

# W. W. LATTA WHO FOUND GOLDEN FLEECE IN NEBRASKA

Energetic Young Man from Ohio Proves that Fortune Smiles on Him Who Ploughs Deep and Harrows His Crop with Care from Year to Year in the Antelope State

THOSE gentlemen who "can increase your salary if you are making less than \$25 a week" need not talk to Nebraska farmers. W. W. Latta is a fair example of what the wonderful soil of Nebraska did in half a century for those who had faith in it. Mr. Latta had about \$200 when he arrived in Burt county in 1857. Today he owns more than 4,000 acres of the most fertile land in Burt county and nearly a thousand acres elsewhere, beside great herds of stock and buildings in the town of Tekamah. He is worth upward of \$500,000. In other words, the labors of this Nebraska farmer have netted him more than \$10,000 a year and every dollar came out of the soil of Burt county.

Jason's quest of the golden fleece celebrated in Grecian mythology has a parallel in the story of Mr. Latta's life. At any rate, so declares a man who believes implicitly that history is repeating itself every day and that there is nothing new under the sun. This man points out the remarkable similarity between the adventures of Jason some fifty centuries ago and the adventures and experiences of Mr. Latta some fifty years ago.

Jason, it will be remembered, was a young prince in Greece. His father, the king, had left the scepter in the hands of one, Pelias, on condition that when Jason became of age it should be placed in his hand. When Jason arrived at his majority, Pelias suggested that it would be folly for a young man with his whole life before him to settle down to the prosaic duty of sitting on the throne of a troublesome and peevish people and held up enticing visions of the glories of travel and adventure. The young prince was of rather a roving disposition and, as a number of other princes had gone in search of the golden fleece he decided to have a try at it himself.

Greek facilities for travel in those days were not very advanced. Canoes and small boats made by hollowing out trunks of trees marked nearly the extent of the ship building art. Therefore when the young man gave an order to Argus for a ship to hold fifty men the world was considerably surprised, and his friends pointed him out as a determined man and said that he might succeed in getting the fleece. He set out with his forty-nine companions, touching at Lemnos, Mysia and finally stopping at Thrace to visit the sage, Phineus. This wise man instructed Jason how to pass the Symplegades or clashing islands, which lay in their route at the entrance to the Euxine sea. They succeeded in getting through safely, though the islands in coming together after them actually razed the stern of the boat.

### Jason's Exploit as Farmer

They arrived finally in the kingdom of Colchis, which was a rich and fertile country and the place where the golden fleece was kept guarded by a dragon. Jason hastened to pay his respects to Aetes, king of the country, who consented to give up the fleece provided Jason could get possession of it. And having made this remarkable concession the kind hearted monarch made one other small condition, namely, that Jason should yoke two fire-breathing bulls with brazen feet to a plow and should sow the teeth of a certain dragon which Cadmus had slain. "It was well known that from these teeth armed men would spring up and would attack the man who had sown the teeth."

Undaunted, Jason accepted the condition, and a time was set for the sowing of the fearsome seed. Jason wisely used the intervening time to woo the daughter of Aetes, the Princess Medea, and before the time of sowing the dragon teeth they had pledged their troth, taken out a license and been married.

On the appointed day Jason bravely yoked the fire-breathing bulls with brazen feet to the plow and sowed the teeth. The armed men sprang up as per program and immediately rushed upon Jason. He thereupon threw a stone into their midst and they turned their swords upon each other and soon were all slain. It was his wife who had taught him this charm. It only remained now for Jason to lull to sleep the dragon which guarded the fleece, which he did, not exactly by putting salt on his tail but by sprinkling over him a few drops of a preparation furnished him by his young wife. Then he took the fleece, hurried with his forty-nine companions and Medea to the boat and returned to Greece.

Where the history of Mr. Latta does not correspond with this it is so exactly opposite that, says the man who draws the parallel, it proves the truth by the law of contraries. History does not relate how Jason got his education. Young Latta got his in a log schoolhouse in Ashland county, Ohio. This was the county of his birth. The date was September 6, 1833. At the age of 22 years the young man struck out for the west in search of wealth. He wasn't particular whether it was in the form of a golden fleece or some other form. He, like Jason, found transportation facilities rather primitive. He went by rail to Freeport, Ill., thence by stage to Savannah, Ill., and thence across the Mississippi river to Van Buren, Ia. There he remained as Jason remained at Thrace. As Jason received his advice from the sage, Phineus, Mr. Latta received his from the great editor, Horace Greeley. It was: "Go west, young man, go west."

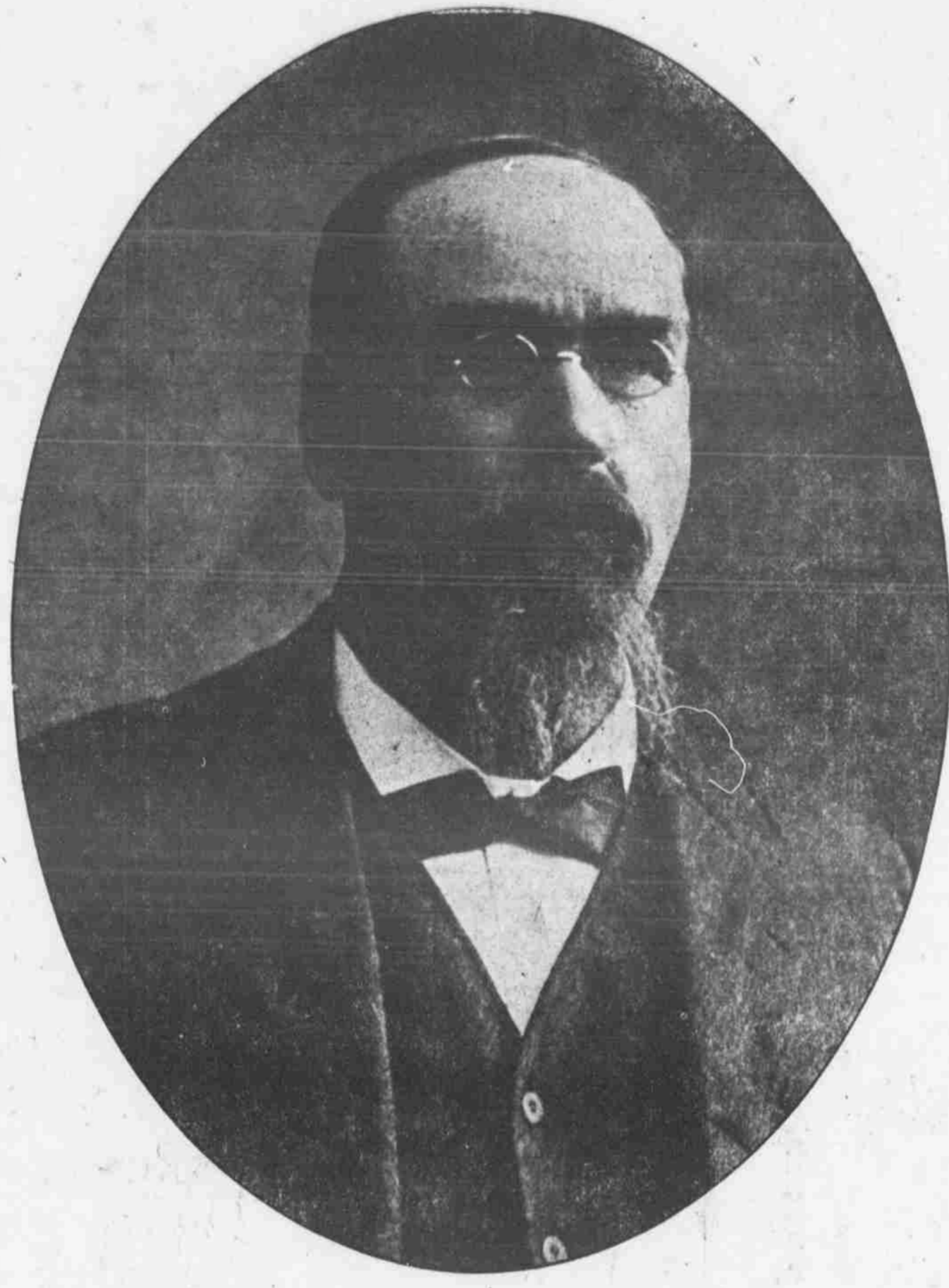
### Out West for the Fleece

Mr. Latta decided to go west and he did so in a wagon drawn by five yoke of oxen. The end of Jason's journey was the land of the golden fleece. The end of Latta's journey was the land of the golden corn. Jason yoked fire-breathing bulls with brazen feet to his plow. Latta yoked plain, ordinary bulls to his plow. What use is there in fire-breathing bulls or bulls with brazen feet anyway? Jason sowed dragon's teeth and Latta sowed corn and wheat and other grains. Of course, Jason had to sow dragon's teeth in order to get the golden fleece, while Latta had to sow corn in order to get the golden grain. Jason's wife was a sorceress, and she knew all about charms and magic and all that. They were useful to her under the circumstances. Mr. Latta's wife knew quite as much about good common sense and industry as Jason's wife did about charms and magic and it is to her that Mr. Latta ascribes much of his marvelous success in securing the golden wealth from the fertile soil of Nebraska during his fifty years of residence here.

One point in which the two histories do not parallel is in the fact that Mr. Latta was not, like Jason, the son of a king. He was the son of a hard working man, whose business was the building of bridges. In this work the young man helped a great deal during his boyhood. They built the old fashioned wooden bridges, sometimes as much as 700 feet long and covered with a shingle roof and sides. He soon became an expert in driving horses and then his ambition soared to a seat on the box of one of the big stage coaches which were then the chief means of travel between the towns and cities of the east. He was only 16 years old when he took the reins and proudly played the long whip for the first time over the backs of four horses that drew the big coach over the roads of Ohio. He continued in this occupation six years, during which time he had some of the big men of the country riding in the bounding vehicle behind him. He finally secured a route, one end of which was Niagara Falls. This brought him out of the backwoods country and into communication with the busy world. He saw some of the tide of emigration already setting out across the great lakes toward the west and he determined to join the argonauts.

### Married in Iowa

He reached Van Buren, in the eastern part of Iowa, and there he remained three years on a rented farm, before he resumed his journey in the summer of 1857. Shortly before setting out for Nebraska he married Miss Mary A. Mason in Lyons, Ia., May 10, 1857. The trip across Iowa in the wagon drawn by five yoke of oxen was without special incident and they arrived in Sioux City in the early part of July. Mr. Latta, who was accompanied by his brother, had brought a plow with him and at Sioux City they secured a contract for breaking forty acres of prairie land for "Doc" Yomans. Their old twenty-two-inch plow did noble service biting



W. W. LATTA.

the crust off of the primeval land and with the ten oxen the task was completed in eighteen days. The pay was \$5 an acre and \$5 looked pretty big in those days.

One day Mr. Latta secured a horse and rode away to find some permanent location. He went down the Iowa side of the river to a point nearly opposite the present town of Tekamah. Across the river in Nebraska he could see a broad stretch of bottom land, with plenty of timber and covered with a wild growth of vegetation that bore witness to the fertile soil beneath. He crossed the river on a skiff owned by a settler named Hendrickson, and then rode up the trail which ended in the embryo city of Woodville. The town then consisted of about six small houses made of cottonwood logs, but 160 acres was laid out in streets, public squares and build-

ing lots. It was a typical "paper town" of the kind that became so plentiful in the early days. "Doc" Woods was the chief boomer of Woodville. According to this optimistic individual, there was no "ville" but Woodville and "Doc" Woods was its prophet.

"Doc" Woods received Mr. Latta with much ceremony. "It was a true case of 'welcome to our city.'" Woods was not the man to blush for his houseless municipality. He believed in it as thoroughly as though it was a reality. He conducted Mr. Latta through the "streets," pointed out the "postoffice square," the court house square, "the main street." He showed him the "residence district" and a place where factories and wholesale houses could grow and be out of the way of the finer part of the city. It was true, indeed, as "Doc" said, that all they needed was the people. The Woodville

bubble burst soon and the hopeful builder of cities returned to the east.

Mr. Latta on this trip rode out beyond the suburbs of Woodsville and looked over the country. The wild grass grew so high and so thick that even mounted on his horse he could get but an imperfect view of the country and the grass was so thick as to impede progress through it. But he determined without any hesitation to locate there. He returned immediately to Sioux City, crossed with his wagon and oxen and plow to the Nebraska side and drove down to Burt county, where he arrived with \$200 on July 30, 1857.

### Gold in Nebraska's Soil

Many men in those days saw little more chance of getting gold out of Nebraska than Jason had for getting the golden fleece guarded by the never-sleeping dragon. W. W. Latta from the first believed that the gold was in that magnificent soil. True, the gold was guarded, not by a mere dragon which could be killed by sprinkling a sleeping potion on it, but by several dragons which it required years of courage, industry, hope and frugality to overcome. The first dragon which they encountered was the money panic of 1857, which burst over the young country just after Latta had built his first cabin on a quarter-section of land south-east of Tekamah. Later came the dragons of Drouth, Grasshoppers and Low Prices. All these were overcome by the strong qualities named above.

"The first year I was in Burt county I broke up about forty acres of the prairie," says Mr. Latta. "The ground was so hard I had to chop the kernels of corn into it with an ax. I bought iron harrow teeth in Omaha and put them into a home-made harrow. We worked sixteen and eighteen hours a day, but we got good pay for we had a fine crop. We started right into the stock raising business, too. We had to have hogs and cattle to eat up the corn. A fellow came up from Omaha with two pigs in a wagon and I bought them from him. Another fellow drove a herd of hogs over the river on the ice and I traded a horse for fifteen of them. This was the start of the tens of thousands I have raised since then. I got my start with the cattle from the oxen, I drove out from Iowa and a few cows I bought. I have raised tens of thousands of them, too."

"We had no railroads, of course, anywhere near here for years, and we sold most of our produce and our stock and did our trading in Omaha. It was a three days' drive down and back in a wagon. My wife used to make 100 pounds of butter a year from the milk of each of a dozen cows. This I hauled to Omaha and sold to the emigrants going to Pike's Peak. I also sold a number of oxen to the Mormons at \$75 and \$100 a yoke."

### Slow but Steady Wins

"It was slow work until we got started, but we never suffered. We never went barefooted and we always had plenty of good corn-bread and beef and bacon and chicken to eat even in the hardest times." We didn't dissipate like people do nowadays. Occasionally we'd go to a dance in the blockhouse, but that was about the extent of our pleasures."

Mr. and Mrs. Latta remained on the farm only seventeen of the fifty years they have resided in Burt county. By that time Mr. Latta had acquired so much land that he needed all his time to look after it. They built a handsome home in Tekamah, where they have lived since then. They had four children, one of whom, Bud Latta, survives and lives in Tekamah.

Mr. Latta is still very actively interested in his many farms and is kept busy throughout the year in visiting them and directing the work. He raises many hundreds of head of stock and thousands of bushels of grain on the farms which he manages himself. Others are rented out to tenants.

"I took everything I have right out of this soil here in Nebraska," he says proudly. "I never lost faith in the country, and I never let much money lie around in the bank. I might have \$5,000 or \$6,000 loose money at a time, but as soon as it got above that I'd buy another farm. I guess I was a little more of a trader than some of the others, which was useful to me also. But there were hundreds here who got discouraged and left the state. They would be rich now if they had stayed and farmed even what they had. There is no better land anywhere than right here in Burt county. The geologists tell us the substratum is from twenty to seventy feet thick and that gives a fertility which is inexhaustible. Nebraska land will continue to go up for years to come. Of that there can be no doubt."

# Aerial Warships of at Least Five European Nations

France, Germany, Austria, Italy and England Have Built and Equipped Balloons for War Purposes

At least five of the great powers of Europe now possess more or less efficient dirigible war balloons, and these machines may play an important part in the next great conflict. France has La Patrie, the first and perhaps the most practical of all. Germany has the Parseval, not called after the hero of the Wagnerian opera, but after an army major; the unsamed Gross balloon and the Zeppelin airship. England has the Null Secundus, and both Austria and Italy have war dirigibles which really sail the air, though very little is known about them.

France was the first country to develop an aerial engine of war which was a distinct advance over the old-time balloon, such as did good service as far back as the siege of Paris in 1870-71, and which was used for observation in the recent Russo-Japanese struggle. On July 14 of this year, at the review of the garrison of Paris at Longchamps, La Patrie made its first appearance.

The note of a siren in the air drew the eyes of the great crowd aloft and there was a sure enough dirigible, looking like a great whale, sailing over their heads, now with, now against, and again athwart, the wind, ascending and descending and changing its course at the will of its crew.

The later doings of La Patrie—how it sailed around the Eiffel tower on July 23, with Premier Clemenceau as a passenger, called on President Fallieres at the Elysee palace on August 9, and made various other flights under test conditions—are well known. The French consider it one of the most important features of the national defense. Their confidence in the present airship is sufficient at any rate for the construction of three more upon the same model.

The main body of La Patrie resembles a huge bologna sausage, except that at one end it is pointed like a cigar. It is nearly 200 feet long and about thirty-five feet in diameter. It has two screw propellers, each of about eight feet diameter, which give it an average speed of about twenty-seven miles an hour.

The car is suspended from the body of the balloon and, besides fuel for a ten-hour flight, it

will carry a weight of more than 2,500 pounds. All the framework is made of steel tubing and the under side has a sheathing of light, tough armor plate calculated to resist rifle bullets.

Equally like a sausage, but shorter and thicker, is the latest German balloon, which seems to have put both the Parseval and the Zeppelin inventions in the shade, at least for the present. It made its first appearance on July 23, sailing to Berlin from the artillery school at Jungfernhede and back again, remaining in the air three hours and twenty-five minutes.

It is the invention of Major Gross of the Tegel aeronautic battalion of the German army, and it is understood that a whole flotilla is to be constructed on the same general pattern. The Germans continue to back Count Zeppelin also in his experiments.

He has actually constructed an airship of aluminum 500 feet long, which rose to a height of 2,500 feet and made a journey of thirty miles, flying over Lake Constance in 1906. The enormous weight and size of this machine render it hopeless as an adjunct to an army in the field and the count is now busy trying to build a more manageable one.

The Austrian dirigibles were first heard of on August 1 last. Three of them made a flight that day over the fortifications of Cracovia. They remained in the air a considerable time and the other governments believe that they are serviceable.

The secret of their construction has been carefully guarded, as has that of the Italian war balloon. Little or nothing is known of the latter except that in the autumn field maneuvers of the Italian army this year it was in constant operation and staff officers, so far as they would talk about it at all, expressed satisfaction.

England is the latest power to give a demonstration of military aeronautics. The voyage of the Null Secundus to London and its failure to get back in the teeth of a stiff gale were recently told by cable.

So certain are the war experts that the balloon is to be a prominent factor in the strategy

of the future that they are all forming large aeronautic establishments. France has no actual school for balloonists, but there are several balloon clubs, whose employes acquire a certain amount of skill.

These when they perform their military duty are drafted into the Battalion d'Aerostiers, which has its headquarters at Moissons, and they spend their entire term of service learning to navigate and fight and do scout duty in the air. The post is under a commandant and it occupies the old zoological garden of St. Cyr. There is another station at Chalais-Mendon, also near Paris, where there is a large balloon factory.

Germany has a private school for aeronauts at Chemnitz. The military school and experiment station is at Jungfernhede. The head of the service is Major Gross of the Aerostiers of Tegel.

England has experimental stations both at the camp of Aldershot and at Farnborough in Hampshire, whence the Null Secundus started on its memorable flight. Probably every country in Europe has a busy corps of experimenters at work.

Activity even in little Belgium was shown recently by the report of experiments in firing from balloons with artillery. This illustrates the new problems that the dirigible balloon is bound to introduce into the art of war.

In the primary stage, of course, their utility for scouting is most obvious. With the present range of fire the prime requisite of every commander in the field is some means superior to cavalry scouts in locating the enemy and gaining some idea of his defenses.

The dirigible balloon keeping the air for ten hours and traveling at the rate of twenty-seven miles an hour plainly solves this problem. Many hundreds of feet in the air, the engineers of each army can trace the fortifications of a city, sketch the earthworks of an army arrayed for battle, count the guns and the battalions, estimate reinforcements coming up and form a fair idea of the contemplated plans of attack.

Much of this information can be conveyed by flashes direct to headquarters and plans, sketches and photographic films can be dropped within the

friendly lines without wasting time to descend.

But it is not merely information that can be dropped on one's own side. It is hoped that havoc can be spread in the enemy's lines by dropping explosives upon him. Carrying a crew of four men, La Patrie is said to be able to lift more than 2,000 pounds of dead weight to a height of 1,000 feet and remain aloft two hours. What is to prevent it, the French experts ask, from hovering over the enemy's camp or works and dropping wholesale destruction in selected spots.

As these possibilities are open to both sides alike, the means of countering to the war balloon are eagerly discussed. At a height of 1,000 feet the balloon is safe from artillery fire. No guns now existing can be elevated sufficiently to fire at it.

The rifle bullet is futile against the balloon itself. The hole which it makes in the envelope practically closes itself like a puncture in a rubber tire. Of course, there is a leakage, but it is so trifling in proportion to the volume of the balloon that it would not affect its buoyancy in a whole day's flight.

Even strappal has failed to bring down an old-fashioned balloon which was riddled with it for many hours. Shell are equally useless. They pass through the envelope without exploding and the chances of their striking the framework and causing serious harm are trifling as things are reckoned in war.

Finally, there is the prospect of encounters between the war balloons themselves, and this is what some students of the subject look forward to as the characteristic feature of future war. Each army will be obliged to send out fleets of airships not merely to attack the enemy on land, but to defend itself.

Here arises theoretical estimates of future balloon fleets, their armament and their tactics. Whether they will fight with light cannon at long range or will attempt ramming and boarding, whether great battleships will be built with numerous crews or whether the fighting will be confined to skirmishes between light craft—these are the questions that soldiers in Europe are asking.