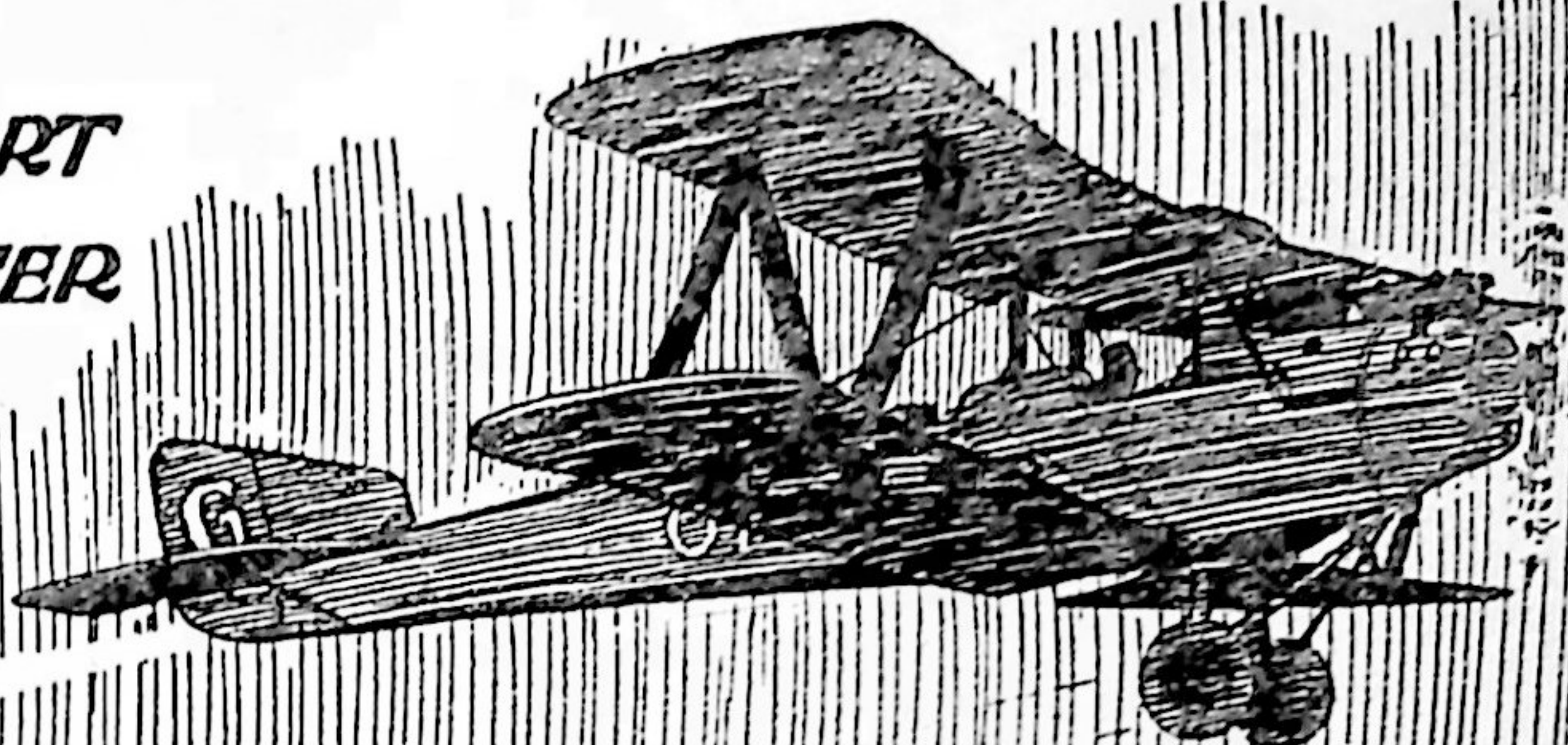


# BOB THE AIRMAN!

by GILBERT  
CHESTER



*An exciting yarn of a lad's dash from London to Prague by aeroplane and motor-cycle, with some important papers.*

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

"No Use for Flying!"

"YOU'RE late, sir!"

John Norton raised his stern grey eyes from the bundle of documents on his desk to regard his young nephew angrily from under his fierce and shaggy brows.

"Yes, uncle. I—I'm sorry," Bob Norton admitted apologetically, though with some difficulty. Flushed and out of breath with running, he was rather flustered, besides which he stood somewhat in awe of his masterful relative. "I—I couldn't help it this time," he added. "But it shan't happen again."

"Humph!" John Norton scrutinised the youngster's tanned features for a brief moment. Then he queried sharply: "Been flying again, eh?"

"Yes, uncle. Jim Cardew's going abroad. He wanted me to make a final flight with him before he goes, just to make sure I was really shaping well. Only the engine packed up, and we had to make a forced landing, so——"

"Confound Cardew!" his uncle broke in wrathfully. "Ought to be ashamed of himself, encouraging a half-fledged boy like you to break your idiotic young neck! The half-crazy madman——"

"But Jim's a crack pilot!" Bob protested, aghast at such an outburst against his hero.

"I don't care what he is!" John Norton interrupted. "I promised your dead father I'd make a business man of you. You're here to learn the rudiments of engineering, not to kill yourself before your time. I've told you before, I won't have you flying. I absolutely forbid you to go up again!"

Bob bit his lip. His whole soul was wrapped up in aviation, and he cared very little for the office routine of the big engineering firm over the destinies of which his uncle presided.

John Norton, he knew, had no use for flying. A railway man, whose life had been spent on constructional contracts at home and abroad, his uncle looked on the aeroplane as a dangerous rival to his beloved



railways. And Bob shrewdly suspected that his prejudice was subconsciously founded on this, rather than on the alleged dangers of flight.

"Very well, uncle." Bob spoke at length, reluctantly.

John Norton was his guardian, and, until he came of age, the lad realised that his uncle's word must be law, however absurd or unfounded his views appeared to be.

"Then remember what I've said," the elder man resumed, "or I'll send you somewhere where you won't have a chance of getting within five hundred miles of one of these confounded contraptions."

He straightened abruptly in his chair, then took up a sheaf of papers, tied together with a length of red tape.

"Here is that Czecho-Slovakian tender, the one we're putting in for that new line near Burno. I've made some alterations. As Miss Hickman is away ill to-day, you'll have to copy them. I doubt if you'll be able to get them done in office hours, though you could have done so had you arrived on time. You'll have to stop behind and work overtime. I'm leaving for Prague first thing to-morrow morning, and must take this tender with me."

"Don't worry, uncle. It shall be ready, even if I have to work all night," Bob announced promptly, anxious to make amends for his enforced absence from duty. "If need be, I'll ask Holstman to help me."

"No! I want no one to see that tender except yourself. That German firm are out to get the contract for themselves, and though, of course, I don't for one moment suspect the loyalty of any of our staff, I want no chance of any details leaking out in advance. You are not to mention them to anyone, understand?"

"Certainly, uncle." Bob gathered up the papers, and, by no means sorry to escape from his uncle's presence, went back to his desk in the outer office, where he settled down to his appointed task.

At a neighbouring desk, a short, thick-set young man was seated, intent on some

calculations. As Bob settled himself the other looked up.

"Get it in the neck from the old man, eh?" he inquired in a pronounced American accent, and with a rather unpleasant sneer on his loose lips. "He raised Cain properly when you didn't show up this morning."

"Well, I got ticked off a bit," Bob admitted, making a wry face. "Not so bad as it might have been, though, Holstman. Except I'm afraid it will mean no more flying, and—— However, I've got to get on with this."

He indicated the documents, at the same time glancing at the clock, whose hands were moving onwards with disconcerting regularity.

"Huh! Holstman bent over to scan the papers. "What's that you've got there? The Czech tender, eh? Gee! You'll never get all that copied out in time. Better let me help you."

"Thanks all the same, but I'll do it somehow," Bob replied, remembering his uncle's instructions. "Still, it's jolly sporting of you, Holstman, to offer. I appreciate your kindness no end."

"Oh!" the American muttered, shrugging. He seemed about to renew his offer. Then, as though thinking better of it, he turned to his own work.

For some time silence reigned in the room, unbroken except for the scratch of Holstman's pen and the steady clicketty-click of Bob's typewriter. Then, when at length the clock struck five-thirty, Holstman rose. It was knocking-off time, as the hooter on the power-house told by its long, raucous screaming.

"See here!" On his way to the door Holstman paused. "Can't I give you a hand there, Bob? You'll be here all night from the look of it."

"Oh, I'll be through by nine all right," Bob declared confidently. "You might let me have the key to that cupboard over there, though, before you go. I'll need to stow these papers somewhere safe for the night when I'm finished."

"Sure!" Holstman took a key from his ring, and tossed it carelessly on to Bob's



desk. "Well, cheerio. Don't be late in the morning."

For all Bob's optimism, however, it was nearly ten before the re-draft of the tender was completed, and he stumbled up from his desk, stiff-limbed and tired-eyed, to lock the papers in the cupboard.

The office building attached to the big works was silent and in darkness, except for a light or so in the passage and stairway that led to the front entrance. Out in the yard the sound of the night watchman going his rounds was the only indication of life.

Yawning, Bob got his hat and let himself out of the premises. He was half-way home when he heard the clock of a neighbouring church strike the hour.

"Better set my watch," he thought to himself, "now I think of it. It won't do to risk being late to-morrow." And he made to adjust his wrist-watch, only to discover that it was missing.

"Great Scott! I'd forgotten!" he exclaimed in dismay.

He remembered then that he had taken the watch off before settling down at the typewriter, in case the key-punching should jar its delicate works. The watch was still on his desk at the office.

Better not trust to that old dud of a clock at his digs. He had not come far, and it would not take many minutes to get the watch. With that tender locked up in the cupboard and the key in his pocket, it was essential that nothing should be left to chance, since John Norton was leaving first thing in the morning. So he retraced his steps.

He let himself in quietly. He had no wish to rouse the watchman and be delayed over explanations. He had rubber soles on his shoes, so it was unlikely that his arrival had been noted. Hurrying up the stone stairs, he made for the office.

The place was in darkness, but he did not switch the lights on because of the watchman. Groping for the door-knob, he found the door open.

"Could have sworn I shut this door," he muttered, half aloud, to break off abruptly as a sharp sound came from the

corner by the cupboard. Someone was in the room!

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, jumping for the electric-light switch as a rush of feet came through the blackness.

But before he could find the switch someone cannoned violently into him, and he staggered back heavily against the wall.

Like lightning, Bob grabbed at the intruder, and, when the latter tried to free himself with a violent wrench, clung on tightly. But the fellow was strong as a bull, bigger than Bob, and heavy. In his efforts to hold his opponent the youngster was dragged right across the room.

Still, Bob was not to be beaten. Though his unseen adversary struggled furiously to throw him off, he held on grimly.

Twisting and wrenching, jerking and heaving, the pair rocked up and down the room, overturning chairs in their whirlwind passage, and locked in a fierce embrace.

Through the darkness Bob could hear the other's panting, could feel his hot, laboured breath upon his forehead. But the fellow did not speak. Fighting silently, he worked with grim ferocity to wear his would-be captor down.

Though only seventeen, Bob was strong and well grown for his age. What was more, he was fit and nimble with constant exercise. But he was not yet in his prime, and against a full-grown man he was at a disadvantage.

Slowly but surely he felt his strength going, felt the other's superior weight bearing him down. If the struggle went on much longer, he must inevitably go under. Something had got to be done, and quickly.

There was only one thing for it—shout! He must rouse the watchman before his opponent overpowered him.

"Help!" he yelled, with all the power of his strong young lungs, as he felt the intruder force him over against a desk and pin him to it.

His enemy promptly loosened one hand and pressed it to the lad's mouth. For a second his grip relaxed.

In a flash Bob acted. With an agile



wriggle he broke free of his adversary, and, ducking, leapt for the doorway.

But in the dark he misjudged his direction. His rush ended against solid wall. With another shout, he sprang to correct his mistake, guided by the scurry of feet across the floor as the intruder blundered for the exit.

He gained the door ahead of his opponent and slammed it shut, then leaped at the fellow once more. But his enemy had had enough of wrestling. As Bob flung himself on him, he lashed out viciously with his fist, determined to end the combat swiftly.

The blow took Bob full in the face with sickening force, and he reeled backwards against the door. But, recovering gamely, he struck back like lightning, countered a second blow, then smashed a left hook to his opponent's jaw.

With a stifled curse the man broke away, lost in the darkness. And, breathing tensely, Bob waited, his fists clenched, and covering up in expectation of further attack.

But the onslaught did not come. For an instant there was silence. Then a slight noise sounded by the window. His enemy meant to escape that way.

In a flash Bob dashed towards the window, to fling himself upon the fellow and hold him till the watchman arrived. But he never reached his objective.

Half-way across the room something heavy smashed down upon his head with terrific force, and he went down on the floor in a heap, his head ringing with the force of the blow.

Before he could stagger up again he heard his enemy spring past him. Something clattered noisily to the floor, and the door shut with a bang. As Bob stumbled towards it he heard the lock click home.

He flung himself frantically on the door to wrench it open. But it was fast. So, realising the futility of tugging, he found the switch and turned it on.

In the middle of the floor lay a broken chair—the club used to fell him. Then his eyes sought the cupboard in the corner.

Its doors were shut, but in the lock was a key.

Stumbling dizzily to the cupboard he pulled it open—to give a quick sigh of relief as his hand closed upon the precious tender. He had been in time!

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

### "I Won't be Beaten!"

By the time his shouts brought the watchman and release, all trace of Bob's opponent had vanished. Only a duplicate key remained as clue to the fellow's mysterious identity. So, shelving the matter for the time being, Bob went home, taking the papers with him as a precaution.

"Humph! Spies, eh?" John Norton grunted when, next morning, his nephew reported the incident. "Well, thank goodness the fellow was foiled. Though I hope this will teach you a lesson, my lad. But for that confounded flying trip of yours, the papers would have been re-drafted during office hours and locked up in the safe," he added, stowing the documents in the familiar leather attaché-case he always carried when on business.

"Still, I've no leisure to investigate this matter now," he went on quickly. "There have been so many delays getting this tender finished that I've had to run things very fine. The tenders must be in at Prague by noon to-morrow. In fact, I'm having to do something I've never done before, and that's fly there by a special aeroplane that's waiting for me at the airport."

Rather downcast, for he had expected at least some slight appreciation of his promptitude the previous evening, Bob withdrew. He even failed to see the irony of fate which compelled his uncle to make use of the very form of transport against which he constantly inveighed.

"I think he might have let my lateness yesterday rest," the youngster muttered as, nursing a swollen jaw, he quitted his uncle's room. "He seems snappier than ever this morning."

"Cheer up, young 'un! The Chief's a bunch of nerves this morning." Bob looked up, to find the genial works manager before him. "There's so much hanging on this



contract. If we lose it, it will mean paying off hundreds of the hands, and Mr. Norton has a kindly heart underneath, even if he is strict over discipline."

With a sympathetic smile the manager went past into John Norton's office, to reappear shortly and beckon to Holstman.

"Here, Holstman, the Chief wants you. Bring those figures for that Kenya bridge, will you? Hurry! Mr. Norton's just off!"

"Right!" Holstman seized an attaché-case and hurried into the inner office.

For a few moments, Bob's room-mate was closeted with his Chief. Then the latter came out, carrying his attaché-case.

"Good-bye, Bob. No flying, mind, while I'm gone!" John Norton threw a brusque farewell to his nephew. "Come, Carstairs!" He signed to the works manager. "I'll want you to come as far as Croydon with me. We'll talk over those details for that other matter on the way."

Another moment, and the two men were gone. Holstman returned, a bundle of papers in his hand. Along with Bob, he settled down to tackle the day's work.

Bob's head was aching frantically. Try as he would, he could not concentrate on the work before him. That blow from the chair had left a nasty lump on his head, and an effort to do figures only made matters worse, as did vain puzzling over the identity of last night's intruder.



Twisting and wrenching, jerking and heaving, the pair rocked up and down the room, locked in a fierce embrace. (See Chapter 1.)

"I believe I saw some aspirins on uncle's desk this morning," Bob thought to himself as, during the afternoon, his headache grew splitting. "Perhaps a couple will put me right."

He went into the empty sanctum, where he hunted amongst the litter of documents strewn about the big flat-topped desk. But he could not see the little bottle he was looking for.

Wondering if it had fallen to the floor beyond the desk, Bob went round to



scrutinise the narrow space between the desk end and the wall. But there was no bottle there—only a leather attaché-case, stowed out of sight in the narrow gap.

"Hallo!" Bob whipped the case from its hiding-place, and started as he saw the initials, "J. S.," on its lid. He could have sworn he had seen the case in his uncle's hand when, in company with Carstairs, he had set out for Croydon.

Puzzled, Bob tore the lid open, only to step back in dismay as his gaze rested on the interior. There lay the all-important tenders!

In a flash the lad realised what had happened. By some mischance John Norton had picked up the wrong attaché-case, and, though he did not know it, was flying rapidly towards Prague with a case full of perfectly useless documents!

Bob's heart almost stopped beating. By this time his uncle would be well over the Channel, and beyond recall. Even if a wireless message could be got to the 'plane that carried him, it would be too late for him to return and get the tender.

Yet unless that tender reached Prague by noon to-morrow the contract would be irretrievably lost. And Prague was in the heart of Middle Europe—hundreds of miles away!

To reach Prague by train in the time was out of the question. The only way was to get to Croydon, charter a special 'plane, and pursue his uncle with the tenders by air.

But to do that a big sum of ready cash was needed. The aeroplane people would demand payment in advance. Where was he to get such a sum from?

There might be enough in Carstairs' safe. But, then, Carstairs was in London, and might not be back for many hours—might not be back to-day. It was late in the afternoon now, and the banks were closed. There was no chance even of drawing on his savings.

Besides, dare he trust anyone in the office with this information? That attempt on the cupboard last night might have been the work of an outsider. But this affair of the attaché-case was different.

Obviously someone had managed to sub-

stitute another case for Jim Norton's, at the last minute, and while his attention was diverted. That could only have been done by some traitor in the office itself. And the very position in which the case had been hidden proved that the affair was no accident.

Holstman, he now remembered, had gone in to see John Norton with those Kenya statistics, carried in just such an attaché-case.

Bob frowned. Only Holstman could have known he was going to put the papers in that cupboard for the night.

No, this was a matter he must handle by himself, Bob decided. There was plainly some deliberate, determined, and well-organised plot afoot to secure the tender, or prevent its safe arrival at Prague. If he sought help from officials of the firm, news of the trick and its discovery would leak out. Forewarned, the traitor would simply form fresh plans to intercept the papers on their way to Czecho-Slovakia.

Bob peeped back into the outer office. It was empty. Holstman had evidently gone on some errand to another department.

A quickly-formed plan in his head, Bob seized the telephone and got through to the aerodrome where Cardew housed his 'plane. Getting on to the man in charge, the youngster put a rapid question to him.

"Can I let you have Mr. Cardew's 'bus?" the man echoed down the wire in a tone of astonishment. "Certainly not! Mr. Cardew's left for France, and I've no authority to hand his 'plane over to anyone."

"But it's important!" Bob exclaimed desperately. "I've simply got to reach Prague by noon to-morrow, and I'm sure Mr. Cardew wouldn't mind if he knew —"

"Well, he doesn't," the other interrupted irritably. "And if you think I'm going to risk letting you have his or anyone else's 'bus for a crackbrained attempt to get to Prague, you must take me to be as silly as yourself. Why, an inexperienced flier like you would never get across the Channel! You're crazy!"



His last hope gone, Bob rang off, to stand disconsolately by the telephone. It seemed that the treacherous enemy would triumph, after all.

"By gosh, I won't be beaten, though!" he exclaimed, his mouth tightening in a grim, straight line, and he clenched his fists. "There is a way, and I'll take it! There'll be no one at the aerodrome after dark! I'll pinch that 'plane of Cardew's this evening, and chance my arm! I'll get that tender to Prague or bust!"

### THE THIRD CHAPTER

#### Aboard the 'Plane!

"V ELL, haf you der papers got, mein freund?" a guttural voice demanded as, rising from the park seat on which he was sitting, the speaker gripped the arm of a man who had just come up.

"No, worse luck!" The newcomer was Holstman. "That infernal, meddlesome young hound was too much for me again!"

"Himmel! You mean John Norton haf gone to Prague mit der tenders?" The other, a blond-haired foreigner, started back in dismay.

"No." Holstman chuckled evilly as he shook his head. "When that nephew of his surprised me at the office last night, I made fresh plans. I knew the attaché-case Norton always uses, got another just like it, and managed to change the two over unseen at the last moment. He went off unsuspecting, with a case full of dud papers!"

"Unluckily the young cub discovered, this afternoon, the case Norton left behind. I had to hide the thing, and had no chance to get hold of the tender for you."

"Vell, at least Norton vill not get der tenders through in time," the German commented philosophically. "You may der five hundred pounds ve offer earn after all, Herr Holstman. If ve get der contract, dat is."

"I hope so," Holstman returned gloomily. "But the young hound's planning to pinch a 'plane to-night, and fly to Prague himself with the papers. Quite by accident, I overheard him on the 'phone this afternoon."

He reported the conversation Bob had had with Cardew's representative.

"Den you must to der aerodrome go, and gif varning!" the Teuton exclaimed excitedly. "To schtop dis flight——"

"Not me," Holstman interrupted coolly. "He's a persistent young hound. If he's stopped, he'll only try some other way. He might get through, too. Besides, by this time he must guess who worked that trick on the old man. And I don't want him dropping John Norton any hints. I've got a good job to lose."

"Still, at present the youngster doesn't suspect his plans are known. He never heard me enter the room, and I escaped before he turned round." Holstman paused to smile grimly, then added: "And he mustn't suspect, either. I want him to go ahead."

"Are you mad?" the other ejaculated.

Holstman shook his head and grinned again.

"No, but I've got a good plan. Listen! I've seen this 'plane of Cardew's. It's the usual tractor type—with engine in front, and a long exhaust pipe running aft, alongside the fuselage. It's wrapped with abestos thread, and runs so far back as to protect the wood and fabric of the 'plane itself from the heat of the exhaust gases."

"Young Norton wouldn't dare enter the aerodrome till after dark, in case he's caught. But I know a man there, and he can get me in unnoticed. I'm going to unship Cardew's exhaust pipe, drill a hole in its inner side—I mean the side next the fuselage—and plug the hole up with cement."

"But vat for?"

"If I replace the pipe, everything will look as usual," Holstman explained. "I'll tap a screw-thread in the hole. That will hold the cement in place for some time. But after a while the vibration of the exhaust will blow the cement out, and flames will spurt out through the hole on to the fuselage. The 'plane will catch fire, and the young hound will crash!"

For an instant the German paused, gasping, as details of the fiendish plan his confederate had so callously proposed penetrated his intelligence. Then he gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"A goot plan, mein freund, und doubly



goot because no von vill efer know it vas nod ein accident. Be quick, den, and make everyt'ings as you haf said. Remember, five hundert pounds, Herr Holstman."

But "Herr Holstman" gave a short laugh.

"Don't worry," he said confidently. "That five hundred is as good as mine!"

It was quite dark when, trembling with suppressed excitement, Bob reached the deserted aerodrome, the all-important attaché-case gripped in his hand. Climbing the high fence, he slipped swiftly towards the hangar, oblivious of the stealthy form that melted into the shadows as he came up.

The hangar was locked, but no matter! Cardew had given him a key, and with this he quickly got the doors open. Then, after pausing to listen cautiously, he set to work to get the 'bus out into the open.

Fortunately the machine was a light one, or he could never have accomplished the task unaided. As it was, after much hauling and straining, he contrived to get the 'plane outside, where he proceeded, swiftly but systematically, to replenish the fuel tanks.

Every nerve in him told him to hurry, to get away before someone surprised him. But again he fought such instincts down. The flight was a long one. He must make his preparations coolly, thoroughly. A premature start might spell disaster in the air.

So he inspected everything minutely, an electric torch screened in the "cup" of his hand. But everything seemed in order, and at last, satisfied, he walked round to the propeller.

Here he foresaw his greatest difficulty. There was no mechanic to swing the "prop" for him, and thus start the engine while he sat ready in the cockpit. The instant the motor fired the 'plane would start to move forward on to him, uncontrolled, and the plaything of the powerful engine.

He would have to trust to luck and his own agility to spring clear in time, and to board the moving 'plane before she took off or

buried her nose in the ground. Failure might well mean death. At the least, it would mean a smashed machine, and an end to all his plans.

Well, it had to be done! Gritting his teeth, he seized the long wooden blade, thrust it into position, then jerked it downwards with all his strength.

"Hi, there! Stop!"

As the engine gave a futile cough, a loud, peremptory voice bawled at him through the darkness. While he thrust the blade upwards again, he saw over his shoulder two men running towards him.

But, ignoring them, he yanked at the propeller once more. The engine burst into a roar, and, as he jumped clear of the whizzing blades, jerked forwards upon him.

He sprang sideways, ducking low. A great balloon-tyred wheel struck his thigh, throwing him. But he stumbled free by an ace, only to blunder into the arms of the foremost newcomer.

"Here—you!" The man grabbed at him furiously.

Bob hooked an under-cut to his jaw, knocking him backwards. As the fellow reeled away he sprang for the machine, and, with a flying leap, got a precarious foothold.

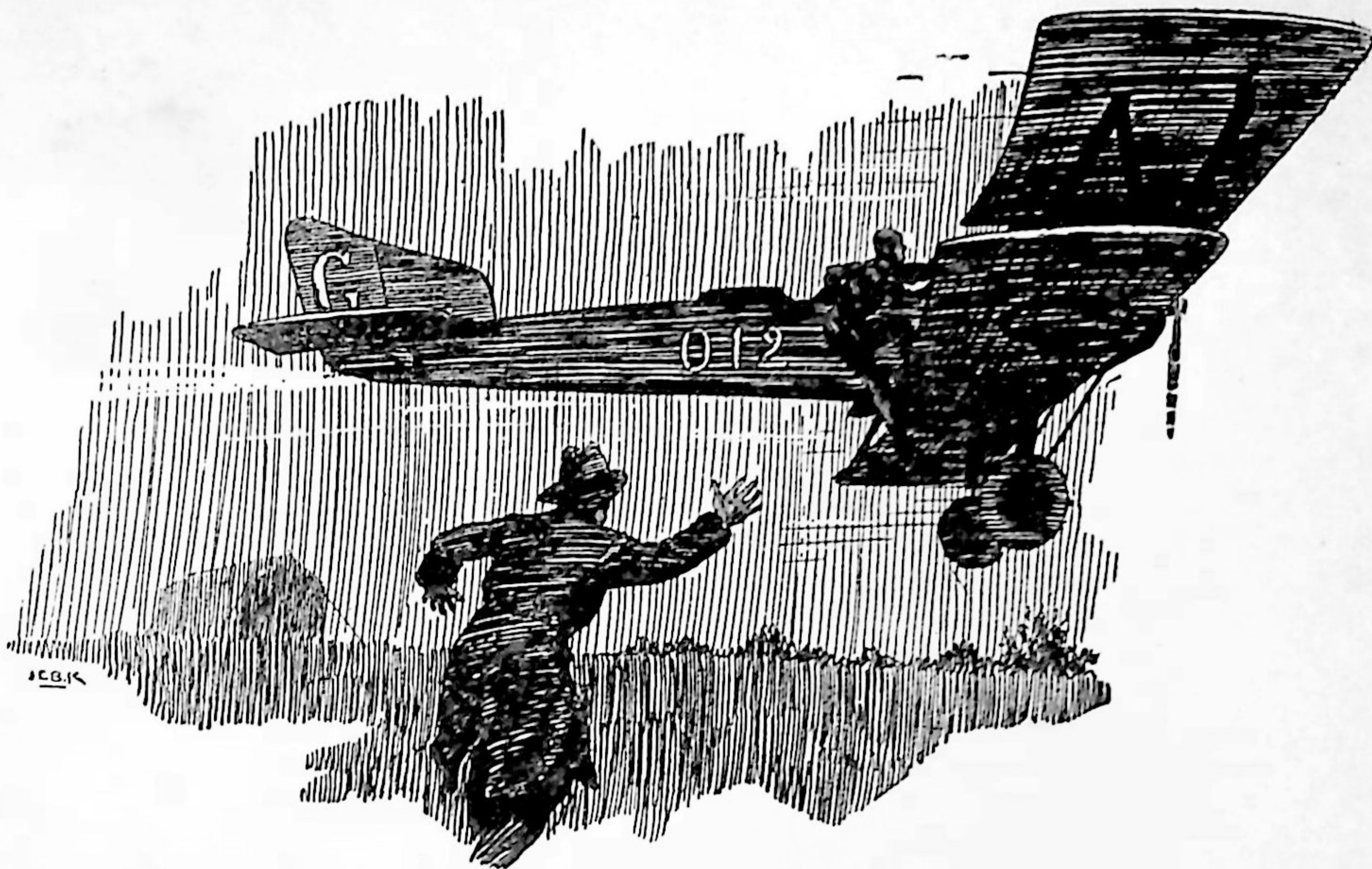
Rocking and swaying, the 'bus bumped over the rough ground, its tail swinging viciously, lifting and heaving. A dozen times, while the intrepid youngster scaled into the cockpit, the 'bus all but overturned.

But in the nick of time he managed to seize the controls, fought the bucking 'plane into submission, and, a long line of tall trees dangerously close ahead of him, took off the ground, the shouts of the two men drowned in the roar of the engine.

For a breathless second the trees loomed up to meet him. It seemed he could never clear them, as he wrestled desperately with the elevator rudder to gain more height. Then the wheels of the landing chassis cleared the topmost branches by an inch, and he was safely over.

Rising swiftly in the air, cool, confident, and undismayed, he set out on his dare-devil flight through the darkness across the





In the nick of time Bob managed to clamber into the cockpit and seize the controls, the shouts of the two men drowned in the roar of the engine. (*See previous page.*)

long, unfamiliar stretch of sea and country that led to Prague.

Had he known of the fatal flaw, fashioned by Holstman's treacherous hands in the flame-flooded exhaust pipe, he would have been less confident.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER

### The Crisis and—Victory !

HE had been flying for over seven hours, guided through the night by his compass and some maps he had with him. Seven long hours, in which his tired hands grew numb, his feet, never off the elevator bar, stiff and cramped.

In his ears the deafening monotone of the roaring engine. Away to the right, shadowy giants against the white gleam of the rising moon—the towering crests of the Swiss Alps.

Gradually these fell away and were lost in the distance. Then ahead he saw the rosy radiance of coming dawn, heralded by the ruddy iridescence of cotton-wool clouds.

Below, the unseen Bavarian countryside, hidden in mists.

Well, he was on the right course—the Alps, now vanished, proved that. Another hour or two would bring the Czech capital in sight. Meanwhile, his engine was behaving beautifully. The whole flight, notwithstanding its hazards, had gone off without a hitch. He was within sight of victory, and—

Hallo! What was that? Impelled by some subtle instinct, he turned to glance backwards. Behind, from the fuselage, black clouds of smoke were billowing. Even as he looked, a sheet of flame burst from their midst. The 'plane was on fire!

"My giddy aunt!"

His feet moved to depress the elevator. He must dive for it quickly, before the fire spread. His fingers gripped the "joy-stick," only to slacken as no response greeted their movement. A wire or something had gone already! The rudder was out of control! To dive meant death!





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A LEAP FOR LIFE!



Swiftly he checked the downward plunge, his brain working furiously. If he dived and got into a tail spin! No! Yet to stay up here in the blazing machine meant equal disaster. All this flashed through his mind in a second.

The doomed aeroplane was quivering now, as though in fear of the flames that wrapped it. He could feel the torrid heat from the eager, licking tongues that ran along the failing fuselage astern.

The 'bus heeled sideways, twisting as she made to spin. This was the finish.

The parachute! He had forgotten that, ready strapped as it was to his body. Clutching the attaché-case, he scrambled up, gained the side, and for a second stood poised on it. Then he jumped.

For an eternity he seemed to fall through space, his arms rigid, his hands gripped to his thighs, while, still clinging to the case, he spun over and over.

The parachute had failed him! It would never open! He was choking!

Thud! With a terrific wrench that all but tore his arms from their sockets, the stout straps tightened. His flying heels righted, and he felt the rush of air about him cease. Then he sensed the clammy touch of the ground mists, but a moment since far below.

The parachute had acted, after all, and not a second too soon! As realisation came, and with it relief, his feet crashed into some springy, yielding object, and he fetched up with a jerk, mild as compared to that other one, to find himself dangling from the wreck of his parachute in a large tree.

He was safe!

Dropping the case, he wriggled loose and dropped to earth. At the same instant, a frightful crash in the distance smote the still air, and a leaping mass of fire shot skywards. It was the 'plane, crashed some way off in an inferno of blazing petrol.

With a shudder, Bob retrieved the attaché-case, really aware now for the first time of the frightful death he had so narrowly avoided. Then his ear caught the staccato bark of a motor-cycle engine, and instinctively he turned in its direction.

This reminded him—he was on land once

more, though where he did not know. And, delightful as it was to be again on terra-firma, the thought brought with it a fresh sense of danger.

He had flown across Europe without a permit, without a passport even. He was a law-breaker, an outlaw, in the heart of some foreign land. The crash would bring people to the spot; he would be questioned, his papers demanded. It meant arrest and detention—while the precious hours sped!

The motor-cycle had stopped now. Through the half-light he saw a man running across the mist-cloaked fields towards the blazing wreck. As yet he himself was undiscovered.

His eyes sought the red glow on the horizon in the East, his direction. Another instant, and he was running towards the roadway.

Tumbling over a fence, he came upon the motor-bike, abandoned by its rider in his dash for the scene of the crash. And as he saw the lone machine Bob realised his opportunity.

He must get away unchallenged, get on with his journey. Here was the means, and nobody to stay him!

Stamping on the kick-starter, he set the machine in motion and swung into the saddle. Its owner could be traced later and compensated, with apologies. He flung the throttle lever over, his mind made up. Another instant, and he was scorching all out towards the ever-rising dawn.

As he tore onwards through the misty country, he scanned the sign-posts, flashing past in the growing light. The lettering on them was Gothic, like the title-head to a morning newspaper. He was in Germany, with the frontier between him and Czecho-Slovakia, his destination!

Weiden; a name flew by on a sign-post. It caught his eye as he sped past, and he remembered seeing the name on a map. Well, he was close to the frontier, anyway, and going in the right direction.

He streaked on, fences, hedges, houses, all flashing by. Then, before he was aware of it, a guardhouse swung into view on a corner, and another beyond it. At the same moment, a uniformed figure in green-grey



stepped out, rifle in hand, to meet him.

The frontier, questions, detention! The crisis was at hand!

He gripped his handle-bars resolutely. The figure in uniform shouted, waving him to stop. But he tore on, his speed unchecked.

The man raised his rifle, full in the leaping motor-cycle's path. There was a crash, a spurt of flame, and something whistled past Bob's head. He was on the figure now—the gun—

But the fellow sprang aside at the last second, and Bob was by, to shoot into the midst of another group by the second guard-house, scattering them like chaff before his breakneck onrush.

Again he was through and safe, but only for a moment. In his wake a splutter of rifle-shots echoed, and the ping-ping and "phwhitting" of

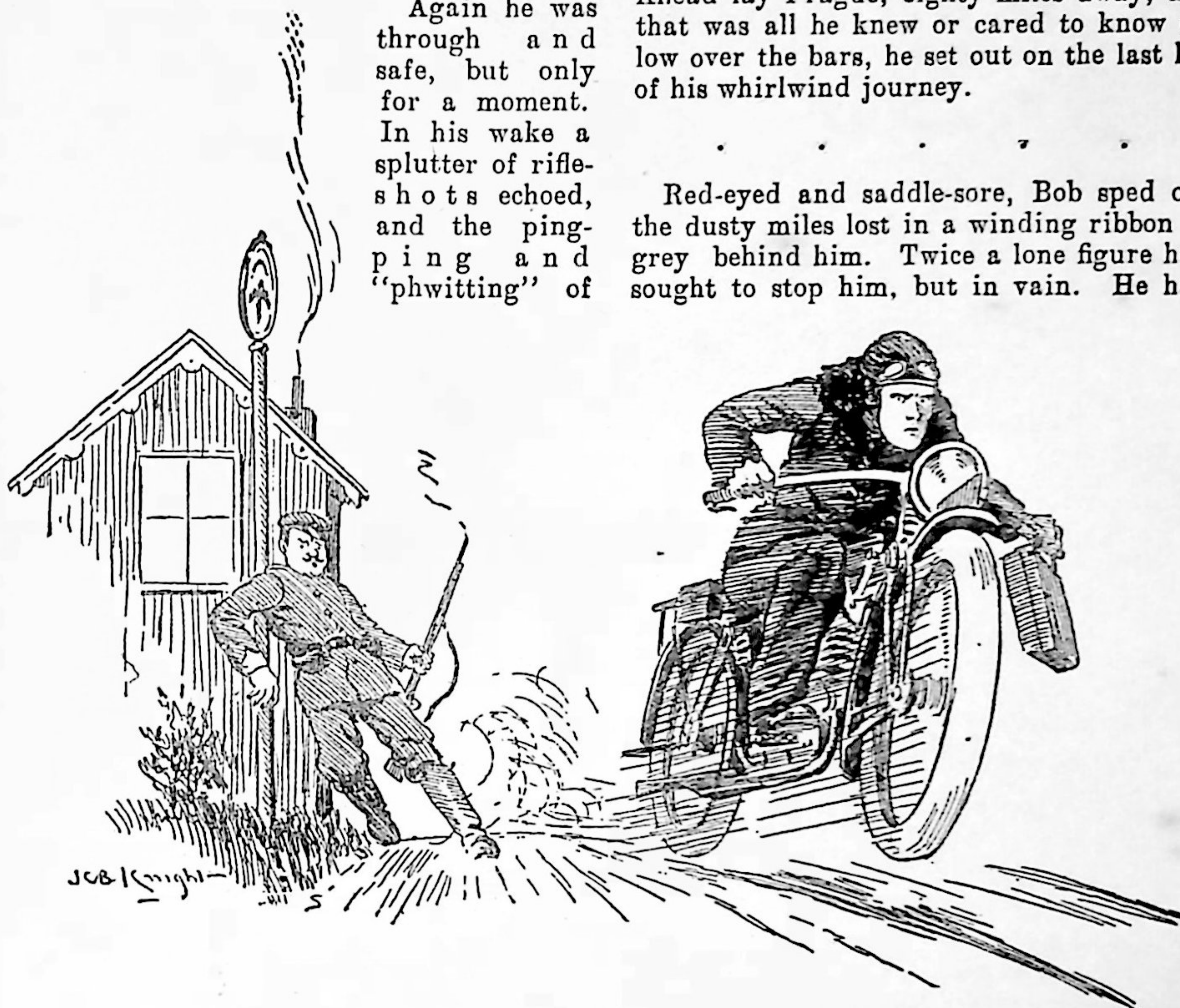
flying lead broke about him. Something went sighing past his ear; a fleck of leather, gouged from his shoe-sole, spun into the air.

But luck was with him. Unhurt, he gained a bend in the road, and the guard-houses dropped out of view. Beyond the turn was a signpost, on its arm words painted in strangely-accented lettering and devoid of vowels, like Welsh.

Czech! And that word—Plzen. That was Pilsen, en route for Prague! His courage rose within him. He was a frontier jumper, astride a stolen mount, the hounds on his trail, and, doubtless, a price on his head.

But he did not think of such things now. Ahead lay Prague, eighty miles away, and that was all he knew or cared to know as, low over the bars, he set out on the last lap of his whirlwind journey.

Red-eyed and saddle-sore, Bob sped on, the dusty miles lost in a winding ribbon of grey behind him. Twice a lone figure had sought to stop him, but in vain. He had



The frontier guard, missing his aim, sprang aside at the last second, and Bob went by him with a rush and a roar! (See this page.)



"It's all right! The tender's here!" gasped Bob, bursting in upon his astonished uncle and a group of government officials. (See next page.)



barrier were more uniformed figures.

C-r-runch! His brakes went on with a jerk that all but flung him over the bars, and he fell off, right on the very crown of the bridge, his front wheels not a yard from the obstacle in his path.

With a groan he stumbled up, defeat before him as the men sprang down to seize him. He was beaten.

There was a roar and a rattle beneath his feet, and a dense cloud of smoke rushed upwards from beneath the bridge. It was a train, passing below!

A man gripped his arm, but he jerked himself free. Before his would-be captors realised his intent, Bob had mounted the parapet and dropped to the line of black carriage roofs rushing out from under the bridge!

shot past grimly, and the figure had dropped behind, impotent.

But such episodes warned him that the telegraph wires had been busy. They were looking for him, and his mount, with its tell-tale German registration marks, might at any moment spell his undoing.

How long the petrol in his tank would last he did not know. If he could find a garage across that railway bridge ahead, it would be wise to stop and refill. But then he had no money—Czech money, that was.

He bit his lip as he roared up the steep approach to the bridge, then grabbed wildly at his throttle lever. Across the narrow gap between the bridge sides a barrier of carts and barrels had been erected. On the

He struck the convex roofing squarely, with a thud that shook the breath out of him, rolled sideways drunkenly, all but lost both case and foothold, then saved himself with a last prodigious effort. When he looked backwards, the bridge and the men on it were lost in the drifting clouds of smoke from the locomotive.

Gathering himself together, Bob recovered breath; then, creeping cautiously to the end of the coach, climbed stiffly down to the buffers. The train went on, unchecked; evidently its crew knew nothing of the incident. Emboldened, he swung out on to the stepboard, found a door, and pulled it open.

"My hat!" As he stumbled into the



compartment, its solitary occupant started forward, to stare at him in amazement.

Bob sank on to the seat, and drew a deep breath of relief. The astonished accents were English, pure and unmistakable.

He had found a friend!

And so it proved. An English agent, with an office in the City, the stranger was more than sympathetic. Bob's story told, he stowed the airman's kit out of sight in his bag, found money for the youngster's ticket, and, Prague reached—by luck the train was bound there—guided him to the contract office, the address of which was on the tender.

Racing into the building, Bob ran into the arms of John Norton, engaged in tearing his hair in vexation at a last-minute discovery of his useless trip. At the same instant the big clock overhead boomed out the hour of twelve.

"It's all right! The tender's here!" Bob gasped, flinging the case on a table, before the astonished eyes of his uncle and a group of government officials.

"How the deuce did you get here?" John Norton exclaimed.

"I flew, uncle. And—why, I've committed so many crimes on the way there isn't a punishment big enough to fit 'em all!" he added, with a cheery grin, as he poured out his story.

That done, he lay back on a chair, panting, conscious that a smiling, kindly-faced official spoke of "smoothing matters over." After all, it was a Government contract, which, it seemed, John Norton was undoubtedly going to get.

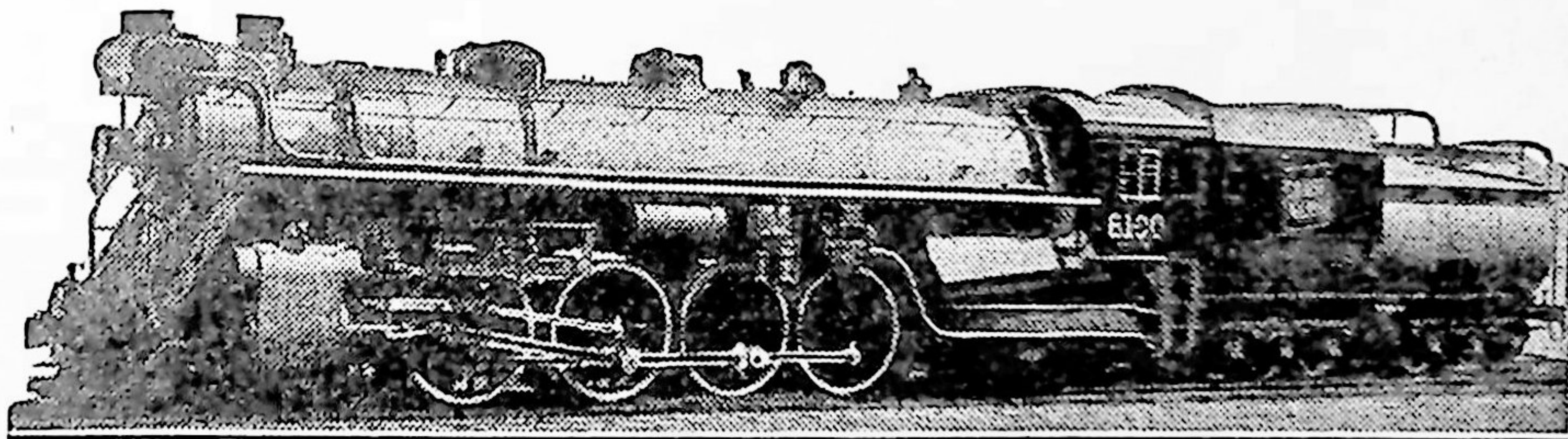
That gentleman seemed a little overcome and speechless at first. But as Bob closed his tired eyes, his uncle's voice came to him dimly:

"After this, I reckon your neck's unbreakable, Bob. Still, if you want to go on tempting Providence—well, I s'pose I'll have to let you!"

Bob gave a sigh of eminent satisfaction. He had delivered the goods, and, what was almost as splendid, the embargo on his future flying had been lifted!

THE END

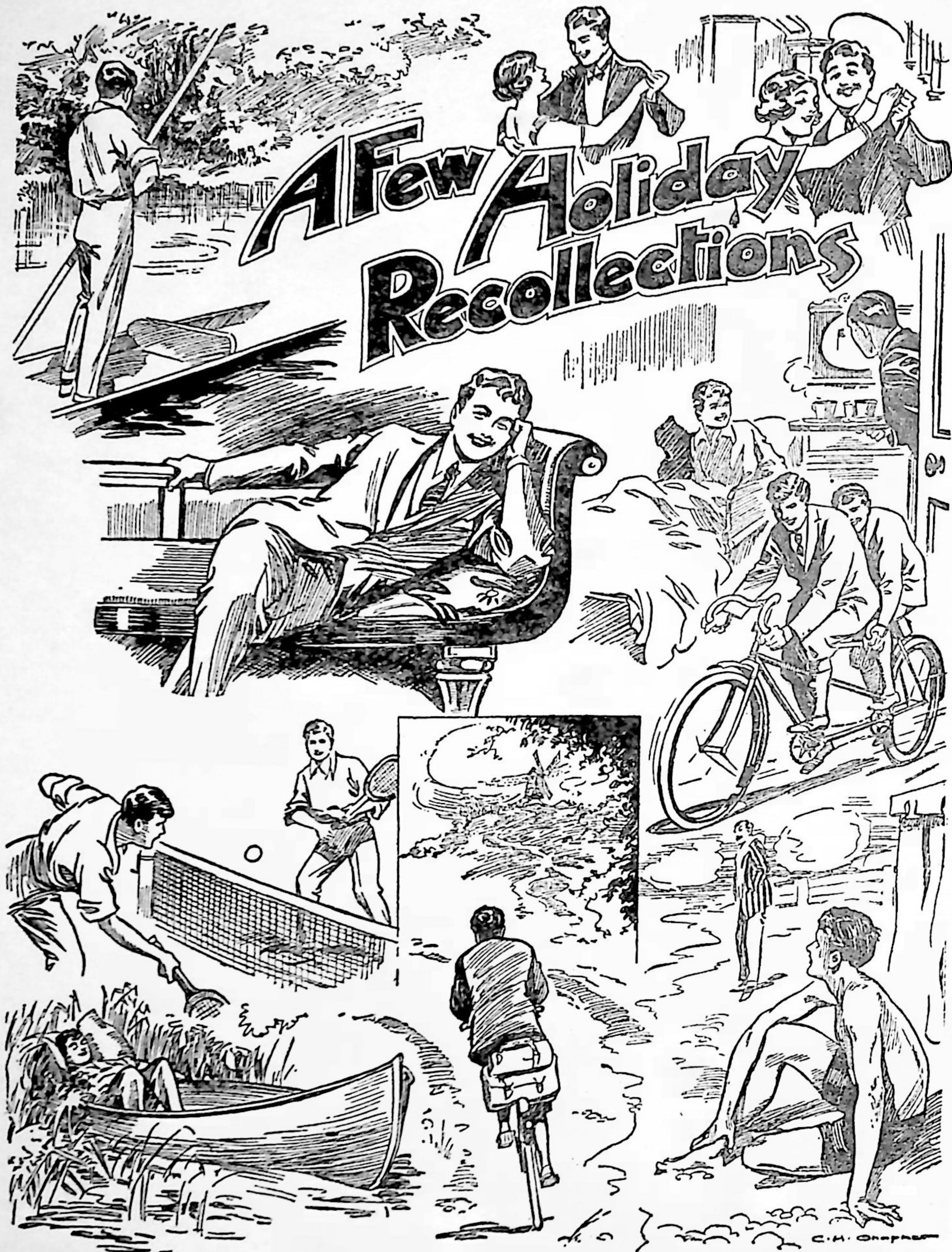
## A Giant of the Canadian Railways!



The "Confederation," Locomotive No. 6100—the pride of the Canadian National Railways—takes its place among the world's record passenger engines. It is 100 feet long, it weighs over 300 tons, and it stands fifteen feet high! This giant hauls a train

a third of a mile long, at ninety miles an hour when travelling at its fastest, and does a trip of 2,900 miles! The train carries 500 people and, all told, the "Confederation" has to pull a load of 1,850 tons. How would you like to be the driver! A proud job, eh?









*William George Bunter, in an interview, takes this opportunity of giving the whole world the truth (?) about himself.*

**A**LTHOUGH I admit that Mr. Frank Richards is a jolly good writer, I really consider that some of the insinuations he makes about me are uncalled for. In case, therefore, some of his readers may have a wrong impression of me, I am going to take this opportunity of giving the whole world the truth about myself.

Now, in the first place, as to my appearance. I possess a slim, graceful figure, an aristocratic demeanour, and an easy grace of manner. Mind you, when I say I'm slim, I don't mean I'm skinny, like the rest of the blessed Form, because I'm not. I'm fairly well covered, if it comes to that. Possibly a little plump—stoutish, maybe.

Well, all right! It's nothing to be ashamed of! I'm like a young elephant, then!

About grub. If you believed Mr. Richards, you'd think I was a regular gormandiser. Nothing of the kind! Three light meals a day is all I require in the way of nourishment. Well, fairly light, anyway. Say half a dozen eggs and a pound

of ham for brekker, a couple of chickens, plenty of veges., and a Christmas pudding for dinner, and two or three haddocks and half a dozen poached eggs for tea.

Did I say three meals? Better make it six. Safety first, you know!

Then there's that blessed postal-order business. Readers of Greyfriars yarns are always being told I never really receive one. Rot! They arrive by nearly every post. Of course, I'm disappointed sometimes. Perhaps I shouldn't say nearly every post; nearly every day would probably be more like it. An exaggeration? Oh, really! Sometimes, it's true, a week goes by—or a month, or even a term or so. When I really come to think of it, I don't remember when I got the last one!

Turning to the question of my abilities in the Form-room. Mr. Frank Richards is awfully fond of telling everybody what a dunce I am, but the truth is very different. Take Latin. Caesil—I fairly revel in him! Virger—I know his works backwards. Or is it Caesar and Virgil? Blessed if I remember! It's all a lot of piffle, anyway!





About a dozen eggs and a pound or two of ham is all I require for brekker!

I don't know anything about either of them, and, what's more, I don't want to know anything!

And it makes me jolly wild to read the sarcastic remarks Mr. Richards makes about the way I play football. Honestly, if you'd seen me play at compulsory practice last Wednesday you'd have said I ought to play centre-forward for the First Eleven. I kicked a magnificent goal in the second half, too! Had the goalie fairly whacked, you know!

What's that? Well, now you remind me, I must admit it—though, mind you, I still say it was a fine goal. Yes, I did kick the ball into my own goal!

A very sore point with me, too, is titled relations. Mr. Richards just pours scorn on them, and even suggests that they don't exist. Cheek, you know! I've got tons of relations with titles, and some in the House of Lords, too! Well, not exactly the House of Lords, perhaps—The Lords, anyway—Lord's cricket ground, you know. Awfully

well connected there, the Bunter family.

How? Well, they're really nothing to do with the ground, if it comes to that. As a matter of fact, it's just an uncle of mine who's there—runs an ice-cream barrow outside the entrance now and again. What other titles? Well, I can't quite think of them for a moment. Of course, that rot about Sir Bunter de Grunter is just Mr. Richards' sarcasm. There isn't such a person. But I did have a cousin who once received a letter addressed A. Bunter, ESQUIRE, and that's something, isn't it? Fact! He showed me the envelope!

And finally, I hate the way that blessed writer tries to make out that I'm not always strictly truthful. It's a libel, you know—an outrageous libel. I've never told a lie in my life! A little exaggeration now and again, perhaps! A misunderstood metaphor here and there. Possibly I do get a little confused over facts at times. What's that? It's only by mistake that I ever tell the truth! That's done it! I'm finished!



I kicked a magnificent goal in the second half—had the goalie fairly whacked!