

CHAPTER XLII

FLYING FROM ATHENS TO BRINDISI

It could not be hoped that the trip from Athens to Brindisi would prove so thrilling as the trip four days before from Constantinople to Athens, and it was not -- yet it was very interesting. Grandfather, Grandmother, Grace, Miss Shield, Miss Kavanaugh and one official of the airplane company took off from Piraeus in an eight passenger Dornier Wall flying boat.

It was thrilling to fly over the Bay of Salamis where once the Persians went down to defeat before the crafty Greeks, it was interesting to look from above into the deep gorge cut through the Isthmus of Corinth to connect the waters of the Aegean Sea and the Gulf of Corinth. It was very pleasing to fly along the Gulf of Corinth and to see the low mountains on either side, and it seemed marvelous that so soon we were settling down at Patras for gas.

Soon the party was on its way again, winging over the blue Mediterranean and over the island of Ithaca famed in Homer's song. It took Ulysses ten years, according to the Iliad, to return from Troy to Ithaca. The party flew this distance in five hours of flying time. We began to think what a change it would have made in the life of Ulysses if he had owned an airplane. He could have flown home almost any forenoon, had lunch with Penelope, shot a few suitors and got back in time to put his army to bed before dark.

Later Grandfather got to wondering what would have happened if Helen had had an airplane. That seemed too much for the imagination until someone, utterly reckless as to the kind of a pun one might make with

propriety, suggested that if Helen had possessed an airplane, she probably would have flown to Paris.

The trip seemed all too short when the coast of Italy came in sight, and we settled safely in the harbor of Brindisi - the end of the Appian way - the gateway from Rome to the Orient. All told, from Constantinople to Brindisi, we had been in the air about ten hours.

What a thrill such a thought would have given Alexander the Great. The Greeks in their myths, to be sure, did tell how Daedalus, the first maker of wings, had flown successfully and then how his son Icarus had ~~pled~~ for a pair until with many misgivings the father finally gave his son a pair. But, alas, Icarus in the joy of youth flew too near the sun, the wax melted on his wings and he crashed into the sea - a story of presumption - a story of a man who dared to challenge the heavens and had retribution meted out to him for his impiety - a warning to all humans thereafter not to offend the Gods by attempting a conquest of the sky.

The 2,000 miles of air travel from Vienna safely over, the party lunched at leisure, saw the ancient pillar marking the end of the famous Appian way, the great military road from Rome to the East, and then drove out for a couple of hours along a modern military highway which Mussolini was constructing.

Six huge road machines and 250 carts were busily engaged completing a section. Beyond the section under construction a fine highway led inland to the hill town of Octuri. Along the road were strange little structures looking like aggrandized bee hives built of cement. Finally the almost unbelievable truth dawned upon the party - these were human habitations, built almost windowless, in order to keep out the hot Italian sun.

Back in Brindisi all took the sleeper for Rome. The sleeper, it may be said in passing, is much the best means of travel in Italy in the summer time - the best, that is, until air transport lines establish themselves. Summer evenings are delightful - a dew settles the dust, the stars are bright and a breeze blows into the car window refreshingly and one is soon lulled to pleasant and refreshing slumber. On the other hand, if a trip be made by day the hot summer sun beats down through a thin, dry atmosphere and turns a passenger coach into a veritable furnace, from which one emerges at the end of a journey well nigh exhausted.