

MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 24
AUG. 7, 1909

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR MATT
ON THE WING

OR FLYING FOR
FAME AND FORTUNE

By The Author
of MOTOR MATT



Quick as a flash, Motor Matt caught the lieutenant's arm just in time to keep him from falling.

STREET & SMITH
PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK

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By Stanley R Matthews

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THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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Motor Matt On The Wing

OR,

FLYING FOR FAME AND FORTUNE

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CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

Matt King, otherwise Motor Matt.

Joe McGlory, a young cowboy who proves himself a lad of worth and character, and whose eccentricities are all on the humorous side. A good chum to tie to—a point Motor Matt is quick to perceive.

Ping Pong, a Chinese boy who insists on working for Motor Matt, and who contrives to make himself valuable, perhaps invaluable.

Mrs. Traquair, wife of the inventor, Harry Traquair, who lost his life by a fall from an aëroplane of his own invention.

Amos Murgatroyd, a mortgage shark who gets the Traquairs in his clutches and becomes a bitter enemy of Motor Matt.

Siwash Charley, a ruffian who becomes the tool of Murgatroyd in his desperate attempts to keep Matt from flying the Traquair aëroplane in the government trials.

Lieutenant Cameron, an officer in the Signal Corps, U. S. A., who proves to be the cousin of an old friend of Matt, and who nearly loses his life when the aëroplane is tested.

Mr. Black, a friendly real estate man of Jamestown, N. D., who owns an automobile which proves of good service to the king of the motor boys.

Sergeant O'Hara, a good soldier, but who indulges in a game of cards at an inopportune moment.

Benner, post trader at Fort Totten, a bluff person who falls into a trap laid by Siwash Charley.

Jake, a teamster for Benner, who uses a blacksnake whip in a novel, but effective way.

CHAPTER I.

WANTED: A MAN OF NERVE.

"Mr. Amos Murgatroyd?"

"My name."

Amos Murgatroyd whirled around in his office chair and measured his caller with a pair of little, gimlet eyes. The caller, at the same time, was measuring Murgatroyd.

The young man who had entered the musty office of the loan broker and was now undergoing his scrutiny, stood straight as a plumb line, his shoulders squared, his lithe, well-set-up form "at attention." He wore a cap, and his clothes were of dark blue and of a semi-military cut.

He was prepossessing in appearance, which, most decidedly, the loan broker was not.

Murgatroyd's face was too lean and hard, his eyes too sharp and shifty, to give one a very exalted idea of his character.

The caller drew a folded newspaper from the breast pocket of his coat and laid it on the broker's desk.

"Are you the man who put that 'ad' in the paper?" inquired the youth.

Murgatroyd picked a pair of nose glasses off his vest, carefully adjusted them, and lifted the paper. The following marked paragraph riveted his attention:

Wanted: A man of nerve, one who has had some experience with flying machines and can handle a gasoline motor. To such a person a chance is offered to fly for fame and fortune in a new aëroplane. Sand and

sagacity absolutely essential. Call on or address, A. Murgatroyd, Brown Block, Jamestown, North Dakota.

The broker dropped the paper, leaned back in his chair, and swept the glasses off his nose. Tapping the glasses against the knuckles of his left hand, he continued to regard the youth.

"Well?" he growled. "It's my 'ad.' What of it?"

"I've come several hundred miles to answer it in person."

"You? Why, I advertised for a man, not a boy."

"What difference does that make, so long as I can do the work?"

Amos Murgatroyd had no answer for this, and his remarks took another tack.

"Had any experience with aëroplanes?"

"No, but I have had a good deal to do with dirigible balloons. If you're hunting for a man who is experienced with aëroplanes, Mr. Murgatroyd, I guess you'll have to hunt for a long time. Heavier-than-air machines are only just beginning to come to the front, and the supply of experienced drivers is limited. It was the chance to familiarize myself with flying of that kind that brought me here."

Murgatroyd continued to tap reflectively with his glasses.

"Do you know that the man who invented the aëroplane fell with one of the machines and was killed?" he inquired.

"I heard that there had been an accident here, recently," was the answer.

"That was ten days ago, over in the park. The aëroplane turned turtle, dropped fifty feet, and

Traquair was badly smashed. He lived about fifteen minutes and wasn't able to speak a word. The machine may be wrong in principle, I don't know that, but I've got to get some reliable person, who's not too much afraid of risking his neck, to learn the machine and then give an exhibition for the government, up at Fort Totten. The trial is set for two weeks from to-day. There's not much time, you see, to learn the ropes."

"I believe I could learn the ropes," said the other confidently. "I seem to have a knack for picking up such things."

"If anything happens to you, your relatives may come at me for damages."

"So far as I know, Mr. Murgatroyd, I haven't any relatives."

The beady, gimlet eyes gleamed with undisguised satisfaction.

"You will have to sign a paper," went on Murgatroyd, "releasing me from all responsibility, financial or otherwise, in case any accident happens."

"I'm willing," was the cool response. "It can't be that you have very much confidence in your aëroplane, Mr. Murgatroyd."

"Solid ground is good enough for me. If man was intended to fly he would have been born with wings. That's where I stand in this aëronautical game. Besides, Traquair invented the machine—I didn't; and the fact that Traquair was killed by his own invention doesn't give me superlative confidence in it."

The youth wondered why Murgatroyd was taking such an interest in a machine that did not command his confidence. The next moment the broker explained this point.

"Traquair owed me money, and the machine was the only thing belonging to him that I could get hold of. If the test at Fort Totten is satisfactory, the war department will buy the aëroplane at a good figure. This is the only way I can get back the loan, you see?"

"What are you willing to pay for the work you want done?"

The youth's tone was chilling and business-like. He was anything but favorably impressed with Murgatroyd.

"I won't pay a red cent," declared the broker. "I'll furnish the aëroplane, and you can use it for practice. If you please the war department, and they pay fifteen thousand for the machine, we'll split the amount even. That's fair enough. I won't be throwing good money after bad, and success or failure is put up to you."

"Is the machine you have the one that killed Traquair?"

Murgatroyd gave a choppy laugh.

"I should say not! There was nothing but kindling wood left of that machine. Traquair was intending to fly for the government, and he had a machine constructed especially for the purpose. It's in storage at Fort Totten now. The machine he was using here was the first one he built. By the way, young man, what's your name?"

"King, Matt King."

Murgatroyd gave a grunt of surprise, jammed his glasses on his nose, and stared at his caller with renewed interest; then, suddenly, he pressed a push button at the side of his desk.

A clerk appeared, a wizened, dried-up little man, who came in with a cringing air.

"Yes, Mr. Murgatroyd?"

"File 'K,' Prebbles. And dust it off. Why don't you go around this place with a duster, once in a while? The older you get, Prebbles, the less you seem to know."

The clerk winced. With a deferential bow, he turned and slunk out of the room. He returned in a few minutes, a duster in one hand and a battered letter file in the other. Murgatroyd took the file on his desk and sent Prebbles away with a curt gesture.

After a brief search through the file, the broker developed a number of newspaper clippings.

"That your picture?" he asked, holding up a clipping with an electrotpe reproduction of the king of the motor boys at the top of it.

"It's supposed to be," smiled Matt, wondering why this close-fisted broker had gone to so much trouble to collect the clippings.

"You had a flying machine called the *Hawk*, quite a while ago, didn't you?" pursued Murgatroyd, studying the clippings.

"It was a dirigible balloon," explained Matt. "Correctly speaking, a flying machine is not a motor suspended from a gas bag."

"Quite right. I got these clippings from a clipping bureau in the East, and ever since I found this aëroplane on my hands I've been trying to locate you. Finally I had to give up, and then it was that I put that 'ad' in the paper. And now, here you come answering the 'ad'! Looks like fate had something to do with this, eh?"

"Just a coincidence," answered Matt, "and not such a remarkable coincidence, either. If you knew me better, Mr. Murgatroyd, you'd understand how anxious I am

to become familiar with every sort of machine propelled by a gasoline motor. It's the coming power"—Matt's gray eyes brightened enthusiastically—"and as motors are improved, and their weight reduced in direct ratio with the increase in the horse power, the explosive engine will be used in ways as yet —"

"That's all right," cut in Murgatroyd, who was coldly commercial and as far removed from anything like enthusiasm as night is from day. "A gasoline engine is a noisy, dirty machine and smells to high heaven. But that's neither here nor there. Will you take hold of this aëroplane matter, learn how to run the Traquair invention, and then test it out at Fort Totten, two weeks from to-day?"

"I'll think it over," said Motor Matt.

He would not have taken a minute to consider the matter if he had been more favorably impressed with Murgatroyd.

"I can't wait very long for you to make up your mind," went on the broker, visibly disappointed. "There's only two weeks between now and the Fort Totten trials."

"I'll give you an answer by to-morrow morning," and Matt turned toward the door.

"Fame and fortune are in your grasp," urged Murgatroyd. "Don't let 'em slide through your fingers."

Without answering, but nodding a good day to the broker, Matt stepped into the outer room.

As he passed through this other office, he saw Prebbles on a high stool, humped over a ledger. The clerk's eye shade and little bald head, and his thin, crooked body, gave him the grotesque appearance of a frog, roosting on a stone, and getting ready to jump.

Matt passed on into the hall. Before he could descend the stairs he heard a hissing sound behind him. Turning, he saw the clerk standing in the open door, touching his lips with a finger in token of silence.

Matt paused with his hand on the stair rail, and the clerk came gliding toward him.

"Don't have anythin' to do with him," said Prebbles, in a tremulous whisper; "he's a robber."

"Who's a robber?" returned Matt.

"Murgatroyd. He's a skinflint and hasn't any more heart than a stone. He's a robber, I tell you; and, anyhow, if you try to run that machine you'll get killed. Traquair got killed, and he invented it, and knew more about it than you can ever learn. If—"

A buzzer began to sound its call in the outer office. Prebbles whirled and shuffled away. Pausing at the door, he turned to repeat, in a stage whisper:

"Leave him alone, I tell you. He's a robber, and you'll get killed."

Then Prebbles vanished, and Matt went thoughtfully down the stairs.

CHAPTER II.

FOILING A SCOUNDREL.

Near Jamestown the "Jim" River forms a loop, encircling a generous stretch of timber. Wherever there is timber, in any prairie country, there is an invitation for men to make a park; so the ground encompassed by this loop of the river was beautified and obtained the name of "City Park."

After leaving the broker's office, Matt started for the park. In the outskirts of town he met a youngster walking in the direction of the river, with a fishpole over his shoulder.

"Hello," said Matt.

"Hello yourself," answered the boy.

"Do you know where Mr. Traquair lost his life in that flying machine?"

"I guess yuh don't live in Jimtown, do yuh?" returned the boy. "Everybody around here knows where *that* happened."

"No," said Matt, "I only reached Jamestown last night."

"Well, the' was a hull crowd o' us seen Traquair when his flyin' machine flopped over. He come down like a piece o' lead, all mixed up with ropes, an' canvas, an' things. Gee, but that was a smash. I was one o' the kids that went to tell Mrs. Traquair. She was allers afeared Traquair 'u'd git a drop, so she never went to see him do his flyin', an' she never let any o' the kids go, nuther. I wisht I hadn't gone. Say, I dream about that there accident 'most ev'ry night, an' it skeers me stiff."

"I'll give you half a dollar," went on Matt, "if you'll take me to the scene of the accident. Will you?"

"You've bought somethin', mister," grinned the boy. "I was goin' fishin', but I'd pass up a circus if some un offered me half a dollar."

They pushed on toward the park.

"Fellers that try to fly ain't got as much sense as the law allows, I guess," remarked the boy. "Ever'body said Traquair 'u'd break his neck, an' that's what happened."

"What kind of a machine did he have?" queried Matt.

"Doggone if I know. It had wings, an' machinery, an' a thing that whirled behind, an' three bicycle wheels, an' rudders, an' I dunno what-all."

"What were the bicycle wheels for?" asked Matt, interested.

"Traquair had to take a runnin' start afore he got wind enough under his wings to lift him. When the wheels begun to leave ground, he turned the power onto the whirlin' thing behind, an' that made him scoot up into the air; then, somehow, he folded the bicycle wheels up under the machine."

"Did Traquair ever do much flying?"

"Did he? Well, I guess! The day before he got killed he was in the air as much as two hours, twistin' an' turnin' an' floppin' ev'ry which way, jest like a big chicken hawk. The' wasn't much wind, that time, an' people say that's how he was able to keep right side up. The day he dropped, the wind was purty middlin' strong from the west."

"How did the accident happen?"

"That's more'n anybody knows. Traquair was

skimmin' over the tops o' the trees, an' a big crowd was down on the ground lookin' at him; then, all to oncet the' was a snap, like somethin' had busted. The wind grabbed holt o' them canvas wings an' slammed it plumb over, the hull bizness droppin' so quick we hadn't much more'n time to git out o' the way."

By this time Matt and the boy had reached a cleared space among the trees. In the middle of it was a level, grassless stretch, almost as hard as a board floor.

"There, mister," said the boy, pointing, "is where Traquair used to start. He'd git his bicycle wheels to whirlin' at one end o' that tennis ground, an' when he reached t'other end o' it he was in the air. He was comin' back to the startin' place when he dropped. Here's the place."

The boy stepped off to the left and pointed to a spot where the earth was grewsomely gouged and torn.

"Traquair was crazy," observed the boy, as Matt stepped toward the bruised turf, and stood there reflectively. "Ev'rybody says his flyin' machine was a fool killer."

"Traquair was a great man, my lad," answered Matt, "and a martyr to science. He gave up his life trying to help the human race conquer the air. Don't call him crazy."

"Gee, mister," scoffed the boy, "he'd better have helped his folks 'stead o' givin' so much time to the human race. Mrs. Traquair had to take in washin' to keep the fambly in grub."

Matt kicked up a twisted bolt.

"That's a momentum," said the boy.

"I guess you mean memento," laughed Matt, tossing the bolt away.

"Mebby it's that where you come from," persisted the boy doggedly, "but it's momentum out here in Dakoty. Things is diff'rent in the Northwest to what they is in the East."

"Where does Mrs. Traquair live?" asked Matt.

"What hotel yuh stoppin' to, mister?"

"Gladstone House."

"Then you can pass Mrs. Traquair's shack right on the way back to the hotel," and the boy proceeded to give Matt minute instructions as to the way he should go in order to reach the house.

Matt flipped a silver coin to the youngster, and turned and started back toward the town. The boy pushed the coin into his pocket and went whistling in the direction of the river.

Several things were drawing Motor Matt in the direction of the Traquair home. Mainly, he distrusted Murgatroyd, and thought that perhaps Mrs. Traquair might be able to tell him something about the man. Then, too, Matt was anxious to learn what he could about the Traquair aëroplane, and felt sure there were papers containing drawings or descriptions at the house which would give a tolerably clear idea of the machine.

The Traquair home was in a squalid neighborhood. Most of the houses were tumbledown structures with windows ornamented with old garments wherever a pane of glass happened to be missing. But, despite its unpainted walls and sagging roof, the Traquair house had about it an air of neatness that distinguished it from its neighbors. There was no rubbish in the front yard, and two pieces of broken sewer pipe, set on end near the gate, had been filled with earth and were blooming with flowers.

In the rear were two long lines of drying clothes. A pang of pity went to Matt's heart. No matter how heavily the hand of grief had fallen on Mrs. Traquair, she could not neglect the toil necessary to supply the needs of herself and of her fatherless children.

Three youngsters—a boy and two girls, the boy being the oldest and not over six—stood in a frightened huddle on the front walk, near the gate. The smaller of the two girls was crying.

"What's the matter?" asked Matt, halting beside the forlorn little group.

"We're 'fraid to go in the house," answered the boy, looking up at Matt.

"Do you live there?"

"Yes'r, but we're 'fraid. He's in there with mom, an' he's talkin' like he was mad."

"Who are you?"

"Teddy Traquair. I'm six, an' sis, here, is risin' five. Mary Jane's only three."

"Who's talking with your mother, Ted?"

"Murg. I hate him, he's so mean to mom. He was mean to pap, too. But pap's dead—he got kilt when the flyin' machine dropped."

There was a pathetic side to this for a lad with a heart as soft as Matt's, but just then he had no time for that phase of the matter. The windows of the front room of the house were open, and covered with mosquito net. Voices could be heard coming from the front room—a woman's voice, tearful and full of entreaty, and a man's sharp, clean-cut, and almost brutal.

Quietly Matt passed through the gate and took up his

post near one of the windows.

"You sign this paper," Murgatroyd was saying, "and I'll give you a receipt for two years' interest. What more do you expect?"

"I can't sign away all my rights to my husband's invention, Mr. Murgatroyd!" a woman's voice answered. "The interest for two years is only three hundred dollars, and that machine he sent to Fort Totten cost nearly a thousand dollars to build. It isn't right, Mr. Murgatroyd, for you to take the machine the government is thinking of buying, and all my interest in poor Harry's invention, for just three hundred dollars."

"Oh, you know a heap about business, you do, don't you?" snarled Murgatroyd. "What good's the flying machine, anyway? It killed your husband, and it's likely to kill anybody else that tries to run it. By taking over the invention, I feel as though I was loading up with a white elephant, but I've got a chance to get a young fellow to try and fly in that aëroplane at Fort Totten. I'll have to pay him a lot of money to do it, and before I make an arrangement with him I've got to have your name down in black and white to this paper. Do you think for a minute I'm going to spend my good money, paying this young fellow two or three thousand dollars to risk his neck in that machine, when I haven't got any writing from you to protect me? Sign this paper. If you don't, I'll come here and take everything you've got in the house to pay that hundred and fifty, interest. Don't whine around about it, because it won't do any good. If you want to keep a roof over your head, you do what I say—and do it quick."

It would be impossible to describe the harsh brutality of the loan broker's words. The ruffianly bullyragging was apparent to Matt, even though he could not see what was taking place in the room, and

his blood began to boil.

"I can't do what you ask, Mr. Murgatroyd," said the woman brokenly. "When the two years had passed, you'd have the homestead, and the invention, and everything I've got. My duty to my children—"

A savage exclamation came to Matt's ears, followed by a cry from the woman and the clatter of an overturned chair. Prebbles had said that Murgatroyd was a robber. Matt, of course, could not understand all the ins and outs of the present situation, but he understood enough to know that the broker was seeking to browbeat a defenseless woman, and to intimidate her into signing away rights which meant much to her and her children.

Without a moment's hesitation, the king of the motor boys leaped through the window—with more or less damage to the mosquito netting.

CHAPTER III.

MATT MAKES AN INVESTMENT.

Murgatroyd, his face distorted with anger and his little eyes snapping viciously, was clutching a slender, middle-aged woman by the arm. He had leaped at her, in a burst of rage, overturning the chair, which happened to stand in his way.

Matt's unceremonious entrance into the room startled Murgatroyd. Releasing his grasp of Mrs. Traquair's arm, he fell back a step, staring at Matt as though at a ghost.

Mrs. Traquair was so desperate and frightened that she was not nearly so startled by the lad's spring through the window as was Murgatroyd. From Matt's manner she was not long in realizing that fate had sent her a champion at just the moment when she needed one most. Instinctively, she drew toward the youth, half fearful and half appealing.

"Ah, King!" exclaimed Murgatroyd, struggling to get the whip hand of himself. "Rather a peculiar way you have of coming into a house," he added, with some sarcasm.

"It looked as though I was needed," returned Matt grimly.

"You'd better look again. You're not needed. This is a little money transaction between Mrs. Traquair and myself. Isn't that so, Mrs. Traquair?" he queried, turning to the woman.

"Y-e-s," answered Mrs. Traquair, her voice so low it was almost a whisper.

"Don't butt in here, King," scowled Murgatroyd.

"You hear what the lady says. This is none of your business."

"That's where I differ from you," said Matt sturdily. "If I'm not mistaken, you were using me as a club to drive Mrs. Traquair into signing that paper," and he nodded toward a document that was lying on the table near pen and ink.

"Don't make any misstatements, sir," blustered the broker.

"And don't you," cautioned Matt. "I overheard you tell Mrs. Traquair that you would have to pay a thousand or two in order to get me to risk my life flying that aëroplane. As a matter of fact, Mr. Murgatroyd, you did not offer to pay me a cent. I was to exhibit the machine, then, if the government bought it for fifteen thousand dollars, I was to have half."

The red ran into Murgatroyd's face.

"How do you know that I was referring to you?" he demanded.

"I know it, and that's enough." Matt picked the paper from the table. "I'll just look over this and see—"

"Give that to me!" cried Murgatroyd, stepping toward Matt and making a grab at the document.

Matt jumped back quickly and thrust the paper behind him.

"Mrs. Traquair," said he to the woman, "I want to be a friend of yours. May I read this?"

"So—so far as I am concerned," the woman whispered, with a frightened look at the broker.

"By thunder," exploded Murgatroyd, "I'll not stand for this! Give that up, King, or I'll have the law on you."

"The law won't touch me," said Matt. "This paper

was prepared by you for Mrs. Traquair to sign; as a friend of Mrs. Traquair's I have the right to look the trap over before you spring it."

"Well, of all the impudence— Say, I wouldn't let you fly that aëroplane for me if it never got a try-out at Fort Totten. I'll be even with you for this, my lad! I'll—I'll—"

Murgatroyd choked up with wrath and could not finish. Meanwhile, Matt had glanced at the paper. One glance was sufficient.

"This, Mrs. Traquair," said he, "is a document conveying all your right, title, and interest in your late husband's aëronautical inventions, and in the aëroplane now in the post trader's store at Fort Totten, to Amos Murgatroyd. And the consideration is three hundred dollars. You will not sign it, of course?"

"But what am I to do?" faltered the woman hopelessly.

"Whatever you do, Mrs. Traquair, you must not sign away your interest in what may perhaps prove valuable property, for such a small sum."

Then Matt, with steady hands, ripped the document into ribbons.

If Murgatroyd had been angry before, he was fairly beside himself now.

"You—you young scoundrel," he cried, shaking his fist, "I'll teach you to meddle in my business affairs. This isn't the last of this, not by a long chalk. I'll have this woman and her brats out in the street before night. I'll—"

"You'll keep a respectful tongue between your teeth, that's what you'll do," and Motor Matt stepped resolutely toward the broker.

There was something in the lad's bearing that caused

Murgatroyd to grab his hat and retreat precipitately to the door.

"You'll hear from me, the pair of you," he snarled, "before you're many hours older."

Then the door slammed. Through the open window, edged with its torn streamers of mosquito net, Matt could see the broker hustling through the gate. A choking sob struck on the lad's ears, and he whirled to find Mrs. Traquair in a chair, her face in her hands.

There were ample evidences of poverty in the bare little front room, and the appearance of the woman herself testified eloquently of a fierce effort to keep the wolf from the door by grinding toil. Matt's heart was full of sympathy for her in her trouble.

"Don't take it so hard, Mrs. Traquair," said Matt, stepping to her side. "There may be a way out of this."

She lifted her head.

"No, there is no way out," she answered, in a stifled voice, "you don't know Mr. Murgatroyd! You don't know what it means to owe him money and not be able to pay him even the interest."

"How much do you owe him?"

"Just a thousand dollars."

"But he said the interest due, if I recall his words, was one hundred and fifty dollars."

"That's right—fifteen per cent."

"Fifteen per cent? Great spark-plugs! Why, that's usury."

"Not out here. Harry borrowed the money on our homestead, up in Wells County. He needed it to build his aëroplane, and he needed a lot more that he raised by selling his live stock and farming tools and some of

the furniture. He thought he'd get everything back when he showed what the aëroplane could do, and sold it to the government. But—but the very machine that was to make our fortune has taken his life, and—and what am I to do?"

Mrs. Traquair's face went down into her reddened, toil-worn hands again.

"There may be a way out of this, Mrs. Traquair," said Matt. "It's clear, I think, that Murgatroyd is a thief and a scoundrel. If he didn't believe there was merit in your husband's invention he wouldn't be trying to get hold of it. Have you any drawings, or papers from the patent office, that I can look at to get an idea of what the aëroplane is like?"

"There is a model—"

"Good! A model will do better than anything else."

Mrs. Traquair went into another room and brought out an old "telescope" grip. Unbuckling the straps with fingers that still trembled, she lifted out of the grip and held up for Matt's inspection the beautifully constructed model of an aëroplane.

Matt sat down in a chair and took the model on his knees. For all of ten minutes he studied the small machine, his eyes glowing with amazement and delight.

"I haven't had much experience with aëroplanes," said Matt finally, lifting his eyes to Mrs. Traquair's, "but I've put in a good deal of time studying them. I came to Jamestown in the hope that I could make a deal with Murgatroyd and get a little practical work with a real flying machine. When I first met Murgatroyd I didn't understand the circumstance so well as I do now; and after overhearing what I did while standing outside that window, and after

inspecting this model, I am more anxious than ever to make an acquaintance with the larger machine at Fort Totten. You haven't signed any papers giving Murgatroyd a hold on that machine, have you, Mrs. Traquair?"

"I haven't put my name to anything," declared the woman. "Harry had arranged for the government test, and had sent the machine to Fort Totten before the—the accident. After that, Mr. Murgatroyd came here and said he would have to take the aëroplane, and get some one to fly it, unless I could pay him the interest money. What could I do?" The poor woman made a pathetic gesture with her hands. "There were the funeral expenses to pay, and I could not even think of paying the interest. Mr. Murgatroyd said that he would try and find some one who was fool enough to risk his neck in the aëroplane, and that if he could find such a person he would talk with me again. That was the reason he came here this morning."

Matt placed the model on the table, and walked thoughtfully up and down the room.

"There are two or three ideas embodied in this aëroplane, Mrs. Traquair," said he, halting in front of the woman, "that seem to me to be of immense value. Do you know whether Mr. Traquair protected the ideas with patents?"

"Harry said that all his inventions were securely protected. I can find the papers if you—"

"Your word is enough, for the present. A friend of mine came to Jamestown with me, and we have a little money which we would like to invest. Now, I will make this proposition: If you will give me an order on the post trader at Fort Totten for the aëroplane, I will go to the fort at once and familiarize myself with the machine; then, when the time for the government test

arrives, I'll put the aëroplane through its paces. If the try-out is a success, then I and my friend are to have half of the fifteen thousand dollars to be paid for the machine. I will stand my own expenses, and, in addition, will give you five hundred dollars. You can take some of this money and pay Murgatroyd his interest; then, if the trial at Totten is a success, you will have plenty to take up the mortgage. Understand, I am not buying an interest in the invention—that, I firmly believe, is worth more than I could pay—but I am buying a half interest in what the government is to hand over, providing the government officials are pleased with the performance of the aëroplane."

Mrs. Traquair was so overwhelmed she could hardly speak.

"I don't want to rob you," she protested; "I don't want to rob anybody, or—"

Matt interrupted her with a laugh.

"I'm willing to take a chance, Mrs. Traquair," said he. "If you will come to the Gladstone House at three o'clock this afternoon, we'll have a lawyer draw up the papers, and I'll give you your money. Can I take that model with me to the hotel? I'm a stranger to you, so I'll leave twenty dollars in place of the model."

"Who'll I ask for when I come to the hotel?" inquired Mrs. Traquair.

This unexpected stroke of fortune seemed to have dazed her. She had heard Murgatroyd call Matt by name, but she did not appear to remember.

"Matt King," the young motorist answered.

A cry of astonishment fell from Mrs. Traquair's lips.

"I've heard my husband speak of you dozens of times!" she exclaimed. "A friend of his, in Chicago,

sent him a newspaper clipping about you. Motor Matt is what you were called in the newspaper article, and you had a flying machine—"

"A dirigible balloon, Mrs. Traquair," interrupted Matt. "May I take the model?"

"Yes, yes," answered the woman eagerly, "do whatever you please—I am sure Harry would have it so if he could be here and speak for himself. Heaven is kind to raise me up a friend like you, at such a time."

Hope glowed in Mrs. Traquair's face—for the first time, it may be, since her husband's death—and Matt was happy, for it was a pleasure to know that he was doing some good in the world while helping himself.

A few minutes later, with the telescope grip in his hand, he left the house and made his way swiftly in the direction of the hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

MATT EXPLAINS TO M'GLORY.

Joe McGlory sat in front of the Gladstone House wondering what had become of his pard. Matt had been gone from the hotel for three hours, and when he left he thought he would be back in an hour. Just as McGlory had made up his mind to go bushwhacking around the town, in the hope of picking up his pard's trail, the king of the motor boys turned the corner, carrying a telescope satchel, and walking rapidly.

"Thought you were lost, strayed, or stolen, Matt," sang out McGlory. "What have you got there?" he added, his eyes on the grip.

"A flying machine," laughed Matt.

"Speak to me about that!" gasped the cowboy. "Has it come to this, pard, that every man can tote a flying machine in his grip, then unpack, and hit a trail through the clouds whenever he takes the blessed notion? Go on!"

"It's only a model," went on Matt. "Come up to our room, and I'll tell you about it."

"Let's sit in at grub pile first. The dinner gong was pounded half an hour ago, and I'm as hungry as a buck Injun on a diet of cottonwood bark."

Matt took the satchel into the dining room with him, and kept it between his feet all the while he was eating.

"You act like that thing was full of gold bricks," remarked McGlory, as he and Matt climbed the stairs to their room as soon as the meal was done.

"Not gold bricks," said Matt. "There's the biggest

little thing in this grip, Joe, you ever saw in your life."

"Have you hired out to that Murgatroyd person as the human sky-rocket?" inquired McGlory, as he unlocked and opened the door of the room.

"I'm going to try out an aëroplane, up at Fort Totten, but not for Murgatroyd. A lot of things came up this morning, and that's what took me so long. The only way for you to get the whole business straight is for me to begin at the beginning. Now sit down, take it easy, and I'll tell you what I've found out, and what I've done."

The cowboy was anxious to see what was in the satchel, but Matt made no move to gratify his curiosity, just then; instead, he launched into his experiences at Murgatroyd's office, at City Park, and, lastly, at Mrs. Traquair's. When he was through, McGlory rubbed his eyes, stared, then rubbed his eyes and stared again.

"What's the matter with you?" inquired Matt.

"Dreamin'," answered the cowboy. "You're going to take a little fly for fame and fortune, and I'm in on the deal to the tune of two hundred and fifty cold plunks. It's all right, pard. I'd buy an interest in the North Pole if you thought there was any profit in icicles; but tell me: Will it be pleasant for your Uncle Joe to stand on the ground and watch you taking flyers in a thing that killed one fellow, and is hungry to wipe out another? Remember, I'm putting up two-fifty for the privilege. It's all very fine to help out a poor widow in distress, and to backcap a loan shark like Murgatroyd—that reads like a book, and I'm plumb tickled to help—but, son, there's your neck to think about."

"I'm not going to take any foolish chances, Joe," said Matt earnestly. "I'm hungry to run an aëroplane with a gas engine—and this aëroplane is the goods, don't forget that."

"Um-m! Suppose you let me look at the goods?"

Matt unbuckled the straps, and lifted the model of the aëroplane out of its case.

"Oh, tell me about that!" jeered the cowboy. "Two strips of cloth, one above the other, with an engine between 'em and a propeller behind! Fine! You'd look pretty a mile high in that thing!"

"This," said Matt, taking the model on his knee, "is the fruit of several hundred years of thought and study."

"Sufferin' buzzards! If I couldn't think up an arrangement like that in two minutes, and make it in three, I'm a Piute."

"When you understand it, Joe, you'll think differently. An aëroplane is like a kite, but instead of a string to pull it against the air, it has a propeller to push it. It's easy enough to fly a kite, but when you put a man in the kite, and a gas engine and other machinery, and take away the string that connects the kite with the earth, you're confronted with problems that it has taken centuries to solve."

"Keno!" spoke up McGlory. "And do you mean to say, Matt, that those two pieces of cloth have guessed the riddle?"

"They'll come pretty close to it," asserted Matt. "The thing that bothered, you see, was keeping the centre of wind-pressure coincident with the centre of gravity so the machine wouldn't turn turtle, or—"

"Help!" fluttered McGlory, throwing up his hands.

"A German named Lilienthal tried and failed, and so did an Englishman named Pilcher. It remained for the Wright brothers to work out the conundrum. Lilienthal and Pilcher shifted weights to keep their machine right

side up in the air, but the American scientists shift the ends of the wings, or planes. Traquair's invention does away with the shifting of weights or planes. Look here, Joe."

Matt pulled a diminutive lever affixed to a platform in the middle of the lower plane. The ends of the left-hand wings drew in, and the ends of the right-hand wings simultaneously extended. By pulling the lever the other way, a contrary movement was effected.

"Sufferin' blockheads!" muttered the cowboy, pushing his fingers desperately through his thick hair. "I'm only in the primer, pard, and you're leading me through the hardest part of the fifth reader. Shucks!"

"You can understand, can't you," went on Matt patiently, "that closing or opening the wings distributes the air pressure on each side of the machine and holds it level?"

"Never mind me, pard," said McGlory. "Keep right on."

"These bicycle wheels," and Matt indicated three wheels under the aëroplane, "give the machine its start."

"It's got to have a running start, eh?"

"Sure. When a bird begins to take wing it has to have some kind of a start. A small bird jumps into the air, and a big bird, like a condor, has to take a run before its wings take a grip on the atmosphere. It's the same with an aëroplane. A speed of twenty-eight miles an hour is required before the air under the planes will lift the flying machine. The motor of this machine is geared to the bicycle wheels, at the start. When the machine is running fast enough, the power is switched to the propeller—and up we go!"

"Mebby we do," muttered the cowboy, "but I

wouldn't bet on it. Then, again, if we go up will we stay up? And how can you guide the blooming thing skyward, or on a level, or come down?"

"Why," continued Matt, "these two little planes in front of the big ones attend to that." He shifted them with a lever to show McGlory how they worked. "This upright rudder behind," he added, "shifts the course to right or left."

"I'll take your word for it, Matt," said the cowboy. "I've taken a good many slim chances in my life, but you'll never catch me taking a chance on one of those things."

"I don't intend to ask you to take any chances, Joe," proceeded Matt. "All I want you to do is to trail along and attend to the work below while I'm in the air. Traquair has invented something here that's scientific and valuable, and I'm sure we can make a winner out of it, and not only help Mrs. Traquair, but ourselves, as well. That work of ours in Madison netted us more than twelve hundred dollars. The question is, do you want to put in two hundred and fifty dollars with me on the chance of raking in seven thousand five hundred up at Fort Totten?"

"You couldn't keep me from takin' that bet with a shotgun," averred the cowboy. "If you're in on the deal, then that means me, too, any old day you find in the almanac. We'll go to Fort Totten, Matt, and while you're paddlin' around in the air I'll hunt up soft places for you to 'light. Your head's pretty level on most things, and it's a cinch you must have this business figured out pretty straight, but—"

At that moment, a hullabaloo came up from the street. The room occupied by the boys was at the front of the building, and the two windows were open.

"Sufferin' cats," cried McGlory, starting for one of

the windows, "I wonder if that's a fire? Ever since we had that close call at the burnin' boathouse on Fourth Lake, I'm scared of a fire."

But it wasn't a fire. A Chinese boy was rushing down the street like a whirlwind, his silk blouse and baggy trousers fluttering and snapping in the wind of his flight, and his pigtail standing straight out behind him.

Back of the Chinaman came a bear. The bear was muzzled, and there was a collar about its neck and some six or eight feet of chain rattling around its legs. The bear was going after the Chinaman like a brown streak, and a whopping crowd of onlookers was gathering on the sidewalks.

"Great jump sparks!" cried Matt, astounded; "Why, it's Ping!"

"Ping it is, pard, and no mistake!" gasped McGlory; "and we left Ping in Madison, workin' for Lorry. How did he get here? And how in Sam Hill did that bear pick up his trail?"

But Matt was already out of the room, and halfway down the stairs on a run for the street.

CHAPTER V.

PING AND THE BEAR.

Ping Pong, the Chinese boy, had long ago made up his mind that he was going to work for Motor Matt. He wasn't particular whether he got any pay or not; just so Matt gave him enough to do to keep him around.

Ping had followed Matt from San Francisco to Madison, Wisconsin. When Matt was ready to leave Madison, he got Ping a good job. The Chinaman seemed a bit depressed, but he thanked Matt for the interest shown in his welfare, and seemed reconciled with his lot when he bade him good-by.

And now here was Ping, dropping into Jamestown like lightning from a clear sky. The Chinese boy was full of surprises, and his surprises were always dramatic—sometimes tragic.

When Matt burst from the hotel into the street, Ping was hustling for a telegraph pole. The bear was within a couple of lengths of him, and there was nothing for Ping to do but to find something he could climb.

Behind the bear raced a rough-looking man in a buckskin jacket. He was flourishing his arms and yelling, but the roar of the crowd prevented his words from being heard.

The people on the sidewalks were enjoying the spectacle immensely. The bear was muzzled, and the Chinaman was scared. It did not seem possible that any harm could come to the fleeing Celestial.

"Two to one on the bear!" whooped some one.

"It's the Chink gits my money!" guffawed some one else. "He's goin' like a limited express train, an' that

telegraph pole's too handy."

The crowd surged into the street and toward the pole. Ping was already climbing, but the pole was slippery, and when he had got up about twelve feet, he lost his "clinch" and slid downward. The bear was standing erect and reaching upward with its front paws. Ping slid down just far enough for the paws to reach for him and close on one of his feet.

He gave a yell of fear, and once more began frantically climbing. One of his wooden sandals was left behind. The bear dropped it with a sniff, and once more straightened up along the pole.

Again the slippery surface proved more than Ping could manage, and down he came with a rush. The bear got the other sandal before Ping could check his sliding, and the crowd went wild with delight.

The man in the buckskin coat had come close to the pole, but he made no move to interfere with proceedings.

Matt was not able to extract much fun from the situation. The bear's claws were sharp, and if they once came in contact with the Chinaman's body, the consequences might prove serious.

Quickly as he could, Matt forced himself through the edge of the crowd.

"Is that your bear?" he demanded of the man in the buckskin coat.

"Waal," drawled the man, with a scowl, "I reckon it ain't no one else's b'ar."

"Why don't you chase him away, then?" asked Matt indignantly. "Do you want him to kill the Chinaman?"

"It won't be much loss if the critter takes a chunk out o' him. He's only a Chink, anyways, an' he desarves all

he'll git."

This line of reasoning did not appeal to Matt. The man was leaning on a heavy club. That club was the only weapon handy, and Matt made a grab at it and pulled it out of the man's hands. With his support thus suddenly removed, the man fell flat in the street, striking his head against the stone curb at the edge of the walk.

No serious damage was done, and the man got up, swearing luridly. Matt gave no further attention to him, but turned toward the bear and Ping.

The Chinaman, tiring with his useless efforts, had started for the third time to slide down the pole. Before the bear could use its paws, Matt whirled the club and struck the brute a heavy blow on the head. The bear was dazed, and dropped down on all fours, blinking at Matt.

Ping dropped to the foot of the pole, rolled off to one side, bounded erect, and continued his flight down the street.

Barely had Ping got away when Matt felt himself grabbed from behind.

"I'll l'arn ye ter rough things up with me!" snarled a hoarse voice.

Then, before Matt could make a move to defend himself, he was hurled backward so fiercely that he lost his footing and fell sprawling in the dust.

The man, beside himself with rage, caught up the club, which had fallen from Matt's hand, and would have attacked the lad with it had McGlory not interfered.

While the club was still poised in the air, the cowboy hurled a stone. The missile struck the man's arm, and

the uplifted hand fell as though paralyzed.

There was now another vent for the man's seething anger. With a furious oath, he pushed his left hand under his buckskin coat, and jerked a revolver from his hip pocket. One of the bystanders caught the weapon away from him.

Just at that moment a policeman showed himself, stepping briskly between the man and McGlory.

"What's the trouble here?" asked the officer. "What are you trying to do, Siwash Charley?"

"I'm er peaceable man," roared Siwash Charley, "but I ain't a-goin' ter be tromped on!"

"Who's been tramping on you?" inquired the officer soothingly.

"Fust off, it was er Chink. I was bringin' that tame b'ar inter town fer delivery ter Hank Bostwick, at the ginmill he runs, an' I sot down ter rest. I was ca'm, an' the b'ar was ca'm, but erlong comes the Chink an' sets off a big firecracker he had left over from the Fourth, I reckon. Anyways, the blasted thing went off like er cannon, an' I was blowed clean over the b'ar. When I got up an' looked around, the b'ar was goin' after the Chink, allymand-left an' all sashay. I took arter the b'ar. Seein' as how Bostwick is goin' ter gi'me twenty-five dollars for the brute, I wasn't wantin' him ter git loose. When I got hyer, that feller"—Siwash Charley nodded toward Matt—"pulled a stick I was kerryin' out from under me. I sailed inter him an' then that other feller"—he indicated McGlory—"let loose with a rock an' purty nigh busted my arm. I ain't goin' ter stand fer no sich doin's—that ain't Siwash Charley's stripe, not noways."

"Did the Chink throw the firecracker in the first place?" asked the officer.

"He must er done it. If he hadn't, the b'ar wouldn't have took arter him. I'll fix that Chink if I ever git hands on him; an' I'll fix you fellers, too," he added, scowling at Matt and McGlory.

"The Chinaman was trying to climb the telegraph pole and get away from the bear, officer," spoke up Matt, "but every now and then he'd slip down the pole, and the bear would slap at him with his claws. Siwash Charley, as you call him, stood by and never made a move to interfere. I grabbed the club and struck the bear, and the next thing I knew I was caught from behind and thrown on my back."

"I'd 'a' welted you good, too," snarled Siwash Charley, "if that rock hadn't landed on me."

The officer looked around. Three men had caught the bear by the chain and were holding the brute warily. The bear seemed to be recovering its good nature, the Chinaman had escaped, and little damage had been done.

"Let the matter drop, Charley," said the officer. "You haven't any proof that the Chink threw the cannon cracker, or—"

"B'ars hes got sense," blustered Siwash Charley, "an' this un wouldn't hev chased the Chink if he wasn't guilty."

"Well, you go on to Bostwick's and let the matter drop. Scatter," the officer added sharply to the crowd, "the fun's over with, and there's nothing more to see."

Matt beckoned to McGlory, and the two started back toward the hotel. A roar from Siwash Charley caused them to turn their heads.

"I'll saw off squar' with ye, yet," shouted Siwash Charley, shaking his fist.

"Say moo and chase yourself!" taunted the cowboy. "You're more kinds of a fake and false alarm than I know how to lay tongue to."

The officer gave Siwash Charley a push in the direction of his bear, and Matt caught his chum by the arm and drew him into the hotel.

Annexing himself to the bear by means of the chain, Siwash Charley shook his head angrily, rubbed his forearm up and down the front of his buckskin coat, and proceeded on toward Bostwick's.

When he got clear of the crowd, a man stepped out into the street. It was Murgatroyd, and there was an ominous gleam in his eyes.

"I've got a job for you, Siwash," said the broker.

"Is thar any money in it, Murg?" demanded Siwash. "It's got ter be spot cash an' good pickin's, er we don't hitch."

"You'll get your pay before you begin. Come to my office at five o'clock."

"I'll be thar," and the ruffian continued on toward Bostwick's, still rubbing his aching forearm up and down the front of his greasy buckskin coat.

Murgatroyd, muttering to himself, faded away into the building known as Brown's block.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW VENTURE.

"That old persimmon is about ripe enough to be picked," growled McGlory, as he and Matt climbed the stairs on their way back to their room. "He's one of those cold game gents that gets quick and deadly every time a fellow looks at him cross-eyed. The next time he and I come together there's going to be fireworks."

"The chances are," said Matt, "we've seen the last of him. We'll close up our business with Mrs. Traquair at three o'clock, and then we'll catch the first train for Totten. That will finish our dealings with Siwash Charley, and with Murgatroyd, too, I hope. There's a lot of work ahead of us during the next two weeks, and we'll—"

Matt and McGlory were just turning from the hall into their room. Some one had arrived in the room during their absence. As fate would have it, it was Ping.

The Chinaman sat in a rocking-chair near the window. He was nervous and uncomfortable, not so much because of his recent experience with the bear, perhaps, as because he feared the sort of reception he was to receive from Motor Matt.

"Well, if it ain't Little Bright-eyes himself!" grinned McGlory. "You're more kinds of a surprise party, Ping, than I know how to describe. What did you set off that cannon cracker under the bear for?"

"My no shootee fi'clackel," expostulated Ping. "Melican boy shootee. Beal make one piecee mistake—chasee Ping, no chasee Melican boy. Whoosh! No likee."

"Where did you come from, Ping?" asked Matt.

"Mad'son. My no workee fo' anybody but Motol Matt. Tlakee tlain, come 'long."

"You didn't intend to stay in Madison any of the time, did you?"

Ping shook his head.

"Why didn't you tell me you were not going to stay there?"

"Plaps, my tellee, you no likee. My makee wait till come to Jimtown, then tellee. You no likee, no can send back."

A crafty grin worked its way over Ping's yellow face.

"You can't shake him, pard," laughed McGlory.

"How did you know where we were coming?" asked Matt.

"No savvy the pidgin. Come on same tlain."

"Then you got here on the same train we did?"

"Sure."

"Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"My stay by othel hotel. Bumby, thisee molnin', makee sneak fo' Gla'stone House. Watchee beal, then fi'clackel makee go bang. China boy lun allee same Sam Hill. Teleglaph pole him heap slick. Makee climb, makee slide down, thlee time. Beal ketchee one shoe, ketchee othel shoe, mebbysso ketchee China boy neck, sendee top side, but fo' Motol Matt. Whoosh! You heap mad with Ping?"

"What's the use of getting mad at you, Ping?" smiled Matt.

The little Chinaman bounded joyfully out of his

chair.

"My workee for you some mo'?" he asked.

"You seem bound to work for me, whether I've got anything for you to do, or not."

"My no havee luck 'less my workee fo' you. Plenty queer pidgin. One piecee luck come plenty time when my stay 'lound Motol Matt; no gettee luck when my no stay. What you do now, huh?"

"We're going to hit the clouds on two canvas wings, Ping," said McGlory.

"No savvy," returned Ping.

"Matt's going to fly. Savvy fly? All same bird," and the cowboy flapped the edges of his coat, and lifted himself on one foot.

"My no makee good bird," said Ping, the white running into the yellow of his face. "My makee fall, bleakee neck."

"You'll wish you'd stayed in Madison, Ping, before you get through with this bag of tricks," went on McGlory, winking at Matt. "We're going to let you—"

The cowboy was intending to have a little fun with Ping, but, at that moment, a boy from the office appeared in the doorway.

"Mrs. Traquair is waiting for you down in the office, Motor Matt," he announced.

"It's three o'clock!" exclaimed Matt. "Get your two hundred and fifty, Joe, and come with me."

"I've got it, pard, right in my jeans," answered McGlory.

"You can stay here, Ping, till we come back," went on Matt to the Chinaman.

"Can do," chirped Ping.

Thereupon Matt and McGlory went downstairs, and the king of the motor boys introduced his friend to Mrs. Traquair. The clerk directed them to a lawyer, and they were soon in the lawyer's office, stating their business.

Mrs. Traquair had brought her husband's papers along with her, and also a duplicate of the mortgage on the Wells County homestead.

The lawyer's name was Matthews, and he was no friend of Murgatroyd.

"Murg's a skinner," observed Matthews, "everybody in these parts knows him for that. I'll bet he's been planning all along to get his clutches on this invention of your husband's, Mrs. Traquair. Motor Matt is doing the handsome thing by you, I must say. He takes all the risk, spends all his time and money, and then gets nothing if the try-out at Fort Totten isn't a success. Just sit down, please. I'll not be more than five minutes drawing up a memorandum of agreement."

When the paper had been drawn up, signed, and witnessed, and the money turned over, the only thing that remained was for Mrs. Traquair to give the boys an order on Benner, the post trader at Fort Totten, for the aëroplane. This second paper having been written out and signed, and the five hundred dollars turned over, Matt and McGlory found themselves embarked on a new venture.

It was different from anything Matt had yet undertaken. Driving a dirigible balloon was utterly unlike manœuvring an aëroplane. In a "dirigible" one had only to sit calmly in the driver's seat, keep the motor going, and attend to the steering. In an aëroplane, on the other hand, there was a certain knack to be acquired. Air pressure under the wings was

never the same for two consecutive moments, and if the swiftly changing centre of air pressure was not met instantly by extending or contracting the wings, disaster would be sure to result. But Matt had studied the subject, felt sure that he could acquire the necessary knack, and was determined to carry the venture through to a success.

"You're a plucky young man," said Matthews to the king of the motor boys when the business had been finally wound up, "but I want to warn you to look out for Murgatroyd. It does me good to hear how you sailed into him, but that was something Murg will never forget. As matters are now, you've beaten him, but he'll never let it rest at that. He'll move heaven and earth to get even with you. Keep your eyes skinned, that's all. You're engaged in a worthy work, and I believe you'll succeed, but you've got to be wary. I'm going with Mrs. Traquair to pay this interest. Murg won't attempt any bulldozing tactics while I'm around, you can depend on that."

"You might see that he doesn't persecute Mrs. Traquair while we're at Fort Totten, Mr. Matthews," said Matt. "If he gets his interest, he can't make her any trouble, can he?"

"He can't make her any more trouble until next year, when the interest and principal both become due. Long before that, I hope Mrs. Traquair will be able to settle up with Murgatroyd in full. She can, too, if your work at Totten is successful."

"How much do I owe you for drawing up these papers?" Matt asked.

"Not a red!" was the prompt response. "Do you think I don't know what you are trying to do for Mrs. Traquair? And do you think I won't do as much as I can to help her? Why, I got Harry Traquair's patents

through for him, and I'm proud to say that he was my friend. He knew Murgatroyd was a skinner, just as well as I did, and at the time of his death he was exhausting every effort to fit himself for making a 'go' of that deal at Totten. He was planning on using that money to get himself out of Murgatroyd's strangling grip. It looks like a special favor of Providence, Motor Matt, that you happened along here just when you did."

Reference to her husband brought tears into Mrs. Traquair's eyes. Stepping to Matt impulsively, she caught one of his hands.

"I appreciate what you are doing, Motor Matt," said she in a low tone, "and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I know the risks you are running, but somehow I have the utmost confidence that you are going to pass safely through them all, and please the officers at Fort Totten."

Matt was touched by the poor woman's gratitude. He pressed her hand cordially and reassuringly.

"I've gone into this thing to succeed, Mrs. Traquair," he answered, "and you may count on me to do my best."

"When do you go North?" asked the lawyer.

"We can't go before morning. The afternoon passenger has left, and we'll have to take the 'accommodation' at eight o'clock."

"Well, good-by, and good luck. If I can ever do anything for you here, in a legal way, don't hesitate to call on me."

Matthews gripped the young motorist's hand heartily, and the little party separated, the lawyer and Mrs. Traquair starting for Murgatroyd's office, while Matt and McGlory made their way back to the Gladstone House.

"Little as I know about flyin'," remarked McGlory, "and scary as I am about letting you go up in that aëroplane of Traquair's, just the same I feel like patting myself on the back. It's a brand-new venture, pard, but it's a good one. There's something in it, you see, besides just helping ourselves."

"It's not going to be easy," remarked Matt.

"That's you! Sure, it ain't going to be easy, hitting up a cloud trail and sliding around through the air in a machine that's—"

"I don't mean that," interrupted Matt. "During the last hour or so I've had a hunch that Murgatroyd is going to get busy."

"I'll take care of that old hardshell," declared the cowboy, with confidence, "if you do the rest of the work with that sky-scraper. That's what I'm along for, savvy?"

CHAPTER VII.

A PARTNER IN VILLAINY.

Murgatroyd's interview with Matthews and Mrs. Traquair, at the time the one hundred and fifty dollars interest was paid, threw the broker into a spasm of chagrin and temper. One would have thought that Murgatroyd would have been delighted to get his interest money. But it was not the interest that Murgatroyd wanted, so much as financial embarrassment on the part of Mrs. Traquair, which would ultimately lead to foreclosure of the mortgage on the Wells County homestead.

To Motor Matt the broker rightly attributed the widow's ability to pay the interest. And if Motor Matt had given Mrs. Traquair the interest money, it was a foregone conclusion that Matt had interested himself in the aëroplane at Fort Totten.

Matt, the wrathful broker reasoned, was to fly the aëroplane at the forthcoming government trial. If he pleased the government, and the machine was bought, then Mrs. Traquair would be able to take up the mortgage.

Murgatroyd paced his office for a long time after Matthews and Mrs. Traquair left. In the midst of his reflections, Prebbles thrust his head in at the door.

"A caller, sir," he announced.

"Who is it?" demanded Murgatroyd sharply.

"Siwash Charley."

A feeling of gratification swept through the broker's nerves.

"Send him in here. And, I say, Prebbles, you can put on your hat and coat and go home. You're quitting an hour earlier than usual, but you can make it up some other day."

Precious few holidays old Prebbles got without "making them up."

"Very good, sir," he said in his usual humble fashion, and faded into the other room.

A moment later Siwash Charley faced the broker.

"Shut the door, Siwash," said Murgatroyd.

"That looks like we was a-goin' ter talk over things that was mighty important," said Siwash Charley as he closed the door.

"We are."

"You're an ole fox, all right," chuckled the other; "reg'lar ole gouger. Money layin' around ev'rywheres," Siwash added, his eyes on the desk where the money paid by Mrs. Traquair had been left.

"There's a hundred and fifty in that pile, Siwash," said Murgatroyd. "If you agree to help me, I'll give you that; and, if you carry out the work successfully, I'm going to give you a hundred and fifty more."

Siwash Charley's eyes opened wide.

"Must be somethin' mighty tough on ter make ye loosen up like that," said he. "Mebby it's so tough I won't dast ter touch it."

"I guess it's not too tough for you," returned Murgatroyd dryly.

"I've done a heap o' things fer you, Murg, as won't bear the searchin' light o' day," observed Siwash Charley. "From now on, though, I'm a-goin' ter be a leetle keerful."

"If you don't want the job," rapped out the broker, "say so, and I'll get somebody else."

"How kin I tell whether I want it or not till ye explain what the work is?"

"I'll not go into details until you agree to take hold. I'd be in a nice fix, wouldn't I, if I told you what was up, and then had you back out on the proposition."

"Ye'll have ter tell me somethin' about it, that's shore."

"I'll tell you this much, Siwash, and that is that the two young fellows you mixed up with, when the bear treed the Chinaman, are the ones you'll have to go after. That ought to be enough, hadn't it?"

Charley's eyes kindled viciously.

"I'm arter them two," he growled.

"Of course you are," went on the broker, noting with satisfaction the effect his words had had on his caller. "You're pretty well acquainted up around Devil's Lake, aren't you?"

"I spent a good many years thar, Murg."

"Do you know Benner, the post trader?"

"Him an' me uster be blanket mates."

"Well, this young fellow who roughed things up with you, is called Motor Matt."

"That's his name, hey? I'm going ter saw off squar' with this Motor Matt. Revenge is the sort o' por'us plaster I put on my grudges ter draw out the pizen. I'm wuss ner a rattler's bite when I land on a feller, Murg."

"There's a flying machine in the post trader's store at Fort Totten. Traquair sent it up there for a government trial, two weeks from to-day."

"I see."

"This Motor Matt knows something about gas engines and flying machines, and I'm pretty sure he's going to Totten on the train to-morrow morning to familiarize himself with the Traquair flying machine, and try it out for the government when the time comes."

"Then I kin lay fer him around Totten, hey?"

"Not alone, Siwash."

The burly ruffian gave a grunt of disgust.

"Think I kain't handle that outfit alone, Murg? Oh, thunder! Why, them two fellers ain't much more'n kids. I kin pick 'em up, one in each hand, an' knock their heads tergether."

"Don't be overconfident, Siwash. If you are, it'll lose the game for us. You ought to have two more men associated with you—fellows you can depend on. You can either get them at Totten, or here in Jimtown."

"Who'll pay 'em?" asked Siwash cautiously.

"I'll give them twenty-five dollars each, if the work succeeds."

"That brings us down ter the work ag'in," said Siwash. "What is it, Murg?"

"Well, I don't want the flying machine tried out for the benefit of the government. I want something to happen so that this Motor Matt won't be able to give a demonstration of what the aëroplane can do."

"Got er axe ter grind, hey?"

"That part of the game is my business, Siwash, not yours," said the broker sharply. "The point is, do you want to follow out my plans, and make the money I'm offering you?"

"I'm hungry fer money, all right, Murg," ruminated Siwash. "I jest sold that pet b'ar ter Bostwick fer twenty-five—b'ar that I captered as a cub an' fetched up by hand. But twenty-five won't last me fer long. If I kin git three hundred off'n you it'll be quite a boost. Still, fer all that, I'd about made up my mind ter be honest from now on, an' cut out these hyer crooked deals. The way ye come at me, though, kinder sets me ter calculatin' that I'll go inter pardnership with ye fer one more round, an' then start ter bein' honest arter that."

Siwash Charley pushed up the right sleeve of his buckskin coat, unwrapped a reddened bandage, and exhibited a ragged wound.

"This hyer's what makes me listen ter ye, Murg," he gritted. "It ain't the three hundred dollars so much as this hyer arm. That's whar the young cub landed on me with the stone. I kain't never pass that up without sawin' off squar'."

"Of course you can't," declared Murgatroyd, doing everything in his power to foster Siwash Charley's hard feelings, "it wouldn't be like you to forget a thing like that, Siwash. I guess you haven't weakened to that extent."

Siwash Charley swore under his breath, replaced the bandage, and pulled down the sleeve of his coat.

"Will you help me?" went on the broker. "I've got to have your promise, before I can tell you the plan I've thought out."

"Yes, I'll help you," answered the ruffian.

"And you know of two trustworthy men you can get to go with you?"

"I could pick up a dozen game fellers right here in this man's town all inside o' fifteen minutes. They're

fellers, mind ye, who'd run the risk o' puttin' their necks in a noose fer twenty-five plunks."

"Those are the men we want. You're not to tell them anything about me, mind."

"That's allers yer game, Murg," and something like discontent pulsed in Siwash Charley's hoarse voice; "ye don't seem ter hev the sand ter stand up an' face the music."

"I can't afford to. How long do you think my loan business would last if I was found out in a job like this? You've got to screen me, Siwash."

"I'll promise ter do that, an' I ain't goin' ter let no one find out that I'm mixed up in it, either, if I kin help. Go ahead."

The broker got up, and moved softly to the door. Opening it quickly he peered into the outer office. Apparently satisfied, he closed the door again, and returned to his chair.

"Walls have ears," he remarked with a grim smile. "Draw your chair closer, Siwash."

The other, with another of his ill-omened chuckles, pulled his seat nearer to Murgatroyd; then, for five minutes, Siwash listened while the broker spoke in low, quick tones. When Murgatroyd was done, Siwash leaned back with an exultant expression on his face.

"By Jericho," he exclaimed, "we kin do it, Murg! Thar'll be no flyin' at the fort two weeks from terday. This Motor Matt kain't git ter Totten afore termorrer. If ye'll start me an' them other two fellers in a ottermobill, an' land us at Totten afore mornin', I'll agree ter take keer o' the flyin' machine. If I kain't do that, then I'll agree ter take keer o' Motor Matt. Count on me, Murg."

"Enough said, then," answered Murgatroyd, getting up. "Take your money, Siwash, and get out of here. It won't do for us to be seen leaving Brown block together. You go out first, and I'll follow, a little later. The automobile will be at the place I told you within an hour, and a trusty man will be along to drive it."

Two minutes later, Siwash Charley swaggered out of the entrance to the office building and slouched off toward a "shady" part of the town.

Five minutes after Siwash left, Murgatroyd emerged.

The broker was hardly out of sight, before Prebbles glided out of the Brown block, his face puckered with fear and apprehension. But there was resolution in the clerk's face, too, and he made his way in the direction of the Gladstone House.

CHAPTER VIII.

MATT SHIFTS HIS PLANS.

Matt, McGlory, and Ping had their supper together. Following supper, Ping went back to the other hotel where he had been staying, for the purpose of getting his luggage. The luggage was not extensive, being completely wrapped in a yellow silk handkerchief, knotted at the corners. There was a pair of grass sandals in the handkerchief bundle, and the Chinaman stood in need of new footgear.

When Ping had gone, Matt and McGlory sat out in front of the hotel, waiting for early bedtime to roll around. While they sat there, a stoop-shouldered, wizened figure shambled along the walk.

"Prebbles!" exclaimed Matt.

"Not so loud," croaked Prebbles. "Come along—drop in behind—don't let anybody notice."

Matt was surprised.

"Who's that?" queried McGlory.

"A clerk in Murgatroyd's office," whispered Matt, getting up.

"Look out for him, then, for he may be—"

"He's all right," cut in Matt. "Come along, Joe. Prebbles has something on his mind."

Deferring to Matt's better judgment, McGlory arose, and he and Matt followed Prebbles around one corner of the hotel, and into the dusky regions that lay in the vicinity of the rear of the building.

Here, in a place where they could talk unheard by

outsiders, Prebbles halted.

"What's the matter, Prebbles?" queried Matt, as he and McGlory drew close.

"Who's that with you?" asked Prebbles guardedly.

"A friend of mine."

"Is he the one that hit Siwash Charley with the stone?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. I got to be careful. If I'm not, Murg'll find out about this and pull the pin on me. I get eight dollars a week workin' for him, and I can't afford to lose it. Eight dollars a week pays my board, takes care of my laundry bills, buys a *War Cry*, and gives a little to the army every week. You boys belong?"

"Belong to what, Prebbles?" asked Matt.

"To the Salvation Army," answered Prebbles earnestly.

"No," answered Matt.

"I do. Soon's I leave here, and get my supper, I'm going to the barracks, get into my uniform, take my tambourine and march with the rest. I was converted two weeks ago. That's why I hate Murgatroyd and his ways. He's a robber. I want to do right, and that's why I'm here."

"What do you work for the old skinflint for, if you want to do right?" put in McGlory.

"There's nothing wrong with tainted money," replied Prebbles, "if you use it in the right way."

"I shouldn't think your employer would like to have you in the army," said Matt.

"He likes it. You see, he thinks it gives the office a

standing which it hasn't got, me being connected with the army. But little he knows what I'm doing on the side. It's because I belong, Motor Matt, that I spoke to you as I did when you left the office this forenoon; it's because of that, too, that I suspected something was up when Siwash Charley came into the office at close to five o'clock and Murg told me to take my hat and coat and go home; and it's because of that that I'm here, now, to give you a warning."

McGlory gave vent to a low whistle.

"Looks like Siwash and Murg were stackin' up against us, pard," said he.

"Does Siwash Charley know Murgatroyd?" inquired Matt.

"Well, I should say," breathed Prebbles. "Siwash is a hard citizen, and used to live by gambling, stealing, and other ways that the law wouldn't sanction if he was found out. He's a hard case, Siwash is—most as hard a case as Murg. I didn't leave the office when I was told to go. I put on my hat and coat, walked real heavy to the door, slammed it, and then slipped back to a curtain that hides a lot of old letter files. Back of the curtain there's a stovepipe hole from the outside room into Murg's. I climbed up on the letter files and listened at that hole. Wouldn't have done it if I didn't belong. Say," and Prebbles straightened himself with feeble pride, "it makes a regular lion of a man to join the army. You ought to be in; you don't know what you're missin'."

"The army's a good thing, Prebbles," said Matt, "and I'm glad you belong to it. Siwash and Murgatroyd talked about me?"

"Did they?" echoed Prebbles. "Well, they didn't talk about anything else. You see, Murg has got a mortgage on the Traquair homestead, up in Wells County, and

he wants to get the quarter section on the mortgage. I don't know why, but he's set, and determined to foreclose and annex the land. That's what he's workin' for. Everything was coming his way, Motor Matt, till you blew in and befriended Mrs. Traquair. Now Murg's afraid you'll win that government money and fix things so'st Mrs. Traquair can pay off the mortgage. Murg's goin' to fight you, and he's rung in Siwash and two of Siwash's friends to help him."

"Speak to me about this!" murmured McGlory. "That hunch of yours, Matt, is panning out good color already."

"How is he going to fight us, Prebbles?" asked Matt.

"By fixing things so'st you can't exhibit the flying machine at the time set. If it ain't exhibited then, the government'll back out. In case Siwash and his pals can't spoil the machine, then their orders are to eliminate Motor Matt. Oh, it's a villainous scheme, I tell you that."

"I guess we can take care of ourselves, Prebbles," averred Matt. "The first train for Totten leaves in the morning, and we're going up on that. Siwash and his pals can't get there ahead of us, and we'll be able to look after the aëroplane and see that nothing goes wrong with it."

"That's where you're lame," fluttered Prebbles. "Siwash and his pals have already started for Totten."

"Started!" exclaimed Matt. "How?"

"Automobile. That gang of scoundrels will get to Totten in time to carry out Murg's villainous plans to-night. I've wasted an hour tellin' you this, waitin' for you to get through supper. You see, I couldn't walk into the hotel and talk to you; everybody would have seen me, and told Murg about it. Then Murg would have

pulled the pin on me."

"What are Siwash and his friends going to do at Totten?" queried Matt, more wrought up over the information of Prebbles than he cared to admit.

"I don't know that, Motor Matt. When they talked over that part of it, they dropped their voices so low I couldn't hear. But you can bet it's a slick scheme, if Murg had anything to do with it."

"Sufferin' slow freights!" murmured McGlory. "It looks as though Murg had knocked us out of the running right at the start off."

"Prebbles," said Matt, "do you know of any one, here in town, who has a good automobile we could hire?"

"Well, there's a fellow named Black, a real estate man, who has a car. In spite of his name, he's as white a man as you'll find in a month of Sundays. Real estate's kinder dull, just now, and I know he sometimes lets out his car."

"Where does he live?"

"I pass his place on the way to my boarding house. If you want, I'll have him come around and see you."

"There's not much time to lose, Prebbles, as Siwash and his pals are already on the road. Call me up on the phone and let me know if he'll take us to Fort Totten to-night. If he will, have him hustle his car right around to the hotel."

"He'll ask a heap of money for the trip," suggested Prebbles. "How much are you willing to—"

"Tell him we'll give him fifty dollars if he'll get us to Fort Totten before morning."

"That'll fetch him! I guess I better start right off. You won't tell anybody about me giving Murg away to you?"

I don't want to have Murg pull the pin, you understand."

"Certainly we won't tell anybody!" answered Matt. "We're obliged to you, Prebbles, and here's a five-dollar bill to pay you for your trouble."

Prebbles drew back from the money.

"You can't make me take that," he declared. "Murg's the only robber in the loan office. I'd be as bad as him if I took the money. I'm doing this because I want to be square. They'd kick me out of the army if I took money for doin' what's right."

"Take this," insisted Matt, "and give it to the mission. You can do that, can't you?"

"Sure." Prebbles pocketed the money. "I'm off, now," he went on, starting away. "I hope you won't have more trouble than you can take care of, but you've got a hard gang against you. Good-by."

"So long, Prebbles."

The clerk vanished, and Matt and McGlory, their nerves tingling with the prospect ahead of them, went back into the hotel, and took chairs near the telephone booth.

Mr. Black himself called up, fifteen minutes later. He was willing to take the boys to Fort Totten that night, for the sum of fifty dollars; his machine was ready, and he'd be at the hotel in five minutes.

"Bully!" exulted McGlory, when Matt came out of the booth and reported what the real estate man had said. "Say, pard," the cowboy added, "you're throwin' your money around like a nabob. At this rate, how long'll that stake last that you picked up in Madison?"

"Till we pull down that government money on account of the aëroplane, Joe," returned Matt

decisively.

"You're banking on that?"

"To the last cent. I'll soon be on the wing, Joe, and making a fight for fame and fortune. That's got to be a winning fight, in spite of Siwash Charley and his pals, and in spite of Murgatroyd."

Matt's quiet confidence always inspired confidence in others.

"Whoop!" jubilated McGlory. "You've got a cheery way about you, pard, that's as catchin' as the measles. Sure we'll win; and we'll save the old homestead for Mrs. Traquair like the feller in the play."

CHAPTER IX.

DODGING TROUBLE.

The wagon road from Jamestown to Devil's Lake follows the railroad all the way. At Minnewaukon, near the western end of the lake, the wagon road to Fort Totten leaves the iron rails and points southeast.

The trail from Jamestown to Minnewaukon crosses a prairie almost as level as a floor, and the trail itself is like asphalt. From Minnewaukon southeast, the road is not so well traveled. Formerly the mail was hauled from Minnewaukon to the post by wagon, but the mail carrier was put out of business by a launch that crossed the lake from Devil's Lake City, on the north shore. The garrison at the fort, too, has dwindled to a corporal's guard, so that the post has become practically abandoned.

Black's car was not a late model. It had the obsolete rear-entrance tonneau, and was equipped with a four-cylinder thirty-horse-power motor. However, the car could "go." It would have been a poor car, indeed, which could not show its heels on such a road.

It was eight o'clock when Matt, McGlory, Ping, and Black ducked out of Jimtown, and struck into the trail that followed the railroad track and the river. Black attended to the driving, and Matt occupied the seat at his side. McGlory and Ping occupied the tonneau.

Matt explained to Black that there was a car, somewhere ahead, which they wanted to beat to the post trader's store at Fort Totten; also, that the car ahead was filled with men who were not on friendly terms with Matt and his companions.

Black was a man of spirit.

"You want to pass that car, then," said he, "and you want to dodge trouble?"

"Exactly," agreed Matt. "We don't want to butt into any trouble if we can help it. A whole lot depends upon our getting to the post trader's store right side up with care, and ahead of the other outfit."

"We'll do what we can," and Black nursed the car to its best speed.

The night was cool, the sky was cloudless, and the two acetylene lamps burned holes in the dark far in advance of the car as it devoured the miles. The forward rush, and the motor's music, thrilled Matt as they always did whenever he was connected with a speeding engine.

They whipped through a little town, hardly glimpsing the scattered lights before they had left them astern.

"This machine is a back number," remarked Black, "but she can slide along pretty well, for all that."

"You're right," said Matt. "I never saw a car with a rear door that could hold a candle to this one. But the road helps. It's like a boulevard."

"Take these Dakota roads, when they're neither too wet nor too dry, and they're hard to beat. We're going to lose time, though, going around the sloughs."

"Sloughs?" queried Matt.

"Just bog holes," went on Black. "They gully the prairie, here and there, have no inlet or outlet, and the water rises and falls in 'em like tides of the ocean. Queer, and I don't think the rise and fall have ever been explained. A wagon with high wheels can spraddle through, but low wheels and a lot of weight have to go round. But the car ahead will have to go

around, too. There's one of the sloughs, just ahead. We'll begin going around it right here."

Having been for several years in the real estate business, selling farms up and down the Jim River, Black had an accurate knowledge of the country.

Three extra miles were added to the journey by going around the slough north of Parkhurst. But this was a whole lot better than taking a chance and miring down.

"Did you know Harry Traquair, Mr. Black?" Matt asked, when they were once more in the road and forging ahead.

"I did," answered Black, "and he was one of the finest fellows you ever met. Still, for all that, I thought he was a little bit 'cracked' on the flying-machine question. He was always of an inventive turn, and he built his first aëroplane in his head, up on his farm in Wells County, long before he ever came to Jimtown and built one of canvas, and spruce, and wire guys. The Traquairs have had pretty hard sledding for the last three years. Mrs. Traquair had all the faith in the world in her husband, but she was possessed with the idea that some accident was going to happen to him, and she was never around when he flew the aëroplane. Too bad Harry Traquair had to be killed just as he was about to give his machine the first government test."

"That's the way luck runs, sometimes," said Matt. "What town's that?" he added, as they whisked through another cluster of lights.

"Buchanan," answered Black. "Say, but we're coming! The next place is Pingree, then Edmunds, then Melville. After Melville we'll swoop into Carrington, the biggest town between Jamestown and the lake. Here's where I'm going to hit 'er up for the last ounce of power in her cylinders. Hold on to your

teeth, everybody!"

More gasoline and a faster spark hurled the car onward in a way that made Ping chatter and hang to the rail behind the front seats.

Then something went wrong. The motor began to miss fire, the speed slackened, and the motor died with a gasping splutter.

"Oh, hang the luck!" growled Black, getting down.

While Matt kept hands off, Black tried out the primary circuit, then the secondary, then the buzzer. After that he cranked and cranked, but nothing happened except a distressing cough when the engine tried to start.

"Wouldn't that knock you slabsided?" growled Black. "I guess I'll have to take the carburetor to pieces, run pins through the spray nozzle and sandpaper the float guides. If that don't work, I'll go under the car and take off the fuel pipe, and—"

"It's a gravity feed, isn't it?" asked Matt.

"Yes."

"Well, don't lose any time on the carburetor, just yet."

Matt got at the gasoline tank. What he did Black couldn't see, but he wasn't more than a minute doing it.

"Now turn over your engine," said Matt, as he climbed back into his seat.

Black gave the crank a pull, and the pleasant chug in the explosion chamber came to his ears.

"What the dickens did you do?" he asked, dropping in behind the steering wheel and getting the car under way.

"The tank vent was clogged," explained Matt. "You can't feed by gravity if the gasoline tank is hermetically sealed."

"That's right; but how did you know the vent was plugged?"

"By the noise."

Black turned this over in his mind as they rushed onward.

"I guess you know a thing or two about motors," he remarked. "I never heard of a fellow who could tell the tank was hermetically sealed merely by the noise of the engine."

"It takes practice," said Matt, "that's all."

Pingree, Edmunds, and Melville were passed in record time, and the car rushed into Carrington at a quarter to ten. Carrington was quite a town, and the party halted to make some inquiries about the car that was preceding them.

From a man at one of the hotels they learned that a car had stopped at a filling station, about nine o'clock, and had dashed on to the northward about nine-fifteen. There were four men in the car, and one of them was Siwash Charley.

Siwash Charley seemed to be well known through that section, and the fact that the man at the hotel knew him made Matt and his friends certain that their enemies were less than an hour ahead.

"We're gaining on 'em!" cried McGlory, as the car shot through the outskirts of Carrington. "If we can keep on gaining, we'll reach the post trader's with ground to spare."

"We're good for it," averred Black. "Hold onto your hair and eyebrows."

The air fairly sang in the ears of the boys as the real estate man, throwing himself spiritedly into the contest, hurled his machine onward over the hard roadbed.

They flashed through a couple of towns which, Black said, were Divide and Sheyenne.

"The next place," the real estate man went on, "is Oberon. After that comes Lallie, and then Minnewaukon. But it's a waste of time to go to Minnewaukon. If we went there, we'd have to come southeast to Totten. We can leave the road at Lallie and go northeast to Totten, thus saving a few miles and considerable time. If—"

He broke off with a startled exclamation. Then, in a twinkling, it was out clutch, down brake, and a kick at the switch.

Another car, at a dead stop in the road ahead, had come like a blot under the glow of their lamps.

At that point the prairie was level, and no such thing as fences were to be seen.

"Sufferin' hold-ups!" exclaimed McGlory. "Something's gone wrong with the Siwash outfit. Look! Two of the gang are plugging this way."

The cowboy had "called the turn." Two dark forms untangled themselves from the dusky blot in the road which represented the car, and were running back along the trail. As the figures came closer, it could be seen that they were carrying rifles.

"Quick!" hissed Matt in Black's ear. "Go around the car—take to the prairie. We can make it if there's gas enough in the cylinders to take the spark."

As luck would have it, the engine took the spark and Black worked the car rapidly out of the road, heading

so as to give the other car a wide berth.

The dry grass crunched under the swiftly moving tires, and the car leaped away as Black coaxed her to do her best.

"Halt!" shouted a husky voice; "halt, or we'll put a bullet into you!"

"Drop down!" ordered Matt; "they're going to shoot."

"Let 'em shoot," said Black pluckily. "It's pretty dark for accurate firing, and we'll be out of range in a minute. I—"

Sping! Sping!

Two reports came from behind, two flashes leaped from the guns, and two bullets fanned the air close to the occupants of the car.

But the car dashed on over the rolling turf, and presently regained the road, once more, well in advance of the other automobile.

"I guess that's dodging trouble, all right!" muttered Black, with a grim laugh.

CHAPTER X.

BLANKED.

Only two shots were fired. Before the two scoundrels in the road could send any more bullets after Matt and his friends, their car had swept back into the road and the other automobile acted as a barricade.

"Siwash must have known who we were," remarked McGlory. "How do you reckon he found that out?"

"The way we kept on going when he ordered us to halt was enough for him," said Matt.

"I'll bet it was a surprise," chuckled McGlory. "Wish I could be close to Murg when he hears about it. We're in the lead, now, and I hope we can keep it."

"If the motor hangs together," returned Black, "we'll not only keep it, but increase it. That's a murderous gang, back there," he added. "There must be something mighty important awaiting you fellows at the post trader's to cause Siwash Charley to break loose like that!"

"Murgatroyd is back of it," said Matt.

"Murgatroyd? There's a double-dyed scoundrel, if I ever knew one."

Black's expressing himself in this manner opened the way for Matt to tell him the true inwardness of that night's work.

"You're the sort of fellows I like to help!" cried Black, as soon as Matt had placed the situation before him. "It's a fine thing for Mrs. Traquair, and it speaks mighty well for you that you've jumped into this thing like you've done. Not many young fellows would have

gone to all that trouble, with the prospect of a broken neck, or a bullet between the ribs as a possible reward. But let me tell you something, Motor Matt."

Black spoke very earnestly, and commanded the instant attention of the king of the motor boys.

"What's that, Mr. Black?"

"If I were you, I'd be more afraid of that aëroplane than of Siwash Charley or Murgatroyd."

"Flying the aëroplane is the least of my worries. I'm sure I can handle it all right."

"Don't be too sure. Traquair invented the machine, and it stands to reason that he knew it as well as any human being could; but see what happened! Something snapped, a gust of wind hit the aëroplane, and the whole business came down like a piece of lead."

"Accidents are always liable to happen, of course," said Matt; "the only thing to do is to guard against them as well as you can, and do your best."

"This North Dakota wind is a hard thing to figure on," pursued Black. "It gathers terrific force coming across the prairies, and it's liable to come up quick. I don't think Traquair's aëroplane could stand a sixty-mile-an-hour wind."

"She couldn't make any headway against it, but I believe she could be kept upright."

"That's your look out, Motor Matt, and I don't want to throw any wet blanket on your hopes. Be careful, that's all, and—"

Black broke off with an angry exclamation. The motor began to miss fire, and finally came to a stop.

Matt, his head inclined, had been listening sharply.

"What's the matter now?" asked Black, getting out.

"It's the carburetor, now," said Matt. "Sounds to me as though it was clogged."

The carburetor was taken apart and freed of the obstruction that kept the gasoline out of the mixing chamber.

A delay of half an hour was caused, and while they were at a halt an anxious look out was kept along the road, behind. Much to the relief of the boys and the real estate man, the other car failed to put in an appearance.

"They must be hung up with something serious," observed Black, as he once more started the car in the direction of Lallie.

"It can't be too serious to suit me," laughed McGlory. "I won't make any kick if they're kept back there on the road for a week."

"No such luck as that, Joe," said Matt.

Black was about to say something more when the motor went wrong again. It began to pound furiously.

Black's exasperation reached a point where he was tempted to say things. Matt, however, laughed at his impatience, and proceeded to right the trouble, warning his friends to keep a sharp look along the back track while he was doing it.

There was an hour's delay, this time, but still the other car did not show up, and Matt and his companions finally continued on their way, congratulating themselves that they were still in the lead.

Not much time was spent in Lallie. The town was dark, and all the inhabitants had undoubtedly been abed and asleep for several hours.

Matt looked at his watch just as they were bumping over the railroad tracks into the northeast road that led to Totten.

"Two o'clock," announced Matt.

Black groaned.

"Elegant time we're making," said he, "but we'll be at the post trader's by three o'clock, providing we don't have any more breakdowns."

This road was not nearly so good as the one they had been following, mainly because it was not so well traveled. Not more than fifteen miles an hour could be made.

"There's another road to Totten from Oberon," observed Black. "That road comes into this one about five miles this side of Totten. We'll soon be at the forks, now. I didn't suggest taking the Oberon road, because it's a good deal worse than the one we're following."

When they were close to the forks, the creak of a wagon reached their ears, and the gas lamps showed them a loaded vehicle just pulling into the Oberon road. This was the first team they had met since leaving Jamestown.

"Say, there!" yelled a man on the wagon. "Slow up a little with that chug cart o' yourn, will ye? My hosses ain't used ter sich sights."

Black lessened the speed and came on more slowly. The wagon was at a standstill, and the horses were snorting and rearing against the pole. The car got past without causing an accident, however, and, a little after three, drew up in front of the post trader's store.

The store was at the foot of a hill which overlooked the lake, and was surrounded by the fort. As was to be expected, the store was dark, and seemed deserted.

"Benner lives in the back part," said Black. "Go around the side of the building, Matt, and knock on the door. You'll not be long getting him up. I'll wait here till I see what luck you have, and then I'll put up the car and bunk down somewhere for the rest of the night."

Matt and McGlory jumped out of their seats and followed around the plank wall of the building. Although it was dark as Egypt in the shadow of the wall, yet they succeeded in locating the door, and pounded a loud summons on its panels.

The post trader was a sound sleeper, and it took three or four minutes to develop any signs of life within the dark store building.

At last, however, they could hear some one stirring around. A light appeared in a window, and a shuffling step was heard approaching the door.

"If you're Injuns," cried an angry voice, "get out! You can come after what you want in the mornin'."

"We're not Indians," said Matt. "Are you Mr. Benner?"

"That's my name, yes."

"Then we've got important business with you. Please open the door."

"Beats all a feller can't have no sleep," grumbled Mr. Benner, shoving a bolt and jerking the door open.

A big, sandy-haired man, in undershirt and trousers, stood confronting the boys, a flickering candle upheld in his right hand.

"What d'ye want?" demanded Benner.

"Here's a paper I want you to read," answered Matt, taking from his pocket Mrs. Traquair's order for the

aëroplane, and handing it to the post trader.

Benner grabbed the paper in his left hand, and held the candle in front of it.

"Jumpin' Mariar!" he gasped. "Here's an order for that bloomin' flyin' machine."

"Yes. We're here to take charge of it, Mr. Benner."

"Oh, y' are, eh? Well, I haven't got it. Looks kinder suspicious, too, this here order does."

"Haven't got it?" repeated Matt, staring at McGlory.

"Ain't I tellin' ye?" answered Benner in an irritated tone.

"Did some men come here in an automobile, a little while ago, and take it away?"

"Any one would have played hob takin' that flyin' machine away in an automobile," scowled Benner. "There's somethin' mighty queer about this. Step inside, you two, an' I'll show you that telegram."

Intensely disappointed, the two boys stepped into the room. Benner placed the candle on the table, and picked up a yellow sheet, which he handed to Matt.

"That come to the fort, about two hours ago, an' the lieutenant sent it down ter me," explained Benner. "I had to hustle some, but I worked through the trick. Now, less'n an hour after I get to bed, here you fellers come askin' for the flyin' machine. That's more'n I kin understand, that is."

The telegram read as follows:

"Send flying machine on the jump to Oberon. Get it off within an hour after you receive this. Will settle for your trouble with the man who brings it."

This message was addressed to the post trader, at

Fort Totten; had been sent from Oberon, and was signed by "Mrs. Traquair."

"Oh, sufferin' dummies!" cried McGlory. "Blanked, or I'm a Piute!"

Matt was fully as much wrought up as was his chum.

"This message is a forgery, Mr. Benner!" he cried. "Mrs. Traquair isn't in Oberon, and she never sent it."

"How was I ter know that?" snorted the post trader. "Soon's I got the message, I routed out my man, Jake, an' we hitched up to the wagon, loaded on that consarned machine that I've been holdin here, an' Jake started with it fer Oberon."

The cowboy gave a groan, and fell over against the wall.

"That must have been him we passed, Matt," he murmured.

Without pausing to reply, Matt whirled and ran out of the room. The aëroplane was on the road to Oberon, but the automobile could easily overtake the wagon. It was well, however, not to lose any time.

CHAPTER XI.

SIWASH SHOWS HIS TEETH—AND HIS HEELS.

Black's astonishment was great when Motor Matt reappeared at the front of the building and leaped into the car.

"Hustle for the Oberon road, Mr. Black!" Matt cried.

"What's to pay?" asked Black as McGlory flung himself into the tonneau.

"You remember that wagon we passed?" asked Matt.

"Of course, but—"

"Well, the aëroplane is aboard the wagon."

"Great Cæsar!" Black was already on the ground, cranking up. "How did that happen?" he asked, getting back into the car and turning it the other way.

When they were well started, Matt explained about the telegram received by the post trader.

"It's easy to understand what happened," said Matt. "Murgatroyd's plan was to send Siwash Charley here after the aëroplane. If Siwash had had all night and part of to-morrow to work in, he and his pals would have got away with the flying machine in spite of us. But Siwash had to make another move when he saw us on the road. It was a clever move, too, although it only won out by a scratch. Siwash went on to Oberon and sent that message, signing Mrs. Traquair's name to it. If we hadn't had so many breakdowns, we'd have reached the post trader's before his man got away with the aëroplane."

"Well," declared Black, "we can overhaul the wagon

long before it gets to Oberon. If Siwash Charley had used his head a little more, he'd have known there wasn't one chance in ten of this move of his succeeding.

"And to think of us sailin' right past that wagon," muttered McGlory, "and even slowing up so as not to scare the horses! Funny how things will turn out sometimes."

The Chinese boy had been using his eyes and ears a great deal more than his tongue. But his emotions, at every stage of that ride from Jamestown, had changed with Matt's and McGlory's. Now Ping was all chagrin, and a wild desire to "push on the reins" and overhaul Jake.

The road was fairly good until the automobile reached the forks; after that, it ran into hilly country where there was considerable sand.

Black forced the car all he could, but the poor speed it developed filled the impatient boys with dismay and anxiety.

"We'll never overtake that wagon in a thousand years, at this gait," fumed McGlory.

"You forget, Joe," answered Matt, "that if we're going slow, the wagon is going a lot slower."

"That's the talk," said Black. "We'll come up with the wagon several miles this side of Oberon."

As the car ground through the sand, and chugged up the hills, the boys kept a sharp watch ahead. Dawn brightened in the east, and the gray streamers crept steadily toward the zenith.

"Five o'clock," said Matt, looking at his watch. "The sun will be up in half an hour."

"Precious little I care for that," chuckled Black.

"There's Jake!"

The car had topped a hill which gave its passengers a long view out over the level prairie. Far away in the distance the dim gray light showed the boys a dark blot on the plain. It was impossible to tell much about the blot, at that range, but there could be no doubt concerning it. Surely it was the wagon; it could be nothing else.

"Jake must have punctured a tire," observed McGlory humorously. "What has he stopped for?"

"Possibly he stopped to breathe his horses," suggested Black. "We'll eat up the ground, now, for the road is on the level, and there's less sand."

Black let the car out. As he and the boys came closer and closer, a startling scene slowly unfolded before their eyes.

The wagon was at a standstill, just as the cowboy had said, and beside it was a motor car. Four or five figures could be seen moving around in the vicinity of the wagon. Abruptly these figures hunched together, and stood quietly.

"It's the other automobile," said Black between his teeth. "Siwash Charley and his pals came out from Oberon to meet Jake."

"They've got together and are looking this way," breathed McGlory.

"Mebbyso they makee shoot," chattered Ping.

"Shall we go on?" queried Black. "It's for you to say, Motor Matt. I don't think Siwash will dare rough things up so close to the fort, and in broad day."

"Yes," said Matt grimly, "we've got to go on. For all we know, Murgatroyd may have told Siwash to destroy the aëroplane. In fact, that may be what he's doing,

now. Go on, Mr. Black, and go with a rush."

The boys fell silent as the car bounded on along the road. All of them felt the danger of their position, but neither McGlory, Black, nor Ping would have thought of asking Matt to turn back.

In a few moments the boys were so close they could see the guns which Siwash Charley and his friends were holding in their hands. Matt, however, had more concern for the bulky load in the wagon than for the guns. So far as he could see, the load was intact, and had not been tampered with.

The wagon was facing toward Oberon, and the car—drawn up alongside the wagon—was pointed toward Fort Totten. Several yards in front of the car stood Siwash Charley, and two other men, who looked fully as villainous. All of these three had rifles.

Jake was standing up in the front part of the wagon, hanging to the reins with one hand and looking back. The driver of the automobile was leaning against the front of the car, watching passively for what was to come. An atmosphere of ugly foreboding hovered over the scene as Black stopped his car within a dozen yards of Siwash Charley and his two pals.

"That's erbout as fur as we reckoned we'd let ye come," shouted Siwash Charley. "If ye'd got hyer ten minutes later, ye'd hev found the flyin' machine scattered all over the perary."

"Do you mean to say," cried Matt, standing up in the car, "that you were going to wreck the aëroplane?"

"That's what," answered Siwash Charley, "an' we're goin' ter do it, yet. Ye needn't think that yer comin' will make any diff'rence. I told you cubs I'd git even with ye fer what ye done, but when I showed my teeth ye didn't allow I'd bite. I'm showin' my fangs ag'in, an' this time

thar's goin' ter be somethin' doin'."

"Siwash Charley," said Matt, "you don't mean to say that a trifling disagreement, like the one we had in Jamestown, is enough to make you destroy that aëroplane?"

"I reckon ye don't know me, Motor Matt," blustered Siwash. "I allers make it a p'int ter saw off even, an' I reckon I kin squar' my account with you a heap better by bustin' up the flyin' machine than in any other way. I'll give ye two minutes ter turn that thar machine o' yourn and take the back track."

Simultaneously with the words, Siwash lifted his rifle to his shoulder, and pointed it directly at Matt.

The king of the motor boys did not stir, but his gray eyes snapped dangerously as they looked into the eyes gleaming along the barrel of the gun.

"You're not going to do any more shooting, Siwash Charley," said Matt, his voice steady. "You took two shots at us last night, and if either one of them had struck me, or any of my friends, you and Murgatroyd would have paid dearly for it."

The mention of Murgatroyd caused Siwash to drop his gun suddenly.

"Murgatroyd hasn't got a thing ter do with this," he roared. "It's my own affair I'm settlin'."

"Murgatroyd has got everything to do with this!" retorted Matt. "He got that car for you, and sent you out of Jamestown last night. You hoped to reach the fort ahead of us—and you'd certainly have done so if we'd waited until this morning and taken the train. If you make any trouble for me here, Murgatroyd will be arrested in Jamestown just as quick as a message can be wired to the police. And you'll make trouble for yourself, too, for you played a trick in getting that

aëroplane off the government reservation. You can show your teeth as much as you please, but if you try to bite you'll regret it."

"I'm done chinnin' with you!" whopped Siwash Charley, once more bringing his gun to his shoulder. "Turn that ottermobill t'other way, an' hike out o' this. Ye got a minute left."

Black got out of the machine, and walked around to the crank.

"Leave the crank alone, Black," ordered Matt. "That scoundrel's a coward, and he doesn't dare to shoot."

Black hesitated.

"Better do as he says, pard," observed McGlory, climbing over the back of the seat and ranging himself shoulder to shoulder with Matt.

The cowboy's words were addressed to Black. The latter retreated from the front of the machine, and stood at the roadside, watching developments anxiously.

It was a situation of the gravest peril, but Matt could not go away and leave the aëroplane to be wrecked.

"Are ye goin'?" yelled Siwash furiously. "If ye think I dasn't shoot, I'll show ye I ain't afeared o' nothin'."

"Put down that gun!" ordered Matt.

The scoundrel's finger flexed on the trigger. In another instant the trigger would have been pressed. But something happened. Jake, standing in the front of the wagon, whirled a long blacksnake whip about his head by the lash. Suddenly he let it go, and the weighted handle shot through the air, and struck Siwash Charley's fated right arm. The end of the whip handle landed at about the place where McGlory's missile had struck, the day before.

With a swirling bellow of pain, Siwash dropped the rifle and staggered back, clasping his right forearm with his left hand.

He swore terribly, but the torrent of profanity was cut short by one of his pals.

"Sojers!" cried the man, sweeping Siwash Charley's gun off the ground. "Hustle out o' this, or we're done fer!"

"Swatties!" jubilated McGlory, waving his hat. "Speak to me about this!"

Matt faced the other way. There, sure enough, were half a dozen mounted troopers galloping toward the scene.

The pop of the other car's motor could be heard, and when Matt looked around, once more, Siwash Charley and his comrades were kicking up the dust in the direction of Oberon.

"Siwash Charley showed his teeth," laughed Black, immensely relieved, "and now he's showing his heels. Motor Matt," he added soberly, "I wouldn't have been in your shoes, a moment ago, for all the money in the United States Treasury!"

The king of the motor boys did not hear the last remark. He had leaped down from the car, and had run forward to the wagon, where he was reaching up and shaking hands with Jake.

CHAPTER XII.

"UNCLE SAM" TAKES HOLD.

"Them fellers stopped me," said Jake, "an' was allowin' to unload the flyin' machine. What could I do agin' the lot of 'em, and armed like they was? But the fust I knowed they intended ter smash the thing was when Siwash begun talkin' with you. He'd have shot ye, too. I know him, an' I know he's desprit, so I took a chanst with the blacksnake. Gosh-all-hemlocks, but I shore made a good throw of it."

"You certainly did," said Matt, "and I'm much obliged to you."

Matt turned away from the wagon to talk with the officer in charge of the troopers. The soldiers had come to a halt, and one of them, in the uniform of a lieutenant, had spurred forward.

"What's the ruction here?" he demanded. "Benner rushed up to the fort and said some one had stolen the Traquair aëroplane. He showed us a telegram he had received, told us he had started Jake for Oberon with the machine, and that a couple of young fellows had happened along, pronounced the telegram a forgery, and had started in pursuit of Jake in an automobile. Are you one of the lot that chased up Jake?"

"Yes," said Matt. "Harry Traquair was killed in Jamestown—"

"That's stale news," interrupted the lieutenant, sitting back in his saddle and taking Matt's sizing at his leisure.

"Well," went on the king of the motor boys, "I've come to Totten to try out the aëroplane for the

government."

"You?" The lieutenant laughed. "Why, my lad, the machine will do for you just as it did for Traquair. Who are you?"

"Matt King."

The lieutenant almost fell out of his saddle.

"Not Motor Matt?" he asked.

"That's what I'm called more often than anything else."

"Well, this certainly takes the cake!" muttered the lieutenant, pulling at his mustache. "My name's Cameron, and I'm a lieutenant in the signal corps. By a coincidence, I'm here to watch the trials of the aéroplane for the government."

"Where does the coincidence come in, lieutenant?" asked Matt.

"Do you remember a young fellow called Ensign Glennie?"

"Remember Glennie?" cried Matt. "Well, I guess I do. Why, he went around South America with me in a submarine."

"Representing the government, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, Glennie's my cousin, and he wrote me all about you and that trip in the submarine. So that's where the coincidence comes in. He watched your work with the submarine for the government, just as I'm to watch your work with the aéroplane. Give us your hand, Motor Matt! I feel as though we were old friends."

Matt was delighted. It was one of those meetings

which sometimes happen, and which make a fellow overjoyed with the occasional workings of fate. McGlory, Black, and Ping were introduced, and then Matt took the lieutenant off by himself and narrated the events that had taken place, and which had led up to the villainous work of Siwash Charley.

Lieutenant Cameron was properly indignant.

"Siwash Charley's a whelp," he averred, "and this Murgatroyd is a thoroughbred scoundrel. But the aëroplane seems to be safe, and you'll have no further trouble with those villains. From this on, Motor Matt, you and your friends and the Traquair aëroplane are under the protecting wing of Uncle Sam. We'll have the flying machine guarded, and you and your friends will stay at the fort with us. There's only a handful of boys at Totten, now, but we're more than enough to look after Siwash Charley."

The lieutenant rode over to the wagon.

"Jake," said he, "you'd better drive back with that machine."

"That's what I was calculatin'," grinned Jake. "Somebody hand up my whip."

McGlory gathered in the blacksnake, and tossed it to the teamster.

"Sergeant," called the lieutenant to one of the troopers, "you and the rest will convoy the aëroplane back to Totten. If Siwash Charley or any of his gang show up, shoot them on sight."

"All roight, sor," answered the sergeant, touching his cap.

"Ride back with us in the car, lieutenant," suggested Matt. "One of the troopers can bring in your horse."

"I'll go with you," said Cameron promptly.

He dismounted at once, and turned his horse over to the Irish sergeant. He and Matt rode in the tonneau, with Ping, where they could talk to better advantage, and McGlory mounted to the front seat alongside of Black.

"My orders instructed me to be of all the assistance I could to Traquair," remarked Cameron, when they were sliding off toward the hills on the return trip; "so, of course, now that you represent the Traquair interests, I consider it my duty to help you."

"Glad of that, lieutenant," responded Matt. "After I get the aëroplane together I'll not need much help. You see, I've got to learn to run the machine. There's a knack I've got to get hold of."

"You'll get hold of it, never fear. A fellow like you can learn whatever he sets out to."

"But I've only got two weeks," laughed Matt, "and there's a fair chance, according to a good many people, of breaking my neck."

"That's what I was thinking, when I heard Traquair had been killed, and that there was an advertisement in the newspapers for a man of nerve. But, somehow, I feel pretty confident of the outcome, now that I know you are to boss the air flights. Let's see. I think Glennie wrote me you had had some experience with a dirigible balloon?"

"Yes, I served my apprenticeship at that sort of flying before I tied up with the submarine."

"Then you can't be called a new hand at the game."

"Sailing a dirigible balloon is a whole lot different from driving an aëroplane."

"Learn it well, Motor Matt, whatever you do. According to conditions governing the aëroplane trial,

you've got to stay in the air two hours, make not less than thirty miles an hour, and carry a passenger. I'm to be the passenger."

So long as Matt had only his neck to think about, the situation was tolerably clear; but, now that he knew he had to carry the lieutenant along, he began to worry a little.

"I didn't know that part of it before," said Matt gravely.

"Don't fret, pard," put in McGlory, turning around in his seat. "If the lieutenant hasn't got the nerve, why, I'll go with you. And I reckon you know about how much I enjoy the prospect of flyin'."

"You can't cut me out of that, McGlory," declared Cameron. "Why, if Mrs. Traquair hadn't found some one to navigate the aëroplane, I was thinking seriously of offering to do it myself. I was attached to the balloon corps, for a while, but I'm handicapped by a very imperfect knowledge of gas engines. You're the fellow for the job, all right, Matt, and you can bet something that I'll not pass up the chance of flying with you. Know anything about the Traquair aëroplane?"

"Only what I've found out from a study of the model. Apart from that, I've been looking into the subject of aëroplanes for some time. It was the hope of adding to my knowledge of the subject that brought me to North Dakota."

"And you dropped into a villainous conspiracy right at the start off!" exclaimed Cameron. "I'll send a message to Oberon, just as soon as we reach the post, and see if Siwash Charley and his mates can be headed off."

"It won't do any good to send a message, lieutenant," said Matt. "Siwash knows enough to make himself

scarce. Better let the matter drop—for the present, anyhow."

"But there's Murgatroyd. He's got himself into a pretty kettle of fish. You can go after *him*."

"I don't want to bother with him, nor with any one nor anything else but the aëroplane for the next two weeks."

"I guess your head's level on that point," mused Cameron. "However, if Siwash Charley shows up on the reservation while you're at work, we'll lay him by the heels and throw him into the guardhouse. When are you going to put the aëroplane together?"

"This afternoon," replied Matt. "There's no time to lose."

An hour later they were at the post. Black had made up his mind to remain over until the following day, and Matt paid him his fifty dollars, and thanked him for his work with the motor car.

Following a late breakfast at the post, Matt went down to meet Jake and superintend the unloading of the aëroplane. Selecting a favorable site for the experiments with the aëroplane required time, and dinner was ready at the post before Matt and Cameron had picked out a spot which they considered most favorable for the initial trials.

Following dinner, Matt and McGlory, in their working togs, and accompanied by the lieutenant, hustled down the hill to begin work with the aëroplane.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE WING.

The ground Matt selected for his initial experiments lay about a quarter of a mile from the post trader's store on the road toward Lallie, Minnewaukon, and Oberon. For a long distance, at this place, the road was level, flat as a board, and smooth as asphalt. It was just the right bottom to give the aëroplane a good start on the bicycle wheels.

This part of the road, too, was free from timber, so there could be no accidents from collisions with stationary objects.

Lieutenant Cameron had a large "A" tent brought down from the post, and pitched in a place convenient to Matt's field of operations. Here the young motorist and his assistants could rest, when they so desired, and make their headquarters at all times.

Four dismounted cavalrymen were to be constantly on guard, each detail relieving the other, morning and night.

The post farrier placed his working tools at Matt's disposal, and hammers, hatchets, and wrenches were carried down to "Camp Traquair," as the aëroplane headquarters came to be called, and Matt set actively to work uncrating the machine.

The two big planes of the flying machine measured thirty-two feet in length by five in width. For convenience in packing, carrying, and stowing, these planes had been cut into halves, one half dovetailing into the other by means of iron sockets.

In assembling the aëroplane, Matt worked from

memory alone—his study of the model serving him in good stead.

Both of the thirty-two-foot planes were put together first, and then joined, in a double-deck arrangement, by tough spruce rods, which held the planes six feet apart. The rods were further braced by wire guys, which could be tightened at will by means of turn-buckles.

For a width of about five feet the middle section of the lower plane was reënforced with light, tough boards. This platform formed a bed for the engine, the gasoline tank, the mechanism-operating propeller and bicycle wheels, and afforded seats for the operator and one passenger, as well as giving a rigid support for the various levers controlling motor and rudders.

The sliding wing extensions, so necessary for keeping the machine's equilibrium while in the air, gave Matt the most trouble of all. They slid on ball bearings from under each plane, and were so adjusted that when one extended the other contracted in the same proportion; for, if there was too much air pressure under one wing, it was necessary that the area of that wing should be reduced, while the area of the other was enlarged.

The putting together of the two large planes consumed the afternoon; and when Matt, weary and tired, answered the mess call of the colored cook sent down from the post, he was able to see that the aëroplane was gradually taking shape.

"Looks about as much like a bird as I do," commented McGlory.

The next morning Matt went to work on the two smaller planes which, in flight, went ahead of the machine, guiding up or down, and doing something toward distributing the air pressure. The vertical

plane, which had its place in the rear, was likewise adjusted.

So rapidly did the work proceed that, by noon, Matt was ready to install the motor.

Traquair, it was evident, had built the aëroplane, put it together, and adjusted every part before shipping it to Fort Totten. The result of this forethought was apparent in the installing of the engine. Every piece had its place and dropped into it readily. The exact point for every bolt and screw was marked.

By seven o'clock the second night the aëroplane was ready.

McGlory, just before he, Matt, and Ping went for their belated supper, stood in front of the forward planes.

"Every boat, pard," said he, "whether she sails the ocean or the sky, has got to have a name; therefore I, by virtue of my authority as assistant to the big high boy who is to navigate the craft, name this aëroplane the *June Bug*."

With that, the cowboy broke a bottle of Adam's ale over the lower plane.

"No likee *June Bug*," chattered Ping. "Him velly bum name. Why you no callee him *Fan Tan*, huh?"

"*Fan Tan*!" jeered McGlory. "Why, you squint-eyed heathen, this ship's no gamble, but a sure thing. Remember the lines of that beautiful poem:

"The June bug has no wings at all,

But it gets there just the same."

"That's good enough," laughed Matt. "I'm going to eat and turn in, for to-morrow I fly."

The motor was a four-cylinder, and Matt judged,

after taking measurements, that it would develop about twenty-five horse power.

The next day came on with a very high wind, so high that Matt deemed it worse than foolish to attempt his first flight. It was hoped that, later in the day, the wind would go down. Time was not lost while waiting, however. Gasoline was secured from the fort, together with a quantity of oil, and the motor was disconnected and given its own particular try-out.

It worked splendidly.

Next the power was connected with the bicycle wheels, and the *June Bug* was sent along the road under its own power. Matt, in the driver's seat, came very near taking a fly in spite of himself, for the wings caught the wind and lifted the aëroplane some four feet in the air. With a twist of the lever, Matt quickly pointed the smaller planes downward, and glided into the road again without a jar.

The wind held until nightfall, and, of course, all hope of a fly for that day went down with the sun.

On the following morning there was hardly a breath of air stirring. All the troopers came down from the fort, and every person from the immediate vicinity of the trader's store assembled to see how well Matt would acquit himself of his first attempt at flight in an aëroplane.

After making sure that everything was properly adjusted and in perfect working order, Matt had the *June Bug* pushed to the centre of the hard road. McGlory was stationed at one wing, and Lieutenant Cameron at the other, in order to run with the machine and help give it a start.

"Nervous, Matt?" queried Cameron, as the king of the motor boys took his place on the seat and lifted his

feet to the foot rest.

"Not half so nervous as you are, old chap," smiled Matt. "Here, feel my pulse."

"I'll take your word for it. Don't go very high."

"So far as results are concerned, if I'm going to fall it might just as well be from five hundred feet as from fifty. All ready?"

"All ready!"

McGlory's voice was a bit husky, for he was even more nervous than Cameron.

The engine was already humming like a swarm of bees.

"Let her go," said Matt, switching the power into the bicycle wheels.

In less than a dozen feet, the aëroplane was traveling too fast for Cameron and McGlory, and they dropped out. Standing breathless where the *June Bug* had left them, they watched the machine rush faster and faster along the road, then, suddenly, swing into the air and glide upward.

Cheers rang out from half a hundred throats, only to be suddenly stifled as the great wings tilted, fifty feet above ground, into an almost vertical position. Matt, they could see, was almost hurled from his seat.

A groan was wrenched from Cameron's lips, and he turned away.

"Sufferin' thunderbolts, but that was close!" the lieutenant heard McGlory mutter, and then the cheering was renewed.

Cameron looked again. The *June Bug* had righted herself, and was rushing off toward the lake, mounting steadily, higher and higher.

"That feller's head's level, all right," remarked Benner.

"How's that?" asked Cameron.

"Why," laughed the post trader, "if he takes a tumble he intends comin' down in the water."

"Don't you believe it!" cried McGlory. "He don't intend to take a tumble. That pard of mine has his head with him, at every stage of the game."

At the watchers judged, the *June Bug* passed over the post some two hundred feet in the air. The contortions of the machine were alarming. First one side would tilt, and then the other. Half a dozen times it looked as though the *June Bug* must surely go over on its back, and come down a wreck with her intrepid young driver mangled in the machinery.

But Motor Matt, calm and clear brained, was working to "get the knack." Every second he was studying. Not once did thoughts of a mishap flash through his brain.

At the end of ten minutes he returned from the lake, glided downward, and brought the bicycle wheels to a rest in the road within a hundred feet of the place from which he had started.

His face was flushed, and his gray eyes shining as he stepped from the machine to receive the congratulations of everybody, even of the bluff post trader.

"I'll try it again this afternoon," said Matt. "That's enough for this morning. I want to think over my experience, and see if I can improve my work in any particular point."

"You wabble a good deal," said Cameron.

"I won't—when I get the knack."

So that afternoon, and day after day thereafter, Motor Matt went up and practiced to acquire the "knack." Little by little it came to him, every flight teaching him something that it was necessary for him to know.

He went up in still air, in light winds, and in breezes that made his friends tremble for his safety; but not once did he get a spill, not once did anything go wrong with the machinery, and not once did he fail to bring the *June Bug* back to earth as gently and easily as he had done on the morning of his first flight.

Greater and greater crowds assembled to witness the trials. The people came from Minnewaukon, from Oberon, and from Devil's Lake City. Even the Indians gathered from various parts of the reservation, and gazed stolidly while "Boy-That-Flies-Like-the-Eagle"—as they called Matt—continued to keep on the wing, and learn the knack.

As Tuesday—the day of the government test—drew nearer, the railroads advertised excursions, and from the Department of the Missouri came sundry men, high in the councils of the war department, to see how well Motor Matt would meet the supreme test.

On Monday afternoon, after Matt had finished a flight during which he had kept the *June Bug* almost level in the air, Lieutenant Cameron caught his hand in a convulsive grip.

"I'm ready, Matt," said he; "you've got the knack."

CHAPTER XIV.

DASTARDLY WORK.

Ping was a badly demoralized Chinaman. He had watched, with soulful admiration, every flight Matt had made; he had swelled out like a toad every time the work of his master was applauded in his hearing; and he crept around Matt as though he was a joss—a wizard more superhuman than a mere mortal.

But the *June Bug* seemed to have become a part of the Chinaman. He gloated over it, he patted it affectionately, he crooned strange gibberish to it, and he kept watch of it while in the air and on the ground as though it was the apple of his eye.

After Matt had finished his last flight before the Tuesday trials, Ping crept off into the woods by himself, dipped some water into a small china bowl, and dropped into it a cake of India ink. Then he stirred the ink until it was dissolved, found a big, smooth boulder that answered for a table, and squatted down beside it.

First, he placed the china bowl on the boulder; next, he brought from the breast of his blouse a camel's-hair brush, and half a dozen strips of rice paper; then, on each strip of paper, he began painting potent prayers.

Having finished his peculiar labors, he threw the little bowl into the lake, hid the slips of rice paper under the boulder, put the brush in his pocket, and sneaked back to Camp Traquair, arriving just in time for supper.

That night Matt went to bed early, and McGlory soon followed him. The *June Bug*, drawn up to the left of the tent, looked like a ghost in the gathering dusk.

Around her were the four armed and alert guards.

Then, again, Ping stole away to the boulder. On its flat top he started a little fire of dried twigs, and one by one he dropped the slips of rice paper into the blaze.

When the last prayer was consumed, and the fire had died down to a little heap of white ashes, Ping felt that he had done everything possible to insure Motor Matt's safety and success.

It was nearly midnight when he stole back toward Camp Traquair. He saw a little glow of light in the vicinity of the *aëroplane*, and he wondered what it could be. Creeping forward, he investigated, and laughed at himself for his fears.

The guards had secured a lantern, and, in its light, they were smoking and playing cards on a blanket.

With the idea of curling up under one of the wings of the *June Bug* and passing the night near the machine, Ping made a wide detour around the soldiers, and started toward the *aëroplane* from the other side.

Suddenly his attention was arrested by a crawling form moving back and forth, now showing darkly against the white canvas of the planes, and now vanishing in the deeper shadow under them.

Presently he heard a queer, rasping note, as of a file biting into steel. In a second he knew what was going on.

Siwash Charley was meddling with the *aëroplane*—was weakening it here and there so that an accident would be certain on the following day.

With his heart in his throat, the Chinese boy arose to his feet, and started toward the soldiers, his lips framing a cry.

But the cry was never uttered.

Ping had not taken two steps toward the guards before he was felled by a cruel blow from behind, and a black, impenetrable pall dropped over his brain.

"Begorry, what was thot?" exclaimed Sergeant O'Hara, starting up from his seat on the ground and looking toward the machine.

"What's the matter with you, sarg?" asked one of the others.

"I've a notion, d'ye moind, thot I heard somethin'," answered O'Hara.

"Your wits are woolgatherin', old man," said another of the men.

"I'll make sure av it, annyways," averred the sergeant.

Taking the lamp, he walked over to the aëroplane, and looked under it, inside it, and all around.

"Iverything's all roight, so far as I can see," he reported, coming back to his comrades, "but divil another card do I play this noight. To yer posts, iviry wan o' ye, an' we'll kape our eyes peeled. Th' leftinnint an' Motor Matt sail in thot machine to-morrow, an' there's a rumor thot Siwash Charley was seen in Divil's Lake City th' day. Cut out th' card playin', b'ys. We've done too much of it already."

In the shadow of the woods, three men were carrying a senseless Chinaman.

"Let's toss him inter the lake, Siwash," suggested one of the men.

"What's the good, hey?" answered Siwash. "We'll rope an' gag him. He'll not be found till too late, an' mebbly he'll never be found."

"But if he saw you, an' recognized who ye was—"

"He didn't; he didn't have time. Put the ropes on him. Twist a cloth into a gag, Pete."

"The lot o' us would swing fer this if it's ever found out," demurred Pete.

Ping opened his eyes before the scoundrels had left him. He recognized Siwash Charley by his voice, and he saw his face by a ray of moonlight that drifted in among the trees.

Ping tried to cry out, but his lips were sealed; and he tried to use his hands and feet, but found them bound.

With an inward groan, he sank back and the night of unconsciousness once more rolled over him.

When he again revived, the sun was high, and there was a murmur of life from far off in the direction of Camp Traquair. He lay on his back, his face upward, and he could see the high bluffs of the lake, over toward the post. They were covered with people.

What was the matter? he asked himself. How had he come there? Why was he bound, and why was the cloth tied between his jaws?

In a flash, his bewildered mind remembered all that had happened.

He heard again the rasp of the file biting into steel; he recalled his suspicions, his attempt to cry out to the soldiers, the blow that had felled him; then, too, the moment of consciousness in the woods came back to him, bringing the raucous voice and ill-omened face of Siwash Charley.

The aeroplane had been tampered with by Motor Matt's enemies! And this was Tuesday, the day of the trials!

If Matt attempted to fly in the *June Bug*, there would be an accident, and he would be killed!

Like a demon, the boy fought to free himself. He must get to Camp Traquair and tell what he had seen and heard. If he did not, the fiendish work of Siwash Charley would spell destruction for Motor Matt and the joss of the clouds.

What passed in that little heathen's mind will never be known. He was a Chinaman, and the workings of a Chinaman's mind, while following the same lines as the workings of a Caucasian's, are yet never quite the same.

Ping's fight with the cords that bound his wrists and ankles brought pain and drew blood, and his tongue, from a frenzied gnawing of the gag, was sore and swollen; but he could not free himself. Siwash Charley and his mates had performed their work only too well.

In sheer desperation, Ping attempted to roll in the direction of Camp Traquair.

He got perhaps twenty feet over the sharp stones and rough tree-roots, and then his mind faded into an oblivion—quite as much the result of his own horrifying thoughts as of his physical pain and weakness.

He awoke to hear cheers, and to piece together, once more, his battered notions of the trend of events.

As he lay staring dumbly upward, he saw the cloud joss winging across the woods like a huge bird, high, very high in the air.

Motor Matt was there, guiding the joss, and making it do his will; and beside Motor Matt was Lieutenant Cameron. Only a moment did the aëroplane show itself to Ping's restricted vision, and then the tops of the trees shut it from his sight.

Far away somewhere the helpless boy could hear wild cheering.

What good were choice prayers, painted on rice paper, and burned to the heathen deities?

This is what Ping's bruised and quivering mind asked itself.

By every means in his power, Ping had tried to avert disaster.

One prayer had been for a calm day. This seemed to have been answered, for there was hardly a breath stirring the tree tops.

Another prayer was for a safe start. That, likewise, must have been answered, or Matt would not now be on the wing.

Yet another prayer was for the flying machine's safety while in the air; a fourth had been for the machinery; a fifth for the wings; a sixth for a safe descent; a seventh had been general in its terms, and had most to do with Motor Matt's fame and fortune after the trial was over.

Ping had burned no prayer for Lieutenant Cameron. In some manner, he could not understand how, the lieutenant had escaped his mind.

While he lay there, miserably going over these heathen things which were all terribly real and important to him, a roar of fear, horror, and consternation came from the distance.

Turning his head a little, Ping was able to see people scrambling over the bluffs, wildly excited.

The accident had happened.

With a groan, Ping closed his eyes, and turned his face to the earth.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GOVERNMENT TRIAL.

Matt awoke, on that memorable Tuesday, to find that fortune was favoring him with a clear sky and not enough wind to ripple the flag over the tent.

McGlory greeted him in a strangely subdued manner. The cowboy had a lot on his mind, and Matt rallied him about his odd reserve.

"Where's Ping?" asked Matt, noting that the little Chinaman was not hovering around his vicinity as usual.

"Give it up, pard," said McGlory. "Suppose he's off asking his joss to give you luck."

People were already gathering on the bluffs, and rounding up in wagons and automobiles in the near vicinity of Camp Traquair.

While Matt was looking over the aëroplane, Cameron brought several dignified, gold-laced officers, who had come from distant points to witness the trials. The lieutenant presented them, and the boyish, unaffected manner of the young motorist had a good effect on the representatives of the war department.

"You understand, do you, Motor Matt," said one of these gentlemen, "that you are to stay aloft two hours, with one passenger, and travel at the rate of thirty miles an hour?"

"Yes, sir," answered Matt. "I can stay aloft three hours just as well as two, and I think you will see the aëroplane do fifty miles instead of thirty."

The officers smiled at his enthusiasm. But they liked

it, for it proved that his heart was in his work.

"Don't push the machine too hard," counseled one of the officers.

"I'll not do that, sir," said Matt. "Before I take up the lieutenant, I'll go up alone, to make sure that everything is working well. I have just found one of the propeller blades loosened—and that looks a good deal as though some one had been tampering with the machine. Of course, however," he added, "that's impossible, for the aëroplane has been guarded night and day."

"I'd wager my life on O'Hara," put in Cameron, confidently. "He had charge of last night's detail."

As Matt's examination went further, he found bolts loose, here and there. In fact, so many parts were weakened that the general result could hardly be called accidental. However, he liked O'Hara, and did not want to overturn the lieutenant's trust in him. So, saying nothing, he went on carefully with his examination, tightening everything that was loose.

At last he was satisfied that the aëroplane was in as good trim as ever.

"I'm a little late in starting," said he to McGlory and Cameron, "but it's always well to be on the safe side. Be ready, old chap," he added to the lieutenant, "when I come back from this little trial spin."

In a way that had become an old story to him and his friends, but which was intensely new and novel to nine out of every ten of the onlookers, Matt started the *June Bug* along the road, lifted her into the air, and sailed her far out over the bluff and the lake.

Everything was working as well as usual. The air craft met the strain in every part, seemingly as staunch as she had always been. At a leisurely jog—just enough

to keep the aëroplane afloat with the wings but slightly tilted—Matt turned above the lake and glided back to his starting point.

He had done no manœuvring, attempted no speed, and had not tried to break his record for staying aloft. Nevertheless, the military representatives were enthusiastic.

"Wait until you see Matt put the machine through her paces," said the lieutenant, smiling confidently at his senior officer, as he took his place in the machine.

Two signal corps privates ran with the *June Bug* to give her a start. The added weight of the lieutenant made her a little slower in taking the air, and not quite so swift in mounting upward, but Matt soon found that she was more easily managed with this additional ballast.

"By Jove," cried the lieutenant delightedly, "but this is fine! North Dakota has turned out a lot of people to see this exhibition, Matt. The bluffs are black with them, and everywhere you look you can see people with their faces upturned, either gaping in wonder or yelling with delight. Hear 'em cheer! I should think it would make your blood tingle."

"I haven't any time for all that," said Matt, busy with his levers, and watching everything with a keen, alert eye; "I've got something else to keep track of. You're watching the time?"

"Yes. It was ten-fifteen when we started."

Matt slowly speeded up the engine. The route, as already determined on, was to be across Devil's Lake and back, and then to Minnewaukon and back, going over the course as many times as he could during the two hours the aëroplane must stay in the air.

At a height of fifty feet above the surface of the earth,

their flight through the air became a swirling rush. At top speed—a speed which Matt reckoned as fifty miles an hour—he made a wide, sweeping turn over the roof tops of Devil's Lake City, and plunged off across the lake. A frenzy of cheering arose from the bluffs and Camp Traquair as the aëroplane darted over them on her way to Minnewaukon.

"Can't we go higher, Matt?" begged the lieutenant.

"We'll go higher after we make the turn over Minnewaukon," Matt replied.

After that, Cameron did not bother Matt with questions. The young motorist's every faculty was wrapped up in his work. His ear alone told him how well the motor was doing, and his eyes, ears, and his sense of touch were brought into play in preserving the aëroplane's equilibrium.

The merest rise of one wing caused a mechanical shifting of the lever on which Matt constantly held his left hand.

That left hand of the young motorist had been trained to its work in many an automobile race, and its quickness and cunning did not fail him now.

There were some people still left in Minnewaukon—not all the town's inhabitants had gone to the bluffs or to Camp Traquair. Those that remained in the place assembled on the streets or on the roof tops, and cheered wildly as the aëroplane veered in a circle and rushed back toward Totten.

The official recorder was here, as in Devil's Lake City, noting the time, and jotting it down on a pad of paper.

Once turned toward Camp Traquair, Matt sent the aëroplane resolutely upward. Up and still up the craft glided, forced by the whirling propeller and supported

by the air under the planes.

"How high do you think we are now, Cameron?" asked Matt.

"Three hundred feet, I should say," replied Cameron.

"I guess that will do. It's easier sailing up here. The air close to the earth's surface is in a constant state of agitation, but at this height it's quieter. Don't you notice how much smoother we're gliding?"

"I've been noticing that," said Cameron. "It's like a boat on a mill pond, only we're traveling like an express train."

Again they were over Camp Traquair, and again the wild cheering of the crowds reached their ears. They crossed the lake, turned, once more hovered over Camp Traquair, then glided downward to a height of a hundred feet, and rushed over the air line to Minnewaukon.

Three times they made the round trip. As they were coming back from Minnewaukon the third time, Cameron looked at his watch.

"The two hours are up, Matt," he announced, "and I am almost sorry for it. We'd better go down. You have won the test on every point, and the sale of the aëroplane to the government is assured. If you had a hand free, I'd give you a hearty grip along with my congratulations."

"Keep that until we land," laughed Matt.

The cheering came up to them like Bedlam let loose as they drew near Camp Traquair, and Matt slackened the pace, preparatory to descending.

Then it was that the unexpected—so far as Matt was concerned—happened.

There came a snap like the crack of a pistol, and Matt had a sudden vision of a writhing wire rope coiling viciously in the air. It missed him, but struck the lieutenant on the forehead.

Instinctively the lieutenant arose on the footboard, and tossed his arms. It was a fierce blow he had received, and unconsciousness had claimed him. Staggering in midair, he would have tottered off into space had it not been for the king of the motor boys.

Quick as a flash, Motor Matt caught the lieutenant's arm just in time to keep him from falling.

The accident was witnessed by the thousands of spectators gathered below. For an instant it seemed as though the fluttering aëroplane would be overturned and come rushing earthward; then, as the horrified people watched, the reeling lieutenant was dragged out of sight between the canvas planes, the aëroplane righted suddenly, glided downward, and dropped on her wheels in the road.

Matt's face was white, but his voice was steady as he called to those who were rushing toward the machine.

"Cameron is only stunned—he'll be all right in a little while. Here, lift him out and lay him on the ground."

One of the epauletted, gold-laced officers brushed a handkerchief across his forehead with a shaking hand.

"If he lives," said the officer, "he'll owe his life to Motor Matt. I never saw anything like that before, and I hope I never shall again. Gad, how it strains a man's nerves."

When Cameron was removed from the machine, Matt passed to the forward planes and examined the end of the broken wire guy.

"It was notched with a file," he asserted, "and for

more than two hours Cameron and I have been playing with death, hundreds of feet in the air."

He passed rapidly to the wire stay supporting the forward planes on the opposite side.

"This, also, is notched," he added. "If this guy had snapped, nothing could have saved us!"

"What murderous scoundrel could have done it?" demanded a dozen fierce voices.

"His name is Siwash Charley," said Matt. "It must have been done last night. Find the scoundrel, if you can; he should be made to answer for this."

CHAPTER XVI.

FAME—AND A LITTLE FORTUNE.

"The returns are in from Devil's Lake City and Minnewaukon. Time, two hours and seven minutes. Distance traveled, ninety miles. This was at the rate of a little less than forty-five miles an hour, and the government ought to be completely satisfied. I know I am. Motor Matt, allow me to congratulate you."

One of the officers was doing the speaking.

It was three hours after the sensational finish of the trial. The crowds had departed. McGlory, a few officers, Cameron, and Matt were in the tent at Camp Traquair. Cameron, his head bandaged, was lying on a cot, but he was wide awake and smiling.

"I knew he could do the trick," said Cameron; "in fact, I've been confident of that ever since I saw him wobble around on his first flight with the aëroplane. What beats me, though, is how those ropes became notched."

"Sergeant O'Hara thinks he knows how it happened," explained the officer who had read off the *June Bug's* record. "He and the other three guards were having a game of seven-up, last night, when they should have been giving their entire attention to watching the aëroplane. O'Hara thought he heard a noise around the machine. He investigated, but found no cause for uneasiness. After that, O'Hara declares, the card playing stopped; but, it now seems clear, the evil had already been done."

"We don't know that this fellow calling himself Siwash Charley was the scoundrel who filed the guy ropes," spoke up another officer.

"It's a positive certainty, in my own mind," declared Cameron.

"What your individual belief is, lieutenant, would hardly stand at a court-martial, or in a court of law."

"That's true, yes, sir. Siwash Charley was seen in Devil's Lake City yesterday—"

"Circumstantial, but hardly conclusive. He can't be found now. Fully a hundred men have been looking for him and are now on the trail, but Siwash Charley, if he was here, has vanished."

"I'm too happy over the way everything came out," put in Matt, "to waste any thoughts on Siwash Charley. The aëroplane has made good. There's no doubt about the sale to the government?"

"Not the slightest," came a chorus from the officers.

"There can't possibly be, Matt," added Cameron.

"That telegram of mine was sent to Mrs. Traquair?" Matt went on.

"It was sent from the post within half an hour after the aëroplane landed. By this time, Mrs. Traquair knows what Motor Matt has done for her."

"It wasn't that that I wanted her to understand, but the fact that a little fortune had come to her, and that she was no longer in the clutches of that loan shark, Murgatroyd."

"She knows that, too. A little fortune, I understand, has also come to Motor Matt."

"And more fame," put in McGlory, "than one modest young chap like my pard knows how to shoulder."

"What little fortune there is," smiled Matt, "is to be divided with my chum, Joe McGlory, who was a bigger help to me than I imagine he realized. Part of the fame

should be his, too."

"Speak to me about that!" chuckled the cowboy. "Fame! Oh, yes, I ought to be plastered with it. Why, I wouldn't have gone up in the *June Bug* for all the fame they tacked onto Napoleon."

There was a general laugh at this.

"I wonder what's become of Ping?" Matt inquired anxiously. "It isn't like him to hide out on us, in this fashion. The last I saw of him was last night."

"There is something queer about that," averred McGlory. "He ought to have been around to exult, Ping had, and it's—"

O'Hara stuck his head in at the tent flap, just at that moment.

"Beggin' yer pardon, sors, but there's an Injun just come, totin' a half-baked Chink. Do yez want thim insoide?"

"Sure!" cried Matt. "Send them in."

A Sioux Indian, looking anything but the noble red man in his moccasins and coat, hat, and trousers, pigeon toed his way into the tent with a brief but respectful "How!"

Behind him, half carried and half dragged, came Ping!

The boy was a sight.

He was bareheaded and barefooted; his usually neat blouse and baggy trousers were torn and soiled; his hands were bleeding, and there was a wild, despairing look on his yellow face. The wildness and the despair vanished, however, when he caught sight of Matt.

"By Klismas!" he gurgled. "Shiwas Charley no killee Motol Matt? Hoop-a-la!" and Ping ran to Matt and

dropped down on his knees in front of him, hugging one of his hands in a maudlin expression of joy.

"Where have you been, Ping?" asked Matt.

"Allee same woods. Shiwas makee tie hands and feet, stoppee talk with gag. Whoosh! My thinkee you go topside, my no come tellee what Shiwas do. Velly bad pidgin!"

Then, little by little, Matt got the whole story of Ping's experience.

"You are positive Siwash Charley was one of the men who knocked you down, here at the camp, and carried you into the woods?" asked Matt.

"My savvy Shiwas plenty much," declared Ping.

"I guess there's our proof, gentlemen," said Cameron. "Siwash can't dodge that."

"Hardly," said one of the officers. "If Siwash is caught, he'll be taken care of. What a dastardly piece of work! What made the fellow such an enemy of yours, Matt?"

"He was only a tool in the hands of another," said Matt. "That other man was an enemy of Traquair's, and the fellow didn't want the aëroplane to stand the test she faced to-day. The money Mrs. Traquair is to receive will enable her to pay a mortgage which this other scoundrel holds on a quarter section of land in Wells County."

"And all this double-dealing is about a mortgage on a quarter section of prairie land! It hardly seems possible."

"There is something about that land I don't understand," admitted Matt. "But that's the way the matter stands, anyhow, no matter what is back of the mortgage. The government, I presume," he added,

"merely buys the aëroplane? What it pays for the machine isn't a purchase of Traquair's patents?"

"Not at all," went on the officer who had been doing most of the talking. "The government simply buys this aëroplane, called the—er—the *June Bug*—a name, by the way, which I don't fancy—and the government likewise secures the right to purchase any other aëroplane using the Traquair patents, or to build such machines itself, paying Traquair's heirs at law a royalty."

"That," said Matt, "is liable to make Mrs. Traquair a rich woman."

"Well, hardly, unless the government goes into the aëroplane business rather more extensively than I think. Still, Mrs. Traquair should be assured of a modest competence, say, a hundred thousand dollars, or such a matter."

McGlory reeled on his chair.

"Modest competence!" he gulped. "Sufferin' poorhouses! Why, Mrs. Traquair wouldn't know how to spend a quarter of that money. She—"

"Tillygram, sor," announced O'Hara, again thrusting his head through the tent flap. "It jist came down from th' post an' has th' name av Motor Matt on th' face av ut."

Matt took the envelope and tore it open. His face crimsoned as he read, and he started to put the yellow slip away in his pocket.

But McGlory grabbed it.

"Listen to this once," said he, and read aloud:

"How can a poor woman thank you for what you have done? You, and you alone, have saved poor Harry Traquair's wife and children from more bitterness and

hardship than you will ever realize. God bless you!

THE END.

The next number (25) will contain:

Motor Matt's Reverse

OR,

CAUGHT IN A LOSING CAUSE

Plotters Three—The New Aeroplane—Treachery and Tragedy—Murgatroyd's First Move—A Startling Plan—The Air-line into Trouble—Nothing Doing in Sykestown—Brought to Earth—The Coil Tightens—The Door in the Hillside—A Revelation for Matt—Pecos Takes a Chance—Besieged—The Broker's Game—Cant Phillips, Deserter—The Losing Cause.

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THRILLING MOTOR
ADVENTURE FICTION

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TRICKED BY TWO.

CONCLUSION.

Neatly ensconced under the bed clothes, and with its horrible fleshless head laid in ghastly mockery upon his pillow, was a human skeleton.

For a moment Guy Hereford stared at the hideous object. Then recovering himself with a strong effort, he shouted violently for his boy Rufus.

The negro came into the room, showing a double row of magnificent ivories in a grin that stretched almost from ear to ear.

"What does this mean, Rufe?" demanded Guy angrily, pointing to the skull on his pillow.

"Doan' you get excited, boss," said the nigger, still grinning. "I done dat. I been all day gettin' him. Nebber had such a job in all my bawn days."

"Have you gone clean crazy?" cried Guy in amazed perplexity.

"No, sah. *Dat you!*" was Rufe's amazing reply. "Doan' you be angry, boss," he went on hurriedly, as Guy stepped suddenly toward him. "I done discovered a splendiferous plan to obfuscate dat dar Deacon, and dat am part ob de invention. I tell you dat am you."

Guy was beyond speech. He could only gaze helplessly at the beaming face of the negro.

Rufus, proud as a peacock, condescended to explain. "It dis way, sah. You going to build a new house soon, ain't you?"

"I was," replied Guy gloomily.

"Dat all right, den. Now, doan' you be down-hearted, sah. Dis niggah bossing dis heah job."

"For Heaven's sake explain, Rufe," exclaimed Guy.

"I goin' to, sah. It dis way. Dis am de time for burning de woods, ain't it?"

Guy nodded. For the life of him he could not imagine what the man was driving at.

"An' grass am good an' long right up to de back ob de garden?"

"Yes."

"Den dis my plan, sah. I set out fire in de woods to-night, set him in ten, twelve places. Dere's a win' blowin' from de west. Ef we doan' touch it de house burn down sure." He paused with an illuminating chuckle.

Light began to dawn on Guy.

"You mean," he said slowly, "that we're to burn down the shanty and make them think that I've burned in it. That skeleton's to be me."

"You done hit de bull's face in once, sah!" cried the negro in high delight. "Dat just de way I figure it out. In de morning dat no-'count Deacon, he come round to see you an' find out if you done got de money for him. Den he find nothin' but de burned-up house an' de burned-up bones."

"Pon my soul, Rufe, I believe it's workable," exclaimed Guy, a light of hope appearing on his puzzled face.

"In course it am workable, sah. Deacon, he can't get no money from a daid man. Dat one thing mighty sure!"

"But won't he suspect anything?" suggested Guy.

"Not if dis niggah still alive," declared Rufe emphatically. "I tell you, Marse Guy, I goin' to do down dat man proper. He find me hyah, just a-howlin' and a-carryin' on ober dem ole bones, an' I tell him all about how de fire come in out ob de woods an' how it cotch de house, an' how I done try to pull you out. Oh, I fool him 'to eights.'"

Guy couldn't help laughing. Rufe's enjoyment over the prospective humbugging of Deacon was so intense.

"You see, Marse Guy," went on Rufe eagerly, "Deacon he be so glad to think you daid, he never bother to t'ink whether you foolin' him. He next heir, an' all he t'ink be to get de place an' all de t'ings dat belong to you. He nebber go to dat inquisition at all."

"And what's to become of me in the meantime?" asked Guy.

"You got money, ain't you?"

"Yes, luckily I've got twenty dollars or so in the house."

"Well, dat all right. Take de train an' go down to Tampa on de Gulf. Swimmin' in de sea do you a power o' good, boss. I reckon you better take some oder name an' den walk down an' cotch de train at some place furder down de line dan Pine Lake."

After a little more talk Guy and his man settled up all the details. It was agreed that the house should be sacrificed, and that Guy himself should temporarily disappear and go down to Tampa. After the inquest on Blissett, Rufe was to write to him there at the post office and tell him how things turned out.

The worst of it was that Dandy had to be left behind. It would arouse suspicion if the pony were taken away. But Guy, who was anxious above all things that his horse should not fall into Deacon's hands, even for a

few days, thought of a way out of the difficulty. He gave Rufe a note for his wages for two months, and told him that on the following day he was to go into Pine Lake and file a lien on the pony for his pay.

Then the two set to work to take Guy's few articles of value out of the shanty and hide them. This they did by rolling them in a big rubber blanket and burying them in the dry, sandy soil in the orange grove.

This took some little time, and it was nearly eleven o'clock when Guy was at last ready to go.

"Now, mind you, Rufe," were his last words to the negro, "don't you overdo it, and don't let Deacon see that you hate him. A little soft sawder won't do any harm."

"Doan' you worry your haid, boss," replied Rufe consolingly. "I reckon I keep up my end agains' Deacon or any of dem folk. To-morrow, after I seen Deacon, I go to Pine Lake an' hear de inquest on Blissett. Den I write an' tell you all dat happen."

Guy nodded. "I shall be desperately anxious to hear the verdict," he said. "If Deacon doesn't give evidence, the worst they're likely to return is manslaughter."

"Doan' you worry, boss," said Rufe confidently. "I reckon it am going to be 'justificational homeyside.' Deacon, he won't give no evidence. He be too busy gettin' ready to move over heah."

"Only hope so," said Guy. "Now, good-by, Rufe. Remember all I've told you."

Master and man shook hands, and Guy, slinging a small bag across his shoulder on a stick, walked away from the shanty which had been his only home for four long years of hard work and happiness, and disappeared into the forest.

He had not gone far before a flickering glow gleamed redly on the serried ranks of tall, straight trunks.

He turned. Half a dozen pin points of fire were visible on the far side of the clearing. They grew rapidly, and presently the night sky was all aglow with leaping tongues of flame.

The soft breeze which soughed through the tops of the pines sent the flames sweeping down upon the little house, which stood a squat, black mass between the watcher and the blaze behind.

Fascinated by the sight, Guy stood motionless, watching the destruction sweep upon his home.

The many little fires joined forces, and Guy could plainly hear the roar and crackle as the tall, dry grass burst into hissing sparks. There was little chance of any one interfering to save the house. Now that Blissett was dead Guy had no neighbor within a mile, and in the spring of the year fires are too frequent in the Florida woods for any one to pay attention. The cattlemen are always busy burning off the old grass to get fresh pasture for their herds.

Now the whole sky was alight, and the blaze illuminated the sleeping woods far and near. Red-hot sparks were falling like rain upon the shingle roof of the cabin.

Another minute, and little streaks of red fire were winding like snakes about the eaves.

"She's going," muttered Guy sorrowfully.

Yes, once the fire got hold of the sun-dried pine of which the house was built the flames rushed up in great leaping columns. The place burned like a tar barrel, and the glow became so intense that Guy shrank away further into the woods for fear of being observed by any one who might possibly have been

attracted by the blaze.

Still he could not tear himself away from the sight of the destruction of his old home. Sheltering behind a huge pine trunk, he watched till, with a loud crash and a hurricane of sparks, the roof fell in, and of the shanty no more remained than a shapeless pile.

With a deep sigh Guy Hereford turned away, and never stopped until at four o'clock in the morning he boarded the south-bound mail train at the small wayside station of Kissochee.

"Any letter for George Hatfield?"

The smart clerk took up a bundle of letters, ran them rapidly through, and flung them down. "Nope!"

Guy Hereford's face fell.

"Quite sure?" he asked.

The clerk glared.

"What do you think?" he asked sharply, and the other turned slowly away.

"What's happened?" he thought uneasily. "Why hasn't Rufe written?"

He was hardly outside the post office before a bare-legged nigger boy thrust a paper in his face. "Here y'are, boss. *Tampa Sentinel!* All de details ob de horrific tragedy up in Orange County."

Guy grabbed a paper, shoved a quarter into the astonished youngster's hand, and, without waiting for change, was off like a shot.

He reached his room in the boarding house where he had put up, and tore the paper open.

Yes, here it was—a whole column!

"Strange double tragedy near Pine Lake! Well-known cattleman killed. His nearest neighbor burned to death. Two inquests in one day."

So much for the headlines.

Guy gave a deep sigh of relief. "Nothing about murder, anyhow," he muttered.

Then he began to read rapidly. Slowly his expression of anxiety changed to relief, and then to amusement. Finally he burst into a fit of laughter.

"Fine! Dandy!" he cried. "My good Oliver, you are a peach, and no mistake. This is the absolute limit." And dropping the paper he lay back in his chair and laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Dat am too bad, Marse Guy. I nebber t'ink you heah it all from dat fool newspaper."

The deep voice made Guy fairly jump. Springing to his feet he swung round, and there was Rufe, dressed in his best Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, and with an expression of deep annoyance on his ebony face.

"You Rufe?"

"Yes, sah. I come down all de way by de train to tell you de news, an' now dat blame paper done tole you de whole t'ing."

"Not a bit of it, Rufe. It hasn't told me half. If you hadn't turned up I should have taken the next train back to see you and find out just what has happened. Tell me, is Deacon in possession?"

Rufe, somewhat mollified, grinned. "Yes, boss, he dar right enough. He camping in de stable."

"Hasn't got Dandy, I hope?" put in Guy anxiously.

"No, sah. Dandy in de libery stable at Pine Lake."

"That's all right. Now go on. Tell me what happened. Did he come over yesterday morning?"

"Yes, sah; he come ober about ten. An' you ought to hab seen his face when he foun' de house burned!"

"He asked for me, I suppose?"

"Yes, he done ask for you at once, an' I show him de bones, an' tell him you all burned up. Fust he look flabbergasted, den he sort o' chuckle, and I feel like whanging him one ober de haid."

"What happened then?"

"He act like he think he boss an' I his niggah. He tell me go get a wagon an' carry de bones into Pine Lake. Say it sabe trouble hab one inquisition 'stead ob two. I act meek, an go borrow a spring wagon an' hitch Dandy up, an' we take de bones in, an' he tell de sheriff. I t'ink dat sheriff kind ob like you, Marse Guy. He mighty worried. Den he say; 'Quite right. Hab one inquisition on bofe de bodies.'"

"Did you go, Rufe?"

"You bet I go, boss. Firs' dey hab Blissett's body. All dem cracker chaps look at de haid, an' Deacon he gib evidence an say he seen it all. He say dat Blissett done tried to shoot you, and you didn't hab no pistol, but you was real brave an' ride hard at him, an' knock him off de hawse, an' de hawse kick him an' run away into de woods."

Rufe stopped to chuckle at the remembrance. Guy laughed too. He quite understood Deacon's motive.

His cousin wanted to pose in a good light before the jury, so that there could be no chance of suspicion falling on him that he was implicated in his—Guy's—death.

"Den de sheriff he get up an' say dat you was a very

nice gen'elman," went on Rufe, "an' dat Mistah Deacon's evidence was very straight, an' dat dere was only one verdict for dem to give, an' dat he left de matter in dere hands.

"So dey just talk a bit among demselves, an' den de foreman, old Abe Mizell, he get up and say dat dey was all agreed dat Harvey Blissett was killed 'cause his skull not so hard as de heel ob his hawse.

"Den dey hab de bones in, an' I gib evidence." Rufe swelled with pride.

"What did you say, Rufe?"

"Dey ask me if I could 'dentify dem dere bones. I say I reckon dey mus' be you's, 'cause I find 'em in among de cinders ob your bed. I couldn't sw'ar, I tole 'em, because I warn't dar when it happens. I tell 'em I coming home from courting my gal, an' see de fire an' run; but t'ain't no good. I too late. All burned up before I get dar. Anyhow, I ain't seed you since."

"So they gave it accidental death?"

"Yes, sah. Dat's what dey said, and said dey was sorry, 'cause you was a promising young gen'elman."

"And what did Deacon do?" anxiously inquired Guy.

"He go round to de record office to get your land put in his name," chuckled Rufe. "Den I see him ride out on a libery stable hawse."

Guy roared.

"I reckon it going to be de wors' shock he ebber get in his life when you rides up to de ole place," remarked Rufe presently.

"I rather expect it will," replied Guy feebly, wiping his eyes. "Come on, Rufe. There's a train back at twelve-thirty. Just time for dinner, and then the

sooner we're home again the better."

Guy's first task, when he arrived at Pine Lake, was to call on Anderson the sheriff.

Anderson, who was fat and fifty, went positively purple at sight of the man upon whom he had held an inquest!

Guy told him the whole story, all about the quarrel between himself and Blissett, about Deacon's threats and Rufe's plan. The only thing he did not mention was the fact that Deacon had stolen and sold Blissett's horse.

Anderson listened first in amazement, then with amusement, and finally went off into a fit of laughter.

"That Rufe's a wonder," he said. "I didn't reckon there was a nigger in Florida with that much sense. But, look here, young fellow, you've been taking mighty big liberties with the law. According to law you're dead, and buried, too. What d'ye reckon we're going to do about that?"

"Don't know, I'm sure, Mr. Anderson. That's what I came to you about," replied Guy coolly.

"Reckoned I could fix it for you, eh?" There was a sly twinkle in old Anderson's eyes. "I guess I'll have to try. But, say, don't you go wasting time in here. Ef that thar cousin o' yours hears as you ain't as dead as he hed supposed, chances are he'll be getting his gun."

"All right, sheriff," said Guy. "I'll get along. I am under obligations to you about the business. I'm afraid it's given you a lot of bother."

"I ain't kicking," said Anderson dryly. "The State pays my fees for an inquest. Good-by."

Ten minutes later Guy and Rufe were in a hired buggy, with Dandy in the shafts, spinning lightly

homeward over the sandy roads.

It was dusk when they reached the gate.

"So you've brought the horse back," came a sharp voice as Rufe pulled up in front of the stable. "A mighty good job you did. Take him out and tie him up. Then you can sling your hook as fast as you like."

"What for should I git from my boss' land?" asked Rufe with such a delightfully innocent air that Guy, close by under a tree, almost laughed out loud.

"Git!" Deacon roared, "or by—"

A muscular hand gripped him by the back of the neck, and cut short his sentence.

Deacon squirmed round. His eyes fell on Guy Hereford; he gave a scream like a woman's, and dropped as if he'd been shot in the head.

"Now, Oliver," said Guy quietly. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to explain what the thunder you mean by coming and camping on my property."

The man rose slowly to his feet, and his eyes were venomous. "So you tricked me," he ground out between clinched teeth.

"Well, I rather think we did. Rufe and I between us," replied Guy coolly.

Deacon burst into a storm of furious invective. He cursed Guy by everything he could think of. At last he wound up.

"You needn't think you've got the best of me. I'll raise the country against you. They'll have to have one inquest over again. I'll see they have both. I don't care what happens to me. I'll see you hung yet. I swear it."

Guy waited until the other stopped, exhausted.

Then he said very quietly: "Oliver, what's the punishment for horse stealing? Five years' penitentiary, isn't it? I think that's the minimum."

It was quite enough. Deacon went white as ashes.

"Listen to me," said Guy with sudden sternness. "If you're anywhere in Orange County this time tomorrow I'll denounce you for stealing and selling Harvey Blissett's horse."

Without another word Deacon slunk off into the gloom.

Guy never again set eyes upon him, for less than six months later the ruffian was killed in a brawl with a Cuban cigar maker.

IDAHO TO FEED ELKS.

An effort will be made by the State to prevent as far as possible a repetition of the wanton destruction of large numbers of elk which took place in Fremont County last winter.

The animals had been driven by extreme hunger to approach the settlements, and, weak from starvation and struggling in the unusually deep snow when they reached the lowlands, were killed and skinned. In many cases, reduced to mere skeletons, their meat could not be used.

The idea of the game warden is to arrange if possible to have cheap hay shipped into the country where the elk abound and place it where the animals, when their natural food supply gives out, will be able to find food. Several of the ranches in the elk country have put out hay for the animals for a number of years, and they have not been long in locating it when the snow gets deep in the hills. In this manner they are enabled to keep in good condition throughout the winter, and when spring arrives return to their usual haunts.

The eastern part of the State forms the principal range for these animals which the authorities are endeavoring to protect from the pot hunters and specimen seekers. Stringent laws have been enacted, which, if carried out, will go a great way toward protecting the king of North American game animals.

NOISY AVIANS.

The bellbird, which makes perhaps, in its natural state, the greatest noise of any known avian, is found both in South America and certain parts of Africa. Its voice will carry on a still day a distance of quite three miles. Its note is like the tolling of a distant church bell, and is uttered during the heat of the day, when every other bird has ceased to sing and nature is hushed in silence. The hornbill, a bird which is widely distributed in India, the Malay Archipelago, and Africa, has also a very loud note. Its call has been described as "between the shriek of a locomotive and the bray of a donkey," and can be heard a distance of a couple of miles.

FISH THAT CANNOT SWIM.

More than one species of fish that cannot swim are known to naturalists. Perhaps the most singular of these is the maltha, a Brazilian fish, whose organs of locomotion only enable it to crawl or walk or hop. The anterior (pectoral) fins of the maltha, which are quite small, are not capable of acting on the water, but can only move backward and forward, having truly the form of thin paws. Both these and the ventral and anal fins are very different from the similar fins in other fishes, and could not serve for swimming at all. Other examples of non-swimming fishes include the sea-horse, another most peculiarly shaped inhabitant of the sea, and the starfish.



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