

Lunatics of the Air

Moral Aspects of Aviation

By CHARLES J. V. MURPHY

MORE THAN thirty years ago the minister of a fastidious New York Church solemnly warned his congregation, in a Sabbath sermon of more than passing interest and pertinency, that "you can't serve God and ride a bicycle." He saw the hand-writing on the wall. On roll-icking wheels and churning pedals, he saw the country going to the dogs.

There can be no doubt that the advent of the bicycle materially hastened the liberation of America from stuffy Victorianism. Its influence was great, if its range was short. Travel makes for tolerance, and in its day the bicycle was a powerful force for liberalism. The automobile speedily replaced the bicycle. On rubber-shod wheels, behind a multi-cylindere motor, with the power of two score horses or more to command at the simple turn of the switch, we began a new and thrilling epoch. It is not necessary to set forth the multiplicity of changes that the automobile has wrought; social, economic and moral. What does concern us, however, is the fact that another clamorous force is hammering at the gateway of the Gasoline Era—perhaps the most important force of them all—the airplane. What will its peculiar and significant contributions to an impending America be?

With its good, the automobile brought evil. For the joy and freedom of travel, the enriched living and experience it gave, we have had to make essential and indubitably important sacrifices.

From the freedom of travel we must subtract the manifold restrictions imposed by the thousands of new laws the automobile has impelled into the statute books. From the joy of travel we must subtract the terrific honking and racket it has conjured up, the irritating cluttering up of city streets and highways. From the enriched living and experience we must subtract the new risks to normal life, the thousands of persons annually killed, and the fact it has proved an excellent accessory for crime.

If the slower moving automobile brought these things we may well pause

Some weeks ago we published an article, "America on Wheels," which set forth in gloomy detail the horrors of the motor age. Do new, and worse, disturbances lie in the air age which now dawns? What effect will the airplane have on irresponsible humans? Mr. Murphy is not optimistic. He writes, in prophecy, with authority. As a newspaper man he flew to the rescue of the "Bremen" fliers two years ago. He is the author of a biography of Commander Richard Byrd, and of numerous articles on aviation.

to contemplate what the airplane holds in store for us—this astonishing vehicle of wing and motor which, at the moment, is the gorgeous symbol of the emancipation of man-made flight. Over it the sentimentalists and romanticists grow lyrical, but in the near future the airplane must compel a drastic re-ordering of travel routine. What will happen when the lunatics who now drive cars—the speed-maniacs, the drunkards, the road-hogs, the hit-and-run drivers—take to the air?

Human beings, a conscienceless and erratic lot, have now a vehicle which can hedge-hop meridians as easily as an automobile used to lope past the suburbs. They command a machine which gives them a new and dangerous mastery over nature. Their egos will expand still further.

THE AIRPLANE, even now, gives indication of what the future holds. On any Monday your newspaper will provide you with a recapitulation of weekend accidents in aviation. . . . Six die in air crashes Pilot flies into mountain, narrowly escaping crowded bus Unlicensed plane kills four Boy pilot killed when plane spins and so on. Such reports have become as regular a factor in the day's news as the weather forecast; or the Sunday motor death list.

Let me state at the outset that I am not concerned with the statistical relationship of these accidents as compared with those of railroads, steamers, automobiles, Chicago banditry and tuberculosis. And I am thoroughly aware of the fact, which I attempted to establish in a previous article in The Outlook, that the aviation industry is doing all it can to reduce such accidents.

I simply call attention to them here as a manifestation of the new problems engendered by our newest form of mass transportation. If we have such risks now, when only a few thousand people fly as a regular thing, what will they be when the skies begin to swarm with aircraft (if—and when—they do) and the air becomes the Lincoln Highway and the Post Road of tomorrow?

Indeed, we have already begun to make our sacrifices for aviation's excellent contributions, and life in this crowded age is still more trying.

The noise of the airplane is becoming a disturbing note in this nation of raucous noises. Mail planes, flying low, are nightly awakening fretful children in Suburbia. On the shore, where I spend my weekends, seaplanes and circling land planes have driven out all the peace and quiet the place used to have. Occasionally an interstate passenger plane throbs noisily overhead, but its deeper note is no more than a phrase in the greater, penetrating dissonance of pleasure craft.

Laws forbidding flying below a given altitude over certain areas have already been written into the law books of the more forward looking cities, but pilots are prone to overlook them. With irritating abandon, they stunt and dive over passing sail boats, and over country estates and over parks. Not yet are the airways policed like the highways and, besides, the pilot is yet something of a demi-god, to be pleasantly chided, rather than punished, for his recklessness. It is a dangerous and useless business.

In Garden City, home of the great Roosevelt and Curtiss flying fields, this business of flight has brought new nuisances. Members of the golf course are up in arms, like the embattled farmers whose apple trees are plundered by wayfaring motorists. It seems that pilots prankishly glide, with throttled motors, across the putting greens and then zoom up with ear-splitting suddenness. Their games have gone to pot, their blood pressures have reached new highs, and the golfers have sworn to build fences 100 feet

high if the aviators do not put an end to their indulgence in this silly fun.

There is another nuisance. Lighted cigarettes and cigars dropped from passing airplanes have started so many fires that the Department of Agriculture has announced it will ask Congress to pass a law forbidding such carelessness. This is reminiscent of the automobile tourist at his worst. With a preciseness worthy of an investigation into red rust, the Department has made sure of its ground. Of six cigarettes dropped from planes, four were still burning when they dropped into the fields. And of five cigars, all were still alight when recovered.

That lowest form of murderer—the hit-and-run driver—has already had his prototype in aviation. In the lower bay of New York, not long ago, a seaplane sliced through a motor boat, killing a man aboard, and flew away into the fog. On the strength of the fact that the pontoon of his boat was dented, possibly in a collision, a pilot has been arrested, charged with homicide and is now awaiting trial. But he has insisted that he was not the offender.

And just the day before, another seaplane, sweeping out of fog with dry fuel tanks, shot into the crowded surf at Coney Island, killing two persons and injuring half a dozen more. This pilot, too, was arrested. But for what? Was it his carelessness or was it an act of God? It must have been difficult to determine; at any rate, he was exonerated by the court.

Regardless of where the responsibility rests, the fact remains that the Gasoline Era has introduced a new and, at times, terrifying unexpected risk into the normal routine of life.

These imponderables in aviation have already begun to engross the lawmakers, and we may expect, very shortly, a new mass of laws upon our already overburdened law books. Certainly there is need for control. The question is: from what source shall that control emanate, and by what policing body shall it have to be applied?

Here there arises a curious situation. I doubt if there is any single industry in the country as jealous of its newfound influence as the aviation in-

dustry. It has thus far shown a remarkable agreeableness to co-operate with the public in most things: but its underlying attitude toward external control is plainly—hands off. It maintains that it is best capable of bringing order into its own house.

Perhaps it is right. No one is certain. Not even the Department of Commerce, which has made excellent progress in spite of its diplomatic inclination to favor every one, has undertaken a single important step without first finding out whether or not the leaders of the industry were wholly in favor of it.

You see, this business of flight, with hundreds of millions of dollars invested in it, with the country's military security largely resting upon it, is still able arrogantly to argue that any drastic legislation would smother its expansion. It is still able to block legislation that might in any way connote danger and risk in flight—that would, or might, injure its business.

For instance, at the recent conference of the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce at Kansas City, the representatives of the country's leading air lines almost unanimously rejected a suggestion that Congress be asked to pass a law placing commercial lines under government control. Quite as thor-

asking for a governmental investigation into the crash of the Trans-Continental Air Transport tri-motored plane in New Mexico, in which eight were killed. At once the lobby made known its opposition. The industry was well able to investigate thoroughly for itself. I am not so sure. However, the bill seems already doomed to an easy death, and we may rest assured that this accident—whether it was due to fate or to the break-down of human factors—is a closed chapter.

Then there is the factor of drinking. Heavens knows, the drunken driver is a sufficient curse unto civilization: but a drunken pilot, in a vehicle capable of traveling over 100 miles an hour, which cannot be landed at speed less than forty or fifty miles an hour, is a still greater curse. And since human nature shows little sign of improving overnight, we may as well expect him. Flight, therefore, will have a fearful responsibility.

Not long ago, after a particularly distressing crash, the police of a community outside New York conducted a series of raids on speakeasies located near the flying fields. A few arrests were made, the local flying officials virtuously raised their hands, and the thing was soon forgotten.

But I have seen these speakeasies crowded with flying men, and I remember one such place in particular. It was called "——'s Airdrome" and business was always brisk. So brisk and profitable indeed, that the proprietor finally ordered the place closed at 10 o'clock at night, so that he could enjoy his new custom car; and the "airdrome" itself was rewarded with its first coat of paint in years.

On the West Coast, whither I recently journeyed on a mission connected with aviation, I heard from several sources a ghastly story. I was unable to check it up, but the sources were trustworthy. It seems that several young lads, who owned an airplane among them, arrived at their hangar, not

long after dawn, after a fairly enthusiastic all night party, and insisted upon taking the plane for a hop.

The night watchman tried to reason with them. They over-ruled him,



Ewing Galloway

THE MOTOR AGE

Auto traffic at Ocean Beach, California

oughly did they overthrow a proposal that the Interstate Commerce Commission, or some other body, be put into a position to regulate air traffic rates.

In Congress, a bill was presented

climbed into the ship and flew away. Presently they appeared over a field where laborers were working. A rare sport occurred to them. They dived headlong upon the workers, and as they scattered the young men in the plane could be heard cheering. The dives grew longer—the plane came out of them nearer and nearer the earth. It was not long before the inevitable occurred. This time they rode right in. And that was the end of all of them.

I suppose I might chronicle half a dozen similar stories: but what purpose would they serve? We already know that human nature, whether it is operating an automobile or an airplane, is not fundamentally changed. A shift in altitude works no strange alchemy in morals.

Of this, however, you may be sure: regular transport lines, carrying mail, freight and passengers, are as conscientiously opposed to drinking pilots as the Anti-Saloon League could desire. They are jealous of the standard of their personnel, their records, the safety of their passengers. It is good business, good conscience.

Long since the Department of Commerce has made the pilot, who flies under the influence of liquor, liable to revocation of his license and a maximum fine of \$500; and a bill is now pending in New York State which will make the act a felony.

Still, laws have never outlawed drinking, and the fine old habit, I suppose, will continue to the end of time. I, for one, hope it does—under proper conditions. But I pray that there be not much of it in the air.

The parachute has brought to the fore a new moral aspect of aviation—the precedence of passenger and pilot. In time, I believe, we shall have an unwritten law of the air, even as there is an unwritten law of the sea; a rigid, shell-back code prescribing the conduct of men and officers during an emergency.

A year or so ago, a celebrated Western pilot undertook to fly an old plane for a motion picture film. It was one of these so-called "epics" of the

war; and the script called for this pilot to nose the plane into a violent spin, giving the impression he had been shot down. To heighten the illusion, a mechanic was enlisted in the enterprise: he was to conceal himself in the tail and ignite smoke pots, which would throw off great clouds of smoke.

Now the plane they were to use was quite old; and it had the reputation of

pilot and perhaps for the first time codified the unwritten law of the air. In words that did not mince, it held that a pilot is responsible for the safety of his passengers; and that morally, and by virtue of his trust, he must remain with his ship until every last recourse insuring their safety has been exhausted. Such a stand is indication that aviation sometimes senses its responsibilities.

On the West Coast there is today a wealthy young man whose heart was almost broken because of a similar accident. His ship fell out of control in fog, and as it spun from 3,000 feet to 500, he desperately strove to compel his three companions, all of whom were wearing parachutes, to jump. They would not budge. Perhaps fear froze their hearts and limbs. Wild with despair, he hurled himself out. He had done all he could do to save them, and they had put his own life in jeopardy. Only the marvelously fast opening of his parachute saved him.

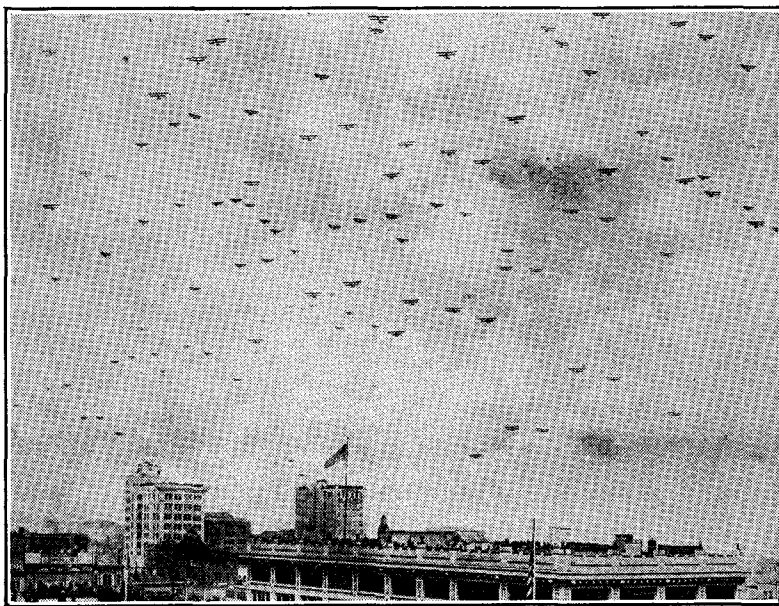
Yet even he was under criticism for having abandoned his ship—severe, harsh criticism.

There is, on the other hand, the story of Lieutenant Sweely, who grimly stuck it out to the bitter end, rather than forsake a stupid passenger; and he must have considered himself lucky to be alive. Several years ago Sweely flew a passenger across the heavily forested section of California. Motor trouble developed, no landing place was available, and the pilot, after vainly struggling to keep the motor going, motioned to his passenger—who wore a parachute—that they would have to go over the side. The passenger had been instructed in how to use it before.

But no. The man cowered in the cockpit and refused to move. Sweely first coaxed, then threatened the man. At last, exasperated, he straddled the cockpit and actually tried to push him out. The passenger just secured a death-hold on the cowlings, and held on.

The ship then began to edge into a spin. Cursing, Sweely gave up and returned to the controls. He must have done some serious thinking. A crash

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Underwood

THE SKY OF THE FUTURE?

When the air becomes the Lincoln Highway of tomorrow

being excessively unstable in this form of spin. Consequently, both pilot and mechanic were equipped with parachutes, as a safeguard in case the pilot found it impossible to regain his control.

What happened after the venerable crate fell into the deliberate spin is still a matter for hot debate in Western hangars. Some say that the pilot "bailed out" the moment the ship swung into the manoeuvre; never warned the mechanic. Others maintain—as did the pilot, who is—and always has been—one of the bravest in the business—that he did give warning, but that the mechanic, blinded by his smoke pots and deafened by the motor, neither saw or heard.

At any rate the pilot jumped clear and parachuted safely to earth. And while the horror-riveted cameramen watched, the mechanic remained in the ship—and as it fell crazily—indeed, up to the moment it crashed—the thickening belch of smoke from the tail was proof that he was still on the job, still setting off his silly smoke pots.

The Professional Pilots' Association, after an investigation, disbarred the

All's Not Quiet on the Junker Front

IN THE RHINELAND, GERMANY.

By T. R. YBARRA

WITH the subject of evacuation of the Rhineland by British and French on every tongue, this part of Germany emphatically suggests to every visitor thoughts of peace instead of war. During the past eleven years the presence of thousands of poilus in horizon blue and Tommies in khaki kept very much alive the memory of the greatest conflict in history; but, these last few weeks, the reports in every newspaper to the effect that still another town has been evacuated in the Zone of Occupation, and the visible signs on all sides that evacuation is proceeding apace, serve to drive away all thoughts appertaining to war and substitute, in their place, memories of the peace that was before 1914 and imaginings of the peace that, one hopes, will last indefinitely after 1929.

This is most certainly true of the Rhineland and, in general, of Germany as a whole. The thought of war and armies and uniforms and big guns and slaughter is not a welcome one to the majority of Germans. But, in Germany as well as elsewhere in the world, there are people who froth at the mouth when war is depicted shorn of its glories, with its horrors standing forth in stark outline and glaring colors. Peace is all very well, according to their theory, but all those who paint peace too brightly and war in hues too hopelessly sombre are no better than traitors to their country. At once the cry of "Pacifist!" is raised against them—and we all know what it means to a lover of peace to get himself accused of pacifism!

Just now a bombardment of books has burst over Germany all of which depict, with uncompromising lavishness, the ugliness of war and, by inference, the beauty of peace. Of these Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* has had a success, in the author's own country and in many others, which have given it high rank in the history of best-sellers.

Against Remarque and authors sharing his views on war, dyed-in-the-wool German militarists, Junkers untamed by Germany's defeat, every sort of adherent of the old order which gloried and reveled in the Hohenzollern Era and the goose-stepping and sabre-rattling which it entailed, have worked

themselves up into paroxysms of fury. Every conceivable insult, every epithet of shame has been hurled at the heads of the dreamy-eyed, half-consumptive author of *All Quiet* and the rest of the writers, who, in the eyes of the die-hards, are, at best, deluded idiots and, at worst, paid agents of foreign foes or of crafty pacifistic organizations working in dark and devious ways to discredit the glorious game of war. Finally, at the height of this rage against the pacifistic school of literature arising in Germany, the editor of a newspaper which is an organ of the old German nobility, adherents almost to a man of the old monarchistic and militaristic German régime, printed a review of one of these books—Arnold Zweig's *The Case of Sergeant Grischa*—in which the reviewer threw all caution to the winds and called the author all sorts of names including "Asiatic ragamuffin."

ZWIG promptly brought suit for libel against the paper. The case, which aroused great interest throughout Germany, has just ended with a victory for Germany's literary champions of peace. The editor of the paper was fined. The pacifists of Germany had won a moral victory; German militarists, already soundly trounced between 1914 and 1918, had received still another slap.

But they remain as hostile as ever to Remarque, Zweig and all the rest of them. There seems no doubt, however, that the star of unadulterated militarism is—for some time at least—destined to shine with a feeble light in the land over which William Hohenzollern, in shining array and upturned moustachios, used to rule. Even in the ranks of the Junkers themselves, in the shoulder-to-shoulder phalanx of the old German army clique, there are gaps and fissures.

Soon after the close of the War, General Von Schonaich, a connection by marriage of William Hohenzollern's second wife—constrained, one would suppose, both as officer and nobleman, to unswerving support of the old régime—came out in open defiance of monarchism and militarism and equally

open espousal of republicanism and pacifism. Von Schonaich is a founder and one of the most prominent leaders of the Reichsbanner, the great organization of German youth vowed to uphold the German Republic against German reactionaries. As a result of his activities, Von Schonaich's name is anathema among his fellow-nobles and fellow-soldiers. Once I went to see him at his country place in Northern Germany, in a region peopled largely by Junkers of the most pronounced type, to get a story from him for an American newspaper. Delighted to speak for readers in a republic, he spouted praise of republican forms of government, compliments to peace and denunciations of war which, coming from a German general with an excellent World War record and a "von" tacked into his name, made me gasp with surprise.

Another super-Republican, also high up in the councils of the Reichsbanner, is General Von Deimling, who can add to a fine World War record the distinction, almost unique among officers of the old German army, of having been under fire before 1914. And at least two of the writers hostile to everything savoring of monarchy and militarism have a "von" on their names—Von Unruh and Von Gerlach.

But the Junkers do not see in the conversion of these men from the old doctrines a sign of the times. They merely consider it proof of the utter depravity of the renegade "Vons." Newspaper organs of the old nobility and the old army continue to hurl insults at them and at every one sharing their views, despite what happened to that editor who libeled Arnold Zweig.

And these Junker irreconcilables are not merely voices crying in a republican wilderness. The old order is by no means dead in the land. Ultra-reactionaries would undoubtedly find enormous obstacles in the path of a restoration of the German monarchy—but a reaction away from pure republicanism and toward the old governmental form is by no means outside the possibilities of the future.

The fact that the German Republic has weathered the storms of its first ten years does not at all mean that the next ten years are necessarily to be plain sailing for it.