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A Flight to Europe's Highest Airport

By ST.

*Sun-bright summits, lofty mountains,
Mountains in its azure hue
Lovable tranquillity.*

Some time ago a friend of mine, who does all his travelling abroad by air, mentioned to me, that flying has become a very ordinary business, and that he can get little thrill out of it. Having flown myself a few thousands miles, I partly agreed with him, for after the novelty wears off, one takes this mode of travelling as a matter of course, and some people might say, that one becomes air blasé if there is such a thing.

However, since my last flight, some 10 days ago, I strongly dispute my friend's statement that Air Travels are devoid of thrills. —

On Friday, February 18th, late in the afternoon I received a telephone message from Croydon, asking me whether I would like to join the first Special "Non Stop" Flight London-Samaden, which was arranged by the SWISSAIR for members of the English Press, and representatives from the British Broadcasting Corporation and Tourist Agencies.

Needless to say, I accepted without the slightest hesitation; here at last, I thought, will be an adventure which will provide some thrills, I felt as excited as a school-boy who is going for his first school-treat.

And thrilling it was, I have only one regret, and that is, that my pen is much too inadequate to describe the beauties of this trip; but I will all the same endeavour to give my readers an idea of this journey, which has since made history. —

Early on Saturday morning, February 19th, when I woke up, after having dreamt about the most hair-raising stunts executed in a very weird contrivance midway between heaven and earth, I glanced out of the window where a golden dawn heralded in a fine day. Dressing and breakfasting took but little time, and off I went to Victoria, the starting point of our journey. After having been duly "put on the scales," we were taken in the comfortable coach of the Imperial Airways to the Croydon Aerodrome.

On this journey I had leisure to think of all sorts of things, would I, I reasoned, come back safe and sound, or would a little wooden cross somewhere in France or Switzerland denote that ST. had ended his earthly pilgrimage and flown to celestial dwelling places. (If he was lucky). I thought of all my sins; which as we had now passed through Streatham, you can well imagine, dear reader, that my "debit" balance is rather on the heavy side. Deep down in my heart I asked all those, whom I have at one time or another wronged for forgiveness; I especially sent a fervent prayer heavenwards for all those whom I have in the past attacked or criticised in the "Swiss Observer," and now that I have come back safe and sound and wiser, I will try and mend my ways and be a better man. —

All this has, of course, nothing to do with the "Non Stop Flight," but I must nevertheless convey to my readers how my thoughts were with them on the eve of the coming adventure. I must have looked pretty queer, — no doubt due to great emotions, — because my neighbour asked me whether I would like to have the coach stopped. I nearly said something rude, but I remembered at the last moment about the prayers and resolutions that I had just undertaken. — On we went, and the roars of engines overhead made me realise that we had arrived at the Airport.

At Croydon the party was received by Mr. Charles Messmer, London Manager of the SWISSAIR, and everybody was introduced to each other. Luckily I met amongst my colleagues of the Press, two friends whom I had encountered on previous flights, so any thoughts, that I should feel lonely amongst the giants of the mighty English Press were at once dispersed. I had previously had visions that I might have to rely for companionship on the stewardess, whom I knew, from previous experience, are not only very kind but very pretty too, and only too willing to study the comfort of their passengers.

Mr. Messmer, who was accompanying the party which numbered fourteen, was in full mountaineering garb, and on his lapel he wore the Swiss Alpine Club badge, as well as the badge of the Ski-Club of the SWISSAIR. We were then also introduced to the Chief-pilot of the SWISSAIR, Flight-captain E. Nyffenegger, who on two previous occasions had carried me over

the fair fields of France to Switzerland; he was assisted by M. Gloor, wireless operator.

After everybody had said "how-do-you-do" to each other, and had promptly forgotten the name of the person to whom he had just been introduced, the party moved off to enter the DOUGLAS D.C.2 machine.

Our Air Hostess, Miss Trudy Staub, chief stewardess of the SWISSAIR, becomingly garbed in white, greeted us with a happy smile, and I got an extra smile, not because of my beautiful eyes (!), but because she hails from the same canton as I do, where "women are women" and "men are slow." Now I must not enlarge on this subject, or I may get into trouble. —

After being properly strapped in for the ascent, we taxied on to the starting place. A mighty roar of the twin engines, then a few little bumps, and looking out of the window the hangars opposite disappeared and with increasing speed we were off rapidly gaining height.

Onwards we went to the "Gefilden der Heimat."

Half way to the coast we ran into clouds which we scaled with great facility, under us now was a vast unending sea of mist, on which a radiant sun shone. In the distance we saw the large Air liner of the Imperial Airways on its way to Paris; having a much shorter route to fly the machine was considerably lower, just skimming the white silvery clouds. After a few minutes we lost sight of it, as we were travelling at a much higher speed.

We were now alone in this vast expanse the sun shone brilliantly and we could distinctly see the shadow of our machine following us reflecting on the clouds far below. Owing to a strong headwind we reached the coast rather later than usual. Through some openings in the sea of clouds we could see Hastings, but hardly had we glanced along the English coast, where Bexhill, Eastbourne and Dungeness could also be recognised, when in the distance the coastline of France came into view.

Beneath us was the Channel looking rather dark in colour, but here and there a white ripple showed that the sea was rough, and I was grateful for not having been obliged to make the crossing in one of the boats, which we could see from a height of about 10,000 feet looking like little toys below.

Our hostess then made two announcements, the first one an agreeable one, and the second one less so, anyhow to ardent photographers. It was announced, that as we were the guests of the SWISSAIR, the contents of the "buffet" was at the disposal of the guests, and that all cameras would have to be given up, as photos must not be taken over French territory.

On crossing the French coast over Berck s. M. we toasted "La Belle France." Flight-captain Nyffenegger then emerged from his cabin — as he had put the automatic pilot (robot-pilot) into action, — and by the aid of maps and charts he explained the navigation of an Air liner. Once or twice we saw a red light coming up on the roof of the cabin, this was the signal of the wireless operator to the captain that a message had been received which he wished to impart to the pilot. Flight-captain Nyffenegger disappeared on each occasion for a few minutes and on emerging again he was bombarded with questions from all sides, which he answered with great competence.

In the meantime we flew over Albert at a height of 3,000m. with a speed of 200km. p.h. We passed over Laon soon after, and I could not but help thinking that exactly three weeks previously, I had passed Laon on a dreary night journey in a packed and stuffy railway carriage; what a difference this time, a comfortable seat and a well regulated temperature, a pleasant hostess and drinks *ad lib.*

Reims the lovely Cathedral town, in the midst of vineyards appeared, and we could clearly pick out the cathedral. If one talks of Reims one thinks of Champagne, so "we had one," because not only does an engine require lubricating, but the human body requires the same attention, at least so I was informed only recently by one of my motoring friends, and he must know. —

The aerodrome of Reims was clearly visible and so were some of the old trenches still left from the Great War, as a reminder that here the sons of France died in heroic defence of their noble country.

In silence we greeted these grim remembrances of all those who had given their lives, so that we should live and enjoy freedom and liberty.

Still the engines carried us further, Chalons s. M., St. Dizier, Chaumont were passed over, it had become quiet in our cabin, some of my colleagues enjoyed a little nap, perhaps the Air hostess had "lubricated" them too well, or perhaps they were gathering strength for the things to come, whilst others became immersed in newspapers and books.

But suddenly the wireless operator sent a message through the stewardess, that in the distance mountains could be seen, books, newspapers, etc., disappeared, sleepy eyes were rubbed and great animation reigned in the "camp." I took out my map and found that we had just passed Vitte and were nearing Epinal. The country below us was now covered with a white sheet of snow. The Vosges were clearly visible and so was the Black Forest with its dark pine trees. Nearing Belfort we could see for the first time, rather dimly the Alps, everybody rushed to one side and I felt rather nervous lest



DOUGLAS DC2 AIR LINER ON THE WAY TO SAMADEN.

the machine should turn turtle. The view below was now almost blotted out, and once again we travelled over a sea of silver clouds which gave me an impression of a mighty ocean frozen still.

At Monbéliard we left the ordinary London to Basle route and entered Switzerland, as we were told (because we could not see) approximately over Porrentruy. Here the cameras were handed back to their respective owners.

And now "Hills peep o'er Hills, Alps on Alps arise!" Sun-bright summits and lofty mountains are straight ahead of us. There was something in the unruffled calm of nature that overawed every little anxiety and doubt, the sight of the deep blue sky and the glittering peaks provided an unforgettable panorama.

How glad we were to have in our midst a keen mountaineer, and a member of the Swiss Alpine Club, only now I realised why Mr. Messmer appeared in Croydon dressed as a mountaineer, he was going to act from now on as our guide.

Once only had we an opportunity to see below, where the town of Delémont appeared in a haze. Hardly did I guess in 1914, when I was billeted in that town during the Frontier occupation, that one day, 24 years later I would pass over at a height of about 11,000 feet and at a speed of 160 miles p.h.

The view was now majestic in its grandeur, before us we had the glorious chain of the Bernese Oberland, such giants, as Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau came into view. One by one, as we passed them they were named by our untiring guide.

Who does not know these names so familiar to mountaineers all over the globe?, the majestic Blumlisalp, the ragged Finsteraar-und Schreckhörner, the Aletschhorn, Breithorn, Altels, Rinder und Fyscherhörner, Gspaltenhorn, Morgenberghorn, Grosse und Klein Tschingelhörner, etc., etc., hundreds of them, covered with a diadem of snow underneath a serene sky. — Unforgettable, awe inspiring. —

On nearing Lucerne (invisible) we could see the Pilatus, Rigi and Bürgenstock just appearing out of the clouds. Clearly, we could discern people coming out of the Hotel on the Pilatus gazing at us, we must have just disturbed their "Kaffe-Jass." Onwards we roared leaving behind untold beauty, but a new panorama came now into sight, the Urner, Glarner, Walliser Alps and Appenzeller Alps, Titlis, Uri Rotstock, Gothard Gr. Windgälle, Matterhorn, Säntis, etc.

Now and then we could see through an opening in the clouds below; the Rheintal spread before our eyes, Hanz, Thusis and Tiefencastel passed and now we beheld the lovely Grisons Alps. We flew directly over the Piz d'Aela, seeing Piz Kesch, Piz Vadret, Piz Languard, Piz Bernina, Piz d'Err, Piz Vadret and hundreds of others, bathed in golden sunshine.

On crossing the lovely Julier Pass, the Pass road could be seen, hewn out of the snow, here and there a black speck on it proved that the road was being used.

We were now nearing our "Journey's End," slowly our machine began to descend, in the distance Maloja, Silvaplana and then St. Moritz appeared, surrounded by Piz Albana, Piz Nair, Piz Schlattain, Piz Grisch, Piz Corviglia, Piz Saluver, Piz Ot, Piz Vadret, Piz Muragl, Piz Languard, Piz Rosatsch, Piz Surlei, to name only a few.

At a low altitude we circled twice over the world famous summer and winter resort St. Moritz, as a greeting to the town which was to extend to us such unbounded hospitality. Then we set out towards the Inn valley and Samaden where we made a remarkable smooth landing on the landing piste of Europe's highest Airport, after a glorious flight which took just under four hours.

(To be continued.)

SWISS ACCORDION CLUB.

I am really glad I accepted the invitation to attend the Grand Social Evening and Dance extended to me by the Swiss Accordion Players, on February 25th last, at the Clubhouse in Gerrard Place, as I little expected such a fine concert of accordion playing. — I was agreeably surprised to find a band of 15 players, mostly young and all very enthusiastic. A word with their excellent leader, Mr. Gandon, revealed the fact that 10 out of the 15 members had but for a short time taken up accordion playing under his masterful tuition. The other 5 members are of course the master players headed by Mr. Gandon himself, but the learners are close at their heels and with perseverance will in time become really fine players.

The President of the Club, Mr. Hausermann, addressed the audience of about 150 strong with a few words of welcome and then invited Mr. Gandon to begin the Concert. — The first piece was a "Ländlermarsch." It became apparent immediately that the leader had his little band well in hand and I noticed later that throughout the Concert the players watched their conductor closely, so effecting a wonderful ensemble. Then followed a "Ländler," a Valse and a Mazurka, all rendered vigorously and with fine accentuation and phrasing much to the delight of the audience. Then came Duets and Solos by the experts, Miss Niggli and Mr. Gandon. Any criticism is, of course, not possible since they are the experts, masters of their instrument; prolonged applause proved to the soloists how much the audience admired their performance. Then the fifteen players continued with a "Rheinländer Polka," a somewhat slower, very pleasing movement, — then a Concert Valse "Maiglöckchen" and a March "Basler Gruss" which I thought were the best pieces of the evening. Here and there the programme was admirably cut by special surprise items, such as a Jodel by Mr. Deubelbeis, and one by Miss Niederhäuser, accompanied on the accordion by Mr. Gandon. They richly deserved the spontaneous applause mixed with many shouts of "encore." The band then terminated the programme with three more pieces "Gruss aus den Bergen," "Militärmarsch" and "Der Filzbacher" after which we were indeed sorry that it was all over. — All over? Not likely. — It was now that the players, who so splendidly entertained us with their music, mingled with the audience and began dancing to their heart's delight to an accordion dance band until well after midnight.

It is quite obvious, therefore, that the whole evening was a great success for the Swiss Accordion Club, its Committee and especially for the Conductor, Mr. Gandon, the man with perseverance, tact and a rare teaching ability. I sincerely hope that we may have the pleasure again soon of hearing the Swiss Accordion players and in wishing them every success in the future I thank them most heartily for a very enjoyable evening.

E.P.D.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Wednesday, March 9th at 8 p.m. — Swiss Mercantile Society — Monthly Meeting — followed by a lecture by Mr. Herbert Banyard, on "So that is London," at Swiss House, 34/35, Fitzroy Square, W.

Saturday, March 12th — City Swiss Club — Dinner and Dance — at the Mayfair Hotel, Berkeley Square, W.1.

Friday, March 18th, at 8 p.m. — Monthly Meeting — Nouvelle Société Helvétique — (supper at 6.30 p.m. sharp) followed by a talk by the Rev. C. Th. Hahn, on "Einige Bemerkungen zum Buch von Emil Baer," Alemannisch (Die Rettung der eidgenössischen Seele), at the Foyer Suisse, 15, Upper Bedford Place, W.1.

Saturday, March 26th — Annual Banquet and Ball — Swiss Club Birmingham — at the Midland Hotel, Birmingham. (Reception 6.30, Dinner 7 o'clock.

Tuesday, March 29th, at 8.30 p.m. — Swiss Orchestral Society — Annual Concert, at Conway Hall (large Hall) Red Lion Square, W.C.1.

Thursday, March 31st — The Symphonic Social Choir — Annual Dinner and Ball — at the First Avenue Hotel, High Holborn, W.C.1 (Tickets 6/- each.)

Monday, April 4th — Unione Ticinese — Annual Banquet and Ball, at Paganì's Restaurant, Great Portland Street, W.

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Sonntag, den 6 März 1938.

11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst und Sonntagsschule.

7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst.

8 Uhr, Chorprobe.

Anfragen wegen Religions-bezw. Confirmandenstunden und Amtshandlungen sind erbeten an den Pfarrer der Gemeinde : C. Th. Hahn, 43, Priory Road, Bedford Park, W. 4 (Telephon : Chiswick 4156). Sprechstunden : Dienstag 12-2 Uhr in der Kirche.