



Throttle Full Open: A Life of Lady Bailey, Irish Aviatrix

Jane Falloon

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I have felt the need for a change of scene and interest lately.' -Lady Bailey on the eve of her London-Cape Town flight, March 1928. Mary Westenra, born in 1890, was the daughter of Derry Westenra, the fifth Baron Rossmore of Rossmore Castle, Co. Monaghan, a famous sportsman and rake. After a youth of much hunting, shooting and fishing, and little formal education, at the age of twenty she married Sir Abe Bailey, a South African tycoon of British extraction. Shuttling between England and South Africa with a much older man whose interests were very different from hers, and cut off from her beloved life of horses and hounds, Lady Bailey began to take flying lessons in secret. With astonishing rapidity, she became one of the world's most celebrated aviators, before setting out on the journey that would make her name: London to Cape Town and back. Flying in her De Havilland Moth, she was detained for several days in Cairo, where the authorities didn't want to let her continue without a man in the plane. Eventually she prevailed, and flew down the eastern flank of the African continent to Cape Town - and then turned back, en route for London up the western flank of the continent. Lady Bailey's riveting journal of this return flight has survived and is reproduced in its entirety here. Lacking a radio, she often lands in unknown places to ask directions, and recounts in unruffled prose her encounters with friendly Africans and unhelpful French colonials. Jane Falloon paints a rich picture of Lady Bailey's life, establishing her sporting pedigree and detailing the still-feudal environment of Monaghan in which the Lord's daughter grew up. The remarkable life of the businessman-imperialist Abe Bailey, who bankrolled his wife's adventures and always supported her despite a lack of warmth in the marriage, is also recounted. Lady Bailey herself emerges from this biography as one of the most remarkable Irishwomen of the century.

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