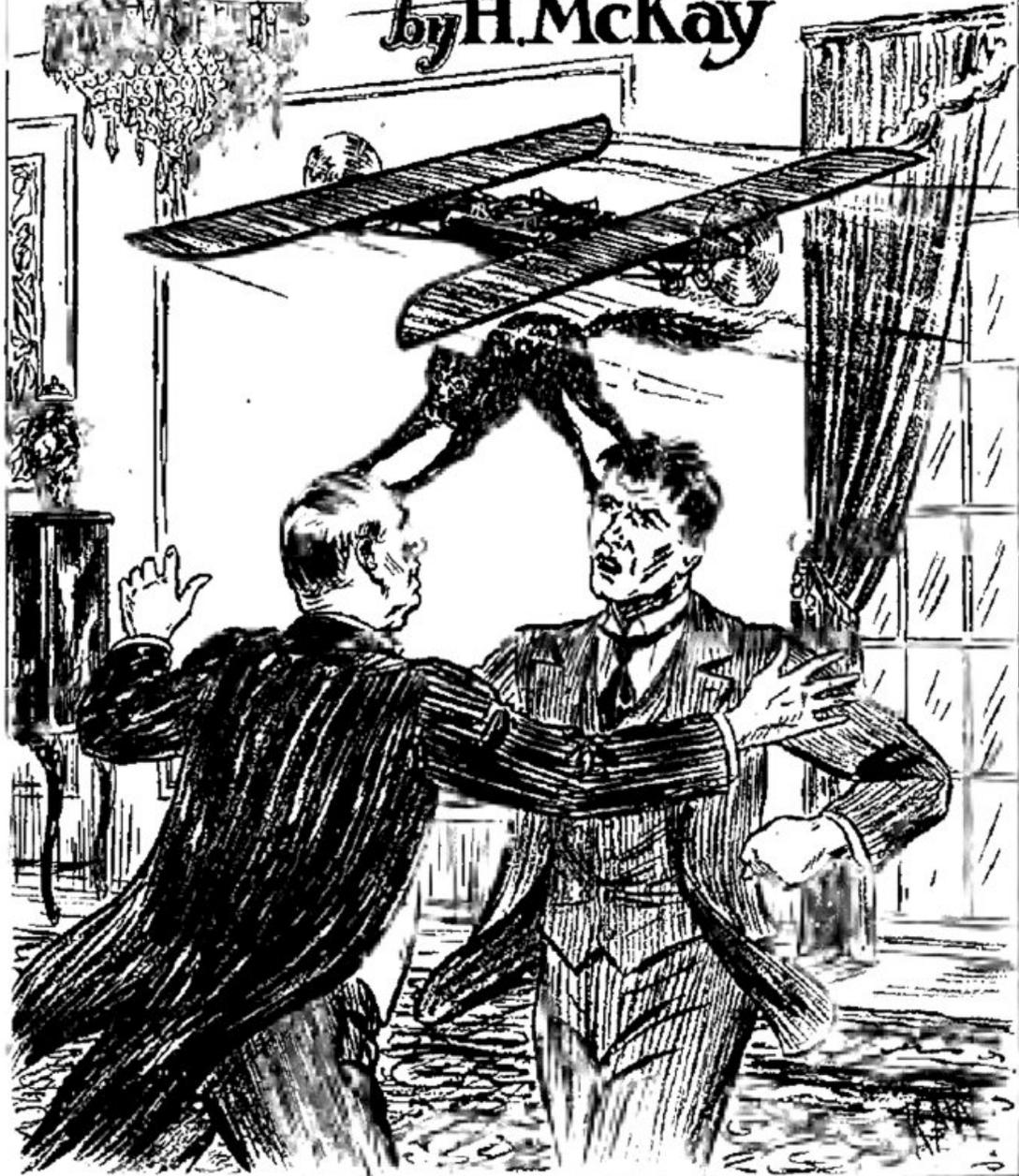


Flannelcake's Invention

by H. McKay



(Illustration by Winter)

The austere Mr. Maxwell rushed to save the machine and Mr. Treat rushed to save his cat and both arrived just as the cat let go and landed in a mad scramble on the faces and heads of these two gentlemen.

HORACE TREAT, of Treat, Trout and Treat Corporation, Fiscal Agents, looked up as his secretary entered the private office.

“That crack-pot inventor is out here again, and he says that he is not going away until he sees you,” she announced, indifferently.

“Well, dammit, send him in and let’s get the torture over with.”

The girl started off but was almost knocked over at the door by that “crackpot inventor” as he dashed in.

“Glad to see you, Mr. Treat, I’m Joe Flannelcake of the Sunset Aviation Club. You remember me; I was one of the fellows that helped launch that glider the day you dedicated our field. I’ve come to you to demonstrate the greatest plane the aviation industry has ever known; a revolutionary idea in heavier-than-air craft. As you know, it has long been the idea of aviators to produce a machine that would rise vertically from the ground, without a running take-off. My friend, I have just such a machine; a machine that fills a long-felt need; present planes will become obsolete over night; everyone will be riding in a ‘Flannelcake Flyer’; you can’t go wrong, it’s—”

“Hey, wait a minute! Take a breath, will you?” said Mr. Treat: “Listen, young fellow, I don’t intend to listen to you practice side-show barking over some fool notion of yours. Now, what do you want; make it short!”

The self-styled inventor did not seem bothered at the rebuke; he only smiled blandly, and continued:

“Mr. Treat, you are in business for money ; I have a stunt here that will make you plenty, if you want to finance it. I have a machine that will rise vertically; that alone ought to interest you.”

“If it were true, it would interest me, but if you’re another helicopter nut, I can’t be bothered. By the way, did you make this machine yet?”

“No, I haven’t; but that’s where you come in, if you will—

“Get out of here! I haven’t time to listen to fairy tales!”

“But Mr. Treat, I haven’t explained yet—”

A button on the desk was pressed, and a well-dressed but mean-looking man walked in.

Said Mr. Treat, “You’re not going to, either! Oscar, give this guy the works.”

Oscar responded by lightly tossing Joe Flannelcake into the hallway.

Horace Treat was primarily a hard-boiled financier; but he had done much to further the cause of aviation by starting glider clubs in different districts, and by his interests in aviation societies. His position had made him the target for a number of get-rich-quick inventors who hoped for his financial backing. But, after this last inventor had gone he felt that in spite of the fellow’s book-agent tactics he seemed sincere.

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Two months later, a man bearing a model airplane sought admittance at the palatial Treat home in Sea Cliff Terrace. The butler announced to Mr. Treat the arrival of a Mr. Flannelcake.

“Throw him out! I’ve seen enough of that flathead,” growled Horace Treat.

As the butler left the library, one of the full-length windows opened, and the ever-smiling face of Joe Flannelcake appeared.

“You ain’t seen nothing yet, Mr. Treat,” said he: “I’ve got my plane here, and it works.”

Horace Treat's anger was mixed with curiosity; so he said nothing as the inventor entered the room and placed his model plane on the floor. It resembled the conventional form of toy plane, except that the rear airfoils or elevators were of the same size as the front wings. In fact, there was no telling which was the front; for each end had a propeller mounted on it. It seemed as though constructed from two toy airships, hooked tail to tail.

Horace Treat looked at it closely:
 "Which way does it go, anyway?"

"Up," returned Joe, smiling blandly as ever: "Yes sir, it goes up."

"Well, let's see it go, then," snorted the financier.

JOE started to wind up the model: "You see, Mr. Treat, this plane is powered by a steel spring, of the type found in German-made mechanical toys; it is light and efficient. A propeller is connected to each end of the spring; which causes both propellers to turn, but in opposite directions. You will notice a small gear on this 'prop;' this is the rear end of the plane. This gear has a stop fastened to the teeth at one point, which automatically stops the rear propeller after it has turned a certain number of times. Now the idea of the thing is, that when both screws turn, the plane will not move along the ground, because they pull against each other. The angle of the wings is adjustable and, in starting, the front and rear wings are tilted oppositely. The wind from the propellers strikes the wing surface, and is deflected downwards, causing the plane to rise upward, by virtue of Newton's second law of motion; or, now, lemme see, maybe it was the third law—"

Mr. Treat was at last interested, or at least, curious; but he was also impatient.

"To hell with Newton; let's see the thing go!"

"Yes, certainly, of course; now watch, it's wound up, and as soon as I set the gear stop—"

"Somebody sure wound you up, too. If those propellers develop as much wind as you do, the thing ought to go to the moon."

"All right, here goes now; the rudder is set, so that it will circle the room after it's aloft."

Joe Flannelcake released a trigger on the device and stepped back. The propeller spun, and the craft rocked slightly to and fro on the rug. One end lifted slightly, it rocked a bit more, and then the whole machine slowly lifted, in a wobbly fashion, to a height of about three feet from the floor. At this point the gear stop took effect, the rear prop ceased turning, and the machine started to circle the room in a curiously lame fashion. The rear end hung slightly downward, and the whole machine wobbled back and forth.

"You see," commenced Joe, "I will have to put a model of the Jenkins' reversible propeller on the rear end, which will reverse after the machine has lifted; this will push, and keep the rear end level. I shall also arrange to have the wings level out automatically, after rising so that it will fly faster."

The craft remained in the air about a minute and a half, and then gradually settled downward as the spring wound down. About a foot from the floor, the machine suddenly went into a side-slip, and landed in a corner on top of Mr. Treat's Maltese tomcat. The cat made several passes at it before Joe rescued the plane. But the cat growled ominously; it apparently thought the score hadn't been settled yet.

Mr. Treat arose with a broad smile and extended his hand.

"Well, my boy, it isn't much, but it seems to work. I'll tell you; get the thing fixed up, and be around here next Saturday

afternoon. I'll have Mr. Maxwell, of the Peninsular Air Transport Company, here to give his O.K. on it. If he likes it, we can have a real one made."

"Thank you, Mr. Treat, thank you; you have made a great decision, you will be hailed as the greatest man aviation has ever known; the royalties from this apparatus will make us as rich as Croesus, it'll—"

"Can the chatter and get out! And don't forget to be back here Saturday."

"Yes sir, I already have a larger model in the making, and I'll have it finished up by Saturday."

AT Saturday noon a group of men was assembled at the Treat home for the try-out. Mr. Treat, Mr. Maxwell, several reporters and a photographer were there to see the "latest" in aircraft. Mr. Joseph Flannelcake proudly displayed a model plane, powered by two miniature gasoline engines manufactured from cartridge shells. It was about four feet in length, and of about the same wing spread.

"Well, Mr. Treat, where shall we try it out?" said Joe.

"We'd better try it outside; it's too big for the house."

"Not at all, Mr. Treat. The machine can be controlled perfectly, and besides, the wind is too strong to-day."

"Hmmm! Well, let's take it into the reception room then; but if it breaks anything, I'll break your neck."

The reception room of the Treat mansion was of ballroom dimensions; it was high-ceilinged, and adorned with pictures, vases, and bric-a-brac of artistic or antique design.

Joe placed his machine on the floor, and made adjustments on the rudder and on the gears.

"We have here, gentlemen," he began, "a true model of what the ideal plane should

be. It is equipped with reversing propellers, adjustable wings, and automatic stabilizers. Now, gentlemen, this machine is foolproof; it is so constructed, that it is impossible to 'crack up' in it. It cannot go into a tail-spin, because it has no tail; it cannot nose-dive, because of the adjustable wings; it can side-slip, but its perfect balance will cause it to right itself. It has no landing wheels, because it can travel straight up or down, and needs none. It can stop, start, and go backwards while in the air. You wouldn't have an automobile that had no reverse in it, would you? Then why have an airplane—"

"Will you please stop that salesmanship, and start that thing going?" broke in Mr. Treat.

Joe started each of the tiny motors by winding a string around a projecting shaft, and pulling on it.

They sputtered a bit, but soon commenced to idle beautifully, emitting a noise like an outboard motor in the distance.

"Fine little motors, these," he said. "Made 'em out of 'forty-five' shells; a piece of string from the gas tank to the manifold serves as a carburetor, capillary attraction, just like a lamp wick. Yes sir, this little boat will go straight up; just an application of mechanics, you know. Same thing as if you take an automobile, and go up a hill that is fifty feet high. The car will do it nicely; but if you should attempt to climb a pole of the same height, you couldn't do it. Not because the car hasn't the power, but because it is not harnessed right. Now, if you would put a drum of small diameter on the rear axle, and wrap a cable around it, and tie the cable to the top of the pole, the car could be made to pull its own weight off the ground. Similarly, with the plane, the motor will ultimately get you to a certain height; then, why not straight up?"

The audience was becoming impatient; that is, except for a newspaper man, who was

inspecting one of the motors, oblivious of Joe's speech. Said Mr. Maxwell: "Never mind about all that. Start the thing off."

Joe moved a small lever on the back of the machine, which caused the motors to speed up to a more or less uneven roar. He then removed his hand from the top of it and stepped back. The machine floundered about for a bit, like a moth that has been burnt in a candle flame, and then lifted slightly from the floor. It slipped back and forth like a piece of cardboard in a high wind; and then rose vertically into the air. A cloud of pale blue smoke eddied up with it, making it resemble a pinwheel. The exhaust pipes threw a pretty little flame, and the thing was under way.

"Watch, my friends, the propeller is about to reverse," cried Joe above the noise.

And, sure enough, the rear blades whined a moment, and changed their pitch. The rear wings also adjusted themselves to the angle of the front ones, instead of opposite, and the machine started at a good rate around the room. It circled once perfectly, and the room was beginning to smoke up quite a bit, when Mrs. Treat entered the room, and, with a statement about smoking up her valuable tapestries, ordered the butler to open a window.

The window was opened; and when the plane made its next revolution, it was forced downward by the draft. It had been circling just over everybody's heads; but now it came down, and just skudded over a gorgeous chesterfield on the far side of the room. Up to this time no one had noticed that the Maltese was reclining on the said chesterfield; but as the plane passed over it, the cat made a springing leap for it, and sunk the claws of both forefeet into the fuselage. The craft had considerable momentum; it yanked the cat into the air, and then banked sharply upward from the added weight on the rear, like a big bird fighting a wildcat. The

austere Mr. Maxwell rushed to save the machine, and Mr. Treat rushed to save his cat; and both arrived just as the cat let go and landed in a mad scramble on the faces and heads of those two gentlemen! The infuriated cat clawed deep furrows in Mr. Maxwell's bald pate with its front paws, while its hind legs were gaining good traction in Mr. Treat's mouth and nostrils.

THE plane, released from its unwelcome passenger, continued upward at its same sharp angle. The first thing encountered in its line of travel was the expensive, glass-prism bedecked chandelier, which it struck vigorously. The rear propeller sustained the weight of the machine, while the front one merrily shot glass pendants all around the room. Soon the machine cut its way through and the remainder of the fixture crashed down to the floor. Above the groans of Treat and Maxwell, who were bleeding from many scratches, the voice of Joe, happy as usual, could be heard. He was talking to the photographer, who was setting his camera and enjoying the scene immensely.

"That proves the durability of my ship. It is practically wreck-proof. The machine is perfect."

But the machine wasn't as perfect as it might have been. Its control wires were severed, for it now pursued an erratic course around the room, scraping walls and dousing everything with the oil and gasoline that were exuding through several gashes in its body. The butler dashed out of the room, and Mrs. Treat ran to the rescue of her bleeding husband. She was stopped half way, however, by the flying machine, which struck her squarely on the back of the head; and the front prop proceeded to tear out her hair. She fought it off madly, and succeeded in throwing the machine backward into the air. It veered around, boomerang fashion, and then it shot

over the photographer's head, smearing his face with oil. He reeled over backwards, and went down with the reporters like pins in a bowling alley; accidentally discharging his flashlight gun. With a smart explosion and cloud of smoke, this efficiently set fire to the gasoline that the plane had sprayed around. The room was in a turmoil when the butler returned with a shotgun and aimed at the plane, which now had one propeller in the goldfish aquarium, tossing water and fish about the place. The aquarium broke open, and the plane again took the air, just as the butler let both barrels go. He missed the ship, but took most of the tapestries and plaster from one side of the room. Joe Flannelcake, trying to catch his brainchild, was desperately running around the room, stepping and falling over everybody. How long pandemonium would have reigned is not known, if it were not for a lucky circumstance in the flight of the ship. For no reason at all, the plane suddenly started to fly straight—yes, straight for the large bay window at the end of the room. As a fitting climax to its reign of terror, it crashed loudly through the glass. Joe followed it to the window, and gazed wistfully

after it as the strong breeze through the Golden Gate carried the plane into the waters of the bay. He watched the spot where it had disappeared, totally unmindful of the room behind him, which was now burning furiously.

He was awakened from his coma by the arrival of the fire department; and, when he went through the window to the street, he was met by an angry group of blood-spattered men. They might have been recognized by their closest friends as Mr. Treat, Mr. Maxwell, and some gentlemen of the press.

"Well, gentlemen, it's too bad that things turned out this way; but really, it shows what a good machine—" he started to say.

"Good machine, h—I," said the battered Mr. Treat: "You dumkopf, nincompoop, flatheaded, crackpot!"

And, as one man, they all started after Joe.

But Joe had been a track runner once, and he was soon out of sight.

Spoke Mr. Maxwell, sorrowfully, as he staunched a new stream of blood from his cheek: "Even at that, I'd like to see a full-size Flannelcake flyer."