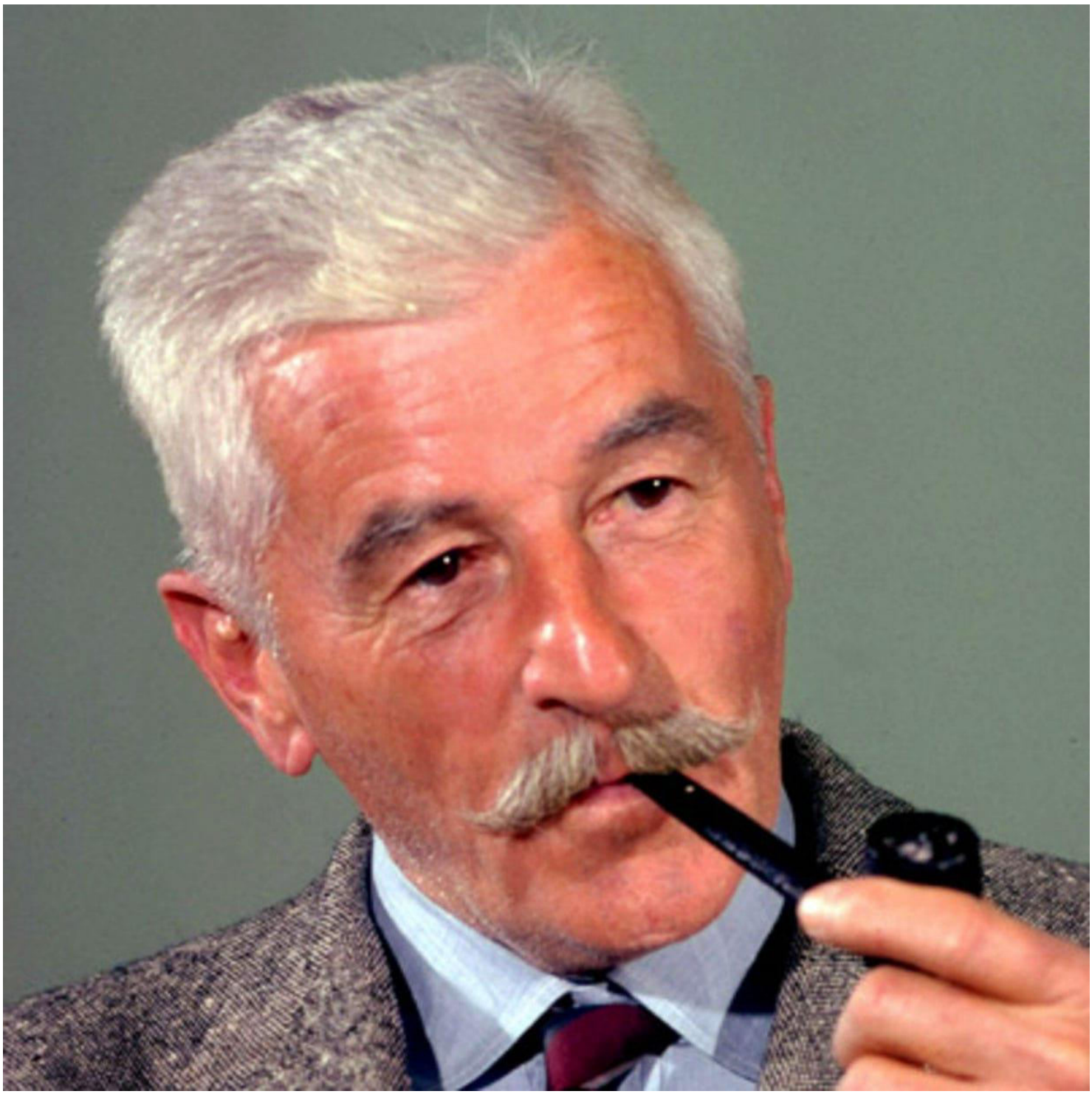

Thrift, William Faulkner

Thrift

The Saturday Evening Post, September 1930

I

In messes they told of MacWyrglinchbeath how, a first-class air mechanic of a disbanded Nieuport squadron, he went three weeks' A.W.O.L. He had been given a week's leave for England while the squadron was being reequipped with British-made machines, and he was last seen in Boulogne, where the lorry set him and his mates down. That night he disappeared. Three weeks later the hitherto unchallenged presence of an unidentifiable first-class air mechanic was discovered in the personnel of a bombing squadron near Boulogne.

At the ensuing investigation the bomber gunnery sergeant told how the man had appeared among the crew one morning on the beach, where the flight had landed after a raid. Replacements had come up the day before, and the sergeant said he took the man to be one of the replacements; it appeared that everyone took the man to be one of the new mechanics. He told how the man showed at once a conscientious aptitude, revealing an actual affection for the aeroplane of whose crew he made one, speaking in a slow, infrequent, Scottish voice of the amount of money it represented and of the sinfulness of sending so much money into the air in a single lump.

"He even asked to be put on flying," the sergeant testified. "He downright courted me till I did it, volunteering for all manner of off-duty jobs for me, until I put him on once or twice. I'd keep him with me, on the toggles, though."

They did not discover that anything was wrong until pay day. His name was not on the pay officer's list; the man's insistence — his was either sublime courage or sublime effrontery — brought his presence to the attention of the squadron commander. But when they looked for him, he was gone.

The next day, in Boulogne, an air mechanic with a void seven-day pass, issued three weeks ago by a now disbanded scout squadron, was arrested while trying to collect three weeks' pay, which he said was owing to him, from the office of the acting provost marshal himself. His name, he said, was MacWyrglinchbeath.

Thus it was discovered that MacWyrglinchbeath was a simultaneous deserter from two different military units. He repeated his tale — for the fifth time in three days fetched from his cell by a corporal and four men with bayoneted rifles — standing bareheaded to attention before the table where a general now sat, and the operations officer of the bomber squadron and the gunnery sergeant:

"A had gone doon tae thae beach tae sleep, beca' A kenned they wud want money for-r thae beds in the town. A was ther-re when thae boombers cam' doon. Sae A went wi' thae boombers."

"But why didn't you go home on your leave?" the general asked.

"A wou'na be spendin' sic useless money, sir-r."

The general looked at him. The general had little pig's eyes, and his face looked as though it had been blown up with a bicycle pump.

“Do you mean to tell me that you spent seven days’ leave and a fortnight more without leave, as the member of the personnel of another squadron?”

“Well, sir-r,” MacWyrglinchbeath said, “naught wud do they but A sud tak’ thae week’s fur-rlough. I didna want it. And wi’ thae big machines A cud get flying pay.”

The general looked at him. Rigid, motionless, he could see the general’s red face swell and swell.

“Get that man out of here!” the general said at last.

“ ‘Bout face,” the corporal said.

“Get me that squadron commander,” the general said. “At once! I’ll cashier him! Gad’s teeth, I’ll put him in jail for the rest of his life!”

“ ‘Bout face!” the corporal said, a little louder. MacWyrglinchbeath had not moved.

“Sir-r,” he said. The general, in mid-voice, looked at him, his mouth still open a little. Behind his mustache he looked like a boar in a covert. “Sir-r,” MacWyrglinchbeath said, “wull A get ma pay for thae thr-r-ree weeks and thae seven hour-rs and for-rty minutes in the air-r?”

It was Ffollansbye, who was to first recommend him for a commission, who knew most about him.

“I give you,” he said, “a face like a ruddy walnut, maybe sixteen, maybe fifty-six; squat, with arms not quite as long as an ape’s, lugging petrol tins across the aerodrome. So long his arms were that he would have to hunch his shoulders and bow his elbows a little so the bottoms of the tins wouldn’t scrape the ground. He walked with a limp — he told me

about that. It was just after they came down from Stirling in ‘14. He had enlisted for infantry; they had not told him that there were other ways of going in.

“So he began to make inquiries. Can’t you see him, listening to all the muck they told recruits then, about privates not lasting two days after reaching Dover — they told him, he said, that the enemy killed only the English and Irish and Lowlanders; the Highlands having not yet declared war — and such.

Anyway, he took it all in, and then he would go to bed at night and sift it out. Finally he decided to go for the Flying Corps; decided with pencil and paper that he would last longer there and so have more money saved. You see, neither courage nor cowardice had ever functioned in him at all; I don’t believe he had either. He was just like a man who, lost for a time in a forest, picks up a fagot here and there against the possibility that he might some day emerge.

“He applied for transfer, but they threw it out. He must have been rather earnest about it, for they finally explained that he must have a better reason than personal preference for desiring to transfer, and that a valid reason would be mechanical knowledge or a disability leaving him unfit for infantry service.

“So he thought that out. And the next day he waited until the barracks was empty, prodded the stove to a red heat, removed his boot and putty, and laid the sole of his foot to the stove.

“That was where the limp came from. When his transfer went through and he came out with his third-class air mechanic’s rating, they thought that he had been out before.

“I can see him, stiff at attention in the squadron office, his b. o. on the table, Whiteley and the sergeant trying to pronounce his name.

“ ‘What’s the name, sergeant?’ Whiteley says.

“Sergeant looks at b.o., rubs hands on thighs. ‘Mac—’ he says and bogs down again. Whiteley leans to look-see himself.

“ ‘Mac—’ bogs himself; then: ‘Beath. Call him MacBeath.’

“ ‘A’m ca’d MacWyrglinchbeath,’ newcomer says.

“ ‘Sir,’ sergeant prompts.

“ ‘Sir-r,’ newcomer says.

“ ‘Oh,’ Whiteley says, ‘Magillinbeath. Put it down, sergeant.’ Sergeant takes up pen, writes M-a-c with flourish, then stops, handmaking concentric circles with pen above page while owner tries for a peep at b. o. in Whiteley’s hands. ‘Rating, three ack emma,’ Whiteley says. ‘Put that down, sergeant.’

“ ‘Very good, sir,’ sergeant says. Flourishes grow richer, like sustained cavalry threat; leans yet nearer Whiteley’s shoulder, beginning to sweat.

“Whiteley looks up, says, ‘Eh?’ sharply. ‘What’s matter?’ he says.

“ ‘The nyme, sir,’ sergeant says. ‘I can’t get—’

“Whiteley lays b. o. on table; they look at it. ‘People at Wing never could write,’ Whiteley says in fretted voice.

“ ‘‘Tain’t that, sir,’ sergeant says. “Is people just ‘aven’t learned to spell. Wot’s yer nyme agyne, my man?’

“ ‘A’m ca’d MacWyrglinchbeath,’ newcomer says.

“ ‘Ah, the devil,’ Whiteley says. ‘Put him down MacBeath and give him to C. Carry on.’

“But newcomer holds ground, polite but firm. ‘A’m ca’d MacWyrglinchbeath,’ he says without heat.

“Whiteley stares at him. Sergeant stares at him. Whiteley takes pen from sergeant, draws record sheet to him. ‘Spell it.’ Newcomer does so as Whiteley writes it down. ‘Pronounce it again, will you?’ Whiteley says. Newcomer does so. ‘Magillinbeath,’ Whiteley says. ‘Try it, sergeant.’

“Sergeant stares at written word. Rubs ear. ‘Mac — wigglin-beech,’ he says. Then, in hushed tone: ‘Blimey.’

“Whiteley sits back. ‘Right,’ he says. ‘We’ve it correctly. Carry on.’

“ ‘Ye ha’ it MacWyrglinchbeath, sir-r?’ newcomer says. ‘A’d no ha’ ma pay gang wrong.’

“That was before he soloed. Before he deserted, of course. Lugging his petrol tins back and forth, a little slower than anyone else, but always at it if you could suit your time to his. And sending his money, less what he smoked — I have seen his face as he watched the men drinking beer in the canteen — back home to the neighbor who was keeping his horse and cow for him.

“He told me about that arrangement too.

When he and the neighbor agreed, it was in emergency; they both believed it would be over and he would be home in three months. That

was a year ago. ‘ ‘Twull be a sore sum A’ll be owin’ him for foragin’ thae twa beasties,’ he told me. Then he quit shaking his head. He became quite still for a while; you could almost watch his mind ticking over. ‘Aweel,’ he says at last, ‘A doot not thae beasts wull ha’ increased in value, too, wi’ thae har-rd times.’

“In those days, you know, the Hun came over your aerodrome and shot at you while you ran and got into holes they had already dug for that purpose, while the Hun sat overhead and dared you to come out.

“So we could see fighting from the mess windows; we were carting off the refuse ourselves then. One day it crashed not two hundred yards away. When we got there, they were just dragging the pilot clear — all but his legs. He was lying on his back, looking up at the sky with that expression they have, until someone closed his eyes.

“But Mac — they were still calling him MacBeath — was looking at the crash. He was walking around it, clicking his tongue. ‘Tzut, tzut,’ he says. ‘ ’Tis a sinfu’ waste. Sinfu’. Tzut. Tzut. Tzut.’

“That was while he was still a three ack emma. He was a two soon, sending a little more money back to the neighbor. He was keeping books now, with a cheap notebook and a pencil, and a candle stub for nights. The first page was his bank book; the others were like a barograph of this war, tighter than a history.

“Then he was a one A.M. He began then to work over his ledger late into the night. I supposed it was because he had more money to worry him now, drawing, as he probably did, more a month than he ever had

in his life, until he came to me for an N.C.O.'s rating sheet. I gave it to him. A week later he had to buy a new candle. I met him.

" 'Well, Mac,' I said, 'have you decided to go for a sergeant yet?'

"He looked at me, without haste, without surprise. 'Ay, sir-r,' he says. He hadn't heard about flying pay then, you see."

Ffollansbye told about his solo:

"His new squadron were pups. I suppose as soon as he saw they were single-seaters, he realized that there would be no flying pay here. He applied for transfer to bombers. It was denied. It must have been about this time that he had the letter from his neighbor, telling that the cow had calved. I can see him now, reading the letter through to the last word, keeping all judgment and speculation and concern in abeyance until he had done, then sitting there — his pencil and paper useless in this case — weighing that delicate and unanticipated situation and its unpredictable ramifications of ownership, then deciding that circumstance would take care of it in good time.

"One day he waked up; the impulse, the need to, may have come like a germ in that letter. Not that he had ever soldiered, but now he began to show interest in the machines and in the operation of the controls, talking with the pilots, asking questions about flight, sifting and cataloguing the answers in his bunk at night. He became so — well, ubiquitous, tireless, made such an up-and-doing appearance when brass hats were about, that they made him a corporal. I suppose if I'd been there then I'd have believed that was his aim all along.

"But this time he had hitched to a star, in more than allegorical sense, it proved. It was in the middle of lunch one day when the alarm goes off.

They rush out, officer and man, clutching napkins, in time to see a pup go down the aerodrome, the wings at a forty-five-degree angle, the tip practically dragging. It righted itself by putting the other wing down, and with the crash car wailing behind, it nosed up and shot perpendicularly for perhaps two hundred feet, hung for ten thousand years on the prop, flipped its tail up and vanished from view, still at that forty-five-degree angle.

“ ‘What—’ the major says.

“ ‘It’s mine!’ a subaltern shouts. ‘It’s my machine!’

“ ‘Who—’ the major says. The crash car comes wailing back, and at about a hundred m.p.h. the pup comes into view again, upside down now. The pilot wears neither goggles nor helmet; in the fleeting glimpse they have of him, his face wears an expression of wary and stubborn concern.

He goes on, half rolls into a skid that swaps him end for end. He is now headed straight for the crash car; driver jumps out and flees for nearest hangar, the pup in vicious pursuit. Just as the driver, clutching head in both arms, hurls himself into the hangar, the pup shoots skyward again, hangs again on the prop, then ducks from sight, disappearance followed immediately by dull crash.

“They removed Mac from its intricate remains, intact but unconscious. When he waked he was again under arrest.”

II

“And so,” Ffollansbye said, “for the second time Mac had caused near apoplexy in high places. But this time he was not present. He was in detention camp, where he was calculating the amount of deficit which bade fair to be the first entry on the flying-pay page of his ledger. Meanwhile, at B.H.Q. and in London they considered his case, with its accumulated documents.

At last they decided, as a matter of self-protection and to forestall him before he invented any more crimes for which K.R. & O. had no precedent, to let him have his way.

“They came and told him that he was for England and the school of aeronautics.

“ ‘If A gang, wull they be char-rgin’ thae leetle unfor-rtunate machine against me?’

“ ‘No,’ they said.

“ ‘Verra weel,’ he said. ‘A’m ready noo.’

“He returned to England, setting foot on his native side of the Channel for the first time in more than two years, refusing leave to go home, as usual. Perhaps it was that matter of the calf’s economic legitimacy; perhaps he had figured the most minimated minimum of unavoidable outlay for the trip — knowing, too, that, whatever he discovered, he could not remain long enough to solidify against what he might find when he got there. But perhaps not. Perhaps it was just MacWyrglinchbeath.”

Seven months later, a sergeant pilot, he was trundling an obsolete and unwieldy Reconnaissance Experimental back and forth above the Somme while his officer observer spotted artillery fire from the blunt,

bathtubish nose of it. Big, broad-winged, the heavy four-cylinder Beardmore engine thundering sedately behind and above MacWyrglinchbeath's head, a temptation and potential victim to anything with a gun on it that could move seventy miles an hour. But all the same, flying hours accumulated slowly in MacWyrglinchbeath's log book.

He and his officer carried on a long, intermittent conversation as they pottered about the ancient thing between flights. The officer was an artilleryman by instinct and a wireless enthusiast by inclination; between him and aviation was an antipathy which never flagged. MacWyrglinchbeath's passion for accumulating flying time was an enigma to him until, by patient probing, he learned of the neighbor and the mounting hoard of shillings.

"So you came to the war to make money?" he said.

"Aweel," MacWyrglinchbeath said, "A wou'na be wastin' ma time."

The officer repeated MacWyrglinchbeath's history to the mess. A day or two later another pilot — an officer — entered the hangar and found MacWyrglinchbeath head down in the nacelle of his machine.

"I say, sergeant," the officer said to the seat of MacWyrglinchbeath's breeks. MacWyrglinchbeath backed slowly into complete sight and turned over his shoulder a streaked face.

"Ay, sir-r."

"Come down a moment, will you?" MacWyrglinchbeath climbed down, carrying a wrench and a bit of foul waste. "Robinson tells me you're a sort of financier," the officer said.

MacWyrglinchbeath laid the wrench down and wiped his hands on the waste. “Aweel, A wou’na say just that.”

“Now, sergeant, don’t deny it. Mr. Robinson has told on you.… Have a cigarette?”

“A’ll no’ mind.” MacWyrglinchbeath wiped his hands on his thighs and took the cigarette. “A smawk a pipe masel’.” He accepted a light.

“I’ve a bit of business in your line,” the officer said. “This day, each month, you’re to give me one pound, and for every day I get back, I give you a shilling. What do you say?”

MacWyrglinchbeath smoked slowly, holding the cigarette as though it were a dynamite cap. “And thae days when ye’ll no fly?”

“Just the same. I owe you a shilling.”

MacWyrglinchbeath smoked slowly for a while. “Wull ye gang wi’ me as ma obsair-rver-r?”

“Who’ll take up my bus? No, no: if I flew with you, I’d not need underwriting.… What do you say?”

MacWyrglinchbeath mused, the cigarette in his soiled hand. “ ‘Twill tak’ thinkin’,” he said at last. “A’ll tell ye the mor-rn.”

“Right. Take the night and think it out.” The officer returned to the mess.

“I’ve got him! I’ve got him hooked.”

“What’s your idea?” the C.O. said. “Are you spending all this ingenuity for a pound which you can only win by losing?”

“I just want to watch the old Shylock lose flesh. I should give his money back, even if I won it.”

“How?” the C.O. said. The officer looked at him, blinking slowly. “They have an exchange basis between here and Gehenna?” the C.O. said.

“Look here,” Robinson said, “why don’t you let Mac be? You don’t know those people those Highlanders. It takes fortitude just to live as they do, let alone coming away without protest to fight for a king whom they probably still consider a German peasant, and for a cause that, however it ends, he’ll only lose. And the man who can spend three years in this mess and still look forward to a future with any sanity, strength to his arm, say I.”

“Hear, hear!” someone cried.

“Oh, have a drink,” the other said. “I shan’t hurt your Scot.”

The next morning MacWyrglinchbeath paid down the pound, slowly and carefully, but without reluctance. The officer accepted it as soberly.

“We’ll start wi’ today,” MacWyrglinchbeath said.

“Righto,” the officer said. “We’ll start in a half hour.”

Three days later, after a short conversation with Robinson, the C.O. called MacWyrglinchbeath’s client aside.

“Look here. You must call that silly wager off. You’re disrupting my whole squadron. Robinson says that if you’re anywhere in sight, he can’t even keep MacBeath in their sector long enough after the battery fires to see the bursts.”

“It’s not my fault, sir. I wasn’t buying a watchdog. At least, I thought not. I was just pulling Mac’s leg.”

“Well, you look him out tomorrow and ask him to release you. We’ll have Brigade about our ears at this rate.”

The next morning the client talked to MacWyrglinchbeath. That afternoon Robinson talked to MacWyrglinchbeath. That evening, after dinner, the C.O. sent for him. But MacWyrglinchbeath was firm, polite and without heat, and like granite.

The C.O. drummed on the table for a while. “Very well, sergeant,” he said at last. “But I order you to keep to your tour of duty. If you are reported off your patrol once more, I’ll ground you. Carry on.”

MacWyrglinchbeath saluted. “Verra gude, sir-r.”

After that he kept to his tour. Back and forth, back and forth above the puny shell puffs, the gouts of slow smoke. From time to time he scanned the sky above and behind him, but always his eyes returned northward, where the other R. E. was a monotonous speck in the distance.

This was day after day, while Mr. Robinson, with his binocular, hung over the leading edge of the nacelle like a man in a bath who has dropped the soap overside. But every day the client returned, daily the shillings grew, until that day came when the shilling was profit, followed by another and another. Then the month was complete, and MacWyrglinchbeath paid down another pound. The profit was gone now, and his gaze was a little more soberly intent as he stared northward at brief intervals.

Mr. Robinson was leaning, down-peering, over the nacelle when the heavy engine behind him burst into thunderous crescendo and the earth pivoted one hundred and eighty degrees in a single swoop. He jerked himself up and looked behind, swinging his gun about.

The sky was clear, yet they were moving at the R.E.'s sedate top speed. MacWyrglinchbeath was staring straight ahead and Robinson turned and saw, indicated by A-A bursts, the other R.E. plunging and darting like an ancient stiffkneed horse. Shrapnel unfolded and bloomed above it, and at last he made out the Fokker clinging to the R.E.'s blind spot. He swung his gun forward and cleared the mechanism with a short burst.

The two R.E.'s approached at a quartering angle, the first zigzagging just above the clinging German, all three losing altitude. The first and last intimation the German had of the presence of the second R.E. was a burst from Robinson's gun. The German shot straight up, stalled, and burst into flames. Then MacWryglinchbeath, yawing violently to dodge the zooming German, saw Robinson fall forward over the edge of the nacelle, and at the same time a rake of tracer smoke along the fuselage beside him.

He swerved; without pausing, the second German shot past and plumped full upon the tail of the first R.E., and again bullets ripped about MacWyrglinchbeath, coming from beneath now, where British infantry were firing at the German.

The three of them were not a hundred feet high when they flashed above the secondary lines and the tilted pink faces of the A-A battery. The German utterly disregarded MacWryglinchbeath. He hung upon the tail of the first R.E., which was still zigzagging in wild and sluggish

yaws, and putting his nose down a little more and unfastening his belt, MacWryglinchbeath brought his machine directly above the German and a little behind him.

Still the German seemed utterly unaware of his presence, and MacWyrglinchbeath put one leg over the nacelle and got from directly beneath the engine and pushed the stick forward. The German disappeared completely beneath the end of the nacelle and Robinson's dead body sprawled there; immediately afterward, MacWyrglinchbeath felt the prolonged shock. He cut the switch and climbed free of the nacelle, onto the bottom wing, where the engine wouldn't fall on him. "Sax shillin'," he said as the sudden earth swooped and tilted.

III

He climbed stiffly down from his Bristol and limped across the tarmac, toward his hut. His limp was pronounced now, a terrific crablike gait, for in the wet, chill October days his broken hips stiffened, even after fourteen months.

The flight was all in, the windows of the officers' mess glowed cheerily across the dusk; he limped on, thinking of tea, a drink, a cozy evening in his hut behind the locked door. That was against the young devils from the mess. Children they took now. The old pilots, mature men, were all dead or promoted to remote Wing offices, their places filled by infants not done with public school, without responsibility or any gift for silence. He went on and opened the door to his hut.

He stopped, the open door in his hand, then he closed it and entered the cubbyhole of a room. His batman had built the fire up in the

miniature stove; the room was quite warm. He laid his helmet and goggles aside and slowly unfastened and removed his flying boots. Only then did he approach the cot and stand there, looking quietly at the object which had caught his eye when he entered. It was his walking-out tunic. It had been pressed, but that was not all.

The Royal Flying Corps tabs and the chevrons had been ripped from shoulder and sleeve, and on each shoulder strap a subaltern's pip was fixed, and upon the breast, above the D.S.M. ribbon, were wings. Beside it his scarred belt lay, polished, with a new and shining shoulder strap buckled on. He was still looking soberly at them when the door burst open upon a thunderous inrush.

"Now, old glum-face!" a young voice cried. "He'll have to buy a drink now. Hey, fellows?"

They watched him from the mess windows as he crossed the aerodrome in the dusk.

"Wait, now," they told one another. "Wait till he's had time to dress."

Another voice rose: "Gad, wouldn't you like to see the old blighter's face when he opens the door?"

"Old blighter?" a flight commander sitting with a newspaper beneath the lamp said. "He's not old. I doubt if he's thirty."

"Good gad! Thirty! Gad, I'll not live to see thirty by ten years."

"Who cares? Who wants to live forever?"

"Stow it. Stow it."

"Ave, Cæsar! Morituri—"

“Stow it, stow it! Don’t be a mawkish fool!”

“Gad, yes! What ghastly taste!”

“Thirty! Good gad!”

“He looks about a hundred, with that jolly walnut face of his.”

“Let him. He’s a decent sort. Shame it wasn’t done sooner for him.”

“Yes. Been a D.S.O. and an M.C. twice over by now.”

“Got quite a decent clink record too. Deserted once, you know.”

“Go on!”

“ ‘Struth. And first time he was ever off the ground he nipped off alone on a pup. No instruction; ack emma then. Sort of private solo.”

“I say, do you know that yarn they tell about him about hoarding his pay against peace? Sends it all home. Done it for years.”

“Well, why not?” the flight commander said. “If some of you young puppies would just—” They shouted him down. “Clear off, the lot of you!” the flight commander said above the din. “Why don’t you go and fetch him up here?”

They charged from the room; the noise faded in the outer dusk. The three flight commanders sat down again, talking quietly among themselves.

“I’m glad too. Trouble is, they should have done it years ago. Ffollansbye recommended him once. Dare say some ass hipped on precedent quashed it.”

“Too bad Ffollansbye couldn’t have lived to see it done.”

“What a putrid shame.”

“Yes. But you’d not know it from Mac. Ffollansbye told him when he put him up. Old Mac never said anything at all; just went on about his business. And then, when Ffollansbye had to tell him it was no go, he just sort of grunted and thanked him, and carried on as though it had never come up.”

“What a ruddy shame.”

“Yes. Sort of makes you glad you belong to the same squadron with a chap like that. Does his bit and be damned to you.” They sat in the cozy warmth, talking quietly of MacWyrglinchbeath. Feet rushed again beyond the door; it opened and two of the deputation stood in it with their young, baffled faces.

“Well?” someone said. “Where’s the victim?”

But they were beckoning the senior flight commander, in whose flight MacWyrglinchbeath was.

“Come here, skipper,” they said. The senior looked at them. He did not rise.

“What’s row?”

But they were merely urgent and mysterious; not until the three of them were outside did they explain. “The old fool won’t take it,” they said in hushed tones. “Can you believe it? Can you?”

“We’ll see,” the flight commander said. Beyond MacWyrglinchbeath’s door the sound of voices indistinguishable and expostulant came.

The flight commander entered and thrust among them as they stood about the cot. The tunic and belt lay untouched upon it; beside it MacWyrglinchbeath sat in the lone chair.

“Clear off, now,” the flight commander said, herding them toward the door. “Off with you, the whole lot.” He pushed the last one out and shut the door and returned and straddled his legs before the stove.

“What’s all the hurrah, Mac?”

“Weel, skipper,” MacWyrglinchbeath said slowly, “thae bairns mean weel, A doot not—” He looked up. “Ye ha’ disfee-gur-red ma walkin-oot tunic, and thae bairns think A sud just dress up in a’ thae leather-r and brass, and gang wi’ they tae thae awf-ficer-rs’ mess.” He mused again upon the tunic.

“Right,” the flight commander said. “Shame it wasn’t done a year ago. Hop into it now, and come along. Dinner’s about about.”

But MacWyrglinchbeath did not stir. He put his hand out slowly and musingly, and touched the gallant sweep of the embroidered wings above the silken candy stripe.

“Thae bairns mean weel, A mak’ nae doot,” he said.

“Silly young pups. But we’re all damned glad. You should have seen the major when it came through this morning. Like a child on Christmas Eve. The lads could hardly wait until they could sneak your tunic out.”

“Ay,” MacWyrglinchbeath said. “They mean well, A mak’ nae doot. But ‘twill tak’ thinkin’.” He sat, slowly and gently touching the wings with a blunt hand, pitted and grained with four years of grease. The flight commander watched quietly and with what he thought was comprehension. He moved.

“Right you are. Take the night and think it out. Better show up at breakfast, though, or those devils will be after you again.”

“Ay,” MacWyrglinchbeath said. “ ‘Twill tak’ thinkin’.”

Dark was fully come. The flight commander strode savagely back to the mess, swearing. He opened the door, and, still cursing, he entered. The others faced him quickly.

“Is he coming?”

The flight commander cursed steadily — Wing, Brigade, Staff, the war, Parliament.

“Do you think he will? Would any of you yourselves, after they’d let you rot for four ruddy years, and then gave you a second lieutenancy as though it were a Garter? The man has pride, and he’s damned well right.”

After his dinner MacWyrglinchbeath went to the sergeant of the officers’ mess and talked with him. Then he went to the squadron commander’s orderly and talked with him. Then he returned and sat on his cot — he had yet the stub of candle, for light was furnished him now; but he was well into his second pencil — and calculated. He roughly computed the cost of a new uniform and accessories, with an allowance for laundry.

Then he calculated a month's average battel bill, added the amounts and subtracted the total from a subaltern's pay. he compared the result with his present monthly net, sitting above the dead yet irrevocable assertion of the figures for a long time. Then he tied the ledger up in its bit of greasy cord and went to bed.

The next morning he sought the flight commander. "Thae bairns mean well, A mak' nae doot," he said, with just a trace of apology. "And the major-r. A'm gritfu' tae ye a'. But 'twina do, skipper. Ye ken that."

"Yes," the flight commander said. "I see. Yes." Again and aloud he cursed the whole fabric of the war. "Stupid fools, with their ruddy tabs and brass. No wonder they can't win a war in four years. You're right, Mac; 'course it's no go at this late day. And I'm sorry, old fellow." He wrung MacWyrglinchbeath's limp, calloused hand hard.

"A'm gritfu'," MacWyrglinchbeath said. "A'm obleeged."

That was in October, 1918.

By two o'clock there was not a mechanic on the place. On the tarmac the squadron commander's machine stood, the engine idling; in the cockpit the major sat. He was snoring. Up and down the aerodrome the senior flight commander and a wing commander and an artillery officer raced in the squadron's car, while a fourth man in an S.E. 5 played tag with them.

He appeared to be trying to set his landing gear down in the tonneau of the car; at each failure the occupants of the car howled, the artillery officer waving a bottle; each time the flight commander foiled him by

maneuvering, they howled again and passed the bottle from mouth to mouth.

The mess was littered with overturned chairs and with bottles and other objects small enough to throw. Beneath the table lay two men to whom three hours of peace had been harder than that many years of fighting; above and upon and across them the unabated tumult raged. At last one climbed upon the table and stood swaying and shouting until he made himself heard:

“Look here! Where’s old Mac?”

“Mac!” they howled. “Where’s old Mac? Can’t have a binge without old Mac!”

They rushed from the room. In his cockpit the major snored; the squadron car performed another last-minute skid as the S. E.’s propeller flicked the cap from the artillery officer’s head. They rushed on to MacWyrglinchbeath’s hut and crashed the door open. MacWyrglinchbeath was sitting on his cot, his ledger upon his knees and his pencil poised above it. He was taking stock.

With the hammer which he had concealed beneath the well coping four years ago he carefully drew the nails in the door and window frames and put them into his pocket and opened his house again. He put the hammer and the nails away in their box, and from another box he took his kilts and shook them out. The ancient folds were stiff, reluctant, and moths had been among them, and he clicked his tongue soberly.

Then he removed his tunic and breeks and putties, and donned the kilts. With the fagots he had stored there four years ago he kindled a meager fire on the hearth and cooked and ate his supper. Then he

smoked his pipe, put the dottle carefully away, smothered the fire and went to bed.

The next morning he walked three miles down the glen to the neighbor's. The neighbor, from his tilted doorway, greeted him with sparse unsurprise:

"Weel, Wully. A thocht ye'd be comin' hame. A heer-rd thae war-r was done wi'."

"Ay," MacWyrglinchbeath said, and together they stood beside the angling fence of brush and rocks and looked at the shaggy, small horse and the two cows balanced, seemingly without effort, on the forty-five-degree slope of the barn lot.

"Ye'll be takin' away thae twa beasties," the neighbor said.

"Thae three beasties, ye mean," MacWyrglinchbeath said. They did not look at each other. They looked at the animals in the lot.

"Ye'll mind ye left but twa wi' me."

They looked at the three animals. "Ay," MacWyrglinchbeath said. Presently they turned away. They entered the cottage. The neighbor lifted a hearthstone and counted down MacWyrglinchbeath's remittances to the last ha'penny. The total agreed exactly with the ledger.

"A'm gritfu'," MacWyrglinchbeath said.

"Ye'll ha' ither spoil frae thae war-r, A doot not?" the neighbor said.

"Naw. 'Twas no that kind o' a war-r," MacWyrglinchbeath said.

“Ay,” the neighbor said. “No Hieland Scots ha’ ever won aught in English war-rs.”

MacWyrglinchbeath returned home. The next day he walked to the market town, twelve miles away. Here he learned the current value of two-year-old cattle; he consulted a lawyer also. He was closeted with the lawyer for an hour. Then he returned home, and with pencil and paper and the inch-long butt of the candle he calculated slowly, proved his figures, and sat musing above the result. Then he snuffed the candle and went to bed.

The next morning he walked down the glen. The neighbor, in his tilted doorway, greeted him with sparse unsurprise:

“Weel, Wully. Ye ha’ cam’ for thae twa beasties?”

“Ay,” MacWyrglinchbeath said.

The End