

Foolhardy Feats.

II.—OTHER FOOLS.

By GEORGE DOLLAR.



TO ride down the Capitol steps at Washington is no easy feat, and the man who does it takes his life in his hands. The attempt has been made by many riders, when the guardians of the law were out of the way and conditions were generally favourable for the exploit, but the men who have accomplished it may be counted on the fingers of two hands. It is a feat which requires a steady brain, expert knowledge of the wheel, and a modicum of carelessness as to consequences — all of which qualities are deserving of some admiration. Two of the men who have ridden down the steps are William Shields and William T. Robertson. Shields has acquired a wide reputation in the United States as a trick rider. He travels under the name of "Rube," and dresses in the fashion of the "hayseeds," which is another way of terming the innocent farmers from the interior. His countrified clothes, however, do not hide the fact that he is one of the most expert riders in America.

There are two frontages to the Capitol, known as the "east" and "west" fronts, and it was on the west front steps that Shields rode down. These steep terrace steps are seventy-four in number, broken at

intervals by three landings, the middle landing being 20ft. wide, and the other two 10ft. wide each. No trifling feat, this! In order to get some practice before attempting it, Shields went to another Government building and rode down its steep flight, finding the task easy, on account of the absence of landings, which might pitch him off the steps. Then, on April 1st, 1897, accompanied by a few friends and a photographer, he prepared to descend the steps which we see in the accompanying illustration.

When the watchman and visitors were out of the way, the rider sprang into his saddle, his bicycle resting on the edge of the steep incline. While coming down the topmost flight he lost his pedals, and, unable to recover them, he gripped his handle-bars fast, and kept his eyes fixed on the steps before him. Down he went like a gust of wind, and when he reached the last landing, his wheel had acquired such momentum that it leaped over the final sixteen steps at one bound without touching one of

them. Both rider and wheel fell in a heap at the foot of the steps, and the spectators thought Shields was killed. But he had escaped without a bruise, and not a bolt of the wheel was loosened, the only injury being a twisted handle-bar.

In 1885, Robertson made his famous



WILLIAM SHIELDS ON HIS PERILOUS RIDE DOWN THE CAPITOL STEPS AT WASHINGTON. *From a Photograph.*



WILLIAM T. ROBERTSON WHEELING DOWN THE CAPITOL STEPS.
From a Photograph.

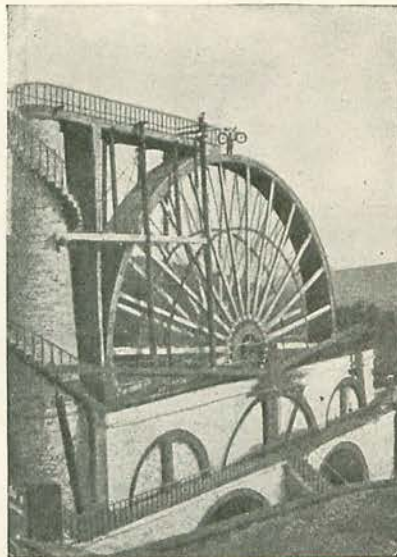
descent on an old-fashioned "Star" machine. Robertson was the champion rider of the district wheelmen, and he determined to ride down the east side steps, which number forty-two, each 10in. wide and 8in. deep. The wheelman applied to the authorities for permission, but was refused, on account of the great risk involved. The feat, therefore, had to be performed in secret; and in the dull light of early morning, when few were stirring and the watchman was elsewhere engaged, the event came off. When the news was circulated, astonishment prevailed, and many people said it was impossible of accomplishment. But Robertson had taken the precaution to bring a photographer, and the photograph which we reproduce

on this page was a sufficient answer to all the talk.

Another of Shields's remarkable feats was performed last year in Cincinnati, Ohio. He rode down a ladder extended from a second-story window to the street below. The angle was at least sixty degrees, and the window out of which he was to ride was 24ft. above the pavement. Shields showed up confidently at the window, and his cries to the crowd to keep out of his way only brought them closer. At a word he jumped on his wheel and shot down the ladder like a streak. At the bottom a crash came. The excited crowd thought he had been thrown against the curb and killed, but in a second the rider was on his feet as lively as a cricket.

The first man to ride down the east steps on a "safety" was Charles Kilpatrick, the famous one-legged bicyclist. Kilpatrick also accomplished the feat of standing with his wheel on top of the Laxey Wheel, in the Isle of Man. Everybody who knows this celebrated wheel, which stands over 100ft. high, will appreciate Kilpatrick's recklessness. The circumference

of the wheel is covered with buckets, into which the water flows, and one revolution is made every 40sec.



KILPATRICK, THE ONE-LEGGED CYCLIST, ON TOP OF THE LAXEY WHEEL.
From a Photograph.

Kilpatrick obtained permission to have a photograph taken of himself standing on the platform at the top of the wheel, but this not being exciting enough, something more daring was planned. The cyclist had timed the revolutions, and decided that he could jump up upon the wheel, be photographed, and get back again within the forty seconds, a feat which he safely accomplished. In the illustration we see him standing on the rim of the wheel, with his bicycle in his hands. It is needless to say that the performance terrorized the onlookers, who thought Kilpatrick would be dashed to the ground.

Kilpatrick is always risking his life at something—but he always comes out safely. A short time ago, when he was in South Africa doing his one-legged bicycle act with a travelling circus, he made bold to climb up an elephant and stand on the animal's head. It was a bit risky, for not even the trainer knew how "Old Ben" would take it. But when Kilpatrick got his breath, he went one better by asking the trainer to show "Ben" the bicycle, to see what he would do with it. The elephant calmly examined the wheel, then held it up for closer inspection, and, with Kilpatrick on his head, was quickly photographed by a looker-on. The best part of the story is that, ever after, when "Kil" was ready to do his wheel-act, "Old Ben" would wander off to the place where the bicycles were kept, and, picking out Kilpatrick's wheel, would hand it to him with a trump of joy.



KILPATRICK ON THE ELEPHANT'S HEAD.
From a Photograph.

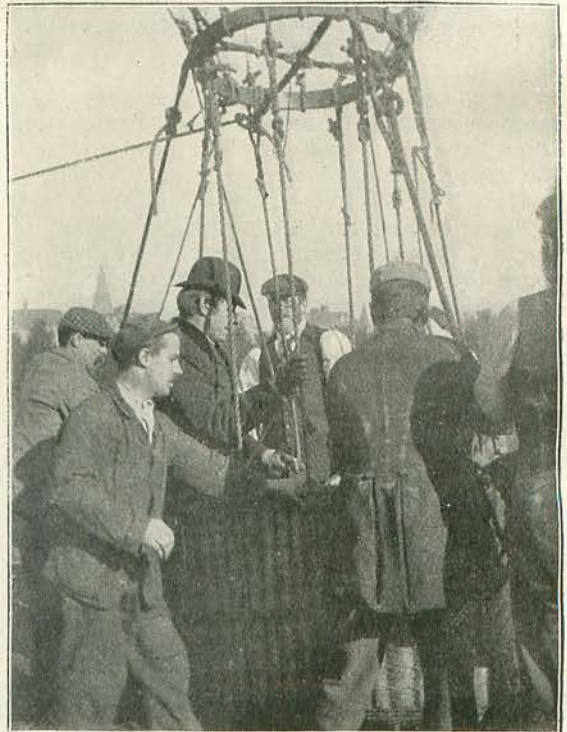
and lent to us by Mr. William H. Hammond, of the Eastbourne Gas Works, were results of the weather's beneficence. In the first photograph, Mr. Pollock is seen in the car of the balloon, ready for the ascent, and in the illustration at the top of the next page the balloon is shown after the "let go." The balloon, which was supplied by Messrs. Spencer and Sons, of Holloway, was filled by the manager of the local gas company, Mr. John Hammond. It was the aeronaut's intention to land near St. Valery, in France, between Boulogne and Dieppe, and this intention was fulfilled almost to the letter. From Beachy Head, through the powerful coastguard telescope, the balloon could be

seen until it was about forty miles off the coast.

The Channel has always been a favourite

Now for a word or two about the balloonatics. Statistics show that nine out of ten aeronauts meet with accidents. During the season of 1896 no fewer than forty-seven aeronauts were killed, and in one week during the present year seven parachute leapers were injured, some fatally.

Considering, then, the danger of it, ballooning may be counted a form of foolhardiness. Often, of course, the experiments are performed for a scientific purpose, and science-loving aeronauts cannot be classed with the "cranks" who jump off bridges, stand on the tops of masts, or swim across the Channel for a bet. The most recent balloon ascension of any importance, that of Mr. Charles Pollock, from Eastbourne across the English Channel, was, it is believed, undertaken for the purpose of testing certain appliances used by Herr Andrée in his late trip to the North Pole. The element of danger was greatly reduced on account of the fine weather prevailing on October 12th, when Mr. Pollock started, and the fine photographs taken by Mr. J. W. Wilks, of Eastbourne,



MR. CHARLES POLLOCK PREPARING FOR HIS TRIP ACROSS THE ENGLISH CHANNEL, OCTOBER 12, 1897.

From a Photo. by Mr. J. W. Wilks, Eastbourne.



MR. POLLOCK BEGINS HIS JOURNEY.
From a Photo. by Mr. J. W. Wilks, Eastbourne.

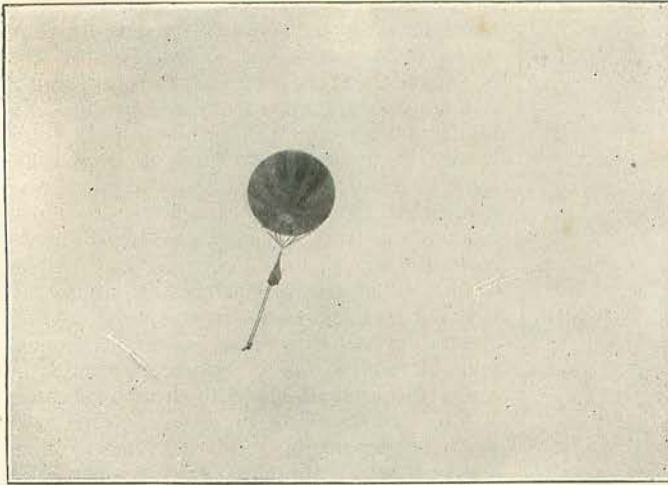
playground of balloonists, but the trips are always fraught with great peril. An excellent French aeronaut named L'Hoste made the trip from France to England several times, but finally lost his life by drowning in the Channel. An old aeronaut who saw Pollock's ascent volunteered the opinion that "with proper care and an average amount of good fortune, the journeys may be taken with great confidence. But," he added, "even under the most favourable auspices, balloon trips across the Channel will probably never become fashionable."

Better far is it to go off and kill

tigers, for then you have skins to show for your pains, and something to be proud of the rest of your life. It is no use to scare off young and ambitious hunters by enlarging upon the perils of tiger-hunting, for these perils can hardly be exaggerated; and it is equally futile to try to prove to those who are tiger-mad, that tiger-killing is among the most foolhardy of feats. Space alone forbids us to quote the whole of a letter from Mr. C. Allan Cooke, descriptive of the hunt in which he killed the magnificent tiger shown in the illustration below. The hunter, it seems, took his station in the jungle near a place where the animals came to drink, and after a three nights' vigil in a tree, heard the welcome screeching and barking of the monkeys, which announce the presence of a tiger or panther. It proved to be a tiger, but he did not stop to drink. Mr. Cooke now prepared to shoot. "The tiger," according to the letter, "saw the movement of the rifle, and stopped and looked up at me. This just gave me my chance, and I took a hurried aim and fired. The tiger immediately bounded off without making a sound; he passed straight under my tree and up the side nullah to the left, and just as he disappeared around the corner I fired the second barrel. I thought of course I had missed, and bemoaned my bad luck till morning. When it was light we got down, and there were spots of blood just below the tree, so I knew at least my first shot had hit. On further examination I found that the first shot had



THE TIGER FOR WHICH MR. C. ALLAN COOKE RISKED HIS LIFE.
From a Photograph.



PERCIVAL SPENCER HANGING TO THE PARACHUTE.
From a Photograph.

knocked it clean over. We followed up his blood tracks for a quarter of a mile, and then returned to collect all the shikarees before going any further."

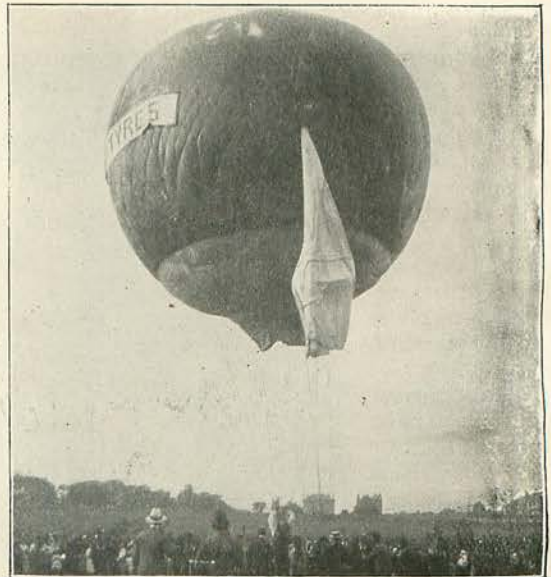
The end of it was that the tiger was discovered in a deep cave wounded and furious with pain. The entrance to the cave was long and narrow—a sort of parallel passage which could be entered only by sliding at full length. Mr. Cooke's attendants feared to enter, with an angry animal at the other end to meet them, but the hunter himself, at the peril of his life, fearlessly undertook the job, and with one shot put an end to the dangerous beast. Several photographs were now taken of the prize, one of which we reproduce. The animal was found to measure 9ft. 3in. It was also found that not one of the early shots had missed.

A page back we shifted from balloons to tigers. Now we gracefully shift to balloons again. As a matter of fact, a man could run on all day telling balloon stories, because the dangerous accidents which have happened to aeronauts have always had interesting tales connected with them. The balloon shown at the top of this page, for instance—it is a slight and weak little thing, and seems to be floating peacefully along, without doing any harm to the man hanging at the end of its parachute. But an interesting story hangs to that man. He is Mr. Percival Spencer, of the celebrated firm of Charles Green Spencer and Sons, of 13, Ringcroft Street, Holloway, N., and our illustration shows him at a

moment when his parachute refused to work. "Many a time," said Mr. Spencer, lately, "has it happened that, for some reason or other, the parachute has gone back upon me, and I have fallen down like a lump of lead, expecting every minute to strike the earth with a crash—when, all of a sudden, like something superhuman, the parachute opened and I was safe. At such times a man's heart is in his mouth, and he makes a vow never to go up again if he once comes down alive. But you can't resist it—there's something in the air that makes

you go again." Mr. Spencer has had many hairbreadth escapes, yet he is one of the most expert aeronauts in the world.

The method by which a parachute is carried with a balloon is shown in the accompanying illustration. The photograph was taken by Mr. James Coster, of Eastbourne, and shows the balloon in which Professor Baldwin made his ascent at Bexhill on August Bank Holiday last year. The balloon is rising with the parachute hanging from the side, and the method by which Baldwin empties the balloon is also seen. The



BALDWIN'S ASCENT AT BEXHILL.
From a Photo. by Mr. James Coster, Eastbourne.



PROFESSOR REDDISH DIVING FROM DOVER PIER.
From a Photo. by Mr. A. L. M. Lefroy.

a tug-boat and arrested for attempted suicide. Of course, there are experts like Professor Reddish (whose recent dive from Dover pier is shown on this page), who may reasonably be expected to strike the water in the proper fashion and come to the surface alive. These men we can admire because of their training and fearlessness. But when a man, under the influence of drink, makes foolish bets and dives, sympathy is lost on him.

The saddest of all dives was that of "Tommy" Burns, who went into the water from Rhyl pier, and came up to die. Burns seemed almost without fear. After his reputation was made at the Aquarium, he did all sorts of queer things, diving from moving trains into the Thames, etc., only to end up in death. The story of his last dive is too well-known to repeat here, but we reproduce the only photograph which was taken on Burns's luckless day.

aeronaut is seated on a ring attached to the ropes. When he is sufficiently high he throws his weight on to the ropes of the parachute, which throws the balloon on its side, the gas rapidly escaping from the opening at the base.

In recent years, many attempts have been made to add novelty to the parachute business, and these attempts have been accompanied by increased risks. The latest freak, I believe, is to attach a bicycle to the parachute, which is opened when the aeronaut puts his feet on the pedals of the cycle. Professor Balleni is one of the experts at this trick, which is always successful with the crowd, probably because they reckon little of the peril involved.

Dives have always been extremely popular. I can remember when "Tommy" Burns crowded the Aquarium with people, who came for nothing else except to see "the great dive." The man seemed to have a charmed life. Then there are the jumpers from Brooklyn Bridge, over twenty-four of them, and most of them dead, who thought that fortune and the praise of the multitude lay in store for them providing they made the great leap. The last of the number was a sailor boy named Otten, who struck the water with a huge splash, and was gathered in by



BURNS DIVING TO HIS DEATH.
From a Photo. by Evans, Rhyll.