

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE DISPLAY

THE Royal Air Force display at Hendon on Saturday, June 27, will demonstrate in some degree the progress which is constantly taking place in the organization and training of the Royal Air Force. The very change in name this year is a move in the right direction. In previous years the function has been described as a "Pageant," which was about as bad a word as could have been chosen. It suggests something pretty to look at, possibly of historical and sentimental interest, but with no practical bearing on the lives of men in the twentieth century. The Royal Air Force stands for the very antithesis of all this—except only for the pleasure given to all by watching its manœuvres. "Display" is a less objectionable word, but still not the best that might have been chosen. The function so described is to the Royal Air Force what the Royal Tournament is to the Royal Navy and the Army. It is a part of the warlike training of the force, it offers prizes for supreme skill in carrying out that training, and it invites the tax-paying public to take an interest in the work of the force and to find delight in watching the highest pitch of efficiency to which training, drill and discipline can bring officers, men, and machines.

Hitherto in the pageant certain pilots and certain squadrons were picked to give exhibitions of their skill to the public. This year the performers, if one may use the word, will be the winners and runners-up of competitions in various forms of air drill, bombing, sham fighting, etc. This is most certainly a step in advance. We have not yet, apparently, reached the point, which the Royal Tournament reached so long ago, of seeing the competitions take place night by night between units for a period of weeks. The public has always been thrilled at seeing teams from two ships race to get their guns over walls, or two parties of sappers in rivalry building bridges over imaginary streams; and we believe that if the R.A.F. Display could be held for several days' running, the public would come to feel a live interest in, say, Biggin Hill, Kenley, Northolt, and even in the particular squadrons stationed at those aerodromes, which in present circumstances is hardly to be expected. Everyone knows how the Worcester Regiment saved the first battle of Ypres, everyone is familiar with the saying "Steady, the Buffs!" and everyone has heard of the "Fighting Fifth." But how many know that No. 25 (Fighter) Squadron shot down Immelman, that Ball and McCudden were in No. 56 (Fighter) Squadron, and that the present Squadron Leader of the latter is Sir Christopher Brand, who flew from England to South Africa? The Chief of the Air Staff has spoken recently of inducing the public to take more interest in service flying. One very good way of doing so is to give the public a chance of indulging its taste for partizanship and hero-worship. The relations of the Air Force and the public will not be really healthy until some squadrons—all, if possible—have been given popular nicknames. If at the coming Display the public learns, as it probably will, to think of No. 25 as "The Cuckoos," the first step in the right direction will have been taken.

The reason for this probability is the advance made in radio-telephony. Previously the leader of a formation had to signal his orders to the other pilots by some visual code. Now he is able to talk to them, and it is obviously better to call some unmistakable title such as "Cuckoos" than a cold "Twenty-five," with the chance of getting connected to a wrong number. At the Display on the 27th inst., the orders of the leader will be picked up by a ground station and broadcast, so that the spectators will hear the order above the roar of the engines, will learn the call title of the squadron over their heads, and will see what is the manœuvre which the leader has ordered. This will be thoroughly educative as well as interesting. It is hoped that the King himself will give order by word of mouth to a squadron in the air.

A sort of rehearsal by some of the squadrons which will

take part in the Display was held at Kenley aerodrome on June 5, and very interesting it was to those journalists who were privileged to be present. Actual competitions were also held and were judged by Air Commodore C. R. Samson, C.M.G., D.S.O., A.F.C., who commands No. 6 Group. This Group, which has its headquarters at Kenley, is a Fighter Group, and includes the eight Fighter squadrons at present in the country, viz., Nos. 17 (Snipe) and 25 (Grebe) at Hawkinge, 19 (Snipe), 29 (Grebe) and 111 (Siskin) at Duxford, 41 (Siskin) at Northolt, 32 (Grebe) at Kenley, and 56 (Grebe) at Biggin Hill, as well as the Communication Squadron, No. 24, at Kenley, which is still using up the stock of general utility Bristol Fighters. It is gratifying to note that only two of the Fighter Squadrons in this country are still equipped with the obsolete Snipe. The progress in re-equipment during the last few months has been good.

No. 25, under Sqdn.-Ldr. A. H. Peck, D.S.O., M.C., gave a fine display of air drill, and some of the manœuvres were somewhat intricate. But it is absolutely necessary for every squadron to be precise in changing formation. The loud speaker gave the audience some insight into the names of the various formations, and the words of command. Air drill appears to be based on an admixture of fleet manœuvres and infantry drill. But the art of air drill is in process of development, and is still liable to modification. The Army, in the last 25 years, has endured several issues of new drill books, but each new edition has aimed in the main at simplification. May the Air Force be no more unfortunate.

After the drill came practice of the attack on hostile aircraft, represented by Bristol fighters of the Communications Squadron. Each attack was carried out by one flight, consisting of three machines. In attack No. 1 the leader, presumably the flight-lieutenant, stays up above the flight, as a sort of general reserve, while his two companions engage the enemy, one from above and one from below. In attack No. 2, all three machines engage the enemy from right, left and rear, timing their flight so as to cause the maximum of confusion to the enemy's gunners. The escape-after this attack and the quick reform of the flight, needs to be carried out very smartly. Low bombing of an object such as a tank, the deck of a ship, or a submarine, was also displayed, the pilots working by judgment, without bomb-sights.

The display, of course, will not be confined to the fighter squadrons, although No. 6 Group is only concerned with them. Bombing squadrons will also play a large part in it. Four bombing squadrons will manœuvre together, making 36 aeroplanes in all. The bombers, of course, are our offensive machines, and it is a recognised truth that attack is the best defence. The fighters are essentially defensive craft, though that may seem a paradox until one thinks about it for a minute. The public are apt to be caught by the glamour of the fighters, just as cavalry seems more attractive than infantry. But the Chief of the Air Staff, in his speech at Cambridge, said that the aeroplane (that is, the bomber) is the most offensive weapon that has ever been invented. He went on to say that it (meaning this time the fighter) is a shockingly bad weapon of defence. Sir Hugh undoubtedly did not mean to cast aspersions on No. 6 Group, but still his words should prevent us from depreciating the bombers because they are less fast and active than the fighters. It must be fear of our bombers rather than fear of our fighters that must give the next "Mad dog of Europe" pause before attacking us. So the great parade of four bombing squadrons manœuvring in the air together will be one of the most impressive sights of the display. There will be other attractions, too, of which more anon; but enough has been said to show that the educative value of the display will be greater than that of any pageant in the past.

The "Los Angeles" in Trouble

THE U.S. Airship "Los Angeles" left Lakehurst on June 7 for Minnesota in order to take part in the Norse celebrations at Minneapolis, but when half-way there engine trouble developed and she had to return to Lakehurst. On arriving there thick fog prevented her making fast for several hours. Eventually, however, this was safely accomplished, after the airship had been aloft for 12 hours.

"Alan J." has a Mishap

WHILE flying to Berlin on June 4 in the D.H. "Moth," with Lieut.-Col. Edwards, of the Air Ministry, as passenger, Alan J. Cobham had to make a forced landing, on rough

ground, near Middelharnis, and in doing so, ran into a dyke. The "Moth" was slightly damaged, but neither Cobham nor Col. Edwards were hurt—the latter proceeding to Berlin by rail.

Presentation to Crew of R.33

ON June 4 last Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for Air, presented the members of the crew of the R.33 with gold watches, in appreciation of their gallant conduct during the "break-away." The ceremony took place in the large hangar at Pulham, beneath the damaged nose of the R.33, now undergoing repair.