

HISTORIC RHEIMS—AND AFTERWARDS.

It taxes the English tongue to the utmost of its reaches adequately to picture the epoch-making events that have marked the progress of the flying races at Rheims. Now they are matters of history, none can gainsay that journeys of over a hundred miles in length can be made by aeroplane without pause; or that the same machine can fly to great heights, or that it can carry comparatively great weights as represented by three persons aboard. On those three counts Henry Farman and his biplane have undoubtedly scored tremendously at the first flying races in the history of the newest phase of scientific manufacturing engineering, as is told in the story that we give of this never-to-be-forgotten meeting at Rheims. But the encouraging feature of the demonstration has been the revelation of the various qualities wherein each system of design proves better than the rest.

The meeting has not shown biplanes as a class to be pronouncedly better than monoplanes, or the other way about. The Antoinette has, perhaps, shown itself to possess more automatic fore-and-aft stability in flight than the little Bleriot, that seemed to have the better speed and lift for their wing area and horse-power; the Curtiss doubtless displayed the best speed of the biplanes, and proved the quickest to launch into flight; the Farman shone for weight-carrying, length of flight and ease of alighting; the Wrights made their mark as to quickness in executing turns; the Voisins showed strength and a certain degree of automatic stability, and so forth. Thus it is good for the movement that no one machine should possess a monopoly of good points.

The organisation of the untried thing is rarely an enviable task. It seldom reflects great credit. But in the case of the splendidly successful enterprise, promoted in chief measure by highly praiseworthy local initiation at Rheims, everything was planned with the most brilliantly imaginative foresight, so that, despite the gatherings being greater than on the occasions of any known French military review or race meeting, traffic facilities and accommodation of all sorts were on an adequate scale. Would we could always rely upon doing similar things in equally satisfactory fashion in this country.

After making due allowance for the generally favourable nature of the weather conditions, the ideal ground, and so forth, the fact remains that the meeting has shown the mechanical flying machine to be farther advanced than the most optimistic had dared to hope. It has revealed that, in future meetings, certain further steps may be embarked on profitably towards the development of organisation. The first is that, to enable the various competitions to convey some notion of the relative efficiency, a system of handicapping or of classification should be drawn up by the Federation Internationale Aéronautique. As such a departure calls for the most careful consideration—and events in the flying world march with exceeding rapidity—it were well that time should be taken by the forelock and the task commenced forthwith. It is obvious that aeroplane rating, if we may use the term, must be arrived at by the observance of certain cardinal points, such as the wing area, the horse-power employed, and the weight lifted. But the details will want a deal of working out. The statistics in connection with the Rheims meeting should serve admirably as a basis for making the needful calculations.

The second point to be learnt from the meeting as conducted at Betheny is that it has proven a 6-mile

course to be too long from the spectacular point of view, while it was plain that the competitors could manage quite well with a 3 mile or 5 kilom. to the lap course. But it is desirable that the flight path should be as long as possible in relationship to its width, that the performers may be reasonably close to the spectators throughout the duration of any competition. This is a change that can be managed quite conveniently at Rheims, and the desirability of it augurs well for meetings that may be organised in this country, where it would be impossible to find the equivalent in expanse of the vast plain hard by the capital of the Champagne district.

We regret to observe, however, that certain attempts are being made to promote flying race meetings in this country in what appears to us to be a premature fashion. There is talk of a meeting at Blackpool, and theoretically every encouragement should be given to the enterprising council of that well-managed watering place for enabling the public to benefit from the natural facilities which are at hand for an aviation meeting of this kind. But the Aeroplane Club has also rushed forward with what we fear to be precipitate haste, proclaiming from the housetops that it is also organising one at Wembley Park in conjunction with the proprietary of that enterprise. Of course, more or less direct profit (or advertisement) is one of the chief aims of both schemes. In the case of the second named, everyone who has followed the aeronautic movement at all closely knows that the Aeroplane Club is bound to secure the auspices of the Federation Internationale Aéronautique before it can hold any sort of contest in which flying machines are concerned. This is so because all flyers taking part in it would otherwise be liable to disqualification from future competitions organised under its auspices and regulations in this or any other country. Now, the Federation is represented in this country by the Aero Club of the United Kingdom, and by no other body, so that in any case it would fall to the A.C.U.K. to exercise the real control over the proposed meeting at Wembley Park if it were held at all. Yet, from the announcements in the Press, we perceive that the Aeroplane Club "of Great Britain and Ireland" has been studiously endeavouring to get all the kudos and all the advertisement out of the scheme, its self-assumed name leading the public into supposing that it is the accredited National authority in all such matters as these. Of course, provided the regulations of the Federation Internationale Aéronautique are complied with, and the chosen venue is considered suitable, the Aero Club of the U.K. would, as a matter of course, grant a permit to any minor organisation which desired to hold a meeting of the kind.

But the notices that have been issued concerning the project at Wembley contain no mention of the Aero Club at all, and such references as there have been to the Federation Internationale Aéronautique are hardly calculated to indicate the true position of the Aeroplane Club to the man in the street. Thus quite early in the history of the flying movement we have an example of the absolute desirability of avoiding the duplication of aeronautical bodies. It will be remembered that some time ago an agreement was come to by the only recognised bodies whereby the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain, which is the oldest-established institution of the kind in the world, represents the scientific phases of the movement, the Aero Club of the United Kingdom the