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北京师联教育科学研究所 编



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PREFACE TO REPRINT EDITION

The reader should grasp clearly the date at which this book was written. It was done in 1907: it appeared in various magazines as a serial in 1908 and it was published in the Fall of that year. At that time the aeroplane was, for most people, merely a rumour and the "Sausage" held the air. The contemporary reader has all the advantage of ten years' experience since this story was imagined. He can correct his author at a dozen points and estimate the value of these warnings by the standard of a decade of realities. The book is weak on anti-aircraft guns, for example, and still more negligent of submarines. Much, no doubt, will strike the reader as quaint and limited but upon much the writer may not unreasonably plume himself. The interpretation of the German spirit must have read as a caricature in 1908. Was it a caricature? Prince Karl seemed a fantasy then. Reality has since copied Prince Carl with an astonishing faithfulness. Is it too much to hope that some democratic "Bert" may not ultimately get even with his Highness? Our author tells us in this book, as he has told us in others, more especially in *The World Set Free*, and as he has been telling us this year in his *War and the Future*, that if mankind goes on with war, the smash-up of civilization is inevitable. It is chaos or the United States of the World for mankind. There is no other choice. Ten years have but added an enormous conviction to the message of this book. It remains essentially right, a pamphlet story--in support of the League to Enforce Peace.

K.

THE WAR IN THE AIR

CHAPTER I

OF PROGRESS AND THE SMALLWAYS FAMILY

1

"This here Progress," said Mr. Tom Smallways, "it keeps on.

"You'd hardly think it could keep on," said Mr. Tom Smallways.

It was along before the War in the Air began that Mr. Smallways made this remark. He was sitting on the fence at the end of his garden and surveying the great Bun Hill gas-works with an eye that neither praised nor blamed. Above the clustering gasometers three unfamiliar shapes appeared, thin, wallowing bladders that flapped and rolled about, and grew bigger and bigger and rounder and rounder--balloons in course of inflation for the South of England Aero Club's Saturday-afternoon ascent.

"They goes up every Saturday," said his neighbour, Mr. Stringer, the milkman. "It's only yestiday, so to speak, when all London turned out to see a balloon go over, and now every little place in the country has its weekly-outings--uppings, rather. It's been the salvation of them gas companies."

"Larst Satiday I got three barrer-loads of gravel off my petaters," said Mr. Tom Smallways. "Three barrer-loads! What they dropped as ballase. Some of the plants was broke, and some was buried."

"Ladies, they say, goes up!"

"I suppose we got to call 'em ladies," said Mr Tom Smallways.

"Still, it ain't hardly my idea of a lady--flying about in the air, and throwing gravel at people. It ain't what I been accustomed to consider ladylike, whether or no."

Mr. Stringer nodded his head approvingly, and for a time they continued to regard the swelling bulks with expressions that had changed from indifference to disapproval.

Mr. Tom Smallways was a green-grocer by trade and a gardener by disposition; his little wife Jessica saw to the shop, and Heaven had planned him for a peaceful world. Unfortunately Heaven had not planned a peaceful world for him. He lived in a world of obstinate and incessant change, and in parts where its operations were unsparingly conspicuous. Vicissitude was in the very soil he tilled; even his garden was upon a yearly tenancy, and overshadowed by a huge board that proclaimed it not so much a garden as an eligible building site. He was horticulture under notice to quit, the last patch of country in a district flooded by new and prbaa things. He did his best to console himself, to imagine matters near the turn of the tide.

"You'd hardly think it could keep on," he said.

Mr. Smallways' aged father, could remember Bun Hill as an idyllic Kentish village. He had driven Sir Peter Bone until he was fifty and then he took to drink a little, and driving the station bus, which lasted him until he was seventy-eight. Then he retired. He sat by the fireside, a shrivelled, very, very old coachman, full charged with reminiscences, and ready for any careless stranger. He could tell you of the vanished estate of Sir Peter Bone, long since cut up for building, and how that magnate ruled

the country-side when it was country-side, of shooting and hunting, and of caches along the high road, of how "where the gas-works is" was a cricket-field, and of the coming of the Crystal Palace. The Crystal Palace was six miles away from Bun Hill, a great facade that glittered in the morning, and was a clear blue outline against the sky in the afternoon, and of a night, a source of gratuitous fireworks for all the population of Bun Hill. And then had come the railway, and then villas and villas, and then the gas-works and the water-works, and a great, ugly sea of workmen's houses, and then drainage, and the water vanished out of the Otterbourne and left it a dreadful ditch, and then a second railway station, Bun Hill South, and more houses and more, more shops, more competition, plate-glass shops, a school-board, rates, omnibuses, tramcars--going right away into London itself--bicycles, motor-cars and then more motor-cars, a Carnegie library.

"You'd hardly think it could keep on," said Mr. Tom Smallways, growing up among these marvels.

But it kept on. Even from the first the green-grocer's shop which he had set up in one of the smallest of the old surviving village houses in the tail of the High Street had a submerged air, an air of hiding from something that was looking for it. When they had made up the pavement of the High Street, they levelled that up so that one had to go down three steps into the shop. Tom did his best to sell only his own excellent but limited range of produce; but Progress came shoving things into his window, French artichokes and aubergines, foreign apples--apples from the State of New York, apples from California, apples from Canada, apples from New Zealand, "pretty lookin' fruit, but not what I should call English apples," said Tom--bananas, unfamiliar nuts, grape fruits, mangoes.

The motor-cars that went by northward and southward grew more and more powerful and efficient, whizzed faster and smelt worse, there appeared great clangorous petrol trolleys delivering coal and parcels in the place of vanishing horse-vans, motor-omnibuses ousted the horse-omnibuses, even the Kentish strawberries going Londonward in the night took to machinery and clattered instead of creaking, and became affected in flavour by progress and petrol.

And then young Bert Smallways got a motor bicycle....

2

Bert, it is necessary to explain, was a progressive Smallways.

Nothing speaks more eloquently of the pitiless insistence of progress and expansion in our time than that it should get into the Smallways blood. But there was something advanced and enterprising about young Smallways before he was out of short frocks. He was lost for a whole day before he was five, and nearly drowned in the reservoir of the new water-works before he was seven. He had a real pistol taken away from him by a real policeman when he was ten. And he learnt to smoke, not with pipes and brown paper and cane as Tom had done, but with a penny packet of Boys of England American cigarettes. His language shocked his father before he was twelve, and by that age, what with touting for parcels at the station and selling the Bun Hill Weekly Express, he was making three shillings a week, or more, and spending it on Chips, Comic Cuts, Ally Sloper's Half-holiday, cigarettes, and all the concomitants of a life of pleasure and enlightenment. All of this without hindrance to his literary studies, which carried him up to the seventh standard at an exceptionally early age. I mention these things so that you may

have no doubt at all concerning the sort of stuff Bert had in him.

He was six years younger than Tom, and for a time there was an attempt to utilise him in the green-grocer's shop when Tom at twenty-one married Jessica--who was thirty, and had saved a little money in service. But it was not Bert's forte to be utilised. He hated digging, and when he was given a basket of stuff to deliver, a nomadic instinct arose irresistibly, it became his pack and he did not seem to care how heavy it was nor where he took it, so long as he did not take it to its destination. Glamour filled the world, and he strayed after it, basket and all. So Tom took his goods out himself, and sought employers for Bert who did not know of this strain of poetry in his nature. And Bert touched the fringe of a number of trades in succession--draper's porter, chemist's boy, doctor's page, junior assistant gas-fitter, envelope addresser, milk-cart assistant, golf caddie, and at last helper in a bicycle shop. Here, apparently, he found the progressive quality his nature had craved. His employer was a pirate-souled young man named Grubb, with a black-smear'd face by day, and a music-hall side in the evening, who dreamt of a patent lever chain; and it seemed to Bert that he was the perfect model of a gentleman of spirit. He hired out quite the dirtiest and unsafest bicycles in the whole south of England, and conducted the subsequent discussions with astonishing verve. Bert and he settled down very well together. Bert lived in, became almost a trick rider--he could ride bicycles for miles that would have come to pieces instantly under you or me--took to washing his face after business, and spent his surplus money upon remarkable ties and collars, cigarettes, and shorthand classes at the Bun Hill Institute.

He would go round to Tom at times, and look and talk so

brilliantly that Tom and Jessie, who both had a natural tendency to be respectful to anybody or anything, looked up to him immensely.

"He's a go-ahead chap, is Bert," said Tom. "He knows a thing or two."

"Let's hope he don't know too much," said Jessica, who had a fine sense of limitations.

"It's go-ahead Times," said Tom. "Noo petaters, and English at that; we'll be having 'em in March if things go on as they do go.

I never see such Times. See his tie last night?"

"It wasn't suited to him, Tom. It was a gentleman's tie. He wasn't up to it--not the rest of him, It wasn't becoming"...

Then presently Bert got a cyclist's suit, cap, badge, and all; and to see him and Grubb going down to Brighton (and back)--heads down, handle-bars down, backbones curved--was a revelation in the possibilities of the Smallways blood.

Go-ahead Times!

Old Smallways would sit over the fire mumbling of the greatness of other days, of old Sir Peter, who drove his coach to Brighton and back in eight-and-twenty hours, of old Sir Peter's white top-hats, of Lady Bone, who never set foot to ground except to walk in the garden, of the great, prize-fights at Crawley. He talked of pink and pig-skin breeches, of foxes at Ring's Bottom, where now the County Council pauper lunatics were enclosed, of Lady Bone's chintzes and crinolines. Nobody heeded him. The

world had thrown up a new type of gentleman altogether--a gentleman of most ungentlemanly energy, a gentleman in dusty oilskins and motor goggles and a wonderful cap, a stink-making gentleman, a swift, high-class badger, who fled perpetually along high roads from the dust and stink he perpetually made. And his lady, as they were able to see her at Bun Hill, was a weather-bitten goddess, as free from refinement as a gipsy--not so much dressed as packed for transit at a high velocity.

So Bert grew up, filled with ideals of speed and enterprise, and became, so far as he became anything, a kind of bicycle engineer of the let's-have-a-look-at-it and enamel chipping variety. Even a road-racer, geared to a hundred and twenty, failed to satisfy him, and for a time he pined in vain at twenty miles an hour along roads that were continually more dusty and more crowded with mechanical traffic. But at last his savings accumulated, and his chance came. The hire-purchase system bridged a financial gap, and one bright and memorable Sunday morning he wheeled his new possession through the shop into the road, got on to it with the advice and assistance of Grubb, and teuf-teuffed off into the haze of the traffic-tortured high road, to add himself as one more voluntary public danger to the amenities of the south of England.

"Orf to Brighton!" said old Smallways, regarding his youngest son from the sitting-room window over the green-grocer's shop with something between pride and reprobation. "When I was 'is age, I'd never been to London, never bin south of Crawley--never bin anywhere on my own where I couldn't walk. And nobody didn't go. Not unless they was gentry. Now every body's orf everywhere; the whole dratted country sims flying to pieces. Wonder they all get back. Orf to Brighton indeed! Anybody want to buy 'orses?"

"You can't say _I_ bin to Brighton, father," said Tom.

"Nor don't want to go," said Jessica sharply; "creering about and spendin' your money."

3

For a time the possibilities of the motor-bicycle so occupied Bert's mind that he remained regardless of the new direction in which the striving soul of man was finding exercise and refreshment. He failed to observe that the type of motor-car, like the type of bicycle, was settling-down and losing its adventurous quality. Indeed, it is as true as it is remarkable that Tom was the first to observe the new development. But his gardening made him attentive to the heavens, and the proximity of the Bun Hill gas-works and the Crystal Palace, from which ascents were continually being made, and presently the descent of ballast upon his potatoes, conspired to bear in upon his unwilling mind the fact that the Goddess of Change was turning her disturbing attention to the sky. The first great boom in aeronautics was beginning.

Grubb and Bert heard of it in a music-hall, then it was driven home to their minds by the cinematograph, then Bert's imagination was stimulated by a sixpenny edition of that aeronautic classic, Mr. George Griffith's "Clipper of the Clouds," and so the thing really got hold of them.

At first the most obvious aspect was the multiplication of balloons. The sky of Bun Hill began to be infested by balloons. On Wednesday and Saturday afternoons particularly you could scarcely look skyward for a quarter of an hour without discovering a balloon somewhere. And then one bright day Bert,

motoring toward Croydon, was arrested by the insurgence of a huge, bolster-shaped monster from the Crystal Palace grounds, and obliged to dismount and watch it. It was like a bolster with a broken nose, and below it, and comparatively small, was a stiff framework bearing a man and an engine with a screw that whizzed round in front and a sort of canvas rudder behind. The framework had an air of dragging the reluctant gas-cylinder after it like a brisk little terrier towing a shy gas-distended elephant into society. The combined monster certainly travelled and steered. It went overhead perhaps a thousand feet up (Bert heard the engine), sailed away southward, vanished over the hills, reappeared a little blue outline far off in the east, going now very fast before a gentle south-west gale, returned above the Crystal Palace towers, circled round them, chose a position for descent, and sank down out of sight.

Bert sighed deeply, and turned to his motor-bicycle again.

And that was only the beginning of a succession of strange phenomena in the heavens--cylinders, cones, pear-shaped monsters, even at last a thing of aluminium that glittered wonderfully, and that Grubb, through some confusion of ideas about armour plates, was inclined to consider a war machine.

There followed actual flight.

This, however, was not an affair that was visible from Bun Hill; it was something that occurred in private grounds or other enclosed places and, under favourable conditions, and it was brought home to Grubb and Bert Smallways only by means of the magazine page of the half-penny newspapers or by cinematograph records. But it was brought home very insistently, and in those days if, ever one heard a man saying in a public place in a

loud, reassuring, confident tone, "It's bound to come," the chances were ten to one he was talking of flying. And Bert got a box lid and wrote out in correct window-ticket style, and Grubb put in the window this inscription, "Aeroplanes made and repaired." It quite upset Tom--it seemed taking one's shop so lightly; but most of the neighbours, and all the sporting ones, approved of it as being very good indeed.

Everybody talked of flying, everybody repeated over and over again, "Bound to come," and then you know it didn't come. There was a hitch. They flew--that was all right; they flew in machines heavier than air. But they smashed. Sometimes they smashed the engine, sometimes they smashed the aeronaut, usually they smashed both. Machines that made flights of three or four miles and came down safely, went up the next time to headlong disaster. There seemed no possible trusting to them. The breeze upset them, the eddies near the ground upset them, a passing thought in the mind of the aeronaut upset them. Also they upset--simply.

"It's this 'stability' does 'em," said Grubb, repeating his newspaper. "They pitch and they pitch, till they pitch themselves to pieces."

Experiments fell away after two expectant years of this sort of success, the public and then the newspapers tired of the expensive photographic reproductions, the optimistic reports, the perpetual sequence of triumph and disaster and silence. Flying slumped, even ballooning fell away to some extent, though it remained a fairly popular sport, and continued to lift gravel from the wharf of the Bun Hill gas-works and drop it upon deserving people's lawns and gardens. There were half a dozen reassuring years for Tom--at least so far as flying was

concerned. But that was the great time of mono-rail development, and his anxiety was only diverted from the high heavens by the most urgent threats and symptoms of change in the lower sky.

There had been talk of mono-rails for several years. But the real mischief began when Brennan sprang his gyroscopic mono-rail car upon the Royal Society. It was the leading sensation of the 1907 soirees; that celebrated demonstration-room was all too small for its exhibition. Brave soldiers leading Zionists, deserving novelists, noble ladies, congested the narrow passage and thrust distinguished elbows into ribs the world would not willingly let break, deeming themselves fortunate if they could see "just a little bit of the rail." Inaudible, but convincing, the great inventor expounded his discovery, and sent his obedient little model of the trains of the future up gradients, round curves, and across a sagging wire. It ran along its single rail, on its single wheels, simple and sufficient; it stopped, reversed stood still, balancing perfectly. It maintained its astounding equilibrium amidst a thunder of applause. The audience dispersed at last, discussing how far they would enjoy crossing an abyss on a wire cable. "Suppose the gyroscope stopped!" Few of them anticipated a tithe of what the Brennan mono-rail would do for their railway securities and the face of the world.

In a few, years they realised better. In a little while no one thought anything of crossing an abyss on a wire, and the mono-rail was superseding the tram-lines, railways: and indeed every form of track for mechanical locomotion. Where land was cheap the rail ran along the ground, where it was dear the rail lifted up on iron standards and passed overhead; its swift, convenient cars went everywhere and did everything that had once been done along made tracks upon the ground.

When old Smallways died, Tom could think of nothing more striking to say of him than that, "When he was a boy, there wasn't nothing higher than your chimbleys--there wasn't a wire nor a cable in the sky!"

Old Smallways went to his grave under an intricate network of wires and cables, for Bun Hill became not only a sort of minor centre of power distribution--the Home Counties Power Distribution Company set up transformers and a generating station close beside the old gas-works--but, also a junction on the suburban mono-rail system. Moreover, every tradesman in the place, and indeed nearly every house, had its own telephone.

The mono-rail cable standard became a striking fact in urban landscape, for the most part stout iron erections rather like tapering trestles, and painted a bright bluish green. One, it happened, bestrode Tom's house, which looked still more retiring and apologetic beneath its immensity; and another giant stood just inside the corner of his garden, which was still not built upon and unchanged, except for a couple of advertisement boards, one recommending a two-and-sixpenny watch, and one a nerve restorer. These, by the bye, were placed almost horizontally to catch the eye of the passing mono-rail passengers above, and so served admirably to roof over a tool-shed and a mushroom-shed for Tom. All day and all night the fast cars from Brighton and Hastings went murmuring by overhead long, broad, comfortable-looking cars, that were brightly lit after dusk. As they flew by at night, transient flares of light and a rumbling sound of passage, they kept up a perpetual summer lightning and thunderstorm in the street below.

Presently the English Channel was bridged--a series of great iron Eiffel Tower pillars carrying mono-rail cables at a height of a

hundred and fifty feet above the water, except near the middle, where they rose higher to allow the passage of the London and Antwerp shipping and the Hamburg-America liners.

Then heavy motor-cars began to run about on only a couple of wheels, one behind the other, which for some reason upset Tom dreadfully, and made him gloomy for days after the first one passed the shop...

All this gyroscopic and mono-rail development naturally absorbed a vast amount of public attention, and there, was also a huge excitement consequent upon the amazing gold discoveries off the coast of Anglesea made by a submarine prospector, Miss Patricia Giddy. She had taken her degree in geology and mineralogy in the University of London, and while working upon the auriferous rocks of North Wales, after a brief holiday spent in agitating for women's suffrage, she had been struck by the possibility of these reefs cropping up again under the water. She had set herself to verify this supposition by the use of the submarine crawler invented by Doctor Alberto Cassini. By a happy mingling of reasoning and intuition peculiar to her sex she found gold at her first descent, and emerged after three hours' submersion with about two hundredweight of ore containing gold in the unparalleled quantity of seventeen ounces to the ton. But the whole story of her submarine mining, intensely interesting as it is, must be told at some other time; suffice it now to remark simply that it was during the consequent great rise of prices, confidence, and enterprise that the revival of interest in flying occurred.

It is curious how that revival began. It was like the coming of a breeze on a quiet day; nothing started it, it came. People began to talk of flying with an air of never having for one

moment dropped the subject. Pictures of flying and flying machines returned to the newspapers; articles and allusions increased and multiplied in the serious magazines. People asked in mono-rail trains, "When are we going to fly?" A new crop of inventors sprang up in a night or so like fungi. The Aero Club announced the project of a great Flying Exhibition in a large area of ground that the removal of slums in Whitechapel had rendered available.

The advancing wave soon produced a sympathetic ripple in the Bun Hill establishment. Grubb routed out his flying-machine model again, tried it in the yard behind the shop, got a kind of flight out of it, and broke seventeen panes of glass and nine flower-pots in the greenhouse that occupied the next yard but one.

And then, springing from nowhere, sustained one knew not how, came a persistent, disturbing rumour that the problem had been solved, that the secret was known. Bert met it one early-closing afternoon as he refreshed himself in an inn near Nutfield, whither his motor-bicycle had brought him. There smoked and meditated a person in khaki, an engineer, who presently took an interest in Bert's machine. It was a sturdy piece of apparatus, and it had acquired a kind of documentary value in these quick-changing times; it was now nearly eight years old. Its points discussed, the soldier broke into a new topic with, "My next's going to be an aeroplane, so far as I can see. I've had enough of roads and ways."

"They TORK," said Bert.

"They talk--and they do," said the soldier.

"The thing's coming--"