Up in a Balloon.

"We took in," says Mr. Albert Smith, "some stores for the trip, as, had it been quite dark, it was the intention of Mr. Gypson to have remained up all night, and, with six or eight bags of sand for ballast, gave the command to 'let go.' The balloon rose with extreme velocity, shooting straight up at once, but turning round as it ascended. The match for the fireworks being lighted, they began to shoot forth cascades of coloured fires, which had a beautiful effect.

It is impossible to form the feeblest idea of the appearance of London seen by night from the elevation we had now obtained—as nearly as could be judged from the apparent breadth of the river at the bridges, about 4,000 feet. In the obscurity, all traces of houses and enclosures were lost sight of. I can compare it to nothing else than floating over a dark blue and boundless sea, spangled with hundreds of thousands of stars. The stars were the lamps. We could see them stretching over the river at the bridges, edging its banks, forming squares and long parallel lines of light in the streets, and solitary sparks—farther and farther apart, until they were altogether lost in the suburbs. The effect was too bewildering—too novel and extraordinary to allow any of us even to speak; we could only gaze on them in rapt and deep attention.

The fireworks had commenced at Vauxhall, and we saw the blaze of light above the gardens very distinctly, as well as the exploding rockets; and a flash of lightning now and then illumined the entire panorama, but too transitorily to catch any of its features. Above us the sky was deeply blue, studded with innumerable stars; in fact, above, below, and around, we appeared sailing through a galaxy of twinkling points of light, incalculable and interminable. The impression made on my mind in these few minutes will never be effaced; neither will the scene by which it was speedily followed.

We were all going up, higher and higher, till we had attained the height of 7,000 feet—namely, a mile and a quarter perpendicular—when Mr. Coxwell, who had charge of the valve-line, and was sitting in the hoop of the netting above us, informed Mr. Gypson that the balloon was getting very tense from the extreme rarefaction of the external air at the elevation we had attained. It may be necessary to explain that the top of a balloon is furnished with a 'butterfly valve,' a circular double-flap trap opening downwards by a cord which passes through the interior of the balloon, and closing again with a spring when sufficient gas has escaped, which it really does by reason of its buoyancy. Mr. Coxwell pulled this line, and immediately afterwards we heard a noise, similar to, but not so loud as, the escape of spare steam in a locomotive; and the lower part of the balloon collapsed rapidly, and appeared to fly up into the upper portion.

To a cry of alarm from Mr. Gypson, Mr. Coxwell answered, 'The valve is gone! we are all dead men!' or words to that effect; and that same instant the balloon began to fall with appalling velocity, the immense mass of loose silk surging and rustling frightfully over our heads as it flapped to and fro, like the sail of a ship when tacking, between the network and cords by which our car was slung, retreating from us more into the head of the balloon.

It was then suggested to throw over everything that might ease the balloon. I had two bags of sand in my lap, which were cast away directly, and Mr. Coxwell lowered himself from the hoop into the car, when we all began to hunt about amongst our feet for whatever we could find. Bags of ballast, and bottles of brandy and wine, were instantaneously thrown away; but no effect was perceptible. The wind still appeared to be rushing up past us at a fearful rate; and to add to the horror of these few moments, the expiring fireworks floated on the air, and hung about the cordage of the balloon. The lightning was playing about us. We must have been then upwards of a mile from the earth.

The balloon began to oscillate frightfully, and our descent scarcely occupied two minutes. Our velocity was frightful. The parallelograms of light, too, formed by the squares, got visibly larger and larger, like an image in a phantasmagoria; and the oscillation of the balloon began to subside, although the car was still swinging. I attribute our preservation alone to the fact of the upper netting of the balloon having kept firm, preserving the empty silk in an umbrella shape, which acted as a parachute.

We now saw the houses, the roofs of which appeared advancing to meet us; and the next instant, as we dashed on their summits, the words 'Hold hard!' burst simultaneously from all the party. We were all directly thrown out of the car, along the ground, amidst the cordage and silk of the balloon, which appeared entirely emptied of gas. Nobody was seriously hurt. Torn clothes, crushed hats, and a few grazes and bruises, were all the evils that resulted from *a descent of a mile without gas!*—not above a mile from the gardens." The accident was attributed to the balloon bursting before the valve-line was touched, the valve being found unmoved upon subsequently examining the balloon.

Mr. Elsdale, in the "Nineteenth Century," says: Alone in a balloon, far above the highest cloud, and how lonely who in the world below can tell? Doubtless there is a loneliness on earth, as we wander in solitude in the untenanted desert, or in the mysterious gloom of some huge tropical forest. And there is a deep moral and spiritual loneliness in the strange and crowded city, where every one is hurrying on his own unregarding way; or in the fading daylight and oncoming darkness as we linger in some forsaken cemetery, where lie the remains of those who in life were dearer to us than life itself. But the desert has its tenants, be it only the slinking jackal below, or the soaring vulture above. The sea is always alive and replete with interest, with its innumerable ripples or its mighty waves, in storm or calm. The forest is peopled, and full of sound and motion, be it of insect, or animal, or bird. The strange city abounds in human interest. Every new face is a study of a human life, and a record of a brother's experience. The solitary cemetery, with its sad monumental inscriptions, though it tells of separation, tells also of hope and renewal. It takes us back to the past and forward to the future. Even the dust beneath our feet is a link to bind us closer to our common humanity. Everywhere there is life or life's associations; everywhere ties and connecting cords to appeal to our own human life, and prevent us from feeling altogether alone. And he knows little of the human heart who knows not the power of these things and how we cling to them. The familiar nibbling mouse, the accustomed spider, the regular bugle-call, the sentry's well-known challenge, have saved many a poor prisoner in his lonely cell from madness and despair.

But here, in these eternal solitudes, there is no familiar form, no accustomed face, no sound, no voice, no life; only one vast, untenanted abyss—only one deep, unfathomable calm.

I dare not move; it would be a dese-

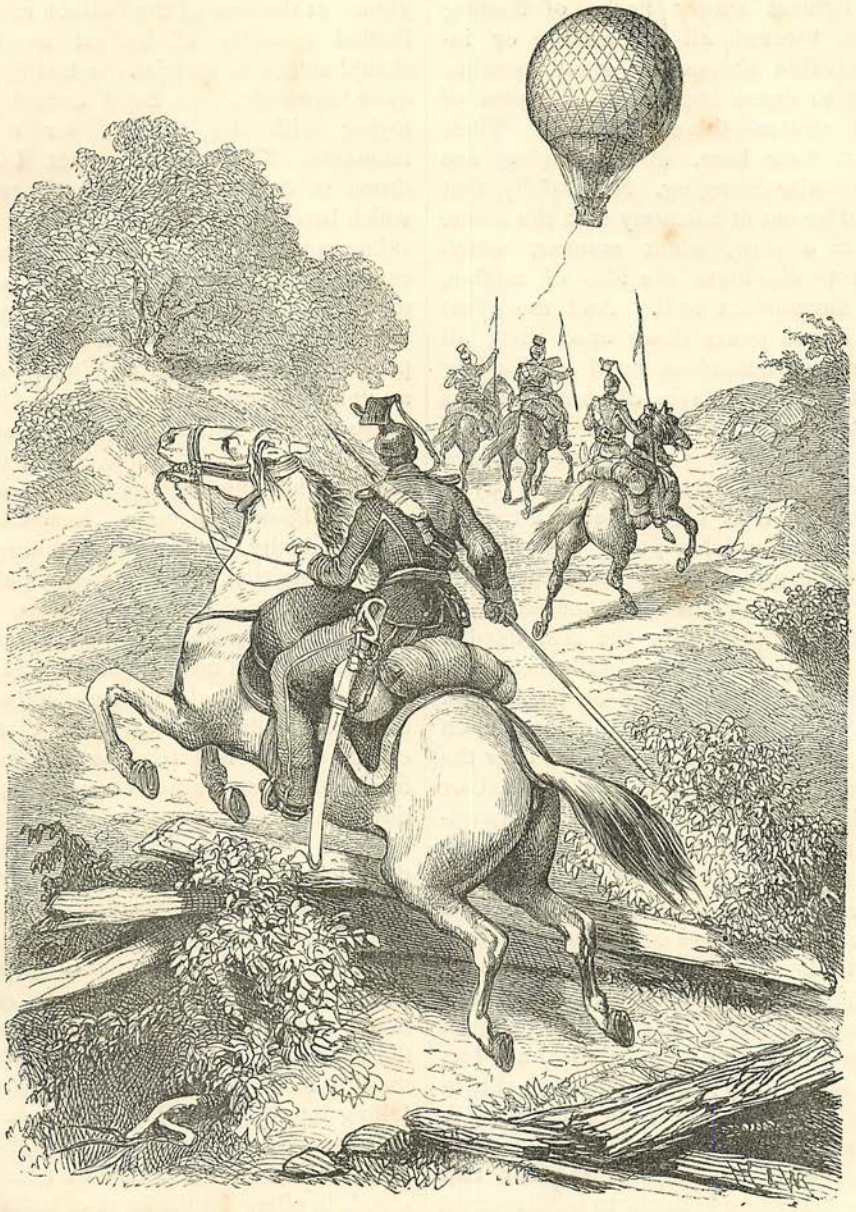
cration. Speech were profanity. The sound of my own voice, breaking in upon this awful silence, would jar upon the ear as harshly as would the loud, boisterous song of some profane and drunken reveller disturbing the devout worshipper in the still and solemn aisle of a cathedral at midnight. It is with extreme reluctance that I force myself to make a slight necessary movement of one arm. The little creaking of the wicker car which this involves makes me shudder. The small sound is quickly gone, it is true. It goes out and returns not. It is instantly devoured—swallowed up and lost in the unfathomable gulfs which open out on every side. There is no cloud near to give back even the faintest murmur of an echo.

The situation is not without moral and spiritual lessons of the highest order, and to these, let us hope, we are not altogether blind or dead. Here there is nothing but the Almighty and His greatest works—surely sun and sky and cloud are these. And here there is nothing else, and we see them in an unimagined perfection. The sun is no longer the sun which we know so well on earth. There he is perpetually half obscured, and even on the brightest summer's day he has to shine through innumerable varying layers of lower, moister, and denser atmosphere, which half quench his rays. But here he is a mighty burning orb, illuminating everything with one overpowering flood of glorious light. And such is the power of his rays, that without a thermometer I should be quite unconscious of the circumstance that the temperature of the surrounding air has fallen twenty or thirty degrees since we left the earth.

The sky, when on the ground, was quite obscured by clouds. As we ascended higher, and it came, here and there, into view, it was of the usual milky 'sky-blue' tint. It has grown brighter and brighter, blue and more blue as we rose; and now it is of an intensely deep Prussian blue colour, like its hue at midnight on an exceptionally clear night. It is a glorious, shining firmament of deepest transparent sapphire. In the whole grand hemisphere there is not one solitary minutest speck to mar its absolute unity and perfection. For we have left far behind every trace of fog or mist or vapor, together with the whole apparatus for their manufacture. We gaze everywhere uninterruptedly into the transparent blue ether of illimitable space.

The clouds are all far below. Their first effect when we rose above them was that of a vast, lustrous, many-rippled lake of snow-white, gossamer cirrus. A little later, as we rose higher, and the larger masses below came more and more into view, in the wide intervals between the floating cirrus, they constituted a mighty ocean, with huge tumbling billows, and each billow seems huger and more wonderful than the last. But far away, towards the horizon, their giant forms melt gradually down and mingle with the cirrus, as the distance continually increases, until at last the vanishing point takes the form of a distinct and clear horizontal arc. This is as well defined all round the entire circumference as the ocean horizon at sea, and upon it I could take a sextant observation fully as well.

Besides these three grand elements of sun and sky and cloud, there is nothing, apparently, in the whole universe but my tiny car, and the soaring balloon above. Stay—far below, projected horizontally on a gigantic cloud, I see another and a far larger balloon, with car, aëronaut, ropes, every detail distinct and clear. It is the shadow of my own balloon, enormously elongated, half a mile long, or it may be ten miles; for I have no means of judging distances in this vast abyss wherein I float, an utterly insignificant speck, with no single known or fixed point anywhere, other than the sun overhead. These



A BALLOON CHASE.

then make up the apparent sum total of things. A simple total. But all monotony in the picture is amply dispelled by the wonderful variations of form and colour in the clouds themselves. From the lightest snowy flecks of floating cirrus, through all conceivable or inconceivable shapes of giant cumulus, down to dense impenetrable layers of solid stratus—there they are. Their forms, their hues, and grouping are perpetually changing. Not rapidly, that would be out of harmony with the scene. But in a slow, silent manner, which seem to eliminate the idea of motion, and harmonizes well. And the great sun above pours down upon them all alike one tremendous flood of dazzling radiance, giving rise alternately to the brightest of lights or the deepest of shadows, according as they are exposed to, or screened from, his powerful rays.

But now it is high time to attend to the balloon and her path. On entering the clouds and losing sight of the earth, I had, knowing that our course might be nearly straight for the sea, fixed a time by my watch, beyond which, on a rough estimate, we must on no account remain lost in the clouds, otherwise, on descending, I might find myself over the water. That time has now expired, or nearly so. The balloon has been travelling at her own will. For a considerable time after rising above the clouds the expansion of the gas, due to the powerful direct rays of the sun, sustained her well. But of late she has been settling slowly downwards. We are now between six and seven thousand feet from the ground. The clouds below are less dense than they were. Through rifts in their dark masses I begin to catch occasional fleeting glimpses of the earth. I lean over the edge of the car, and fancy that there is dimly to be discerned a long, ill-defined line which might be the coast-line. A few moments later, and the truth is clear. There it is. The sea is below and most perilously close. We are driving right on to it. There is yet considerably more than a mile to fall. Shall I ever get down in time? or is it possible to stand on, husband the ballast carefully, and cross over? One glance at the size of the balloon and the limited quantity of ballast available should suffice to dismiss the last idea as quite impracticable. But I cannot help toying with the thought for a few moments. The truth is, that I have drunk so deeply of that intense repose which broods over all here like a presiding spirit, that I seize greedily on any excuse for putting off, just for a few moments longer, the inevitable time of energetic action. But every moment is precious. We are driving steadily on at an unknown rate. So with an effort I rouse myself, and seize the valve line. One, two, three, four, five, six—I count the time, holding the great valve on top of the balloon wide open. It would be sheer insanity, under any ordinary circumstances, thus to challenge my balloon to a headlong course downwards. But I am now fully awake to the situation. A decided effort must be made, and any half measures would be foredoomed to disastrous failure. I calculate that the clouds below will tend to check the inevitable acceleration of speed in our downward course to a considerable extent. No doubt when we get through them I shall have to look out, for she will be apt to accelerate greatly; but there is sufficient ballast to enable me to put on a powerful brake to stop her down below. In any case it seems better to run any unknown risk, which the uncertainty of stopping her involves, than to incur the absolute certainty of falling into the sea a little later on.

Down we go accordingly. I employ the short time available before we reach the clouds in piling up the bags of ballast on the seat of the car ready to hand for instant dismissal, keeping an intermittent eye on the barometer all the time. When we enter the clouds the whistle

and swish of the light vapour as we rush through warn me plainly that we are travelling, but although the barometer is running up rapidly, it does not seem to indicate any marked increase of speed. This gives me time to cut adrift the lashing which ties up the grapnel rope, and to shake out the coils till the falling rope hangs in a single bight below. The grapnel itself I hang by its tines over the side of the car, all ready to let go. The clouds are thick, and before we are through them everything is in readiness for a landing. Still rapid progress, but no very marked acceleration of speed.

Now we are through, and the earth bursts upon us all at once. The sea is still a considerable distance off, and I am inclined to think that all is well. One more glance at the barometer—we are, say, three thousand feet from the ground. I throw out a few pieces of paper. If they were to journey down alongside of us we should be falling rapidly, but at a reasonable rate. But now they rise sharply, and are soon left far above out of sight. Certainly we are travelling. I now watch the ground below steadily. We are over an open marsh. There are one or two solitary shepherds' cottages, and a few dykes full of water. These objects are apparently moving out from below to right or left. The rapidly-increasing velocity of this, their angular movement of divergence from the vertical, together with the progressive enlargement in size of each field, or defined area below, gives some measure to the eye of the rapid rate of our progress downwards, and greater nearness to the ground. I throw more paper. It runs up faster than before. Shall I ever pull her up? But the sea is advancing steadily, in a swift, silent manner, which is not reassuring. We are driving fast right on to it. There is plenty of room under us yet, and I will stand on a little longer. But I heave up a heavy bag of ballast with both hands, poise it on the edge of the car, and hold it ready to throw.

All at once it strikes me that she is accelerating frightfully. The cottage, which at first seemed at rest right underneath us, and then was creeping slowly out to the left, is now going off at full gallop like a runaway horse. The whole country immediately below has become an uncertain sort of moving phantasmagoria. We are two thousand feet from the ground, by eye, for I dare not lose sight of the earth to look at barometers. Sea or no sea, I must bring her to while yet there is room, or surely I shall be smashed to pieces. Over goes the ponderous mass of ballast, bag and all; and more follow as fast as I can seize and throw them. Over they go, till I have only one bag left. The heavy sacks of wet sand go down like thunderbolts. They ought, of course, to be emptied of their contents, which would then descend as usual in a harmless shower. Probably there is nothing but marsh, or only a few cattle, below. But were there flocks and herds innumerable, and a stray shepherd or two into the bargain, I should be sorry to assert very positively that they would not have one and all to take their chance of a bag.

We are still running at a great rate, but it soon becomes clear that the balloon is losing her way. A little later, and she is bringing to. There is no longer an upward rush of air against my flattened hand held horizontally over the side of the car. The moving phantasmagoria has settled down into a well-defined ground plan. A piece of paper thrown over descends. The barometer, which I can now again afford to consult, informs me that we are a little under one thousand feet from the ground. We have gained a thousand in pulling up.

Bad judgment, and badly done! For, it is clear that I have greatly overdone the whole thing. Had one thrown only one-half that precious ballast up above

there, just to check the balloon's course, and the remainder by successive instalments later on as required, we might now have been nearly on the ground, and moving towards it at a safe and manageable rate; whereas now she has lost all her way. We are still a long distance from the earth, with the sea very close. A long white line of hungry-looking foam is coming straight upon me with the speed of a railway train, and in a weird, silent manner, which half fascinates me.

And now her great downward momentum has carried her far below her true equilibrium level. Now, by all the laws which govern balloons, she is bound, if I let her go—like a light float driven forcibly down into a pool of water and then left to itself—to rise rapidly again. She will run up above the clouds once more, and carry me thousands of feet higher than we have ever yet been—to descend later on into the sea, miles from the shore, with a tremendous crash, for there will then be no ballast to stop her. We must get down now at all costs, if not on the land, then as near as possible to it. Below is a favourable marsh, covered with long rank grass. I have still one bag of ballast left, and the heavy grapnel to throw. This I can cut away, rope and all, if necessary; and she can hardly gather any very dangerous way now, however much gas I have to let out to get down in time.

There is no time for weighing such considerations as these before taking action, nor do I need any. For, indeed, at a crisis like this, as the plot steadily thickens, and your nerves get wound up more and more to the sticking point, your wits also seem to sharpen continually, until you arrive at a point at which you seize, as it were by inspiration, at a momentary glance, all the leading points of the situation, and translate them into instant action with a result as good, or better, than an hour's careful consideration would give at an ordinary time. The instant it became clear that the balloon was bringing to, or had already brought to, and before she had time to gather way upwards, I had seized the valve line and opened the valve full. I am now steadily letting out an enormous stream of gas, while thus reviewing and deliberately endorsing this sudden resolve. The sea is very near, and it will be a close race between us. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that the balloon has got the lead, and this time she shall keep it. So I do not let go the valve line till we are well on our downward course once more. I then heave up the last bag of ballast, rest it on the edge of the car, steady it there with one hand, take the heavy grapnel in the other, and stand by to throw them at the right moment. The half-empty balloon goes rapidly down, gathering way as she goes, but in the hundreds of feet that are now left she cannot possibly accelerate as in the thousands up above; and the more empty she gets the more her hollow underside tends to hold the air like a parachute. The last bag goes when we are something over a hundred feet from the ground. The grapnel follows immediately after, the moment I am sure that it will reach the ground, as its sustaining rope is a hundred feet in length. We are running hard after them; but the loss of their combined weight puts a powerful drag upon the balloon, which has now only me and the light wicker car to carry. She strikes the ground with a fairly good whack, it is true, but nothing at all to signify. At the last moment I spring upwards and hold on to the hoop, that the car may take the first bump. The next instant I am sprawling at the bottom of the car, with the hoop and balloon right on top of me.

The poor balloon is utterly crippled by the loss of the great quantity of gas which I had to let out up above, together with all that has been forced through the pores of the envelope by the great

pressure of air below in her downward rush. She has no heart left in her, even to attempt to rise again, so there is no question of her drifting, or dragging the grapnel. Had she been lively and buoyant, and the grapnel not held very well, she might most easily have contrived to dance over the sea-wall into the sea, after all, with or without me.

Now, one can afford to sit quietly down for a few moments, to recover from a somewhat dazed and bewildered state in which the smart landing, following on such a rapid fall, had left me. No harm whatever has been done, except that I am partly deaf for a time. My ears seem half disposed to strike work. They further express their resentment at the great and sudden increase of barometric pressure to which their delicate drums have been exposed in such a hasty descent by sundry crackings and sudden noises at intervals. Two or three hours elapse before they recover their normal condition.

We have landed very near the sea-wall, and won the race by about one minute, more or less. Thus happily ends one of my earliest ballooning experiences."

Many exciting episodes occurred in the Franco-German war in which balloons figured conspicuously. The bold Gambetta owes his position to his daring escape in a balloon from beleaguered Paris. The monotony of the lonely watch of the outposts was sometimes varied by the sight of a balloon apparently about to descend near them. Frantic were the endeavours they made to pierce the balloon with their lances, and intercept the despatches. For long weary months the balloon-post was the only means of communication between long-parted friends.

ABOUT-SHIP!

A COUSIN of mine was aide-de-camp to the Governor of Nova Scotia, who dwelt in Halifax, and as this same cousin had on divers occasions sent me an invitation to pay him a visit, I determined to do so. Accordingly, one beautiful morning in September, I embarked on board the homeward-bound packet for Halifax. A word about these said boats, which carried his Majesty's West Indian mails in the year 1831. They were the old ten-gun brigs, popularly known in those days under the name of "coffins," which *soubriquet* scarcely requires an explanation. They were high out of the water, narrow in the beam, and fearfully overmasted; consequently they were extremely "crank," that is, dangerous boats, were condemned as men-of-war, and turned into packets.

In looking back into history, even for so short a time as thirty years, one is perfectly astounded at the stupidity of the clever, the folly of the wise, and the recklessness of the prudent men of those days. I say "clever, wise, and prudent men," because I take it for granted that "the Lords of the Admiralty," and indeed all "Heads of Departments," are chosen and appointed to their posts of importance and trust on account of their superior wisdom and prudence. I dismiss at once, as an insult to the minister of that day, the idea that social position, or parliamentary influence could in any way have swayed him in the selection of competent men to preside over interests of such magnitude as the packet service of Great Britain. And yet these ten-gun brigs, condemned as unsafe boats, were turned into packets. When I say "turned into packets," I mean that they were simply handed over to the