

HOW IT FEELS TO FLY GRAPHICALLY TOLD BY AN AVIATOR

MANY aviators have described their sensations while in flight in the last few years, but none more vividly than Lieut. Conneau, one of the famous experts of the French Navy. Under the name of Andre Beaumont he has been the victor in no less than three of the international cross-country aviation contests this year—the Paris-Rome, Circuit of Europe, and Circuit of England. In describing how it feels to fly recently Lieut. Conneau said:

"On my return from my three great voyages by air—The Paris to Rome race, the circuit of Europe, and the circuit of England—I endeavor to set down the birdman's sensations during a great cross-country flying race. It is difficult enough in all conscience to discern and analyze one's own emotions, and especially to define them with requisite correctness, even when these are emotions which other men have already known and experienced.

"But here in a domain which is totally new to humanity, both for the spectators who observe the flight of man from below and for the airman who to-day is beginning to try his wings, there is something almost audacious in seeking to lay bare a state of mind which is still unprecise, a mentality not yet conscious of itself. But since I must be thus daring I will try to penetrate for the first time the mysterious grotto where the birdmen jealously hide their emotions, their anguish, and their joy.

"First of all, then, let me remark, peo-

ple must remember that we who fly are men like the rest. Therefore the sensations we have in accomplishing the almost superhuman feat are profound and intense, and it is even by reason of the depth and intensity of these sensations that we are often incapable of understanding them. In point of fact I know more than one airman who would be far less puzzled to cover a hundred miles in full flight than to face an interview on this delicate subject.

"I gather up all my courage, then; I spring into my monoplane; I switch on the contact; the propeller flies round dizzily; I give the signal, metaphorically, to let go, and, with the map of Europe before my eyes, I rise into the air in search of my impressions, scattered over the route between Rome, Paris, Utrecht, Brussels and London. For our impressions have wings, too, and I shall need all the speed and suppleness of my machine to grasp them in their flight.

"Here are three of them already on my road through the air, always the same, familiar to all airmen, varying in intensity according to the day, the weather, or one's state of mind—they are the anxiety at the start, the enthusiasm and the ardor of the contest, the manifold emotions of full flight, and, finally, the immense joy, the involuntary cry of victory at the finish.

"Just look at airmen when they are about to go up. They do not speak, or hardly at all; their attention is absorbed

by the minute examination of the machine to which they are about to trust their fate; they go over everything in silence—the state of the wings, the levers controlling the rudder, the elevating plane, and the warping; the condition of the motor, above all things, this metal heart which gives life to the frail framework of wood, canvas, and steel. This is not the moment, my dear young ladies in search of autographs, to ask the airman to sign picture postcards!

"Then there is the scrupulous toilette while the airman dons the ungraceful paraphernalia of the most graceful of sports, the paper gloves and socks to ward off the cold, the overalls, the Balaclava helmet, the goggles, the woolen comforter—in short, the bizarre get-up which gives one the appearance of a being from another world, a Martian, or a man in the moon, as they are described in books. Next the compass and the map have to be attentively examined. Does the map run all right on its rollers? And so on—a host of other little technical details into which I need not enter here.

"At last the pitiless hour has arrived. Everything is ready. It is time to start. Amid the deafening roar of the motor the aeroplane snatches itself out of the hands of the men holding it back and hurtles along the ground. Then it hops and suddenly rises with a slide into the air, describing a graceful ascending curve as it leaves the ground. Arrow-like it darts straight toward an unknown point on the horizon. The irregular jolting and shaking caused by the unevenness of the

ground as the aeroplane dashes to its ascent from the earth are succeeded by a soft gliding sensation which defies definition; the anxiety and anguish of the start have vanished to make room for a feeling of repose, of absolute solitude. The man has disappeared: he is now a bird!

"He rises, but he has not the impression of rising. As in balloon ascents, one has the impression that the earth is sinking beneath one. People seen far below look like very mobile little black points, then only groups can be seen, then one is only conscious of the black mass of the spectators.

"Everything blends together and dwindles away. Houses look like dice thrown on a billiard table; the largest cities seem like Lilliputian towns, the bas-relief melts away, roads, rivers and railways appear to wind their way in a child's model landscape toy. Only the sea and lofty mountains are spared in this wholesale diminution, and they always impose on the airman respectful admiration mixed with a very lively sentiment of fear.

"Intoxicated by the sight, the airman mounts and mounts, his machine pointing upward. Far beneath him the distant earth lies flattened out. Human sounds no longer reach his ear, deafened by the motor's roar. Suddenly, appalled by the utter sense of solitude, he rights his machine and planes horizontally over the hills and hollowed valleys.

"There are no more roads, nor bridges, nor barriers; forests, marshes, and lakes exist for the airman no more; the road is straight and clear in all directions, and on every side. It is then that man has the real sensation of flying, of having at last left the earth, of having conquered the air as he has conquered the ocean, moving in it, playing in it, at his fancy, with a machine of his own invention, obedient to his slightest gesture, rising, falling, wheeling, and diving with the grace and lightness of the bird.

"The danger' But it is for the very reason of the danger that man loves flying. It is because his fair young conquest threatens at every instant to destroy him that man loves it. Man loves flying as he loves his mistress. But in the great cross-country races man has yet another delight. He has not alone the sensation of fighting against air's treacherous element, but of striving in it against other men, winged like himself, with a destination to reach like great migratory birds.

"The emotion caused by his victory over the air is heightened by the ardor of the strife to be the first to reach that little plot, as yet unknown to him, where, however, he knows other men await him, first with anxiety, then with astonishment, and lastly with enthusiasm at seeing two white, two human wings, at the hour appointed barring the heavens for the first time.

"That is the airman's most impressive moment. When, for the first time, he sees the great bare space where he is about to rest his wings, when he has recognized by signs familiar to him—the flying flags, the white cloths spread as a signal upon the ground, the bonfires lit to guide him, the crowd pressing about the barriers—that he has reached the goal of his race by air, it is then that he is caught at the throat by an intense emotion, so sweet, yet so strong as to make him forget the anguish of the start and the perils of the journey.

"And when this final goal is a city, when this city is a capital, when this capital is the cradle of humanity, when it is Rome, the feeling is so overwhelming that a man may be allowed to enjoy a moment of pride. Anguish, joy, pride, fright, isolation, hope and despair alternating; struggles, disasters, mourning, victories, and, dominating all, the tenacious instinct of self-preservation—such are the sensations experienced in the great cross-country flying races. Therefore may it be said of them that they are the intense image of human life."