

# MY FIRST AND LAST BALLOON ASCENSION.

(ARTISTS' ADVENTURES SERIES.)



**I**N the year 1886 I was a student at the Académie Julian in Paris. One Sunday afternoon, while wandering about the city in search of amusement, my eye was caught by the advertisement of a balloon ascension which was to take place on the following Sunday, under the auspices of the Société des Aéronautes.

Thinking that here might be found amusement, or the chance of a new experience, I wrote to the society, asking on what conditions I would be permitted to accompany the aëronaut. I received a courteous reply stating that if I would pay for the extra amount of gas required to levitate my person to the clouds, I might go.

The next Sunday afternoon, therefore, found me at the inclosed field near the Champ-de-Mars from which I was to take my first leave of earth.

The balloon was there, or, rather, two of them, already half-inflated, and weighted to the ground by sand-bags, which, as the balloons filled, were attached lower down on the netting. Finally the inflated fabrics floated clear of the ground, restrained by ropes, but swaying gracefully in the increasing breeze.

I was introduced to the young man, the assistant of the aëronaut, who was to be my conductor. I observed with regret that the balloon in which we were to sail was the older of the two, and had seen service, as its numerous patches attested.

With consternation I inspected the car, or, rather, basket (for it was nothing more), of wickerwork. Its sides were less than two feet high, and it was so light that a well-placed kick would have sent it twenty feet. It did not strike me as being a safe vehicle in which to be "wafted to the skies."

While inspecting this small edition of a family clothes-basket, a strange and novel sensation of weakness about the knees took possession of me. As I shall not again recur to this phenomenon, the reader may as well understand that it did not leave me until I again reached what Mrs. Partington calls "terra cotta."

However, my friends and fellow-students were present, and escape was impossible; so with a pretense of great calm I watched the workmen attach the car to the wooden ring to which was gathered the network of the balloon. Six small ropes held the car.

Into the basket we stepped, and after many hand-shakings the ropes were cast off.

We did not rise, and being informed that we

must leave behind either a sand-bag or my heavy winter overcoat, I heroically sacrificed the latter. Standing in the basket, I tossed it to a friend, when, presto! he as well as the rest of the world sank out of sight. At that moment I sat down. I can still recall the howl of derision and delight which greeted this commonplace act.

The cries of the spectators were succeeded by a most profound silence, broken only by the fearsome creaking of the willow basket, as my companion leaned from side to side.

I was soon aware of another sound, to which my ears seemed slowly to become attuned—the low, muffled roar of the great city, which produced a continued note almost as pure as a musical tone, but lower in pitch than any note of the musical scale.

The barometer soon showed an elevation of half a mile, and, looking over the side of the car (I was still seated on the floor), I saw the whole of Paris pass beneath me—the public buildings, the Madeleine with its bright copper-green roof, the toy cathedral of Notre Dame on its little island. The distance was so great that all giddiness was gone, and the roar of the city was hushed. Throwing out much of our store of sand, we rose into great cumulus clouds. The barometer indicated a height of two miles; the air had the pure but thin feeling of an Alpine mountain-top. There was no sight, no noise save the patter of the feet of two pigeons on the summit of the balloon. They had refused to leave us, and, after hovering like land-birds about a ship, had settled on our rigging.

The mist congealed on the fabric, trickled down the ropes, and made us so many pounds heavier that it soon became apparent that we could not surmount the cloud.

In the utter silence of these heights the novice, awed by the sublimity of the situation, has no thought of danger. The vast, sightless, silent void in which the bubble hung self-poised impressed the mind with a sense, not of violence, but of calm. Yet danger there was, and that most imminent. Anxiously scanning the barometer, my companion announced that we were falling. Seizing a bag of tissue-papers, he threw a handful from the car. Instantly they disappeared, but *above* us. We were rushing down to the city at an angle of about forty-five degrees. Now the two pigeons left the balloon, and even this slight diminution of weight gave us a short respite. As we approached the earth we struck the ground breeze, which we saw would carry us nearly the entire length of the city. Quickly



DRAWN BY F. L. M. PAPE. AFTER A SKETCH BY A. B. SEWELL.

ENGRAVED BY F. H. WELLINGTON.

“THROUGH THESE WE SMASHED.”

divesting ourselves of our coats and waistcoats, we took a rapid inventory of the pitifully small remainder of ballast, with a view to keeping the air-ship afloat as long as possible.

To a novice who has ever gone down a toboggan-slide the horror of that rush over the spires and chimneys of the great city may be dimly shown if he can imagine his sensations increased a thousandfold. Collision with a building meant almost sure death, while the speed was so great that landing in a boulevard was an impossibility. The roar of one street as it grew less distinct was quickly followed by the roar of the next, as the excited and interested Parisians watched our flight. Several times we avoided collision only by throwing out a coat, basket, or bottle, the balloon each time taking a slight bound, and clearing the obstacle.

At last, without hats, coats, or waistcoats, we approached the river. If we could only cross it there was a possibility of landing in a field on the other side. My companion suggested that we climb into the ring, and unbutton the car and let it drop.

The car weighed over twenty pounds, and, released of its weight, the balloon might mount to an elevation of over half a mile, which was quite high enough to kill any one who might fall out of the barrel-hoop on which my friend suggested that we should sit, and sail through space. I declined with much warmth, and said that a descent into the river would be much

safer. He thought otherwise, as he could not swim.

We were then nearly over the boulevard that skirted the river, and, calculating the distance, which was perhaps five hundred feet, my companion excitedly pulled the rent-rope, and a great tear was opened in the balloon. The pear-shaped neck collapsed upward, the bag took the form of a parachute, and, deprived of almost all our gas, we dropped swiftly to the boulevard.

A telegraph line of about ten wires followed the river, and through these we smashed, breaking one wire after another.

We struck the sidewalk with enough force to prostrate and stun us both. On recovering, I found myself surrounded by a crowd of the *canaille* of the barriers, who were excitedly tearing the wreck of the balloon under pretense of offering assistance. Hastily folding up the remains of our balloon, we threw it into the basket, and carried it to a wine-shop, followed by a rabble that made violent demands for payment for imaginary services. As we were hatless and coatless, we thought it best to remain in our temporary asylum, and to send to town for these necessaries. They arrived late that evening, and, after a certain amount of health-drinking, I bade farewell to my aerial conductor, and departed with the resolution that this my first should be my last balloon ascension.

*Robert V. V. Sewell.*



## ANSWERED.

SHE stood by his grave, and asked him:  
"Hast thou forgiven me?"

And he from the dark grave answered:  
"I have not forgiven thee!

For who can forget,

In a day or a year,

Though lost forever,

The things that were dear—

The smile, the tear,

The pleasure, the pain,

The lips that he kissed,

And would again?

Not I, false one, not I—

I have not forgiven thee!"

She wrung her hands, and asked him:

"Hast thou forgotten me?"

And he—or the dust of him—answered:

"I have forgotten thee!

For who would remember,

A day or an hour,

The pitiful weakness

That seemed to be power,

The faded flower,

The dead desire,

The cold, white ashes

That once were fire?

Not I, and so—good-by—

I have forgotten thee!"

*R. H. Stoddard.*