

up into houses, ditches and trees. And, of course, a forced landing on the way under bad weather conditions was nearly always fatal. Insurance went higher than the machines.

"We weren't reliable enough. No commercial firm could stand the expense. The Government gave us no assistance. The Treasury was squeezing every penny until Britannia squealed. We tried for two years, and then my little lot went phut.

"Yes, the mail-carriers had more success in less well-developed countries. Better weather conditions, longer runs, slower trains. But the money in it was nothing to write home about.

"Then passenger carrying.

"You remember the rather slow and clumsy four-engine aeroplanes they made such a fuss about? Well, they proved to be about the limit in size for a land-machine. Bigger ones were tried, but they were no go. Landing wheel loads, landing speeds, surfaces of aerodromes, big sheds, cost of crashes. The big, slow aeroplanes could get into an aerodrome that the ordinary fast scout merchant could get down into, but when they speeded them up, so that they could get from one place to another in a thirty-knot wind in a reasonable time, they took the most of a county to land in.

"Then there was the weather. They had the same troubles as the mail-carriers, and a few more. Pilots were paid to take risks, but passengers objected to being strewn over the countryside in a mixed lot of metal and matchwood. Fly on half-power plant? Not when fully loaded. Passengers didn't like to go above three thousand feet, it made some of them ill. Couldn't sleep after being up high. With heavy low clouds the aeroplanes had to go under them or over them. Below them, often at five hundred feet, it was too dangerous over land, chimneys, and houses on hills; and they couldn't get down any place like we can at sea.

"The only run that would have paid was from London to Paris, joy-riders mostly, where you had to change from rail to boat and back to rail again. But the Channel Tunnel and the cut-throat competition between aeroplane companies left nothing in the bag.

"Yes, like the mail-carriers, they did a bit better in places with decent climates, but the shareholders could never afford to travel by air on the dividends paid.

"Everybody all at once got wise to the fact that it was the long hauls over the water routes that were going to pay. Competitors! comparatively slow steamers, fifteen to twenty-five knots. One or two flying-boat companies had been working on the job and were not making such a bad fist at it. But the land-machine people had a cut at it. Couldn't get it into their heads that big flying-boats were just as efficient as big land-machines, and a bit faster, as they hadn't to carry landing wheels and under-carriage.