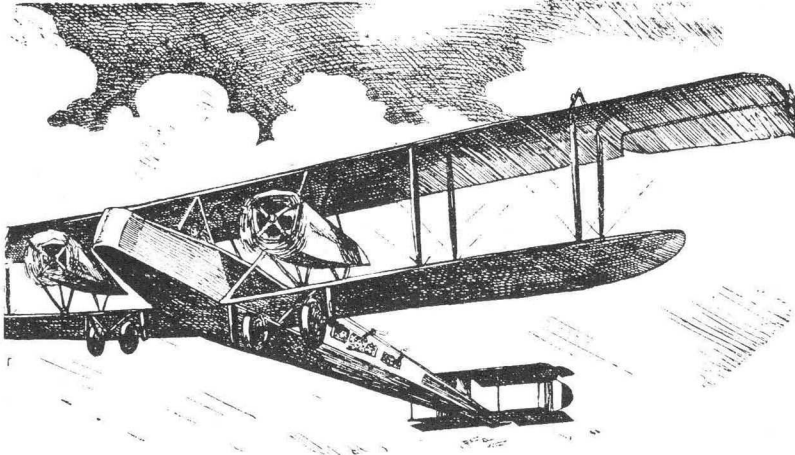


OUT OF BOUNDS!

A Story of St. Jim's in 1950.

By Bernard Glyn.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

SMITH MINOR was grouching. He was dissatisfied. It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and it was raining. Cricket was out of the question. But Smith minor would not have cared for the rain if he could have carried out the little scheme he had planned for that afternoon. It was raining on earth, but the stellagraph had reported fine weather nearly all round the Zodiac, and, once mounted on his air-bike, Smith minor would soon have been far above the rain.

His ripping new air-bike, a present from his Uncle George, had arrived at St. Jim's, and Smith minor had made one or two trial trips on it after lessons, as far as the Pyrenees one evening, and as far as the Hebrides another. Now he was simply burning for a really long ride on it, and he had fixed that afternoon for a run to the moon.

It was easy enough. Leaving St. Jim's at

half-past two on his air-bike, he could catch the great ether-plane which started from Cape Town at 3.30. He would have a couple of hours on the moon—long enough to see most of the sights—catching the return plane in time to land at Cape Town by eight. Then a rapid run home on his air-bike, and at the worst he would be late for evening call-over.

But it was not to be.

The Head had placed the moon out of bounds. It was all the fault of Perkins minimus, of the Third. That young ass had tumbled into a crater on the moon while on a trip there with a gang of fags, and there had been no end of trouble fishing him out. And so the Head had come down heavy, and placed the moon out of bounds for all fellows below the Sixth Form.

It was a bitter disappointment to Smith minor, who had been looking forward for weeks to his trip to the moon. He was the only fellow in the Fourth Form who had not

been there, and it made him feel wild to hear the other fellows talking in the studies about their rambles over the interesting planet, and the manners and customs of the inhabitants.

But the fiat had gone forth: and Smith minor groused. His major in the Sixth spotted him mooching about with his hands in his pockets, and a face as long as a fiddle, and kindly tried to comfort him.

"Tain't much of a catch, that tripping to the moon!" Smith major said. "It's only the novelty of the thing. Why not have a run over the Himalayas on your bike, kid?"

"Blow the Himalayas!" grunted Smith minor. "A chap can air-bike over to the Himalayas any day after lessons. This is a half-holiday."

"Well, what about a run across the pampas in South America?"

"I did that last week. Snooks, of the Shell, gave me a lift on the carrier of his bike."

"The moon's no great catch—and they cheat you awfully in the tea-shops there," said Smith major. "Cheer up, kid, and I'll tell you what—I'll take you with me to Mars in the vac."

But Smith of the Fourth wasn't comforted.

A run to Mars in the vac was all very well; but the vac was a long way off.

"Dash it all," said the Sixth-Former. "When I was a kid in the Fourth, we were jolly glad to get a run across India or South America on a half-holiday. You fags want too much."

"Every other chap in the Fourth has been," said Smith minor sulkily. "It wasn't my fault young Perkins tumbled into a crater. He's an ass, anyway. I've a jolly good mind to go."

"Out of bounds, you know," said Smith major severely; and he walked on.

Smith minor grunted.

Of course, it was rather a serious thing to break bounds; but after all, there was no harm in a run to the moon, and all the other fellows had done it.

Smith minor thought it over as he looked out of a window into the rain dropping in the quad.

He made up his mind at last.

He was going.

Even if he missed call-over that evening, and was called over the coals by his form-master, there was no reason why that gentleman should guess that he had been to the moon. He would come whizzing home on his air-bike, just as if he had merely been to the North Pole or New Zealand for the afternoon.

Having made up his mind, Smith minor lost no more time. He had none too much to spare now, if he was to catch the ether-plane at Cape Town.

He hurried to the bike shed.

In five minutes the handsome new air-bike was ready, and Smith minor's face was bright as he jumped into the saddle.

"Hallo! Whither bound?" called out Snooks, of the Shell, as he started.

"Moon!" answered Smith minor briefly.

"Out of bounds, you know."

"I'm chancing it."

"Look out for the asteroids!" called out Snooks. "The up 'plane yesterday had quite a narrow shave, according to the paper this morning."

Smith minor laughed.

"Bow-wow!" was his answer.

And off he went.

The air-bike was in splendid fettle, and it simply whizzed. Smith minor was a good rider, but he had only had short runs before, within the limits of Europe. His heart beat a little as Spain vanished behind him, and he found himself over the Mediterranean. Like a silver streak, the Mediterranean vanished in the distance, and Africa lay below.

He smiled a little as he thought of the ancient days when men had built a railway from the Cape to Cairo. He was quite excited by his first view of the Congo, and rather sorry that he had no time to stop to take a second glance at the Zambesi. There were quite a lot of interesting things to see on the Zambesi, and he determined to run along again on Saturday and have a look at them.

He glanced at his watch as he buzzed along over the Transvaal; it was 3.25 when he passed the Orange River. He had only Cape Colony to pass now, but only five minutes left to catch the ether-plane at Cape Town. Would he do it?

Smith minor knitted his brows as the air-bike rushed on, fairly humming with its speed. It would be too cruel if he came all that way, and missed the ether-plane after all.

Cape Town was in sight at last. But it was turned half-past three, and Smith minor's heart sank.

If the ether-plane had started to time, he was too late! He had delayed too long thinking it out at St. Jim's.

"Oh, rotten!" groaned Smith minor.

Then his face brightened up.

Rising above Cape Town, was the huge, sprawling form of a mighty ether-plane.

He was five minutes late--but apparently the 'plane was late, too, by a glorious chance Smith minor headed for the 'plane instead of for the landing-place. It was not uncommon for belated passengers to catch the 'plane after it had started, in a swift air-bike; so long, of course, as the 'plane was within the limits of the atmosphere. When once it had passed beyond that an air-bike could not follow.

The ether-plane was rising fast; but Smith minor calculated well. He buzzed alongside, and hooked on, at a height of four miles. A 'planeman rushed forward to help him aboard.

"Just in time, sir!" he said cheerily.

"Buck up and get on your ether-mask—we shall be outside the atmosphere in one minute now."

"Righto!" gasped Smith minor.

He lost no time. He jumped into the electrically warmed ether-suit provided for all passengers, and buckled on the ether-mask. He had scarcely fastened the last buckle when the ether-plane was outside the earth's atmosphere, and cleaving its way through airless space.

Smith minor could have danced with elation. He had caught the 'plane after all, and his trip was coming off. With a light and airy tread he went into the ticket-office amidships.

He laid down ten shillings, and the booking-clerk looked at him. With a tired expression, he connected up the speaking-tube from his ether-mask to Smith minor's.

"Thirty shillings, sir!"

"What?"

"Thirty bob!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Smith minor warmly. "It's ten shillings return to the moon."

"Who's talking about the moon?" grunted the booking-clerk testily. "It's thirty bob single to Mars."

"Mars!" stuttered Smith minor.

"Yes."

The St. Jim's junior blinked at him.

"Is—is—isn't this the 'plane for the moon?" he asked faintly.

"Of course it isn't. The moon 'plane left five minutes earlier."

Smith minor almost tottered.

He understood now.

The 'plane for the moon had left at scheduled time. Five minutes later the 'plane for Mars had started; and it was the Mars 'plane he had caught.

For a moment he was almost overcome as he thought of call-over at St. Jim's, and the grim brow of the Head.

"You wanted the moon 'plane?" asked the man in the office, with a grin.

"Yes," gasped Smith.

"Well, you're booked for Mars now. Don't worry—it's only a two-day trip."

"Two days!" gasped Smith minor. "It's bed-time at St. Jim's at half-past nine. I shall get into no end of a row if I miss dorm."

The clerk shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't be helped now. Passengers shouldn't make mistakes," he grunted. "Thirty bob, please."

Smith minor suppressed a groan, and paid over the thirty shillings. It was all he had, and it was intended to see him through his afternoon's expenses on the moon.

"I—I say, they'll be anxious about me at St. Jim's if I don't turn up for dorm," he stammered. "C-c-can I send a stellagraph?"

"Next window for stellagraphs."

And the man turned to another passenger.

Smith minor moved along to the next window, and connected up with the stellagraph clerk.

"How much for a stellagraph to the earth?" he asked timidly.

"One-and-six."

"I—I—I've only got twopence——"

The stellagraphist gave a shrug.

Smith minor moved away from the window in a worried mood. Away on the lee of the ether-plane he caught sight of the moon, looming large and bright, but it did not interest him now. He was thinking of the painful interview with the Head when he returned to St. Jim's after two days' absence without leave.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

“SMITH MINOR!”

The Head was taking the roll-call in Big Hall at St. Jim's.

Smith major looked round from the ranks of the Sixth. His minor did not answer to his name.

The Head frowned, and marked the Fourth-Former down as absent.

But it was not till bedtime that they were anxious about Smith minor. He did not turn up for dormitory, and the Fourth-Formers went to bed wondering where he was.

It came out that he had been seen starting on his air-bike, and the Head, fearing an accident, rang up a dozen quarters of the earth on his wireless telephone. But there was no news of Smith minor from any of the five continents.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Smith major presented himself in the Head's study, with a troubled brow.

“Has the boy returned?” asked the Head.

“No, sir. I—I'm afraid he's gone out of bounds,” answered the prefect. “If you think proper, sir, I will catch the night plane for the moon, and look for him.”

“Do so, by all means,” said the Head.

It was morning when Smith major returned to St. Jim's, only to report that the missing junior had not been heard of on the moon. It was certain that he had not caught the moon plane the day before at Cape Town, and that was all.

There was excitement at St. Jim's that day.

Where was Smith minor?

“The young ass!” said Snooks, of the Shell. “I know he started for Cape Town. Tumbled into the Congo or the Zambesi, as like as not.”

For two whole days there was no news of Smith minor.

The wireless telephone was going frequently,

and several times the Head rang up the moon on the lunaphone.

But no news came through.

But at last—just before dawn the second night—there came the buzz of an air-bike in the quadrangle, and the fellows rushed out—and there was Smith minor!

“Where have you been?” shouted a dozen voices.

But Smith minor only answered with another question:

“Is the Head waxy?”

“Just a few!” grinned Snooks.

A Sixth-Form prefect took Smith minor by the collar, and marched him into the Head's study. From that dreaded apartment there came the sound of steady swishing, accompanied by loud yells from Smith minor.

Smith minor was looking quite doubled up when he came out. He wore a worried look in the Form-room the next morning. But as the effects of the licking wore off, Smith minor brightened up. He hadn't been to the moon—but he was the only fellow in the Lower School who had been to Mars!

He was the centre of a crowd in the common-room after lessons that morning.

“Oh, ripping—tip-top!” he said. “The moon—oh, bother the moon! Hardly worth a fellow's while goin' there, you know. Rather small beer, what? But Mars—Mars is the real goods! Yes, the Head laid it on rather hard, but I don't mind—it was worth it! I palled on with a Martian chap while I was there—quite a sportsman, and he's coming down to see me next Wednesday. Of course, this ether-planin' bizney is only in its infancy—it's simply rot to spend two days goin' to Mars and back. I shall be jolly glad when they start the six-hour service they're talking about. My idea is, we ought to fix up a match with a Martian school—we could meet them on the moon, to save a bit of the journey on both sides, see?”

On Wednesday afternoon Smith minor was the cynosure of all eyes as he swanked about the quad showing the sights to the chap from Mars; and as the licking had worn off he wasn't at all sorry that he had gone Out of Bounds.

THE END.