

THE RUNNERS OF THE AIR

(Continued from page 12.)

Voisin ran along a little way and came to a stop.

Another type was rolled out, the operator took his seat and the motor started. The plane moved forward, but did not leave the ground. It passed the starting-line and ran on down the course to the turn.

At this point it ran neatly round the post and came racing back at speed toward the hangars as if it had just been out for a spin. Then the crowd began to laugh. "He's an automobile!" "Il roule bien!" and other good-natured gibes, floated across the field.

"That motor's all right. It's the aeroplane that's at fault," said Count Sergius.

"Yes, it's the machine!" said a voice at his side, speaking English with a marked American intonation. "Not enough life to the planes, far as I can make out."

THERE was an assured note in the voice which gave the words weight, and Count Sergius turned to the speaker, who was not looking at him, but intently watching the aeroplane.

He was a man of medium height, dressed in a heavy brown motoring-coat, with a motoring-cap pulled well down over a strong, smooth-shaven, craggy face. His mouth was large, thick-lipped, but resolute; his nose large and somewhat hooked. Suddenly he turned upon Count Sergius a pair of noticeably fine eyes, large, calm, and of a very dark, luminous gray.

"From things I've overheard you say," he continued, as if in half apology for having addressed a stranger, "I reckoned you knew something about these flying-machines." But it was evident to him at once that no apology was necessary, for both Andrews and Madame de L'Orme were leaning over interestedly to catch whatever he had to say.

"I don't know half as much about them as I want to and intend to before I'm much older," responded Count Sergius cordially.

"Same here!" said the American. Gaudart made another attempt, and was rewarded by a short flight. Then Count de Lambert, Wilbur Wright's first pupil, came out in his Wright biplane.

For a time, now, the crowd was very quiet, content to watch de Lambert as he rolled up round after round to his credit.

Suddenly the cry of "Latham! Latham!" rippled along the stands. Latham's signal, a red globe topping a white "diabolo," rose slowly to the place beneath de Lambert's.

"Now, wait!" muttered Count Sergius.

"But don't be too sure!" warned the American. "It's Latham, but he hasn't got his own machine. This is Captain Burgeat's. His own has gone on to Blackpool."

"But it's an Antoinette!" said Andrews.

"Yes," agreed the American, "and when I get home I'm going to put all the money I can scrape together into it. But I'll have my own motor! Listen to that motor now!"

Across the line it soared, the great dragon-fly, at a height of perhaps twenty-five feet from the earth. The crowd, which had been dead still with expectation, roared. Then, the throbbing hum of the motor changed. There was a sputtering. Slowly, reluctantly, the machine slanted downward. Half-way to the turn it was within five feet of the earth. Then the motor woke up again. The tail-plane waved vigorously. Once more the machine soared upward.

With a lovely, assured sweep it rounded the turn and resumed its straight course along the south of the field. But it was only for a few moments. Again the ominous sputtering marred the hum, and this time it continued. It slowed to a sharp spitting and, as the machine gently came to earth, it stopped altogether.

For some little time there was nothing going on. The crowd grew restless. The afternoon was drawing to its close in a calm that was perfection for the flyers, and the people wanted more flights.

Suddenly the sound of a propeller came from an almost invisible hangar far down by the Orge. Presently some one discerned its number, and cried, "27!" There was a fluttering of programmes. Then a glad shout of "Paulhan! Paulhan!" ran the length of the grounds. The signal of the daring Southern aviator, a red globe surmounting a black pyramid, floated up the mast.

"If you can be sure of any one, he's it!" remarked the American tersely. Mounting at a steep slant, Paulhan was eighty or ninety feet in the air at the first turn. The crowd yelled themselves hoarse. Smilingly the aviator gazed down and waved his hand. Still he kept on rising. At the farther side of the field he was fully a hundred and fifty feet up.

Several rounds of the course Paulhan made at this height, then, swooping down, he skimmed along near the ground for a few more rounds. Presently he rose again and swept up to the stands, straight above the heads of the thrilled and shrinking spectators. At last, now once more at a height of perhaps two hundred feet, he forsook the field altogether and sailed off over the woods straight into the sunset.

Count Sergius, seeing that Andrews was intent on Madame and Madame on the sky where the aeroplane had vanished, turned to the American and began an interested discussion of the merits of the Antoinette machine. The unusual heartiness of their agreement on all the most important points drew the two men together so strongly that Count Sergius took out his card and presented it, saying: "I hope we can see more of each other, since we have such strong mutual interests."

The American took it and read aloud, "Count Sergius Charles de Plamenac M'lataz."

"Thanks. Where's M'lataz?" "In Servia," answered Count Sergius.

The stranger looked at him with few interest.

"I've read up a lot about that disturbing little country of yours. It's caught my fancy. Yes, I hope we can get together and kind of talk things over."

He took out his card, scribbled on it with a pencil and handed it to Count Sergius. It read:

Wesley Carver
Buffalo

In pencil he had written,
Hotel du Quai D'Orsay, Paris.

"As soon as this show is over," he continued, "I'm going down to Chalons, to study those Antoinettes."

"Why, so am I, Mr. Carver!" exclaimed the Count, warmly holding out his hand.

Next moment he felt a light touch on his arm.

"Oh, don't miss it! He's coming back," came Madame's voice, tense with excitement.

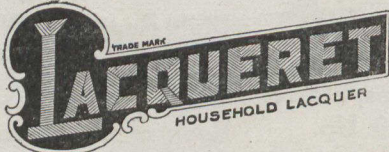
Black, massive, incomprehensible, high against the mystic sky, came the great machine, a portent and a promise, whose significance the world, then, hardly dared to more than guess at. The crowd seemed to feel, all at once, that aspect of the Event. They had begun to cheer at first sight of its return; but as it drew down upon them out of the sunset, they fell silent, as if at a command. At last, as it swept humming over their heads, and they saw young Paulhan gaily and most humanly waving his hand at them, the spell lifted and their shouts rent the air. Once more around the judges' stand the voyager swept his flight. Then he came softly to the ground before the hangars.

Five minutes more and the Red Flag fluttered down from the top of the mast. Flying was over for the day.

(To be continued.)

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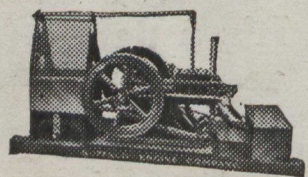
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