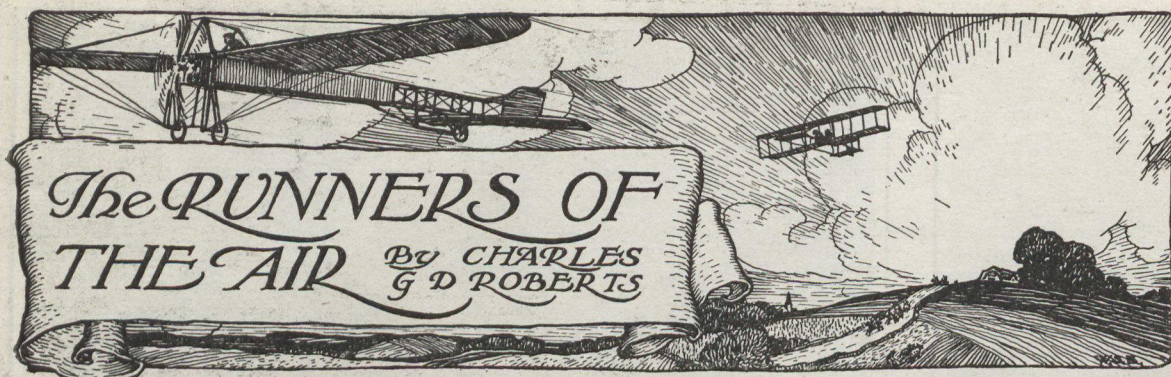




A NEW SERIAL STORY

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

GREGORY NICOLAIEVICH, bandit and patriotic Servian, has taken to Count Sergius Charles de Plamenac, known as Serge Ivanovich, samples of jewels discovered in Austria by the bandit, which they believe will make it possible for Servia to wage a successful war against Austria. Captain Andrews, of the British Army, a friend of Servia, calls on them, and the bandit describes how to find a distant hog-pen under which he has hidden the rest of the jewels. Austrians come in pursuit of Gregory, but he escapes. At a cafe, Andrews and the Count plan to attend an aviation exhibition in Paris, and the Count points out Madame de L'Orme, a Parisienne, wife of a Belgrade, wine-merchant.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

IT was in the middle of the first week of October that Plamenac and Andrews arrived in Paris. They put up at one of the new and admirable hostels, smart but quiet, just off the upper end of the Champs Elysees.

As the two men walked down the Avenue toward the Grand Palais, where the Aeronautical Exhibition was being held, the fantastic element in the beauty of the scene fitted into their mood.

Once entered within the towering portals, their mood changed. They were there, keen-eyed and practical, to study aeroplanes.

They passed around, examining the different types and models, noting the merits and defects of each; considering, the while, to what usage and to what dangers the plane they bought would be put.

"I lean to the monoplanes," said Sergius.

"They're not weight-carriers," protested Andrews.

"I grant them speed and beauty and handiness, of course. But we're interested in something that can carry weight, old chap. Lots of petrol, a passenger, a bit of grub, a box of tools! Don't forget that—a box of tools! Well, note the carrying surface of those two splendid supporting planes. Then, we must have stability. Look at the generous length of the empennage, the stabilizing tail. No pitching forward on your head, there!"

"The Bleriot has just as much length of tail, in proportion to its wing surface!" protested Plamenac. "And so has the Antoinette."

"But they don't carry the weight," persisted Andrews.

A SOFT, gay voice and irreproachable French accent at their elbow made the men turn sharply, hat in hand.

"Madame de L'Orme!" exclaimed Count Sergius, with a swift apprehension which it would have puzzled him to explain. "Why, I thought you were in Belgrade!" At the same time he bent low over the small gloved hand which she held out to him.

"But do hurry, Count, and tell me how glad you are that I'm not in Belgrade—or Captain Andrews, I am sure, will forestall you. I don't need an introduction, Captain Andrews," she continued, holding out her hand to him in turn. "Count Sergius has told me lots of lovely things about you and promised to bring you to see me on your return to Belgrade. He must not wait for that, for now I'm in Paris."

She was an altogether delightful apparition, graceful and well groomed in her long, dark green, straight-lined, narrow coat, of the mode of the hour. Andrews looked at her with so frank an excess of admiration that she laughed, girlishly embarrassed, and Count Sergius exclaimed:

"I fear, madame, I'll have to bring him this very evening or forfeit his friendship forever. May we call to-night? And where are you stopping?"

"Yes, you may come this evening," she answered graciously. "I'm at the Hotel Meurice. Mama has come in from St. Germain to stay with me and she'll be delighted to see you. But tell me, what were you talking about when I stole up behind you?"

"He's got it into his head that he wants to buy an aeroplane and fly it," explained Count Sergius.

"And, as I value his neck if he doesn't, I'm trying to cool his ardor."

"But I thought it was you, Count Sergius, who were so interested in flying!" she exclaimed. "I've heard so much about your wonderful experiments and the strange machines you've built and the daring things you've done with them, down there in your seclusion at M'latza. Why should you discourage Captain Andrews?"

An involuntary glance of astonishment, of suspicion, flashed between the eyes of the two men. It was instantaneous, but Madame de L'Orme intercepted it and smiled. The prompt reply of Count Sergius, however, was simple and candid.

"Surely you've given reason enough, dear madame. It's because I know so well the dangers that I would discourage him. Besides, you have exaggerated the importance of my poor little experiments at M'latza. Like all good Servians, I raise pigs down there. Naturally, it takes some very exciting hobby to divert my mind from that engrossing occupation."

The lady seemed content.

"Well," she said gaily, "since you know all about it, you may take me around and explain the different machines to me."

So they wandered among the exhibits, the two men explaining the various models to Madame de L'Orme. Her ready understanding of the mechanical details surprised them both.

They were discussing the stability of the Voisin as compared with the speed of the Bleriot when madame herself expressed a half-laughing desire to learn to fly, but confessed to some hesitation in risking her neck in the learning.

"If you really contemplated learning to fly, madame, I would undertake to teach you myself and make myself personally responsible for the safety of that inimitable neck," responded the Count.

"There, I knew you knew how to fly!" she cried delightedly. "I may hold you to that promise when you least expect it."

"My poor best shall be at your service," replied Plamenac. But at the same time a whimsical sense of apprehension flashed over him. She might possibly be in earnest. And she might call upon him to redeem his promise at some time when it would be inconvenient either to comply or to refuse.

By this time they had come over to the third corner and were looking at the long, slender, exquisite profile of the Antoinette.

"There's the machine that most appeals to me," cried Count Sergius, unable to subdue the thrill of enthusiasm in his voice.

"But the Antoinette doesn't carry weight," objected Andrews.

"She could be made to, very simply," replied the Count. "That's an easy matter, with her lines. Besides, she has another advantage. She—" but here he hesitated and seemed to change his mind.

"What other advantage?" demanded Madame de L'Orme, a gleam of sharp interest leaping into her great eyes.

"I was going to say something quite foolish," answered Plamenac.

Andrews gave him a steady look with a tinge of amusement in it.

"You've excited all my curiosity and now you leave it unsatisfied," pouted Madame, persuasively petulant. "Make him tell me, Captain Andrews."

"If you can not, Madame, what do you think my persuasions would count for?" answered the Englishman. Count Sergius met her eyes with an admiring but baffling smile.

"If you were so rash as to start me telling you things, dear lady, I might tell you too much!" he retorted ambiguously. She had it on her tongue to challenge him, but, with a half-vexed laugh, she refrained.

AS they were crossing the hall to the farther corner, that upon the left of the entrance, the crowd was so great that their conversation was

interrupted. Andrews, his lofty shoulders towering above the throng, guided Madame through. Plamenac, who had paused for a second to look at some detail of the Antoinette propeller, was separated from them. He rejoined them immediately, however, at the ropes of the Wright stand. He had no intention of leaving Andrews—whom he imagined much more susceptible than he really was—alone with Madame de L'Orme. He was jealous of anything that might divert ever so little of the Englishman's attention from the vital matter in hand. And for Madame he felt a curious mingling of attraction and distrust.

Madame de L'Orme and Andrews were standing very close together as Count Sergius came up beside them.

"Why do you look at me so suspiciously, Count Sergius?" demanded the lady gaily. "We were talking aeroplanes. Nothing more frivolous, I assure you."

"Or nothing more serious? In that case I could not forgive you!" bantered Plamenac.

"Now you are laughing at me," said Madame. "And I don't like it. I think it's only aeroplanes and perhaps men that you take seriously. Here's the lift, by the door. My head's crushed with all this wisdom. I must go and find mama!" She put out both hands at the same time to her two escorts, in her gracious French way. "Thank you so much! But I'm going to ask more, much more. Will you both take me with you, one day, to see the flights at Juvisy?"

"We'll be only too much honoured," answered Andrews quickly.

"Yes, indeed!" agreed Plamenac.

"Entendu!" said Madame. "Till to-night, then. Hotel Meurice, right after dinner!" and she stepped into the little lift that takes tired visitors up to the buffet in the gallery.

The two men lingered after she was gone.

"Why did you hesitate in speaking to Madame about the Antoinette?" asked Andrews.

"Some queer instinct. I found I didn't want to speak to her about the boat-like body. With a little ingenuity, one could manage it so that there would be no great danger in descending upon the water."

"Sly old devil, Serge!" said Andrews.

"You've got to be careful there, Bob," exposed Plamenac.

"Don't worry about me, old chap. I'm as dumb as an oyster on points I don't want to speak about. Shall we go and look at the rest of the machines?"

"No," suggested Plamenac. "I've had enough for the moment. Let's come in again to-morrow morning, before the crowd, and look over all the experiments, models and freaks. We may get some ideas."

CHAPTER V.

PLAMENAC MAKES AN ACQUAINTANCE.

PARIS, it appeared, had gone quite mad over flying.

It was advertised to be one of the greatest days of the Flying Fortnight at the Juvisy Aerodrome. And it was a public holiday. All Paris had made up its mind to be there. Almost before the day's journeying had well begun the railways were overwhelmed.

Late in the morning, after a hurried lunch, Count Sergius and Andrews, with Madame de L'Orme, arrived at the Gare D'Orsay, the central station of the Paris-Orleans railway. The station was almost in a state of siege. The ticket-windows were surrounded by a surging mob; but Andrews, a veteran traveler, had got tickets in advance, so that the mob was of no consequence.

On arriving at Juvisy, they found troops by the hundreds, cavalry, guards, zouaves—directing and controlling the crowds.

They found every seat in the pavilion already occupied, but this they turned to their own advantage. Count Sergius got three chairs and found a place for them close by the railing, almost exactly level with the starting-line. Flying had not yet begun, because the wind, though falling, was still tricky and dangerous. But the red flag, announcing that they were about to fly, was just fluttering to the top of the signal-mast some hundred yards out in the field.

Plamenac and Andrews barely had time to explain to Madame de L'Orme the signals hoisted, which showed the velocity of the wind, what event was to be decided and who was about to fly, when, with a great hum, a motor was started and Gaudart in a Voison rose from the ground.

"He's off!—He's coming!—It's Gaudart!" came the eager, broken cries.

Suddenly the aeroplane veered. The note of the motor changed and, gliding to the ground, the

(Continued on page 26.)