

Goldfrap John Henry

The Boy Aviators in Record Flight; Or, The Rival Aeroplane



John Goldfrap
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CHAPTER I. THE BIG PRIZE

"Phew!" exclaimed Billy Barnes as he reported for work on the New York *Planet* one broiling afternoon in late August, "this is a scorcher and no mistake."

"I should think after all your marvelous adventures with the Boy Aviators that you would be so used to heat and cold and hardship that you wouldn't kick at a little thing like a warm day."

The remark came from a young fellow about twenty-one years old who occupied a desk beside that of the stout spectacled youth of eighteen whom our readers have already met as Billy Barnes.

"Why, hullo, Fred Reade!" said Billy, looking up with a good-natured grin from the operation of opening his typewriter desk, "I thought you were off covering aviation."

"I was," rejoined the other, with a near approach to a sneer, "but since we printed your story about the recovery of the treasure on the Spanish galleon I guess they think I'm not good

enough to cover the subject.”

If the good-natured Billy Barnes noticed the close approach to outspoken enmity with which these words were spoken he gave no sign of it. Any reply he might have made was in fact cut short at that minute by an office boy who approached him.

“Mr. Stowe wants to see you, Mr. Barnes, at once, please,” said the lad.

“There you go, the managing editor sending for you as soon as you get back. I wish I was a pet,” sneered Reade as Billy hastened after the boy and the next minute entered a room screened off from the editorial department by a glass door bearing the words “Managing Editor.”

At a desk above which hung “This is my busy day,” and other signs not calculated to urge visitors to become conversational, sat a heavy-set, clean-shaven man with a big pair of spectacles astride his nose. He had a fat cigar in his mouth which he regarded as he spoke with far more intensity than he did Billy.

“Afternoon, Barnes,” was his greeting.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Stowe,” returned the young reporter, “you sent for me – ”

“Sit down,” said the other brusquely, indicating a chair.

Billy sat down and waited for the next words of his managing editor.

“The *Planet*, as you know, has made a specialty of featuring aviation,” continued Mr. Stowe, gazing fixedly at his cigar.

Billy nodded, the remark did not seem to call for a more

definite reply.

“We have offered prizes for flights from time to time, and in this way have obtained a reputation as an authority on aviation and a patron of what is bound to be the vehicle of the coming ages.”

Again Billy nodded at the managing editor’s rather florid way of putting it.

“For instance, the \$10,000 Albany-New York flight and the \$30,000 New York-St. Louis flight. The \$100,000 offer for a transatlantic flight as yet remains unchallenged for, but I have no doubt that in time some daring aviator will make the attempt.”

“It should be possible,” once more agreed Billy, wondering what was coming next.

“In the meantime,” Mr. Stowe continued, “the *Despatch* has declared itself our rival in this field by also devoting great attention to the subject, and offering prizes for flights in opposition to our original idea. The owner of the *Planet* has therefore decided to eclipse all previous offers and be the first in the field with a prize of \$50,000 for a flight from New York to San Francisco, or as far in that direction as possible. The aircraft that travels furthest will get the prize.”

“Across the continent?” gasped Billy.

“Exactly. We are going to publish the conditions and date of starting in our to-morrow morning’s issue. And the offer incidentally means a great chance for you.”

Billy gave a questioning glance.

"I intend to have you follow the racers in an automobile and send dispatches from the various points along the route concerning the progress of the cross-country aerial racers."

The young reporter's face beamed.

"That's mighty good of you, sir," he said earnestly.

"Not at all. It's simply the selection of the best man for the job; that's all. You have far more knowledge of aviation than Reade – or at least you ought to have after your long association with the Boy Aviators – and therefore we have selected you."

"As to the conditions of the race, Mr. Stowe – how about stops, gasolene and water stations, and so on?"

"Each contestant will be expected to arrange those details for himself," was the answer. "This newspaper simply offers the prize to the first aeroplane to arrive in San Francisco, or go furthest in that direction. Also, of course, we claim the privilege of getting exclusive accounts of the doings of the *Planet* aeroplanes. That's all. Simple, isn't it?"

"Very," agreed Billy as he took his leave. "By the way, sir, does any one else know of your offer?"

"Nobody; not even Reade. I guess he's pretty sore that we took him off aviation on the eve of making the prize offer, but it can't be helped."

"Why, I – you see, sir, I'd rather not take it, if it is blocking Reade in any way. I don't want to take the assignment at all if it's going to hurt Reade with the paper."

The managing editor gave an impatient wave of his hand.

"Let me attend to Reade," he remarked impatiently, "you go and get out a story for to-morrow about possible contestants. Of course your friends, the Chester boys, will enter?"

Billy looked dubious.

"I don't know," he replied. "I rather think they were planning for a rest and to continue their studies, and this cross-country flight won't be any picnic. However, I hope they do enter," replied Billy.

"I had no idea that there would be any doubt about it," said Mr. Stowe impatiently, "well, do the best you can. Anyhow, get interviews with Blewitt, Sharkness and Auldwin. They will be sure to enter their machines, and let's have a good, live story for to-morrow. By the way, not a word of this to anybody but the aviators you may see till we publish the offer. The *Despatch* would be quite capable of offering a similar prize to-morrow morning if they learned what was in the wind."

Billy nodded as Mr. Stowe once more gave a sign of dismissal, and hastened from the room. So hurried was his exit, in fact, that he almost bumped into Reade as he made his way out. The editorial room was deserted, except for the dark-haired, slender young fellow with whom Billy had almost collided. The other reporters were all out on their assignments.

"Well?" were Fred Reade's first words.

"Well," rejoined Billy, adjusting his spectacles, which had narrowly escaped being jarred off his nose in the bump, "isn't there room enough in the place without your getting so near that

door that you almost upset my slender form?"

"Never mind that," replied Frank Reade; "what I want to know is, how do I stand in there?"

He motioned with his head toward the managing editor's room from which the boys were by this time several paces removed.

"I don't understand you exactly," was Billy's reply. He noticed that Reade's face bore an angry flush and he seemed excited.

"What I mean is this: Am I going to continue to do aviation for the *Planet*?"

"Say, Fred, old man, I'm awfully sorry –"

"Oh, cut that out. You don't mean it, and you know you don't. You wanted to grab off the job for yourself, and I can see by your face that you have."

"If you mean that I am to do aviation for the *Planet* in future, you are right," replied Billy. "I am; but it was only on Mr. Stowe's orders. You're wrong, Fred, and you know you are, when you accuse me of trying to take your job away from you."

"Oh, rot," exclaimed the other angrily. "If that had been the case you'd have kept away. You don't have to work. You made plenty of money out of your share of the Golden Galleon treasure. You have just deliberately tried to oust me from my job."

"You talk as if you'd been fired," said Billy. "You know that you are one of the most valued reporters on the *Planet*."

"Don't try to jolly me," rejoined the other angrily. "And as for being fired, I don't have to be, for I've got my resignation ready

written out. Here copy boy!" he cried, "take this note in to Mr. Stowe."

As the boy hurried up Reade drew from his pocket an envelope and handed it to the lad.

"Hold on there!" cried Billy, genuinely moved at Reade's evident chagrin, "have you gone crazy, Fred? What's the matter?"

"Take that note in," thundered Reade to the hesitating boy, who thereupon hurried off, "it's your fault I've had to quit, Billy Barnes, and I'll not forget it, I can promise you. I'll get even with you for this in a way you don't suspect. No; I won't shake hands with you. I don't want to speak to you."

Reade flung angrily off and put on his coat and hat. Without taking any more notice of Billy he strode out of the *Planet* offices and into the street.

On the sidewalk he paused for a minute. His hat shoved back off his brow and his forehead puckered in perplexity.

"I'll do it," he exclaimed suddenly under his breath as if he had made up his mind to something. "I'll do it. The *Despatch* will jump at it, and I'll get even on Billy Barnes and the *Planet* at the same time."

CHAPTER II.

BILLY AS A DIPLOMAT

A few minutes after Fred Reade had left the *Planet* offices he was followed by Billy Barnes. The young reporter boarded an open Madison Avenue car, preferring it to the stuffy heat of the subway, and in due time found himself at the home of Mr. Chester, the wealthy banker, and father of Frank and Harry Chester, the Boy Aviators. The lads need no further introduction to our readers, who have doubtless formed the acquaintance of both the young air pilots in previous volumes of this series. To those who have not it may be as well – while Billy Barnes is ringing the doorbell – to say that Frank and Harry Chester were graduates of the Agassiz High School and the pioneers among schoolboy aviators. Beginning with models of air craft they had finally evolved a fine biplane which they named the *Golden Eagle*. The first *Golden Eagle* was destroyed in a tropical storm off the coast of Nicaragua, as related in *The Boy Aviators in Nicaragua*; or, *In League with the Insurgents*. To carry out an important commission affecting a stolen formula the lads then constructed a second *Golden Eagle*, in which they met many adventures and perils in the Everglades of Florida. These were set forth in *The Boy Aviators on Secret Service*; or, *Working with Wireless*, the second volume of the series. In the third

and fourth volumes the boys had aerial adventures in Africa, and in the Sargasso Sea. What these were will be found in *The Boy Aviators in Africa*; or, *An Aerial Ivory Trail*; and *The Boy Aviators' Treasure Quest*; or, *The Golden Galleon*.

Before the servant who answered Billy's ring had time to announce him there was a rush of feet down the hallway and two tall lads, with crisp wavy hair and blue eyes, were wringing Billy's hand till he laughingly shouted:

"Hey, let up! I'm not the India-rubber man with the circus."

At this moment a door opened and a gray-haired man stepped out. It was Mr. Chester.

"Why, how do you do, Billy Barnes," he exclaimed heartily, "glad to see you; but I hope you haven't come to take my boys off again on some wonderful trip or other. You know their mother and I like to see them at home sometimes."

"Well, sir," began Billy somewhat abashed, "the fact is I – you see – I mean – well, the long and short of it is, sir, that I *have* an adventurous proposal to make to them."

"Hurrray!" shouted Harry. "Good for you, Billy!"

Mr. Chester, however, assumed his – what Frank called – "official face."

"Really, I – " he began.

"Now, father," interjected Frank, "don't you think it would be a good idea if we heard what Billy's proposal, or whatever you like to call it, is before we say anything more?"

"Perhaps you are right, my boy," said his father, "but I am

busy now, and – ”

“We’ll take Billy out to the workshop and make him tell us all about it, and then we’ll submit it to you,” suggested Harry.

“That’s a good idea,” assented his father.

Five minutes later the three boys were closeted in the big room above the garage of the Chester home, which served them as a workshop, study and designing plant all rolled into one. The blue prints, aeroplane parts, chemicals, and tools scattered about or ranged in neat racks against the walls in conjunction with a shelf of books on aviation and kindred subjects, the table illumined by movable drop lights shaded by green shades, gave the room a very business-like appearance. It was clearly a place for work and not for play – as a sort of framework newly erected in one corner showed.

“What’s that?” asked Billy, indicating it.

“Oh, just an idea we were working on for a wireless adapted for auto use,” rejoined Frank, “but never mind that now. What’s this wonderful plan of yours?”

“Simply this,” replied Billy briskly, “how’d you fellows like to get \$50,000?”

“Would we?” exclaimed Harry. “Lead us to it.”

“You’ll have to lead yourselves,” laughed Billy.

“Oh, come on, Billy, put us out of our suspense. What do you mean?” said Frank.

“Well, my paper, *The Planet*, you know,” began Billy, “has decided to offer the amount I named for a successful flight

from here to San Francisco, or as near to that city as can be attained. There are no conditions – except get there first, or travel furthest.”

“Well?” said Frank.

“Well,” repeated Billy, “I’ve come here to interview you. Are you ready to announce yourselves as competitors for the *Planet’s* contest?”

Not so much to Billy’s surprise Frank shook his head.

“I don’t know what to say,” he rejoined. “It isn’t a thing you can make your mind up to in a minute. I’d like to do it, but it would require a lot of preparation. Then, too, there would be maps to get up and a thousand and one details to arrange. It’s a big task – bigger than you imagine, Billy.”

“Oh, I know it’s a big proposition,” said the young reporter, “that’s one reason I thought it would appeal to you,” he added subtly. “As for gasolene, why not carry a supply of it in the automobile?”

“What automobile?” asked Harry.

“Why, didn’t I tell you,” exclaimed Billy, “the auto I’m to follow you fellows in and send out accounts of your progress. Oh, Frank, please say you’ll do it – it would be bully.”

“It would be bully, no doubt of that,” rejoined Frank; “but I have a lot of experimental work on hand that I want to finish. I should have to leave that, and Harry is preparing for college. No, Billy, I’m afraid we shall have to call it off. There are lots of other aviators you can get to take part. The prize is big enough

to call out the biggest of them.”

Bitter disappointment showed on Billy’s face.

“Then it’s all off?” he murmured dejectedly.

“I’m afraid so – yes,” replied Frank. “What do you say, Harry?”

“I’d like to go,” decided Harry promptly; “but, as you said, Frank, it would delay us both in our studies, and then we would have a lot of work to do on the framework of the *Golden Eagle*, wrecked as she was.”

“Hold on there!” cried Billy. “I was coming to that. I was going to say that maybe the reason you refused was that you couldn’t build a new ’plane in time, but did I understand you to say you had recovered the frame?”

“Of the old *Golden Eagle II*,” put in Frank. “You recollect that following the fight with Luther Barr’s dirigible in the Sargasso we had to abandon her.”

“After that rascal Sanborn tried to blow a hole in the pontoons that made her float and sink her.”

“I shall never forget the look on his face as that devil fish seized him and bore him to the depths of the sea,” shuddered Harry.

“Nor I,” said Frank; “but here’s your story, Billy. Having, as you know, left the *Golden Eagle* drifting on her pontoons we never thought we should see her again, but a few days ago a message reached us from Florida saying that the government derelict destroyer *Grampus*, while on the lookout for dangerous

wrecks in the Caribbean Sea, encountered a strange-looking object scudding over – or rather through – the waves. They set out in chase and soon made it out as the framework of an aeroplane. You remember that I advertised the loss of our air craft pretty extensively in marine and naval journals, and offered a reward, so that when the drifting aeroplane was sighted every man on board the government vessel was eager to capture it. As the wind dropped soon after they sighted it they were enabled to get alongside the derelict and found that it was indeed the *Golden Eagle*. Her planes were riddled with bullets and her pontoons covered with green seaweed, but the framework was as solid and the braces as taut as the day we put her together. Moreover, the engine, beyond being badly coated with rust, was as good as the day we set it on the bed plate.”

“Say, why didn’t you tell me about this before?” demanded Billy.

“Too much of a hurry to get her back, I guess,” rejoined Frank. “But, say,” he broke off, “the frame was shipped from Florida and arrived here this morning. Want to look at it?”

“Want to look at it? You bet I do!” gasped Billy. “That’s the finest old air ship in the world.”

“So we think,” laughed Harry, as Frank led the way down a flight of steps into the garage below the room in which they had been discussing the *Planet’s* offer.

Frank switched on the lights and there stood revealed in the rear of the place a shadowy framework that glistened in places

where the light caught it. It towered huge, and yet light and airy-looking, like the skeleton of a strange bird.

"It wasn't shipped that way?" asked Billy.

"Not much," was Frank's reply. "They took it down in Florida and boxed it."

"And a nice mess they made of it," said Harry; "but, thank goodness, they didn't harm the engine."

He pointed to the motor which was out of the machine and lay in a corner.

"Doesn't look very big for the work it's done, does it?" laughed Frank, gazing lovingly at the eight-cylindereed, hundred horsepower engine that had performed such good service since the boys installed it.

"There's certainly a lot of cleaning to be done about the 'plane," remarked Billy, as he handled the rusted frames and tarnished bronze parts.

"Oh, that won't take long," replied Frank lightly; "anyhow, we've got lots of time to do it."

"Unless," put in Billy.

"Well, unless what?" demanded Frank, though he guessed the young reporter's meaning.

"Unless you go in for that \$50,000 prize," cried Billy skillfully evading the playful blow Frank aimed at him. "In all seriousness, Frank, won't you?" he pleaded.

"In all seriousness, no," was Frank's rejoinder. "I'd like to do it. Billy," he went on. "I'd like to do it for your sake, if it would

do you any good – we both would, wouldn't we, Harry?"

"You bet," replied the younger brother with effective brevity.

"Well, of course, I know you fellows too well to try to urge you," said Billy; "but I would like to be able to announce in the *Planet* to-morrow that the Boy Aviators announce they will compete for the paper's big prize."

"To tell you the truth, Billy," laughed Frank, "we've had about enough newspaper notoriety lately. It's mighty good of you to write accounts of our adventures, but I guess the papers can get along for a while without anything about us."

"Not at all, you make good copy," declared Billy, with such comic emphasis that the boys went off into shouts of laughter.

And so it came about that Billy said good-night without having shaken the Boy Aviators in their determination not to engage in any public flights, but all the time, though they little knew it, events were so shaping themselves that little as they dreamed it they were to take part in the record flight.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER A CLOUD

It was early the next morning. The paper had been put to bed. Billy, with the satisfied feeling that came to him with the knowledge that he had written a good introduction and account of the *Planet's* great offer, was slipping into his coat preparatory to going home, when Mr. Stowe, his face purple with anger, called to him in a sharp voice from the door of the editorial sanctum.

"Come here, Barnes, I want to see you," he said brusquely.

"Hullo, something's up with the chief," thought Billy to himself; but he answered cheerily: "All right, sir," with an inward feeling that something was all wrong.

"Look here, Barnes," exclaimed Mr. Stowe, angrily flourishing a first edition of the *Planet's* rival, the *Despatch*, "there has been treachery somewhere. How about this?"

Billy, with an unaccountable sinking of the heart, took the paper the other flourished so furiously. It was still moist and warm as it had been run off the press. The sickly, sweet odor of printer's ink hung about it. But these details did not attract Billy's attention. And for an excellent reason. Staring him in the face in big black letters he read:

THE “DESPATCH” OFFERS FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR A TRANSCONTINENTAL FLIGHT

Below – and every letter of the article burned itself into Billy’s brain, was a long story eulogizing the enterprise of the *Despatch* in making the offer and giving a list of the noted aviators who would be sure – so the *Despatch* thought – to enter the contest.

It was a cold steal of the *Planet’s* idea.

Almost word for word the conditions were the same as those Mr. Stowe had detailed to Billy that afternoon.

“Well,” remarked the managing editor in a harsh tone, in which Billy recognized the steely ring that always presaged a storm from that august quarter.

“Well,” floundered Billy helplessly, “I cannot account for it.”

“You cannot,” echoed the other in a flinty tone.

“Why no,” rejoined the lad, lifting his eyes to Stowe’s, “can you?”

“Yes I can.”

“You can, sir?”

“We have been sold out.”

“Sold out?”

“Precisely. And there are only three people in the office who could have had any knowledge of the secret. One is the owner of the paper, the other myself and the third is you.”

Mr. Stowe joined his hands magisterially and looked straight at Billy, in whose mind a horrid suspicion had begun to dawn.

The managing editor was practically accusing him of selling the story.

Preposterous as the idea was, Billy realized that to a prejudiced mind, such as the managing editor's, there would be no way of explaining matters. His thoughts were suddenly broken in on by Mr. Stowe's harsh voice.

“Is there any one else, Barnes?”

Like a flash the recollection of his encounter with Reade at the very door of the managing editor's room, the latter's strange and defiant manner, and the unaccountable publishing by the *Despatch* of a rival offer, came into Billy's mind. He was about to mention Reade's name when he checked himself.

What proof had he?

Then, too, he saw that Stowe's mind was made up. He did not wish to appear in the position of trying to throw the blame on a man whom he realized the managing editor would not believe could by any possibility have any knowledge of the *Planet's* plans.

“I am waiting for your answer,” came the cold, incisive voice again.

"I can think of none, sir," rejoined the young reporter with a feeling that he had put the rope about his neck with a vengeance now.

"Hum! In that case, by a process of elimination, we have only one person who could have done it, and that – " He paused. "I hate to have to say it, Barnes, but it looks bad for you."

"Great Heavens, Mr. Stowe!" gasped Billy, who, while he had seen what the managing editor was leading up to, was struck by a rude shock of surprise at the actual placing into words of the accusation, "do you mean to say you think that I would do such a thing?"

"I don't know what to think, Barnes," was the discouraging answer. "I am more sorry than I can say to have had to speak as I have. However, until you can clear yourself of the cloud of a suspicion that must rest on you because of this affair we shall have to part company."

Billy went white.

His superior then really believed him guilty of the worst crime a newspaper man can commit – a breach of faith to his paper.

"Do you really believe what you are saying, sir?" he demanded.

"As I said before, I don't know what to think, Barnes. However, what I might say will make little difference. In a short time the proprietor will hear of this, and I should have to discharge you whether I wished to or no. If you wish to act now, you may resign."

"Very well, then, Mr. Stowe, I will make out my formal resignation," exclaimed Billy, his cheeks burning crimson with anger and shame.

"I'm sorry, Barnes," said Mr. Stowe, as the lad, scarcely knowing where he was going, left the room. "I have no other course, you know."

Fifteen minutes later Billy Barnes was no longer a member of the *Planet* staff, and his resignation, neatly typewritten, lay on the managing editor's desk. To do Mr. Stowe justice, he had acted against his own beliefs, but he was only an inferior officer in the direction of the paper. Its owner, he well knew, was a man of violent temper and fixed convictions. When he saw the *Despatch* Mr. Stowe knew that the vials of his wrath would be emptied and that Billy would have had to leave in any event. And so subsequent events proved, for the next day, when Billy's immediate discharge was angrily demanded by the *Planet's* owner, he was informed by his managing editor that the boy had left of his own free will.

"He resigned last night rather than have any suspicion directed toward him," said Mr. Stowe; "but, you mark my words, the boy will right himself."

"Nonsense, Stowe, he sold us out," said the owner bitterly; "sold us out cold and nothing will ever make me alter my conviction."

"Except Billy Barnes himself," said Stowe softly, and lit a cigar, which he puffed at with great energy.

When he had learned that Reade was doing aviation for the *Despatch* the managing editor's mind was crossed for a brief minute with suspicion that here might be the traitor. But he dismissed it – was compelled to, in fact. To his mind it would have been an impossibility for Reade to have heard the conversation in which the offer was discussed.

In the meantime both papers continued to work up their \$50,000 offers, until there was actually developed a keen and bitter rivalry between them. One morning the *Despatch* would announce the entry of some prominent aviator in its cross-country contest, and the next the *Planet* would be out with its announcement of a new contestant added to its ranks. The public appetite was whetted to a keen pitch by the various moves.

Crawford, the man who had taken Billy Barnes' place on the *Planet*, was a skilled writer, and an excellent man to work up such a story as the cross-continental challenge. It was he who first broached to Stowe the idea of flinging down the gauntlet to the *Despatch* and inviting that paper to start its contestants on the same day as those of the *Planet*, the winner to take the prizes of both papers. This would give the struggle tremendous added interest, and attract worldwide attention, he argued.

While events were thus shaping themselves with the *Planet* and the *Despatch*, Billy Barnes had visited his friends, the Boy Aviators, and told them, with a rueful face, of his misfortune.

His manner of so doing was characteristic. A few days after he had left the newspaper he called on them at their work shop. To

his surprise he found there old Eben Joyce, the inventor whom Luther Barr had treated so shabbily in the matter of the *Buzzard* aeroplane of which Joyce was the creator – as told in *The Boy Aviators' Treasure Quest*; or, *The Golden Galleon*.

Joyce and the two boys were busied over the *Golden Eagle* when Billy arrived, adjusting a strange-looking mechanism to it, consisting of a boxed flywheel of glittering brass encased in a framework of the same metal. It seemed quite a heavy bit of apparatus, withal so delicately balanced, that it adjusted itself to every movement of its frame. A second glance showed Billy that it was a gyroscope.

The boys and the aged inventor were so deeply interested in examining the bit of machinery that they did not hear Billy come in, and it was not till he hailed them with a cheery:

“Come down from the clouds, you fellows!” that they turned with a shout of recognition.

“Why, hullo, Billy Barnes!” they cried, “what are you after now? If you want an aeroplane story here’s a good one – a new adjustable gyroscopic appliance for attachment to aeroplanes which renders them stable in any shifting wind currents.”

“It’s a jim-dandy,” enthusiastically cried Harry.

“But it’s a story you can’t use,” added Frank, “because the appliance, which is the invention of Mr. Joyce – has not yet been fully patented. He has been good enough to let us try it out.”

“It looks fine,” said Billy, who knew about as much about gyroscopes as a cat knows of the solar system; “but you needn’t

worry about my printing anything about it, Frank. You see, I'm fired," he added simply.

"Fired?" cried Frank.

"Well, about the same thing – I resigned, as a matter of fact," explained Billy ruefully; "but it all amounts to the same in the long run."

"Sit down and tell us about it," commanded Frank, genuinely concerned at his friend's evident dejection.

Seated on an upturned box, which had contained batteries, Billy related his story, omitting nothing. On his suspicions of Reade, however, he touched lightly.

"You see, I've got nothing on the fellow," he explained, "and although I'm convinced that he gave our plan away to the *Despatch*, yet I've got nothing to base it on."

"That's so," Frank and Harry were compelled to admit.

The three friends spent an hour or so chatting, and then Mr. Joyce, who had been tinkering with his aeroplane attachment quite oblivious to their talk, announced that he would have to be going home. He had some work to do on another invention that evening, he explained.

"Well, say, as we've been stuffing in here almost all day and it's warm enough to be mighty uncomfortable, what do you say if we take a little spin out in the auto. We can give Mr. Joyce a ride home," exclaimed Frank.

"The very thing," agreed Harry.

Old Mr. Joyce was nothing loath to be spared the long ride in

a train to his home in the outskirts of Jersey City. As for Billy Barnes, he was delighted at the idea.

Accordingly, half an hour later the Chester boys' auto rolled on board one of the ferryboats which ply across the North River to Jersey City. The boat had hardly reached midstream before they were aware of another car almost opposite to them in the space set apart for autos in the centre of the boat. Before five minutes had passed they also noticed that they were the object of close scrutiny on the part of one of the occupants of the machine. He was a tall youth with dark hair and eyes, and as soon as he observed that he was attracting their attention he at once withdrew his gaze.

Billy Barnes, who had been "stretching his legs" by a stroll on the stern deck of the ferryboat as she made her way across the river, rejoined the others just as the boat was pulling into her slip.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed as the autos rolled over the apron and onto the wharf, "there's Fred Reade."

He indicated the occupant of the other car, who seemed to have taken so much interest in the Chester boys and Eben Joyce, their aged companion.

CHAPTER IV.

THIEVES IN THE NIGHT

The other occupants of the auto were a man with a heavy red beard and a nervous, alert little man whom Billy said was an aviator named Slade.

“That’s queer to see Reade over here. I wonder what he can be doing,” said Billy, as the two autos left the shed and emerged into the street.

Neither of the boys could, of course, hazard a guess, but had they known it the mission of the reporter who had betrayed the *Planet* was more nearly concerned with them than they imagined. The car in which Reade was seated seemed a more powerful machine than the one the boys occupied and it soon left them behind. They thought no more of the chance encounter and soon arrived at the home of Eben Joyce, a comfortable cottage on the heights overlooking the “meadows” on one side and the North river on the other.

They were greeted by the inventor’s daughter, who seemed much disturbed.

“Oh, I am so glad you have come!” she exclaimed, after she had invited the little party in.

“Why, what has happened?” asked Frank.

“I will tell you,” she said, while they all leaned forward deeply

interested. "This afternoon I was called to the door by a man in ragged clothes who begged me for something to eat. My father has told me never to let anyone go away hungry, so I told the servant to give the man some food. I thought no more of the matter till, on looking out of the window, I saw the man who had asked for charity going toward the old barn out there that my father used as a workshop."

Old Mr. Joyce became greatly excited. It was evident he feared some harm had come to his collection of scientific instruments and plans for inventions which he housed there for lack of room in the house.

"Yes, yes, go on," he exclaimed, quivering with agitation.

"He was fumbling with the lock when I looked up and saw him. I shouted to him to know what he was doing. His reply was to instantly stop what he was at and run toward the front of the house. I opened the door just in time to see him leap into an automobile in which were two other men, and they drove off."

"A tramp in an automobile; that's funny," commented Frank.

"Indeed it is. In fact, I recollect thinking at the time that he asked me for food that his manner was too refined to be that of a genuine tramp."

"What did he look like?" asked Harry.

"He was tall and had a big red beard. That is all I am able to recollect of him."

"Sounds like the man we saw in Reade's auto," exclaimed Harry.

"Can Fred Reade have anything to do with this mysterious happening?" asked Billy.

"Eh, say that name again, young man," demanded the inventor, who was, besides being often preoccupied, somewhat deaf and so had not heard Billy mention the other's name when they were in the auto.

"I said Fred Reade," rejoined Billy. "Why, do you know him?"

"I do, and I know no good of him," was the reply. "It was he that first approached me in connection with the sale of the *Buzzard* to Luther Barr and – "

"Luther Barr again. We seem to cross his trail all the time," exclaimed Frank.

"Eh?" questioned the old man, his hand at his ear, trumpet-wise.

"I said we have heard of Luther Barr before, as you know," said Frank, "but you never mentioned the fact that Reade had acted for him."

"It must have slipped my mind in the excitement," explained the old man. "Yes, Fred Reade has acted for Barr in many matters that I know of."

"A sort of agent of his," said Billy.

"More than that," rejoined old Eben Joyce; "there is some mysterious tie between them. I think Reade knows something about Luther Barr that the other is afraid will come out."

"How is that?" asked Frank.

"I don't know, but such is my impression. At the time of the

negotiation for the *Buzzard* Reade treated Barr as an equal more than if he were employed by him.”

It had grown dusk by this time and Eben Joyce’s daughter lit the lamp and set it down on the cottage table. As she did so there came a loud roar of an approaching motor car down the quiet street and the next moment through the gathering gloom a big auto approached the cottage. As it neared it it slowed down. They all went out on the porch to see who could be driving a car down that little frequented street. It was not very light, but as the car drew nearer Frank recognized it.

“That’s Fred Reade’s auto,” he cried.

But if the boys imagined that they were to get any solution of the car’s mysterious appearance they were mistaken. As it neared the house, and the group on the porch must have been plainly visible to its occupants, the big car suddenly leaped forward and shot away into the darkness.

“What did they do that for?” asked Billy.

“I guess they saw so many of us here that they thought it would be more prudent to stay away,” suggested Frank.

“What can they be after?” wondered Harry.

“The blue prints of my gyroscopic attachment and possibly my experimental machine itself,” declared the inventor, “though if they had the blue prints they could easily manufacture them themselves. Reade has been after me to sell them.”

“That is so,” mused Frank; “undoubtedly such prints would be of great value to them.”

“Will you do something for me?” inquired old Eben Joyce, suddenly.

“Of course,” rejoined Frank; “what is it?”

“Will you take charge of my blue prints for me. It is lonely here and I am old and my daughter unprotected. In case they attacked us in the night we should have little opportunity to keep the prints from them. I would feel quite secure if you had them in your possession, however.”

Frank readily agreed to this, adding that he would place them in a safe deposit vault.

“I shall rest much easier if you would,” said the old inventor. “Bad as they are, I don’t think the men would hurt us; all they are after is the plans and I really dare not have them about here another night.”

It was an hour later when, with the plans safely tucked away in an inside pocket of Frank’s coat, the boys started back for town.

“If you feel at all nervous we will telephone home and stay here with you,” Frank offered before they left.

“Oh, not at all,” exclaimed old Joyce, who was already busy figuring a new problem. “I have a revolver and I will communicate with the police about my fears. I shall be all right.”

With hearty good nights the boys’ car swung off, its headlights glowing brightly. They sped along through the outskirts of Jersey City and were about to leave the lonely, badly-lighted section through which they had been passing when suddenly a figure stepped full into the path of light cast ahead of them.

The sudden apparition of the night was waving a red lantern.
“Stop! there’s danger ahead!” it shouted.

“Danger, what sort of danger?” asked Frank, nevertheless bringing the car to a stop.

“Why, there’s an excavation ahead. Ah! that’s right, you’ve stopped. Now then, young gentlemen, just step out of the petroleum phaeton and fork over the contents of your pockets.”

“What, you rascal, are you holding us up?” cried Billy indignantly, as the man pointed a revolver at them.

“Looks that way, doesn’t it?” grinned the other. “Come on now, shell out and hurry up.”

As he spoke three other figures glided from the shadows of an untenanted house near by and silently took up their positions a short distance beyond him. They were out of the path of the auto’s lights and their faces could not be seen. The light glinted on something that each held in his hand, however, and which were clearly enough revolvers. Things looked pretty blue for the Boy Aviators.

The sudden turn events had taken almost bereft Frank of his wits for a minute, but suddenly it flashed across him that the man who had waved the lantern did not talk like an ordinary robber and that it was remarkable that the others took so much trouble to keep out of the light. The next instant his suspicions were confirmed by hearing the voice of the first comer snap out:

“Which one of you has got them gyroscope plans?”

Frank’s reply was startling. Without uttering a word he

suddenly drove the machine full speed ahead.

It leaped forward like a frightened wild thing.

As it dashed ahead it bowled over the would-be robber, but that he was not seriously hurt the boys judged by the volley of bad language he sent after them. As for the others, as the car made its leap they had stepped nimbly aside.

“Look out for the excavation. Frank; we’ll be in it!” shouted Billy in an alarmed voice as the car rushed forward.

“Why, there’s no excavation, Billy,” rejoined Frank, bending over the steering wheel. “That was just a bluff on the part of those men, of whom, if I am not much mistaken, Fred Reade was one.”

CHAPTER V.

THE BOYS DECIDE

Their strange experience of the preceding night was naturally the topic of the day with the boys the next morning. That Fred Reade was concerned in it there seemed no reason to doubt, though just what part he had played was more shadowy. A perusal of the two newspapers, the *Planet* and the *Despatch*, the next day, however, gave the boys an inkling of one of his motives for his desperate attempt – if, indeed, it had been engineered by him – to gain possession of the Joyce gyroscope. This was the announcement that the two papers had agreed to start their contestants off in a spirit of rivalry by naming the same day for the start and imposing exactly the same conditions, the prizes to be lumped. Among other things in the *Despatch's* article the boys read that Slade, the noted aviator, was an entrant.

“Mr. Reade,” the paper stated, “will accompany Mr. Slade as the correspondent of this newspaper. He will ride in an automobile which will carry supplies and emergency tools and equipment. Every step of the trip will be chronicled by him.”

There was more to the same effect, but the boys had no eyes for it after their sight lighted on the following paragraph:

“Those remarkable and precocious youths, the Boy Aviators, are, of course, not equipped for such a contest as this, requiring,

as it does, an excess of skill and knowledge of aviation. A noted aviator of this city, in speaking of the fact that they have not entered their names, remarked that boys are not calculated to have either the energy or the pluck to carry them through an enterprise like the present.”

“That’s Fred Reade, for a bet,” exclaimed Billy, as he read the insulting paragraph. “He’s crazy sore at you and everyone else beside his sweet self. I suppose he wrote that just to make himself disagreeable.”

“Moreover, he knows in some mysterious way that we have the first option on the Joyce gyroscope,” put in Harry, “and maybe he wouldn’t give his eyes to get it for the principal *Planet* contestant.”

“He’s certainly shown that,” said Frank. “I’ve heard of the Slade machine, and it is reputed to be a wonder. In whatever way Reade heard that we had the gyroscope, there is little doubt that he realizes that fitted with it the Slade plane might win the race.”

“And there’s another reason,” burst out Billy Barnes. “You see now that the two papers have agreed to run the race off together it eliminates the two prizes, and according to the conditions both will be massed and awarded to the winner.”

“Well?” questioned Frank.

“Well,” repeated Billy, continuing, “this means that if Reade has been backing Slade to win the *Despatch* contest, and there is little doubt he has – now that the two contests are massed if Slade has a better man on the *Planet*’s list pitted against him the

Planet man may win, and then Reade gets nothing.”

“You mean that Slade was almost certain to win the *Despatch’s* race – that the \$50,000 was as good as won with the class of contestants he had against him before the two offers were massed?” asked Frank.

Billy nodded. “And that now, for all they know, the *Planet* may have some dark horse who will beat Slade and get the combined prize?”

“Precisely, as Ben Stubbs would say,” laughed Billy.

“It would serve them right for the mean trick they tried to play on us by attempting to steal the gyroscope plans if we were to enter in the race at the last moment and be the *Planet’s* dark horses.” mused Frank.

“Oh, Frank, do you mean that?” shouted Billy.

“I haven’t said I mean anything, you wild man,” laughed Frank, “but inasmuch as my father was talking of going to Los Angeles – you know he has some orange groves out there – I’ve been thinking that we might combine business with pleasure and take a trip to California by aeroplane.”

“Then you’ll do it,” eagerly demanded Billy. As for Harry, he was so entranced at the idea that he was capering about the room like an Indian.

“I think that it is almost certain that we will not,” teased Frank.

“Not what?” groaned Billy.

“Not be able to resist the temptation of going.”

At this point a maid entered the room with a telegram.

"This is for you," she said, holding it out to Frank.

Frank tore it open and his face flushed angrily as he read its contents. He handed it to the others. The message was not signed, but even so the boys all guessed who it was from.

"You got away from us by a neat trick last night," it read, "but puppies like you cannot balk us. Men are in this race, not boys, so keep your hands off it."

"I suppose he means by that, as we are not contestants, we have no right to interfere with their attempts to steal the gyroscope attachment for themselves," exclaimed Frank. "That's a fine line of reasoning."

"That telegram ought to decide us," burst out Harry.

"It certainly ought to," chimed in Billy.

At that minute the Chester boys' father entered the room.

"What are you boys all so excited about?" he asked.

"What would you say if we joined you in Los Angeles?" asked Frank.

"What do you mean? I don't quite understand," said Mr. Chester, puzzled in spite of himself, though he knew the boys' sudden determination to have adventures and suspected that something of the kind was in the wind now.

"If we flew to California, for instance," said Frank.

"Flew there," repeated Mr. Chester. "My dear boy, how could you do that?"

"In the *Golden Eagle*, of course," exclaimed Harry.

"But – but what for?" questioned the amazed Mr. Chester.

“For a hundred thousand dollars,” put in Billy.

“You mean for that newspaper prize?”

The boys nodded.

“I don’t like the idea of your entering a contest of that character,” said Mr. Chester; “there is a great deal of danger, too.”

“No more than we have been through,” remonstrated Frank; “besides, think of the experience. Why, we would fly over a dozen states.”

“A dozen – fifty, at least,” cried Billy, with a fine disregard for geography.

“But how would you go? How long would it take you?” demanded their father.

“I haven’t figured out just the time we would consume,” said Frank, “but I have a rough idea of our route. The object, of course, would be to avoid any big mountain chains, although if we have our Joyce automatic adjuster I think we could manage even those cross currents with ease. But this is to be a race and we want to get there first. The newspaper route is from here to Pittsburg, from there to Nashville, crossing the Ohio and Cumberland rivers, thence, due west almost, across the northern part of Arkansas, Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle, New Mexico, Arizona and then across California to San Francisco.”

“Hurrah,” cried Billy, his eyes shining. “Indians, cowboys, gold mines and oranges.”

When the laugh at the jumbled series of images the mention

of the different states Frank had enumerated aroused in Billy's mind had died down Mr. Chester wanted to know how the boys were going to carry their supplies.

"Well," said Frank, "as you are going to California and leaving the car behind we thought that perhaps you wouldn't mind letting us use it. We will be very careful – "

"Oh, very," repeated Harry.

"Most," supplemented Billy.

Mr. Chester laughed.

"I never saw such boys," he said, "but even supposing you had the automobile – I say supposing you had it, could you carry enough supplies in it for the aeroplane?"

"I am sure we could," Frank asserted. "You see, automobiles are in such general use nowadays that it would only be in the desolate parts of the western states that we should have to carry a large supply of gasolene. Almost every village nowadays has it in stock."

"You seem to have the whole thing thought out," laughed Mr. Chester.

"It will be the trip of a lifetime," shouted Harry.

"Well, I shall have to consult with your mother," was Mr. Chester's dictum.

Mrs. Chester objected very much at first to her sons' plan.

"You are always going off on dangerous trips. I do wish you'd spend a little time at home," she said.

But the boys assured her they would be very careful and would

keep constantly in touch with their parents by telegraph and not take any unwarranted risks.

“Well, I suppose I shall have to yield,” said Mrs. Chester at length.

“Hurrah!” cried the boys.

And thus it came about that one week before the big race across the continent was due to start the names of the Chester Boys were enrolled on the *Planet's* lists as contestants.

CHAPTER VI.

OFF FOR SAN FRANCISCO

The final touches had been put on the *Golden Eagle* and she had been transported to Governor's Island off the Battery four days later. The start for the great transcontinental race was to be made from the flats at the southern end of the reservation. The boys discovered that as the day of the race drew nearer that the list of entrants had narrowed down to three. There was their own aeroplane, the Slade entry of the *Despatch*, and a big dirigible which had also been entered by the *Despatch*. This left them the sole representative of the *Planet*. Of the large number of original entrants, some of them had become discouraged. Others' machines had been broken in practice and still others were convinced, as the starting day drew near, that it would be impracticable to make the long flight.

"Well, the contest is certainly narrowed down," commented Frank one day while they were all seated in front of their shed watching the *Despatch's* plane alight from a flight it had taken above the Jersey meadows.

"I'm glad of it," said Harry; "the fewer there are in the race the easier it will be to avoid collisions and accidents."

After his attempt to steal the plans of Mr. Joyce's gyroscopic balancer the boys heard no more of Fred Reade in a hostile way.

Of course, they did not speak, and Reade cast black looks at them as he came and went on his frequent visits to the aerodrome of Arthur Slade. However, his active antagonism seemed to have ceased. Probably he was too busy arranging the final details of the start to be able to spare the time to make himself unpleasant.

The big dirigible, a red painted affair with a crimson gas bag, was also housed on the island. So great was public interest that the little Government steamer that brought visitors over from the mainland was crowded down to her guards with the curious who had obtained passes to see the racing machines.

For her dash overland the *Golden Eagle* had been equipped with her wireless. An outfit of Frank's invention had also been installed in the automobile which was to carry old Mr. Joyce, Lathrop Beasley and Billy Barnes. Lathrop was an expert operator and the boys hoped to be able to keep in constant touch with each other by means of the apparatus. Mr. Joyce, it had been agreed, was to accompany the expedition as mechanic. His skilled knowledge of aeroplane engines and construction was expected to prove invaluable in case of the breakdowns which the boys knew they must expect on such a voyage.

At last the night came when the red flag with a white ball in the center, which meant the racing ships would start the next day, was run up on the tall flagstaff at the army post. The boys could hardly sleep for excitement and lay awake till late talking over final details. It was agreed that the auto was to "pick up" the aeroplane as it flew over Jersey City. From that time on they

would keep in touch by wireless or telegraph all the way across the country, the auto carrying extra supplies, machinery parts and gasoline.

The *Despatch's* aeroplane was also to be followed by an auto in which Fred Reade was to be a passenger, as was also the red-bearded man whose identity was a mystery to the boys. The red dirigible drivers, not being able to afford an auto, had had to depend on luck for gasoline and other supplies en route, although they could carry a good load.

The day of the start dawned fair and still. The bay lay an unruffled sheet of gray water. The flag drooped on its flagstaff. It was ideal flying weather. All the aviators on the island were up early and working over their machines. There were joints to be tightened, stay wires to be carefully inspected, oiling devices to adjust and engines to be turned. This work was impeded a lot by the inquisitive crowds who began to arrive on the first boat.

A detachment of soldiers was finally set to work roping off a space in which, as the time for the start drew near, the air ships were "parked." This relieved the situation and the boys could work unhampered. Billy Barnes, Lathrop and Mr. Joyce started for Jersey early.

"Good luck!" shouted the boys, as they rolled on to the boat in their big auto.

"So long, see you after dinner," cried Billy with a merry wave of the hand.

The boys' parents, relatives and groups of their school friends

had come over to see them off, and when the hard and dirty work was finished the boys had their hands full explaining to their young friends all about the *Golden Eagle*.

At last the bugle that announced that it was half an hour before starting time sounded. An electric wave of enthusiasm ran through the crowd. Over in the city windows of skyscrapers began to fill with men and women anxious to watch the contestants shoot into the air. On ferry boats and roofs all along the water front thousands of eyes were watching.

“Are you all ready?”

It was General Stanton, commander of the Department of the East, who had consented to start the race, who spoke.

“Yes,” came in a shout from the aviators.

The dirigible men began to cast off ropes and the aeroplanes were dropped into position. A squad of men drove back the pressing crowds, and the boys, after kissing their parents and bidding farewell to their relatives and friends, took their seats in the *Golden Eagle's* chassis.

There was a mighty roar and blue flames and smoke spouted from the engine exhausts as the motors were started. Men, with their heels dug into the sandy ground to avoid slipping, held back the struggling planes. The dirigible swayed and tugged at her resting ropes like an impatient horse.

“Bang!”

It was the starting gun at last.

“Hurrah!” roared the crowd.

“They’re off!” shouted everybody, as if there could be any doubt of it.

Like mighty birds the two aeroplanes swept swiftly forward a few yards over the level ground and then headed out far above the river toward the Jersey shore. The big dirigible, its engine droning like an enormous scarab beetle, followed, keeping well up with the speedy winged craft.

From thousands of windows, banked with white faces, handkerchiefs and flags waved and from the roofs of the office buildings housing the *Planet* and *Despatch* plants bombs were exploded at regular intervals to spread the news broadcast that the race had begun. In the offices of the evening papers the great presses were already rushing out “Extras” telling of the start. Soon newsboys in the canyon-like streets of lower New York would be crying their wares.

Every pilot of every boat on the river pulled his whistle cord and tied it down as the air craft swept far above. The uproar was literally ear-splitting. Owing to the roar of their engines, however, the aviators heard little of the turmoil which they caused.

In a few minutes Jersey City, which had gone just as airship mad as New York, was reached. On swept the high-flying craft above its crowded roofs and bellowing factory whistles. Far beneath them they could see the flat green expanse of the meadows beyond with the silver paths marked on them by the Hackensack and Passaic rivers. As they flew onward and left the

city far behind the boys could spy on the road beneath them the two convoying autos.

All at once the wireless began to crackle.

“They are sending up a message,” exclaimed Harry.

“Great start – good work – we’ll beat them all to a frazzle,” was the message the spark spelled out.

“Thank you, let’s hope so,” replied Harry.

The course had been marked on maps that both the Boy Aviators and their companions had handy for reference. From the autos, too, flew red and blue flags, which made identification easy. At night the Boy Aviators’ auto was to burn red lights. The signal that a good landing place was at hand would be flashed upward at night by a blue flare. Of course, if it was necessary to alight in the daytime the occupants of the *Golden Eagle* would be able to spy such spots far below them more readily than anyone driving on the surface.

The engine was working perfectly as the *Golden Eagle* rushed onward. Its steady song delighted the young voyagers. Harry, with watchful eyes, looked after the lubrication, while Frank kept the craft steady on her course. On and on they flew, the autos beneath seeming specks in clouds of dust. The dirigible was about two miles behind and the *Despatch*’s aeroplane was a short distance in front of it. The boys, therefore, had a good lead.

“That’s a good start. We’re beating them already,” exclaimed Harry.

Frank smiled.

“Two miles isn’t much in a race of this length,” he remarked. “We’ve only started, Harry. We’ll have lots of ups and downs before we’ve finished.”

How prophetic his words were neither of the boys realized at that time.

CHAPTER VII.

ABOVE THE EARTH

As it grew dusk the boys found themselves flying high above a pleasant wooded country, dotted here and there with small villages and prosperous looking farms. From their lofty station they could see men and women rush out below them waving their arms in excited amazement as the contestants in the big race swept along. Cattle and horses, too, tore about their pastures mad with terror at what they doubtless thought were terrible destroying birds of enormous size.

Occasionally, too, they would fly above rivers and railroads and by noting these carefully they managed to keep their bearings clear. The *Despatch* aeroplane was now far behind and the dirigible had taken up second place. The auto had been lost sight of also.

"Send out a wireless. We must locate Billy and the others," said Frank.

The instrument clicked off the message, its blue spark leaping and crackling across the gap like a tongue of living fire.

In a few minutes a reply came back.

"We are now passing Cresston, Pennsylvania. Land and wait for us at Remson. You can tell it by its red brick church tower."

"There it is off there to the north about five miles," cried

Harry, pointing to where a tall red tower stood out against the sky.

"I hope we can find a good landing place there," said Frank, setting his rudder over a bit. The airship answered like an obedient steed. Round to the north she swung, her gyroscopic balancing device keeping her from heeling over, even at the sharp angle at which Frank guided her round.

As they drew near Remson the greatest excitement prevailed. People could be seen scurrying out in all directions and pointing upward. Suddenly a deep-toned "ding-dong" was borne upward to the young sky navigators.

"They are ringing the church bell to announce our arrival," cried Frank.

"Well, I hope they've got supper ready for us," laughed Harry; "air-riding gives me an appetite like a horse."

A few hundred yards from the center of the town was a flat green field which made an ideal landing place. Frank swept downward toward it and as the townsfolk saw that the aeroplane was going to drop there was a mighty rush of townsfolk. The road leading to the field was black with them. The younger ones climbed fences and cut across lots to get there in time.

Frank saw that unless they got out of the way there was going to be trouble. He shouted to them to clear a path, but either from stupidity or from ignorance of aeroplanes they stood stolidly gazing upward, open mouthed, as the aeroplane rushed down.

"Out of the way!" yelled Frank.

“Hurrray!” cried the people, not budging an inch.

There was only one thing to do to avoid injuring someone and that was to attempt to land at the further end of the field where there were some trees. This meant a risk of smashing the *Golden Eagle* or at least damaging her, but if loss of life was to be avoided it was the only course to pursue.

With a ripping, rending sound, as the twigs and branches grazed her, the big plane dropped to earth.

There was a sharp, snapping sound, as her landing wheels struck the ground. A branch had caught one of the rudder-guide wires and torn it out, breaking a pulley wire. Worse still, one of the wheels was badly damaged. But the crowd minded none of this. They rushed in and began handling the aeroplane, pulling wires and twisting wheels and levers, till the boys began to despair of ever getting their craft away from Remson intact.

All at once, however, a big red-faced man appeared and began angrily driving the people back. He was the owner of the field, it seemed, and was dressed like a farmer. When by dint of threatening them with the constable he had succeeded in getting the crowd to fall back to a respectful distance, he began to ply the boys with questions.

They were too busy examining the damage done to their craft to answer many of them, and the man doubtless thought them a very surly pair of youths.

In a few minutes the auto drove up and there was more excitement.

“What’s happened?” asked Billy, as soon as the three occupants of the car reached the boys’ side.

“A bit of bad luck,” said Frank, straightening up from his scrutiny of the damage.

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