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TAUBES

CAPTAIN CLARK GIVES GRAPHIC
ACCOUNT OF EARLY
AIR RAIDS.

This is another "first hand" story of the way Prussianism make war and written by one who knows whereof he writes.

Captain William Arthur Clark was in hospital service at La Panne, Belgium, from December, 1915, to May, 1916. He is now the surgeon in charge of ward C-8.

His former fact story, written in the virile style of a fiction classic, has been the subject of much comment. The following description of a Teuton air raid is one of the most gripping that we have read since the war opened.

"The Prussian is cruel by birth; civilization will make him ferocious."—Goethe.

Although the German monoplane called a taube because of striking resemblance to a dove has been superseded by the more stable biplane, the name is still used as a sort of generic term for all Teuton aeroplanes.

At La Panne, up at the north end of the western front, our principal form of excitement was the taubes. The appearance of one over the village created a disturbance similar to that caused by a hawk over a poultry yard, the warning siren and boom of the anti-aircraft gun was the cry of the cock. The simile has been well expressed in a sketch by Colette Yver:

"Have you heard sometimes in a poultry yard the strange whistling cry of the cock whose round eye raised to the sky has seen a hawk? It is the cry of alarm, even of panic, from the instinctive protector to warn the community of which he has charge. And the chickens, responding to him in terror, scramble to shelter cackling bewilderedly."

Every one goes to his cellar. Most of the houses have the cellar windows barricaded against fragments of bombs with sand bags and rocks. Since the air bombs always come almost straight down, and not from an angle as do the shells, one feels reasonably safe in the cellar or even on the first floor if the house has three or more floors. The air bombs at that time (1916) weighed about thirty pounds and were not so destructive as Zeppelin bombs which are about the size of a punching bag and weigh more than a hundred pounds. Many who have been through both air raids and artillery shelling say they prefer the latter because the shell gives a warning scream while the first sound from an air bomb is the crash. These distinctions as to preference in bombardments was in a way amusing to us—just as one would discuss how one liked one's tea, "with or without?" "One lump please, no lemon; thank you."

However, the appearance of a taube at the dizzy heights at which I first saw one on that bright January day

did not cause any alarm as the inhabitants had learned that they never drop bombs from such heights. The high altitude flying is only for observing and photographing, but they were never allowed to look around to their hearts content. My attention was first directed to this fellow high up in the blue sky by a shot over my head. It was difficult to locate him at first but by searching among the white smoke puffs of lusting shrapnel he was found glistering in the sunlight like a downy moth. If the aim of bomb droppers is wild, and we found it to be so on our visits to villages and camps after air raids, the aim of the anti-aircraft guns is wilder still. Many times I saw just such an occurrence as that—the tiny moth flitting about among the flock of shrapnel, sometimes an allied plane being fired upon by the Prussians, sometimes the Belgians firing on a taube—and the result, or rather the lack of result, was always the same. The moth always got away.

But they do not always come just to look around. One evening after a British monitor had been throwing shells with impunity all afternoon into the German lines from a position about three miles straight out from our beach, three of them suddenly came out from a cloud and started to bomb the ships. The vessels were taken by surprise but it was not many seconds before they had their rapid-fire one-pounders trained on the bird men, and the batteries on shore soon took up the fight. It was a fierce and spectacular skirmish for about fifteen minutes. In the growing darkness the shrapnel flashed brightly against the low clouds and although we could not see the planes on account of the smoke from the guns and misty clouds, the hum of their motors and steady boom of their bombs told us they were persistent in their attack. The monitor's convoy, including a large destroyer, turned quickly and retreated at full speed toward the Channel, but the big ship herself, slower and more clumsy, made a wide turn and, evidently considering it useless to attempt to escape, held her position. In the mixture of detonations we could not distinguish those of the ship's guns from those of the bombs, nor could we discern the outcome of the fight on account of darkness, but we learned later that all the ships escaped serious injury and all the taubes got away.

Although our hospital was never intentionally bombed, they came within a block of us during raids over the village and the railway station. They came in the breaking dawn or gathering dusk, the time of choice for air raids, when it is just light enough to see where to let fall their tokens, yet not light enough to be easily seen in the sky. The first raid I went through is well remembered. Down in the village the streets were crowded with soldiers and the little shops, poorly lighted, some of them only with candles, were busy. A bright half moon hung in the clear sky. At the first bomb, which sounded as though it might have been about a quarter of a mile away, the warning siren screamed from the observing station and every-