

IMPULSE

of 8 m.p.h. which can. The steamer was quite content to obtain its position by two observations, one early in the morning and one at noon. The sun travelled halfway across the sky in that time. But the faster-moving aeroplane required the same information inside an hour, and the sun did not change its position sufficiently in an hour to provide it. And besides moving faster, the aeroplane was more erratic. Whereas a ship was seldom more than a mile or two out of its dead reckoning in a day's steam, many a pilot would attest how easy it was in rough weather for an aeroplane to be forty miles out at the end of an hour's flying. I must concoct a scheme of navigation to surmount both difficulties. And not only must it be simple, it must be foolproof as well. Solving mathematical problems in a ship's chartroom and solving them while flying an open plane, were as much akin as reading a book in a study to writing a letter in a typhoon. Gradually I evolved a scheme of flying along hourly position-lines. It was a perfect little system (I decided); all that was necessary for success was for the plane to leave at the exact moment calculated for that particular day. Ah! little did I know of seaplanes.

As the ordinary sextant was not good enough for air work, I ordered a special one with an artificial horizon, and until I could test it in a plane, practised by the hour while motoring along the road, walking round the house, or running round the garden. My only worry about it at that time was my inability to

IMPULSE

prevent childish errors from creeping into every third or fourth observation. Stupid mistakes such as jotting down a figure wrongly. However, I supposed that my brain knew this was only practice and that it would exert an extraordinary effort necessary for accurate work when the time came.

At this juncture, Menzies of Australia flew the Tasman solo west to east from Sydney. (This was in an Avro landplane which had been built for Kingsford-Smith to make his record flight from England to Australia. Menzies crashed it in a flax swamp on the west coast of South Island, New Zealand, on arrival. It was repaired and shipped back to Sydney where, its wings collapsing when in flight, the owner, named James, and a passenger were killed.) However, the point was, the flight had now been done. West to east, it was true; but still, it had been done. Well, the idea of flying to my islands in mid-ocean and the problem of finding them by my own scheme of navigation had such a hold on me by now, that forty ocean flights would not have quenched my desire for this one.

But a fresh difficulty now cropped up. I was astonished to find that a new pair of floats with the necessary undercarriage alterations would cost £500. I lost much sleep trying to devise a scheme for evading this little obstruction, until I noticed an old discarded pair at the Air Base. They had belonged to the Moth sent up to bomb the Mau rebels at Samoa (with pamphlets); and were the relics of that machine

IMPULSE

after it had been dropped accidentally twenty feet on to the deck of H.M.S. *Dunedin*; however, I thought they would serve me all right if patched up. Unfortunately, the Government refused to let me have them.

I went the round of all the oil companies in the hope that one would back me in return for (possible) advertisement. One said Menzies had already made the flight, another said the financial depression prevented, a third said it could not associate with such a risky enterprise for fear the public might blame it if I failed.

At this time I had my first chance to try my hand with an ordinary sextant when flying solo. The observation was 180 miles in error. Altogether, affairs did not seem to be at their best for me.

I found I was beginning to charge obstacles like a bull, goaded by any check as by a pricking dart. That was no way to accomplish things. "Softlee, softlee, catchee monkey"—one could catch any monkey provided one kept on going "softlee" after it long enough—that is, so long as it did not die of old age first. I must completely throw off the burden of the whole business for a while.

So I retired to a tent in the hills for an arduous fortnight, felling bush and scrub in the heat of the year. Even so, I could not at first altogether shake off thought of the flight. Coming to a young tree, the fancy leaped into my mind—unwanted, as it were—that if I could fell the tree with one stroke of the axe

IMPULSE

I should get across the Tasman, and if I could not, then I should fail. It was a pretty stout young sapling as thick as the width of my palm. I swung the axe and brought it down with all my force—with more force, it seemed, than I knew I possessed. The tree reeled—but it stood. Heavens! I had failed. I gave it a shove. It tottered. Slowly, it fell with a crash of breaking foliage. Yet even on the ground a few strands still bound it to the stump. The axe-haft was split in two. I stood for a moment pondering the omen of it. Had I felled it with one stroke or had I not? It would not have fallen without my shove. And still a few strands remained uncut. The axe broken, too. But the tree, certainly, was felled. . . .

It was no good to work among the hill-tops if I continued to think about flying. I must grow a beard—one could not possibly remain over-serious about anything else with a beard breeding.

Up there the poison of worry sweated out of one's pores; until blood felt ready to burst through its vein-walls; until vitality and power were burnt in by the sun, and fired by swinging the axe to the mark. How grand life could be! with this consciousness of ability to achieve anything, to tackle anyone. My God! this was the life I loved. The true life—that made one feel the joyousness of existence, strength, health. To return to camp after toil with the mist of fatigue creeping over the brain and veiling worthless cares from it, soothing. To emerge from the moun-