— may have felt that we were trying to rob them of it.

My biplane was flying itself. I had nothing to do other than to give occasional attention to my revolution counter, altimeter, and speed-dial. The motor was running with perfect regularity. The propeller was turning over at 1200 revolutions per minute without the slightest fluctuation. Flying is the simplest thing in the world, I thought. Why does n't every one travel by route of the air? If they knew the joy of it, the exhilaration of it, aviation schools would be overwhelmed with applicants. Biplanes of the Farman and Voisin type would make excellent family cars, quite safe for women to drive. Mothers, busy with household affairs, could tell their children to 'run out and fly' a Caudron such as I was driving, and feel not the slightest anxiety about them. I remembered an imaginative drawing I had once seen of aerial activity in 1950. Even house pets were granted the privilege of traveling by the air route. The artist was not far wrong except in his date. He should have put it at 1925. On a fine April morning there seemed no limit to the realization of such interesting possibilities.

I had no more than started on my southwest course, as it seemed to me, when I saw the spires and the red-roofed houses of C——, and, a kilometre or so from the outskirts, the barracks and hangars of the aviation school where I was to make my first landing. I reduced the gas, and with my motor purring gently, began a long, gradual descent. It was interesting to watch the change in the appearance of the country beneath me as I lost height. Checker-board patterns of brown and green grew larger and larger. Shining threads of silver became rivers and canals, tiny green shrubs became trees, individual aspects of houses emerged. Soon I could see people going about the streets and laundry-maids hanging out the family washing in the back gardens. I even came low enough to witness a minor household tragedy—a mother vigorously spanking a small boy. Hearing the whir of my motor, she stopped in the midst of the process, whereupon the youngster very naturally took advantage of his opportunity to cut and run for it. I told Drew about this later. He called me an aerial eavesdropper and said that I ought to be ashamed to go buzzing over towns at such low altitudes, frightening housemaids, disorganizing domestic penal institutions, and generally disturbing the privacy of respectable French citizens. But I was unrepentant, for I knew that one small boy in France was thinking of me with joy. To have escaped maternal justice with the assistance of an aviator would be an event of glorious memory to him. How vastly more worth while such a method of escape, and how jubilant Tom Sawyer would have been over such an opportunity when his horrified warning, 'Look behind you, aunt!' had lost efficacy.

Drew had been waiting a quarter of an hour, and came rushing out to meet me as I taxied across the field. We shook hands as though we had not seen each other for years. We could not have been more surprised and delighted if we had met on another planet after

long and hopeless wanderings in infinite space.

While I superintended the replenishing of my fuel and oil tanks he walked excitedly up and down in front of the hangars. I could not help laughing at him, for he was an odd-looking sight in his flying clothes, with a pair of Meyrowitz goggles set back on his head, like another pair of eyes, gazing at the sky with an air of wide astonishment. He paid no attention to my critical comments but started thinking aloud as soon as I rejoined him.

'It was lonely! Yes, by Jove! that was it. "Lonely as a cloud." Happy choice of simile. Wordsworth had imagination. He must have known. A glorious thing, one's isolation up there; but there was something terrifying in the completeness of it. A relief to get down again, to hear people talk, to feel the solid earth under one's feet. How did it impress you?'

This was like Drew. I felt ashamed of the lightness of my own thoughts, but I had to tell him of my speculations upon after-the-war developments in aviation: nurses flying Voisins, with the cars filled with babies; old men having after-dinner naps in twenty-three-metre Nieuports, fitted, for safety, with Sperry gyroscopes; family parties taking comfortable outings in gigantic biplanes of the R-6 type; mothers, as of old, gazing apprehensively at speed-dials, cautioning fathers about 'driving too fast,' and all of the rest.

Drew looked at me reprovingly, to be sure, but he felt the need, just as I did, of an outlet to his feelings, and so he turned to my kind of comic relief with the most delightful reluctance. He quickly lost his reserve and in the imaginative spree which followed we went far beyond the last outposts of absurdity. We laughed over our own wit until our faces were tired. However, I will not be explicit about our folly. It might not be really so amusing from a critical point of view.

After our papers had been viséed at the office of the commandant, we hurried back to our machines, eager to be away again. We were to make our second landing at R——. It was about 70 kilometres distant and almost due north. The mere name of the town was an invitation. Somewhere, in one of the novels of William J. Locke, may be found this bit of dialogue: —

'But, master,' said I, 'there is, after all, color in words. Don't you remember how delighted you were with the name of a little town we passed through on the way to Orleans? R——? You were haunted by it and said it was like the purple note of an organ.'

We were haunted by it, too, for we were going to that very town. We would see it long before our arrival — a cluster of quaint old houses lying in the midst of pleasant fields, with roads curving toward it from the north and south, as though they were glad to pass through so delightful a place. Drew was for taking a leisurely route to the eastward, so that we might look at some villages which lay some distance off our course. I wanted to fly by compass in a direct line, without following my map very closely. We had planned to fly together, and were the more eager to do this because of an argument we had had about the relative speed of our machines. He was certain that his was the faster. I knew that, with mine, I could fly circles around him. As we were not able to agree on the course, we decided to postpone the race until we started on the homeward journey. Therefore, after we had passed over the town, he waved his hand, bent off to the northeast, and was soon out of sight.

I kept straight on, climbing steadily, until I was again at 5000 feet. As before, my motor was running perfectly

and I had plenty of leisure to enjoy the always new sensation of flight and to watch the wide expanse of magnificent country as it moved slowly past. I let my mind lie fallow, and every now and then I would find it hauling out fragments of old memories which I had forgotten that I possessed.

I recalled, for the first time in many years, my earliest interpretations of the meanings of all the phenomena of the heavens. Two old janitor saints had charge of the floor of the skies. One of them was a jolly old man with a beard like my grandfather's. He liked boys, and always kept the sky swept clean and blue. The other had no children of his own and took a sour delight in shirking his duties, so that it might rain and spoil all our fun. Perhaps it was the sense of loneliness and helplessness so far from earth, which made me think of winds and clouds in friendly human terms. However that may be, these reveries, hardly worthy, perhaps, of a military airman, were abruptly broken into.

All at once, I realized that, while my biplane was headed due north, I was drifting north and west. This seemed strange. I puzzled over it for some time, and then, brilliantly, in the manner of the novice, deduced the reason: wind. I was being blown off my course, all the while comfortably certain that I was flying in a direct line toward R——. Our *moniteurs* had often cautioned us against being comfortably certain about anything while in the air. It was our duty to be uncomfortably alert. Wind! I wonder how many times we had been told to keep it in mind at all times, whether on the ground or in the air? And here was I forgetting the existence of wind on the very first occasion. The speed of my machine and the current of air from the propeller had deceived me into thinking that I was driving dead into whatever breeze there was at that altitude. I discovered that it was blowing out of the east, therefore I headed a quarter into it, to overcome the drift, and began a search for landmarks.

I had not long to search. Wisps of mist obstructed the view, and within ten minutes a bank of solid cloud cut it off completely. I had only a vague notion of my location with reference to my course, but I could not persuade myself to come down just then. To be flying up there in the full splendor of bright April sunshine, knowing that all the earth was in shadow, gave me a feeling of exhilaration such as I had never known before. For there is no sensation like that of flight, no isolation so complete as that of the airman who has above him only the blue sky, and below, a level floor of pure white cloud, stretching in an unbroken expanse to every horizon. And so I kept my machine headed northeast, that I might regain the ground lost before I discovered the drift northwest. I had made a rough calculation of the time required to cover the 70 kilometres to R—— at the speed at which I was traveling. The rest I left to Chance, the godfather of all adventurers.

He promptly took the initiative, adopting rather heroic measures, as he so frequently does with aviators who, in moments of calm weather, are inclined to forget that they are still children of earth. The floor of dazzling white cloud was broken and tumbled into heaped-up masses which came drifting by at various altitudes. They were scattered at first and offered splendid opportunities for aerial steeplechasing. Then, almost before I was aware of it, they surrounded me on all sides. For a few minutes I avoided them by flying in curves and circles in rapidly vanishing pools of blue sky. I feared to take my first plunge into a cloud, for I knew, by report, what an alarming experience it is to the new *pilote*.

The wind was no longer blowing steadily out of the east. It came in gusts from all points of the compass, knocking me about in a very terrifying manner. I made a hasty revision of my opinion as to the calm and tranquil joys of aviation, thinking what fools men are who willingly leave the good green earth and trust themselves to all the winds of heaven in a frail box of cloth-covered sticks. 'If I can only get down,' I said to myself, 'I'll never step into an aeroplane again.'

The last clear space grew smaller and smaller. I searched frantically for an outlet, but the clouds closed in and in a moment I was hopelessly lost in a blanket of cold drenching mist.

I could hardly see the outlines of my machine and had no idea of my position with reference to the earth. In the excitement of this new adventure I forgot my speed-dial, and it was not until I heard the air screaming through the wires that I remembered it. The indicator had leaped up 50 kilometres an hour above safety speed and I realized that I must be traveling earthward at a terrific pace. The manner of the descent became clear at the same moment. As I rolled out of the cloud-bank, I saw the earth jauntily tilted up on one rim, looking like a gigantic enlargement of a page out of Peter Newell's *Slant Book*. I expected to see dogs and dishpans, baby carriages and ash-barrels roll out of every house in France, and go clattering off into space.

(*To be continued*)

THE CONTRIBUTORS' CLUB

THE FLOOR

GETTING the floor in a discussion conducted by our family is no simple matter; but once you have it, you are safe. We do not interrupt. Changing the subject, making irrelevant comments, or breaking up into little sub-groups and talking all at once, are matters that we deal with to the full extent of the Parliamentary law. We do this, not because we are polite, but because each of us loves an audience. We love it to the extent that we are willing to grant it to others on the condition that they may later do even so to us. If one of us starts to talk, the others listen; if two start at once, precedence is given to the elder, or the female. Being myself the youngest, and male, I have led an anxious life. But even I, once started, was always absolutely sure of the undivided attention of the whole house.

Upon this tradition I shall, to use an Hashimuran phrase, establish my family, if any. The genuine friendly confab demands this sense of safety. The most harrowing page in any literature, to my way of thinking, is the passage where Mr. Direck tries in vain to tell Mr. Britling about the little incident that happened to his friend Robinson in Toledo. And one of the most pathetic touches is poor Mr. Direck's wistful day-dream later, when he imagines himself talking very slowly and carefully, while Mr. Britling listens. 'Already he was more than half way