

MY FIRST TRIP IN THE AIR

"Will you return to P. E. I. with me by plane tomorrow?" my companion at a Congress in Montreal asked me two years ago. Before I paused long enough to remember that I had always been somewhat afraid of this mode of travel, I had answered, "Yes, I shall".

It was a gloomy day. The morning had opened with a black mass of clouds upon the eastern horizon. With the progress of the day they had been accumulating and spreading westward, growing thicker and blacker in their advance. Before leaving for Dorval airport, we went to Our Lady of Lourdes Church to assist at Mass. I was surprised to find a pyramid of candles with flames like fiery apostrophes ablaze before the shrine of Our Lady, and a great many people there waiting for the five o'clock Mass. While they waited for Mass to begin, they said the Rosary (in French) and sang a verse of a hymn between the decades.

When Mass was over, we took the airport car and were soon weaving in and out through the busy streets of Montreal. The clouds seemed to hang on the broad, flat landing fields of Dorval. We mounted the steps of the large airliner bound for Moncton. Inside I took a seat at the window just behind the right wing in a very comfortable chair that could be adjusted to a reclining position. In the racks above were pillows and light blankets. With experienced eyes, the stewardess went over the whole airliner to see that everything was in place for the flight. Everything was ready. Seat belts were fastened into place for the take-off. The plane door closed and, without any fuss at all, the plane taxied down the runway to her wind position, speeded up her engines, and after a very short run we were in the air. I realized that we had left the ground only because I looked out the window. The silver ship circled over the field, headed east towards the Maritimes, and was out of sight of land almost immediately after leaving Dorval. It was necessary to fly above the clouds, as it was a dark, foggy morning.

Frightening thoughts of the high average of people being killed in aeroplanes flashed through my mind, but these thoughts soon vanished as I felt the aeroplane gain altitude. For the next four hours my life was really in the hands of the pilot. This gave me a thought to meditate on for a while. I cannot reasonably question that God is a perfect pilot and knows exactly where He is going and why. So I should have more trust in Him than I have just shown

this pilot, even when He tries to take me into the fog where I lose track of the landmarks.

In the plane there was a sound of steady humming which was the subdued roar of the motors. We wrapped a blanket around our shoulders and over our knees, as it can be cool at flying heights. The "NO SMOKING" sign flashed off as the plane levelled out at a high altitude. The flight sheet listed fourteen passengers. The stewardess, a brisk, efficient, young lady, checked off each name and later busied herself getting the trays ready for lunch. She passed around chiclets too. We were supposed to chew these in order to relieve the pressure on the eardrums when the plane was descending. It gave me a real thrill to look out and watch ourselves plow those endless acres of blue, the terrifying vastness of God's great universe, at the rate of a couple of miles a minute. Yes, in thirty seconds I would be a mile from there. There was a "solid" bank of clouds between us and the land. Most of the way the plane skimmed along as smoothly as if it were on the dining-room floor, but after flying for about an hour, we ran repeatedly into bumpy flying, caused by masses of flying clouds through which we had to fly. The same things that cause the clouds — changes of temperature and condensation — cause bumpy flying. Some of the other passengers slumbered, smoked or read, giving plain evidence that they were not afraid. I was too busy with my flights into the realm of fancy to do anything but look out the window and think. The lines of John Gillespie McGee's famous sonnet, "**High Flight**",

"Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings",
kept running through my thoughts.

It meant a great deal more to me at that time than it did when we studied the poem in our English class the previous year. I felt that I, too, was up in the "wind-swept heights where never lark or even eagle flew", and that I was "treading the high untrodden sanctity of peace" and perhaps if I put out my hand I could "touch the face of God". The whole effect was breath-taking!

Suddenly on the front wall of the plane appeared a lighted signal which read: PLEASE FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS. We are running into weather. I couldn't tell if we were slipping down or the clouds were coming up. Heavy drops of rain were driven slantingly through the air by an

icy wind which turned them into pellets of hail as they struck the body of the plane. For a few moments snow swirled like a dotted muslin curtain in a stiff wind. We seemed to fly over a lake. This was a layer of fog as seen from above. I wondered if the pilot could see any better than I? But he was flying on the beam, mechanically, guided by all the automatic devices that guarantee safety. I did not know if I was merely imagining that the engines sounded different in the fog. They seemed to have lost their smooth rhythm and reassuring beat. What courage it must take to be a pilot! I pondered on their thoughts as they wing their lonely way through space. I was glad too, that I did not feel sick. I reflected that with much less rolling motion on sea I had often been quite nauseated. Someone has said that when you are on the ocean you get a fancy called "mal de mer"; whereas when you are flying you get "plane" sick.

When we had flown through the storm and had experienced quite frequent stretches of bumpy air, the sky that stretched above us was singularly clear and cloudless. Most of the morning we had been flying over Canadian territory, but later flew over the State of Maine. At 10.12 A.M. the stewardess came and told us that we were then flying over Millinocket, Maine, at a height of 6248 feet. It was almost impossible to realize that we were boring our way into the sky at 160 miles an hour, as there was no feeling of speed or hurry. Before long we were losing altitude, as there was to be a touch-stop at Saint John.

Our plane circled and glided down to the landing field. Since breakfast we had travelled several hundred miles. Between Saint John and Moncton we were not flying so high. I could see the automobile roads down below. They looked just like small, white ribbons all dotted with tiny cars. Something else stands out in my memory. At a point not far east of Saint John, the pilot dipped down to a very low height. We seemed to be just above the tops of the trees. I wondered if this was what pilots call "tree-hopping". Spread out below us and before us were vistas of rolling hills and beautiful valleys. Soon we came to Moncton. The silver plane circled downwards, the engines slowed down and the plane glided very quietly towards the ground. We came to earth as gracefully as a sea-gull settling on the water.

The stops that a plane make are a welcome relief as passengers get tired just sitting and like to get out for a lit-

tle while and move around. After having dinner in Moncton, we met with a disappointment and lived through some hours of suspense. Although we had reservations made, through some mistake our names were not among those scheduled to fly to P. E. I. that day. We tried to make arrangements to get home that same day, but finally decided we would just wait there and hope for the best. After some time, the loudspeaker in the Moncton terminal announced, "Sisters, come to the desk at once." Fortunately, two passengers who were to travel from Montreal on the late plane had cancelled their reservations so there were two seats available for us.

The plane which took us to P. E. I. was much smaller than the one on which we had come from Montreal. Safety belts were fastened once again as propellers began to whirl. The plane gathered speed, rose easily from the ground, and we were off on the last stage of our journey. We left Moncton at 6 P.M. and a few moments later headed out over the greenish-blue water of Northumberland Strait towards the airport at Summerside. When we arrived there the plane swooped in a graceful curve and the pilot made a perfect three-point landing. After a fifteen minute stop, we took off on the final hop. As we were now flying over P. E. I., I kept staring inquisitively out the window. We did not seem to be up very high and I could see the various shades of green fields, the golden fields of ripening green scattered among the red plowed fields, making the landscape look like a checker board; while against the green background the cozy farmhouses were breathing lazy curls of faint, blue smoke, making the whole scene look like fairyland. The various villages we passed over looked like model villages and along the highways cars crawled like tiny bugs. Our route from Summerside to Charlottetown took us just a bit to the north of my home and it was very interesting to me to see the familiar landscape from above.

At 7 P.M. we came swooping down to the runway at Charlottetown, the whirling blades of the propellers shining in the evening glow. We unfastened our safety belts and stepped out into the now beautiful summer evening. The whole western sky was the colour of golden ashes, with here and there a flash of red on the lip of a little cloud. High above the horizon the evening star flickered like a lamp just lit, and close beside it was another star of constant light, much smaller.

I had thoroughly enjoyed the day and my first trip in the air. I never could quite understand why a friend of

mine had described his first aeroplane trip in these words: "it was as uneventful as a ride home on a load of hay". Some travellers tell us that the actual experiences of travel are more enjoyable in anticipation than in retrospect, but I do not agree with them either. I was so impressed with air travel that I have been anxious to divulge this enthusiasm and interest to those who have not had the opportunity to experience the comforts and advantages of this mode of transportation.

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WHERE ARE THE IRISH VANISHING?

— by —

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Some time ago when half the world was studying, under Dr. Kinsey, the sexual behaviour of (U.S.) male and female humans, the other half of the world was pondering the lack of sexual behaviour in the population of Eire. It was contended by some sociologists that because of this lack the Irish race was vanishing to the point of extinction.

The problem took a new turn one night last summer when several young Irishmen, with a large cache of British arms, vanished in a few minutes. Now, the British were quite content to see the Irish vanish, but when British arms started disappearing with them the problem took on a new light. It seems that (according to TIME magazine) a group of Britons decided to solve the mystery of the vanishing Irish. The group included such distinguished personalities and institutions as the prime minister, the army's chief of staff, the cabinet, and Scotland Yard. The unanimous conclusion to which the learned body came was:

"The Irish are vanishing, that we say;
But just to join the I. R. A."