

Aircraft in the Great War

in conflict. So, as we have explained, they have confined themselves mainly to night-flying and over-sea reconnaissance, and have left aeroplanes to be fought by craft of their own type.

As it exists to-day, and with no armament that is commensurate either with its size or power, the airship is outclassed as a fighting machine by the aeroplane. The latter flies considerably faster than the airship, and offers a target infinitely smaller. The aeroplane can mount a machine-gun and attack her big enemy with bombs ; and the airship, in defending herself, can rely only on these same weapons. One might imagine, by way of comparison, an unarmoured battleship, equipped with nothing but small, quick-firing guns, being sent out to do battle against torpedo-boats that were similarly armed. The battleship, unable to outrange her enemies, and offering a large target, and moving more slowly than her nimble foes, would have a poor chance of victory. What the airship needs, and what in course of time she may be given, is a weapon of high power—one heavier than an aeroplane can carry, and of a greater range. Some type of quick-firing gun, throwing a stream of explosive shells, seems to suggest itself. There would be the recoil from such a gun to consider, but the vessel might be strengthened specially, where necessary, to withstand this.

The whole problem, from the airship pilot's point of view, is this : unless, profiting by his craft's weight-lifting capacity, he can mount some