

Armchair Reflections.

by the "Dreamer"

ALLOWING that there are amateur gardeners who till the soil for pleasure, and amateur authors who write books for pleasure, in the vast majority of cases the work is done with one and the same object in view,

Amateur Gardeners



to make money; therefore, I will not say of any book that I cannot understand why it was ever written.

Publishers, presumably, issue works with the same worthy object in view, and so long as the book is a seller, have nothing much to grumble about. Readers also please themselves what they buy, and what they pass over; therefore, in the ordinary course of things everybody should be satisfied. When, how-

ever, it comes to books on any particular science or art, the matter assumes different proportions, and people interested in any particular branch, and having that branch very much to heart, are apt to feel rather annoyed when works are published that set out to instruct, and do so in an ambiguous manner, or in a manner altogether wrong.

In my humble opinion the science of aviation would have suffered no great loss had the latest addition to aviatic literature, "Aircraft," by an "Air Pilot," never been published. Besides the "Author's Note," there is also an introduction by Mr. W. Joynson-Hicks, M.P., who very wisely disassociates himself from any responsibility for the correctness of the author's technical details. I have read through the work several times with interest and amusement, so that if this was the result to be obtained that was in the mind of the author when writing, his object should be most certainly attained. For the rest, it simply teems with contradictions and inexactitudes, to say nothing of absolute errors.

Engaged myself in the business of trying to evolve bread and butter *via* the end of a pen, I am inclined to look with admiration, even unto enviousness, at the works of some, and with leniency at the efforts of the "budders," for failing "buds" there would be no "blooms." As a literary effort, the book is disjointed, contradictory, jumpy, bad in construction and often involved in its phrasing. From the point of view of technical details, it contains many mistakes. It would have been the better for severe editing. In the opening four lines one gets straight up against a snag, for the author says, "In certain circles there exists a mistaken and prevalent idea that the history of aviation is confined to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries." In his preface he says that his endeavour amongst other things is to "impress upon the public mind that the birth of aviation is the most important and far-reaching epoch

of our generation." And on page 21, "— 1900 may be said to date the birth of aviation." On the same page he says that the "base and vile uses" to which the Zeppelin has been put, debars the name of Zeppelin and his work "from all Christian discussion," and presently follows with two entire chapters on that very subject.

On page 70, he says, speaking of speed, "— and the fastest Zeppelin is a long way behind in this matter, when compared with the best aeroplane." Page 120 twists this about by saying, "But this difficulty the Germans have overcome by constructing the latest Zeppelins on the 'Spitzender'—a sharp point at both ends—shape."

Some of the other gems contained therein, and which ought to be highly instructive to all interested in aviation, are: "— to a great extent the size of the wings influences the speed of the craft, and the larger the wing spread, the greater the speed will be." "The warped portion of the wing is known as the ailerons." "The movements of the control-stick are very natural; by pushing it forward the machine rises; *per contra*, by pulling it backwards it changes the direction downwards." The following, in spite of the Defence of the Realm Act: "The principal engines in use in this country are the Gnome, Avro, Blackburn, Anzani, Clerguet (*sic*) Green, Sturtevant, and certain others which it is not desirable to mention at the moment."

Here is a peach, with reference to an engine: "— and provided it continues to give the requisite speed, will go on running for years." The three

"Choppy" Clouds



qualities most required in building up an aeroplane or aircraft are given as, "Care in the manufacture of parts. Factor of Safety, and Resistance." This next paragraph I do not pretend to be able to unravel: "Flying over shell-fire has proved that the aeroplane is a much more stable craft than we were previously given to understand. This latter is easily accounted for with regard to our own machines by the fact that the proportion of safety is inordinately great—being eight to one, whereas that of our allies is only four." All parts of an aeroplane should fit into their component parts "like a vice in a groove." And, speaking of the men (as apart from the officers) carried by a Zeppelin: "The latter are immaterial, they are but pawns in the game that oil the engines," &c. That Factor of Safety seems to worry the author no end, for in detailing the duties of a pilot, he says: "The pilot is concerned principally with the flying of the aeroplane, the care of the engine, spare parts. . . . He is held responsible for the general condition of the machine, also to see that it has a requisite factor of safety." "Once in a cloud, an aeroplane behaves much in the same way as a ship on a stormy