



CHAPTER VII. POSSIBILITIES.

Behind the great armour-plate factory at Nagasaki three long, low-roofed, wooden sheds had been erected since the arrival of the Zanita. Day and night all approach to them had been guarded by sentries, who were relieved at unexpected intervals. Sometimes a man might be on duty for an hour or an hour and a-half; sometimes he would be relieved in ten minutes; and sometimes he would be marched up, exchange guard, receive the countersign, and marched away again, after which a third man would be marched up and given a different countersign.

The reason for these precautions was that the double 12ft high barbed wire fence which surrounded the three sheds enclosed the most valuable property that Japan or any other military nation had ever possessed.

In each shed there was lying on trestles a structure 150ft long by 40 broad in the centre-line, tapering to a blunt curve at either end. From roof to floor the distance was 16ft, and above the roof was another domed roof, extending from stem to stern, composed of steel and glass. At the front of this rose a sort of conning-tower, on the top of which was a searchlight projector, so balanced that the rays could be thrown up or down and in any direction, to right or left, and fore or aft.

On either side were three lateral rudders, each 40ft long by 20ft broad, made of aluminium sheeting in steel frames. Underneath each of these was a four-bladed fan, 15ft in the sweep, constructed to revolve horizontally, and placed low enough to work clear of the planes at any possible angle.

Astern there were three driving screws, also of aluminium, rimmed with mild steel, and ahead a drawing one. The central propellers, fore and aft, were four-bladed and 18ft in diameter. The two side-screws aft were 12ft in diameter, and of a slightly different pitch.

Underneath the body of the vessel was a light steel framework 12ft in depth, carrying six 30in pneumatic-tired bicycle wheels. This framework was constructed on the cantilever principle, so as to give the greatest possible resistance with the smallest possible amount of weight.

Forward and aft two tubes, almost exactly resembling the ordinary naval torpedo tube, projected through the bottom of the vessel, swung on double ball-joints, which enabled them to work horizontally and downwards through an arc of 160deg. Over the stern was a

flagstaff, and, just behind the conning-tower, was a socket for a 50ft pole-mast for signalling purposes.

This is a brief description of the first aerial vessel that ever took the air in warfare. For the sake of accuracy, it may be stated that although Mark Hillyer, who had evolved it from the designs of Prof. Langley and Sir Hiram Maxim, plus some original ideas of his own, had placed the squadron at the disposal of the Japanese Government for the time being, it was still under his own absolute command.

As they lay in the sheds, the airships were as useless as a body without a soul, as helpless, in fact, as the Mermaid would have been lying at the bottom of the sea with her engines deprived of their motive power.

This meant everything. The Zanita was to all outward appearances, a steamer, and smoke came from her two funnels, but it was only the smoke of little coal fires underneath them, which were lit when any other craft came in sight. As a matter of fact, she had neither furnaces nor boilers. She was driven, as the Mermaid was, and as the airships would be, by the motive power, more tightly reined and more perfectly under control, which, in another form, had produced such frightful results during the silent bombardment of the Donovoi.

The materials for the construction of the aerial flotilla had been carried out in the Zanita, and after the exhibition of the Mermaid's powers the Mikado's Government had accepted the almost incredible proposition that Hillyer had made, but one very considerable difficulty had arisen.

Hillyer had proved to the satisfaction of the best engineers in Japan that these airships would fly and would be able to make headway against even a gale blowing at 65 miles an hour, that they could maintain themselves at a height of five or six thousand feet for a week if necessary, and return to their base of operation, but yet absolutely refused to disclose the secret of the motive power.

During his interview with the Mikado in Tokio he had been asked point-blank what this power was, and he had replied: "I am only mortal, and, with all respect, I do not think that such a power as this should be given into the hands of another mortal."

And to this the head of the Government had replied:

"But why not? If one mortal can wield it why not two or three?"

"Simply because human civilisation has not yet reached that degree of perfection which would make it possible for

two men to trust each other absolutely. As civilisation stands at present absolute power is not within the region of what I may call practical politics.

"Two men knowing this secret would certainly fight each other to the death, possibly they would kill each other, and so the secret of the world-power would be lost, and that is just why I do not propose to give it away. I have shown you what the Mermaid can do, and as soon as the mechanical details are completed I will show you what the cruisers of the air can do, but the motive power is mine only.

"I will use it in your service as far as necessary to win what I believe you ought to win. I will make land warfare as impossible to the Russians as I will make the command of the sea if I can find and destroy L'Anonyme; but that must be left to me.

"I will guarantee that the airships shall be as efficient in the air as the Mermaid has been proved to be under the water, and they shall be under your command as regards all manoeuvres that you may consider necessary; but this is only on condition that no officer who may be in command of any of these vessels makes any attempt to discover what the motive power is. If he does—well, your Majesty, I may say that I have so arranged matters that if he tries he and the airship and everyone on board of her will be in Eternity before he can hear the clock of Time tick."

By GEORGE GRIFFITH,

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Brothers of the Chain,"
"The White Witch of Mayfair," "The World Masters," &c.

BOOK III.—THE FINAL FIGHT.

And so it was arranged. The engines were put in place, all the details of machinery for driving, lifting, or diving were completed according to the plans, and the six airships remained motionless and helpless until Mark Hillyer endowed them with the life of their being.

He had spent a couple of days after his return from Shanghai in a very minute inspection of the work that had been done in the sheds, and at ten o'clock on the morning of the third day he asked the admiral in command of the port to come on board the first completed cruiser of the air, which he had already named the Marian, and take a trip with him beyond the clouds, which were hanging low above the yellow waters which washed the shores of Nagasaki Bay.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRINCESS ADVISES.

"To His Excellency the Viceroy commanding in Manchuria. Begins. Are you prepared to evacuate the fortresses of Port Arthur and Vladivostok, and to retire your troops from Harbin within seven days? If not the Japanese Government will be compelled to take measures to make these positions untenable. This message is sent in the hope of avoiding great loss of life and destruction of property, and it is hoped that a favourable reply may be received

AMUSEMENT FOR THE WINTER EVENINGS!



We Can Supply

PHONOGRAPHS

From 10/6 and 21/- to £15

GRAMOPHONES

AND

ZONOPHONES

From £4 to £16.

Records (cylinder) from 20/- a doz.
" (disc) " 24/- "

WRITE FOR CATALOGUE.

CHAS. M. GUMMER

142, KARANGAHAPE ROAD.

IMPORTER OF

TALKING MACHINES AND SUPPLIES,
SPORTING AND ELECTRICAL GOODS,
CYCLES, ETC.