

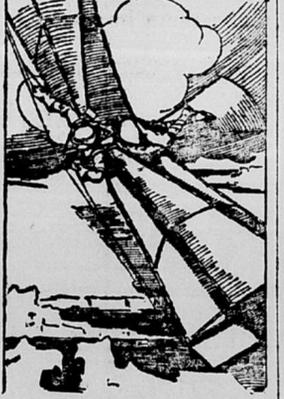


CHAPTER I.

The Man With Wings. The Man With Wings. Cayley was too much of a god today to bother with the exact number of them—he had been flying slowly northward down a mild southerly breeze. Hundreds of feet below him was the dazzling, terrible expanse of the polar ice pack which stretches the northern limits of the Arctic ocean in its impenetrable veil of mystery.

talk on the opposite side of the valley, then notching the cliff and grinding down to sea at the other side of it was a great white glacier, all the whiter, and colder, and more dazzling for its contrast with the brown mountain-side and the green-clad valley. Up above the glacier, on the farther side, were great broad yellow patches, which he would have thought were poppy field, but for the impossibility of their growing in such a place. No vegetable growth was possible, he would have thought, against that clean-cut, almost vertical, rocky face. And yet, what else could have given it that blazing yellow color? Some day he was to learn the answer to that question.

But the thing that caught his eye now, that made him start and draw in a little involuntary gasp of wonder, was the sight of a little clump of black dots moving slowly, almost imperceptibly from this distance, across the face of the glacier. He blinked his eyes, as if he suspected them of playing him false. Unless they had played him false, these tiny dots were men.



Cayley Wheeled Sharply Up Into the Wind.

For all practical purposes Cayley had learned to fly. The great fan-driven air ship, 100 feet from tip to tip, which had long lain idle on his ranch at Sandoval, would probably never leave its house again. It had done yeoman service. Without its powerful propellers, for the last resource, Cayley would never have been able to try the experiments and get the practice which had given him the air for his natural element. He had outgrown it. He had no more need of motor or whirling fans. The force of gravity, the force of the breeze and the perfectly co-ordinated muscles of his own body gave him all the power he needed now.

Perhaps the succeeding generations of humankind may develop an eye which can see ahead when the body is lying prone, as a bird lies in its flight. Cayley had remedied this deficiency with a little silver mirror, slightly concave, screwed fast to the crossbrace which supported his shoulders. Instead of bending back his head, or trying to see out through his eyebrows, he simply cast a backward glance into the mirror whenever he wanted to look ahead. It had been a little perplexing at first, but he could see better in it now than with his unaided eyes.

And now, a minute or two, perhaps, after that fulmar had gone squawking away, he glanced down into his mirror, and his olympian calm was shaken by the shock of surprise. For what he saw, clearly reflected in his little reducing glass, was land. There was a mountain, and a long dark line that must be a clifflike coast.

And it was land that never had been marked on any chart. In absolute desolation of latitude he was not from the arctic explorer's view, very far north. Over on the other side of the world they run excursion steamers every summer nearer to the pole than he was at this moment. Spitzbergen, which has had a permanent population of 15,000 souls, lies 300 miles farther north than this uncharted coast which Philip Cayley saw before him.

But the great ice cap which covers the top of the world is irregular in shape, and just here, northward from Alaska, it juts into the Arctic sea, zig-zagging far down into the Arctic sea. Rogers, Collinson and the ill-fated DeLong—they all had tried to penetrate this barrier, and had been turned back.

rather than in untanned hide. He seemed slighter, sprightlier, and in every way to convey the impression of having come more recently from the civilized, habitable portion of the world than his companions. He carried a rifle slung by a strap over his shoulder, evidently foreseeing no immediate use for it, and a flask.

Cayley was too far aloft for their conversation to be audible to him, but he could hear that they were talking. The leather-clad man appeared to be doing the most of it, and, from the inflection of his voice, he seemed to be speaking in English.

Presently he noticed that the leather-clad man had forged a little ahead of his companions, or rather—like a flash, this idea occurred to Cayley—that the others were purposely lagging a little behind.

And then, before that sinister idea could formulate itself into a definite suspicion, his eyes widened with amazement, and the cry he would have uttered died in his throat; for this man, who had so innocently allowed the others to fall behind him, suddenly staggered, clutched at something—it looked like a thin ivory dart—that had transfixed his throat, tugged it out in a sudden flood of crimson, reeled a little and then went backward over the glassy edge of a fissure in the ice, which lay just to the left of the path where he had been walking.

He saw, in a moment, were left to Cayley's view. The world was suddenly empty again, as if no living foot had ever trodden it; and Cayley, hovering there, a little above the level of the ice, rubbed his eyes and wondered whether the singular, silent tragedy he had just witnessed were real, or a trick the mysterious arctic light had played upon his tired eyes. But there remained upon that vacant scene two material reminders of the tragedy to which it had afforded a setting. One was a smudge of crimson on the snow; the other, a little distance off, just this side of the icy ridge over which the last of the party had gone scrambling a moment before, was the strange looking blunt stick which he had seen in the assassin's hand.

Cayley flew a little lower, his wings almost skimming the ice. Finally, reaching the spot where the thing had fallen, he alighted and picked it up. Whether its possessor had valued it, or not, whether or not he might be expected to return for it, Cayley did not know, and did not much care. He stood for some time turning the thing over in his hands, puzzling over it, trying to make out how it could have been used as the instrument of propulsion to that deadly ivory dart. There was a groove on one side of it, with a small ivory plug at the end. The other end was curiously shaped, misshapen, rather, for, though it was obviously the end one held. Cayley could not make it fit in his hand, whatever position he held it in.

Giving up the problem at last, he tucked the stick into his belt, slipped his arm through the strap in the frame-work of his aeroplane and prepared for flight. He had a little difficulty getting up, owing to the absence of a breeze at this point. Finally he was obliged to climb, with a good deal of labor, the icy ridge up which he had watched the little party of murderers scrambling.

At the crest he cast a glance around, looking for them, but saw no signs of them. Then, getting a favorable slant of the wind, he mounted again into the element he now called his own. Five years before Philip Cayley would have passed for a good example of that type of clean-limbed, clean-minded, likable young man which the best of our civilization seems to be flowering into. Physically, he would have been hard to suggest an improvement in him, he approached so near the ideal standards. He was fine grained, supple, slender, small-jointed, thoroughbred from head to heel.

Intellectually, he had been good enough to go through the academy at West Point with credit, and to graduate high enough in his class to be assigned to service in the cavalry. His standards of conduct, his ideas of honor and morality had been about the same as those of the best third of his classmates. If his fellow officers in the Philippines, during the year or two he spent in the service, had been asked to pick a flaw in him, which they would have been reluctant to do, they would have said that he seemed to them a bit too thin-skinned and rather fastidious; that was what his chum and only intimate friend, Perry Hunter, said about him at any rate.

But he could afford to be fastidious, for he had about all a man could want, or he would think. For three generations they had taken wealth for granted in the Cayley family, and with it had come breeding, security of social position, simplicity and ease in making friends, both among men and women. In short, there could be no doubt at all that up to his twentieth year Fate had been ironically kind to Philip Cayley. She had given him no hint, no preparation for the stunning blow that was to fall upon him, suddenly, out of so clear a sky.

When it did fall, it cut his life clean across; so that when he thought back to that time now, it seemed to him that the Lieutenant Cayley of the United States army had died over there in the Philippines, and that he, the man who was now soaring in these great circles through the arctic sky, was a chance inheritor of his name and of his memory.

He had set out one day at the head of a small scouting party, the best-lit man in the regiment, secure in the respect, in the almost fatherly regard, of his colonel, proudly conscious of the almost idolatrous admiration of his men and the younger officers. He had gone out believing that no one ever had a truer friend than he possessed in Perry Hunter, his mate at West Point, his fellow officer in the regiment, the confidant of all his hopes and ideals.

He had come back after a fortnight's absence, to find his name smeared with disgrace, himself judged and condemned, unheard, in the opinion of the mess. And that was not the worst of it. The same blow which had deprived him of the regard of the only people in the world who mattered to him, destroyed, also, root and branch, his affection for the one man of whom he had made an intimate. The only feeling that it would be possible for him to entertain for Perry Hunter again must be a half-lying, half-incredulous contempt. And if that was his feeling for the man he had trusted most and loved the most deeply, what must be it for the rest of humankind? What did it matter what they thought of him or what they did to him? All he wanted of human society was to escape from it. He fell to wondering, as he hung, suspended, over that rosy expanse of fleecy fog, whether, were the thing to do over again, he would act as he had acted five years ago; whether he would content himself with a single disdainful denial of the monstrous thing they charged him with; whether he would resign again, under fire, and go away, leaving his tarnished name for the daws to peck at.

hands, day after day, while he mastered the art that no man had ever mastered before. He had set himself this task because it was the only one he knew that did not involve contact with his fellow-beings. He must have something that he could work at alone. Work and solitude were two things that he had felt an overmastering craving for. And the possibility he had faced with a light heart every morning—the possibility of a sudden and violent death before night, had been no more to him than an agreeable spice to the day's work.

It was not until he had actually learned to fly, had literally shaken the dust of the earth from his feet and taken to the sky as his abode, that his wound had healed. The three months that he had spent in this upper arctic air, a-wing for 16 hours out of 24, had calmed him, put his nerves in tune again; given him for men and their affairs a quiet indifference, in place of the smarting contempt he had been hugging to his breast before. Three months ago, at sight of those little human dots crossing the glacier, he would have wheeled aloft and gone soaring hard. Even a month ago he would hardly have hung, soaring there, above the fog, waiting for it to lift again the veil of mystery which it had drawn across the tragic scene he had just witnessed.

The month was August, and the long arctic day had already begun to know its diurnal twilight. A fortnight ago the sun had dipped, for the first time, below the horizon. By now there were four or five hours, out of every 25, that would pass for night. The sun set while he hung there in the air, and as it did so, with a new slant of the breeze the fog rolled itself up into a great violet-colored cloud, leaving the earth, the ice, the sea unveiled below him. And there, in the open water of the little bay, he saw a ship, and on the shore a cluster of rude huts.

It struck him, even from the height at which he soared, that the ship, tied to an ice-floe in the shelter of the great headland, did not look like a whaler, nor like the sort of craft which an arctic explorer would have selected for his purposes. It had more the trim smartness of a yacht. They were probably all asleep down there, he reflected. It was nearly midnight, and he saw no signs of life anywhere. He would drop down for a nearer look.

He descended, with a sudden hawk-like pounce, which was one of his more recent achievements in the navigation of the air, checked himself again at about the level of the mast-head, with a flashing, forward swoop, like a man diving in shallow water; then, with a sudden effort, brought himself up standing, his planes arched vertical, and with a backward spring, alighted, clear of his wings, on the ice-floe just opposite the ship.

As he did so, he heard a little surprised cry, half of fear, half of astonishment. It was a girl's voice. (To Be Continued.)

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Wanted—The address of John P. Satterfield for the purpose of perfecting a real estate title. George M. and George S. Walsh, Lincoln, Neb.

Wanted—Do you need a stenographer? We have them. Carl's Employment Agency.

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Wanted—Lady to travel in Iowa; good pay and tailor made suit in 90 days; experience unnecessary; reliable firm. Write for particulars. J. E. McBrady & Co., Chicago.

Wanted—Tailoress, at once. 21 North First avenue.

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Wanted—To handle automobile specialty almost sells itself, no competition, large profits, illustrated booklet. Middle West Sales Company, Dept. G., St. Joseph, Mo.

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