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A Tenderwing in the High Air

(Continued from Page 3)

Oh, they were there all right—like the baby’s building blocks in a nursery. The overgrown Bedlow girl on the Island of Liberty was there, too, as big as a penny doll, waving some little thing at us. I guess it was a torch. So far as size went, the big liners in the harbor could have been bought for 10 cents and pulled around in a tub by a thread.

Over New Jersey the smokestacks of the great factories looked like rows of clay pipes stood on end, and smoking like fury with no man sucking them; the Princeton bowl was as a wedding ring, and the cemeteries patches of green velvet, on which some prodigal dentist had scattered his stock of nice false teeth.

This sort of journey gives one a feeling of superiority and independence. You have left all your little worries below. The important buildings and affairs of the earth over which you are passing seem very unimportant. You don’t care what you are passing over. You don’t care where the roads go or where the rivers run, or where the tracks are laid, for you are independent of them all, faring on the free wide way named “Whitney Ye Will.”

It was interesting to watch the passengers. What were they doing? Why, just what passengers do in Pullman parlor cars—chatting, reading magazines, knitting, writing, munching candy—looking out the windows, walking up and down the aisle. One of the women curled up in her chair and went to sleep for an hour, and an air-traveling fly lit on her nose and tickled her into wakefulness, but she soon dozed off again.

As for me, I kept on with my writing. When going to Mineola in the early morning on the Long Island Railroad I had tried to do a little of it, but the train jiggled so much I had to give it up. On the air liner I found that I could write as comfortably and lucidly as in my own New England study, thus becoming, as it were, a pioneer in aerial authorship. A woman artist on board drew cartoons of her fellow-travelers which have since been published in a magazine.

And so we journeyed without jolt, jar or shock—no car dust or smoke, no station wails, no heat or fret, no “brushing off!” at the end of the trip, no porter to tip. I have traveled to Washington by train many times but never so quickly, comfortably and happily.

From the time of our leaving Mineola till we arrived at Washington I didn’t see a human being below engaged in a peaceful pursuit or any other kind of a pursuit. They must have been too little for me to see, for we passed over their farms and stores and some of them must have been around there somewhere.

And the gist of the new truth about aerial travel is this: Over our heads always and always has been a path as safe and scientifically dependable as the steel rails over which we have become accustomed to travel, but we have not known how to use it till now. The roughness of railroad travel in the fact that it is a proposition of steel on steel. And the softness and smoothness of aeroplane lies in the fact that it is a proposition of air on canvas.