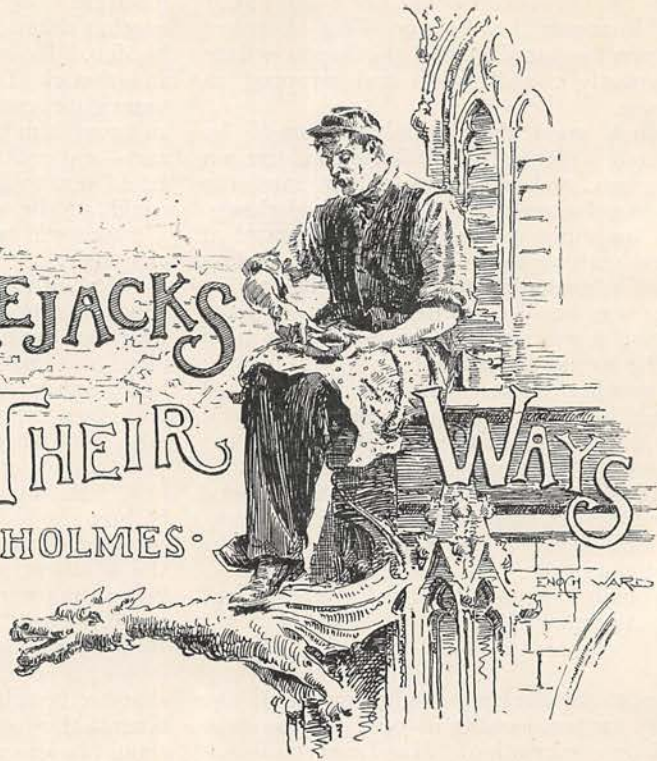


STEEPLEJACKS

AND THEIR

BY

F. M. HOLMES.



“DANGEROUS! Well, I dunno; 'tain't dangerous if you don't think o' danger.”

“And you can keep from thinking of it?”

“Why, cert'nly. I've heerd of a man in our perfession go up a chimney two hundred and fifty feet high, and then to amuse

the spectators, stand on his head when he got to the top!”

“Nonsense!”

“No, sir, it ain't nonsense. It was put in the paper, and I s'pose you'd be one to b'lieve what you see in the papers! Anyhow, I can b'lieve it, easy. It comes o' not thinkin' of the danger.”

“And of knowing your work thoroughly.”

“O' course; we can't have no unskilled labourers in our perfession. When you've got to cure a chimney three hundred feet high, a-swayin' like a tree in the wind, you've got to know your business.”

“So you repair tall chimneys, as well as steeples?”

“Ay, and build 'em too. Steeplejacks as they calls us, are workmen, ye know, who looks after steeples and stacks.”

“Chimney-stacks?”

“Jess so. Didn't I say so? There's forests of 'em in the north where there's so many factories. We gets sixpence an hour extry for every fifty feet higher up we go. So they can have a steeple or a stack as high as they like, for all I care!”

“And you begin at a shilling an hour?”

“That's so. And when we're high up aloft, 200 or 300 feet or so, some of us mout git seven-an-six an hour sometimes. And it's worth it. We saves a lot in having no scaffolding.”

Mr. Steeplejack thrusts his hands in his pockets, looks up to the sky complacently, as though he could reach that cloudy dome with ease, and feel quite at home there, and then brings his gaze back to me.

“Ow do we do it? Oh, we've got several ways o' doin' it, we have. Sometimes we flies kites—but that's pretty near over now, 'cept for square topped chimnies; then we has jointed ladders, one fittin' on the top o' the other; likewise we has a little steam winch and buckets.”

"Something like miners in a shaft?"

"Ay, summat like. Ye see we build up stacks inside, and as we build we have little holes in the sides for the putlog to go across."

"The supports for the scaffolds?"

"That's it; putlogs we calls 'em. Two or three across a chimney, with boards on 'em, makes a tidy scaffold. We has two scaffolds, one to stand and work on, and when we can go no higher with that, we fixes the other above us and mounts to it. Then we can take down the scaffold we have left, ready to build it up again, higher up, and we fill up the holes used by the putlogs. We have openings left in the scaffolds so as the big bucket can come thro', and in the bucket the men, and the mortar, and the bricks are whisked up."

"Rather close quarters?"

"Oh! so long as there's room enough to work in, we don't mind, but o' course a very tall stack has a pretty broad base. I've seen some chimneys with a base of near thirty feet across, and they taper to a top of some ten or eleven feet across. Those sort o' chimneys go up to the clouds."

"I should think so!"

"They do make a draught, too; the furnace roars with heat. The air is lighter, too, at the top o' one o' them big shafts."

"And have you any other methods of reaching the top?"

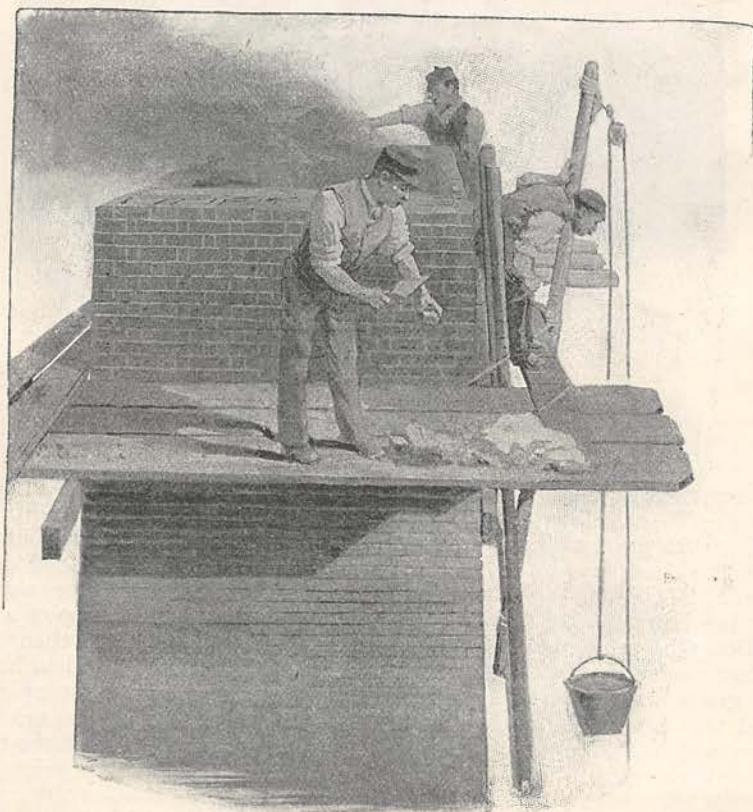
"Well, some steeplejacks can climb right up a tower, without ladders or anything. There was a chap at Vienna, Pilcher or Peecher his name was——"

"Pircher, you mean; I have heard about him."

"Ay, some'ing like that. Well, some years ago, one August, the Emperor of Austria had a birthday, and Poucher——"

"Pircher."

"Ay, Pucher climbed right to the gilt top o' St. Stephen's steeple and placed a flag and a garland of flowers there. He climbed right away up the lightning rod from the very base of the tower in the square. I should ha' liked to have sin him do it; it must have been a pretty sight. He took off his shoes and climbed up the lightning rod easier than a boy does a tree, placing his feet on every projection of stonework. The



RAISING AN OLD STACK WITHOUT A STOPPAGE OF THE WORKS.

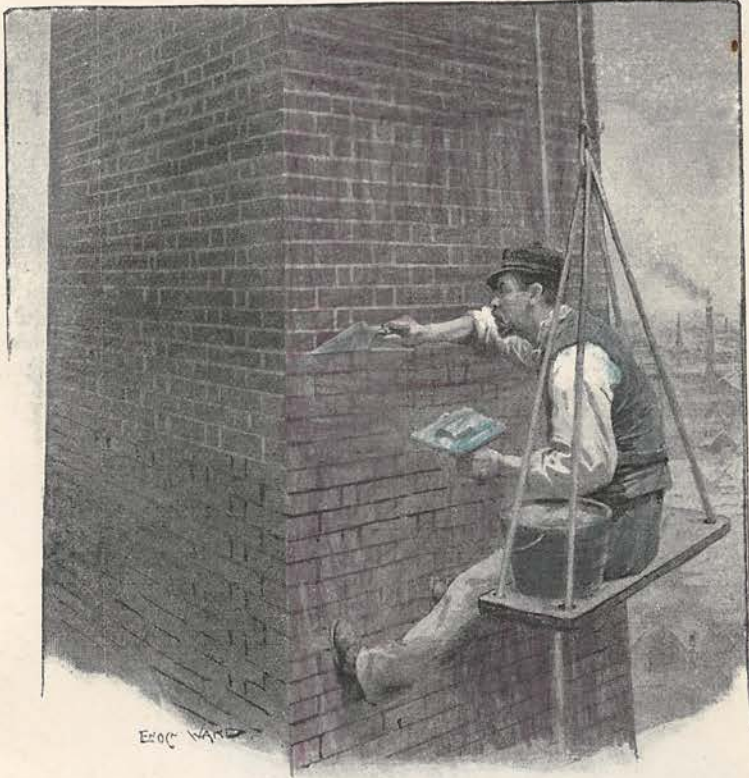
sides of the steeple were 'fretted,' and he got much assistance from them; but the last three or four yards showed a smooth surface, up which he had to 'swarm' the best way he could. Then some of the people got frightened and sent off here and there for the police and the firemen, and the tower was surrounded with mattresses and outspread canvases lest he should fall."

"But he did not?"

"About two hours and a half. The distance to the top was 432 German feet, and the Vienna foot, I'm told, is a trifle longer than an English foot. Mr. Steeplejack was a bit tired when he got down, but yet he jumped pretty briskly to the ground, and the crowd all cheered."

"He must have a very good head."

"Oh, ay; you want that. You must keep your head, if you're a steeplejack. There



REPOINTING A STACK.

"Not he; he climbed right to the top without turnin' a hair. Then he drew an Austrian flag from his pocket and a garland of flowers, tied them to the cross at the top, and giving three 'Hochs' for the Emperor—his way of crying Hurrah! I s'pose—began to descend. Down he came, safe and sound, by the lightning rod, and when he jumped lightly to the ground he chaffed one of the policemen, and told him to go up aloft and fetch his shoes, which, finding inconvenient, he had left somewhere behind him! But Bobby did not see it!"

"No, I should think not. But how long did this trip in the air take Pircher?"

was a chap I heard on, he had got to the top of his chimney and then he dropped his rope. He made a mistake there, but what did he do? Why, he jess took off his boots and stockin's, as cool as if he were a-sittin' at home, 'stead of at the top of a big chimney-stack near the clouds; then he begins to unravel his stockin's. When he got a ter'ble long thread o' yarn out of the untwisted stockin's, he ties a stone to one end and lets it down—down the side of the tall shaft.

"Meantime, the men below had got big ladders, and the stone at the end of the yarn just touched the top of one. Then a man caught it and tied a string to it, and to the

string was fastened a rope which the steeplejack at the top was able to draw up. So he got his rope again."

"I suppose they could have reached him by flying a kite?"

"Dessay they could, if the wind had been right and he could have waited. P'raps that's how he got up there first. I'll tell you how it is with a kite. You want a steady wind, not too strong; and if you ain't got it, you'd better whistle for it or do without it. 'Tain't no use tryin' in an unsteady wind. Your kite—I was orful fond o' flyin' kites when I was a kid—your kite is a big strong thing, mout be ten feet high and eight wide—a reg'lar heagle of a kite compared to what boys has—though you got to manage 'em in much the same way."

"Your kite is made of canvas, I suppose, and must be pretty heavy."

"Ay, and instead o' costin' three-pence, it costs pretty nigh three pounds. Well, it has four strings or cords—one at each corner—and they join together at a distance of three or four yards, on to one rope. Now comes the important part: about six yards down this single or main rope, is fastened another cord, what we calls the 'down-all,' and by it a clever man can manage the kite a bit, and make it fall over the chimney top."

"It is, in fact, a check-string?"

"Jess so. And when the men have flown the kite over the chimney, this 'down-all' is jerked beautiful, and the kite comes down the other side, and there's the cord a-layin' neat over the chimney mouth. The way some chaps 'll manage a kite is jest pretty to see. It seems as if it was a bird, or as if it really had common sense. I'm sure some folks is stupider nor steeplejack's kites!"

"When they won't listen to reason!"

"That's it; well, when once the rope is over the chimney top, the men can easy draw up pulleys and then chains over the top, with a cage in which a man can get to work."

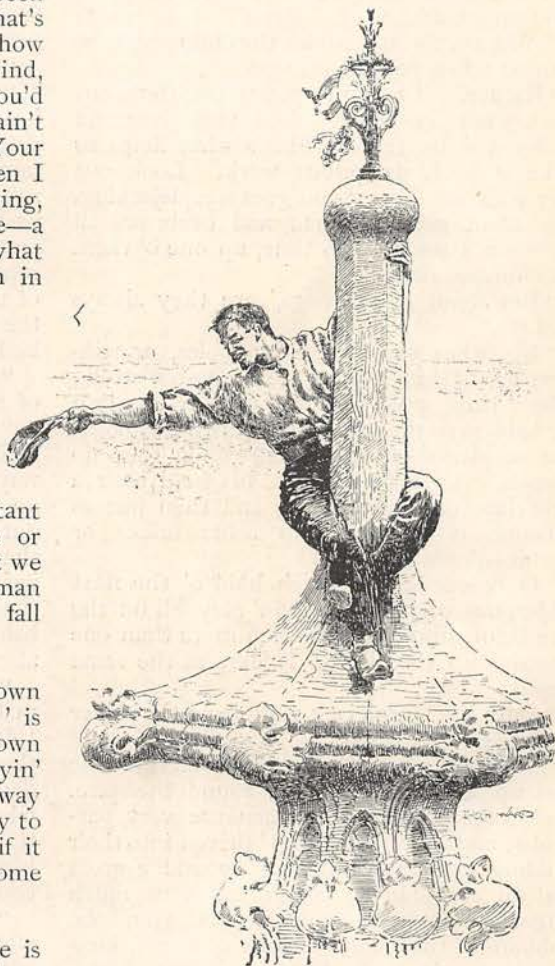
"So you have strong cords or chains up one side and down the other, and going over the chimney top?"

"Right you are, sir, and mendin' chimneys nowadays is quite a large part of a steeplejack's trade—larger nor steeples. But still we do get steeples, and can't find safe lodgment for a strong rope on the needle point of a spire—then we uses ladders. In fac', ladders I reckon is more often used now, cos there's no waitin' for the wind. We use 'em also for round chimneys, and when there ain't a broad coping-stone. Now, in usin' ladders, we're 'bliged to have dogs——"

"Dogs!"

Mr. Steeplejack looked up at the exclamation of surprise.

"Oh! Not the dogs you're thinkin' of,"



PIRCHER AT THE TOP OF ST. STEPHEN'S.

said he. "A steeplejack's 'dog' is a strong steel-tipped iron pin with a ring at the head. We put a ladder against the building, and mounting up it, drive in a 'dog.' These 'dogs' has to be reg'lar bull dogs, I can tell ye, so that they bites hard and firm, and don't let go very soon. A man oughtn't to trust his life to it, till it is tested every way."

"Well, to this first 'dog' a line and pulley is fastened, by which a long ladder is drawn up flat against the structure. The line is fastened to near the middle of the ladder, so that a longer part is below the 'dog' than above it. By this ladder a second 'dog' is fixed into the building, and another long

ladder drawn up. The ladders can be lashed together, and are kept nearly three-quarters of a foot off the building by means of small bits of wood, so that a man can place his foot fair and firm on the ladder, without knockin' agin the brickwork. In this way we could build up a ladder to the clouds."

"And are the fires under the chimneys kept burning when you are up aloft?"

"Rather. 'Twouldn't pay to put them out for a week or more. And very hot and smoky it is up there. That's what helps to make it such dangerous work. Look out after your whiskers if you goes steeplejacking. You mout get your hair and eyebrows all burnt off a treat, in no time, up one o' them tall chimney shafts."

"But about these 'dogs,' are they always used?"

"Not when we can get loopholes, or windows or anything, where we can fasten strong poles; these poles jut out, and we can lash the ladders to them. It is about those 'dogs' that accidents often happen—when they do happen. A 'dog' may lose his hold after a little time, or wobble a bit, and then just as someone is a-carryin' up some bricks or mortar—down he comes!

"O' course he may catch hold o' the next ladder, but what he's carryin' may fall on the man below him; there's often more than one a-passin' up the line o' ladders at the same time."

"Does the steeplejack work from the ladder itself, then?"

"Well, he mout do so; but sometimes he fixes up a bit of a scaffold round the spire. And some church gentlemen are very particular, and don't like 'dogs' driven into their buildings; then we has to depend a great deal on scaffoldings, which takes us much longer. But as I was a-tellin' you, the wobblin' o' the 'dogs' is one o' the riskiest things, and the most often cause of accidents."

"A man must keep himself in the best of nerve, and if he finds his nerve give way, the less he goes up aloft after that the better. Sometimes he may go wrong all in a hop, though he's been goin' up steeples and stacks

for years. There's no accountin' for that, unless he ain't quite digested his breakfast that mornin', or unless he gets thinkin' o' the danger and lookin' below, and wonderin' what his wife and children would do without him; then they're only too likely to have to do without him, for maybe he'll come tumblin' down with a run."

"Ah! it is a risky business."

"It is, no mistake; but let a man keep his head and his nerve, and not think o' the danger, and he ought to do. O' course, if an important rope breaks, or if he trusts to a rotten brick, then he may find himself in a flash tumblin' thro' space and lookin' at his past life in a jiffy. It's when you've got to repair rotten buildings, or the coping-stone of a chimney's loose, or anything like that, then's the time you've got to look out and be hextry careful."

"What should you say is the riskiest bit of work you have to do?"

"Well, one o' the riskiest things I know, is to have to 'cure' a chimney that's got some way out o' the straight. Then you've got to go aloft, and cut some courses o' bricks out o' one side of it that's gone crooked, so that it may settle itself like and get straight again. It's no joke to cut and hammer at them bricks, while the fires are a-roarin' below, and the wind is rockin' the chimney above."

"And the ringin' of church-bells likewise makes a steeple rock! Oh, it does, I tell you. I don't care for pointin' a steeple myself when the bells are clashing. Still, if it's all in the day's work, o' course we do it. You know what pointin' is, o' course—fillin' in cement tight between the joints of bricks or stones; but some spires are of wood, covered with copper, or lead, or slates."

"So you have to do a bit of plumbing up aloft, sometimes?"

"Oh, ay, anything; if it's got to be done, a steeplejack will do it. And so long as the tackle holds, and he keeps his head, and don't think o' danger, he's all right. But how to teach a man to keep his head, I don't know. I reckon he's *borned* to it."

