

A

HUMAN

ALPHABET

BY WILLIAM G. FITZGERALD.



WE think we may fairly lay claim to the title of "Novelty" for this article. The idea of building up each letter of the alphabet and each figure from 1 to 0 out of the bodies of human beings is an absolutely unique "notion." All kinds of difficulties stood in the way of the successful accomplishment of the idea; and even when the very last figure was built up and photographed by our artist, there came the fear that, after all, the letters might not stand the test of contiguity—would not



spell words when used as type. Now, we do not know whether printers would refer collectively to these letters as the "fount of life," but that the fears indicated above were groundless will be evident from the very title of the article itself, which is formed from our living letters.

We were extremely fortunate in our choice of "material." We selected the most intelligent and original trio to be found on the variety stage. These gentlemen are known as the "Three Delevines," and in the ordinary way they go through a quaint entertainment, which they call "Satanic Gambols." It will be seen that, throughout the whole of the alphabet and figures, the Delevines retain

their diabolical uniform. We found them ideal men for the purpose—splendidly formed, highly intelligent, and full of helpful hints. Now, as to the method of obtaining the photographs. The letters and figures were built up separately and photographed in a special studio in the beautiful town of Plymouth. We will first give a few specimen letters reproduced on a large scale, and then the entire alphabet and numerical figures "in smaller type."

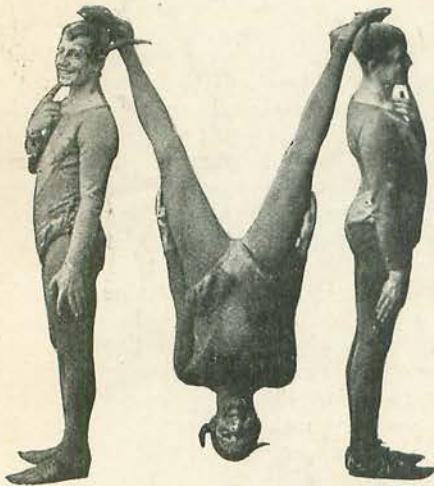
The A is remarkably simple. It would form an excellent design for a Christmas card, with seasonable greetings printed below. The men merely form an isosceles triangle, with the floor for a base and their heads for the apex. The crosspiece is simply formed by the men shaking hands and, as it were, whispering Christmas greeting. It is Messrs. Harry and Sam Delevine who form this letter.

The E, which is the next to be reproduced large as a specimen letter, is elaborate and strenuous. Few will doubt its claim to ingenuity. Mr. Percy Delevine may be called the backbone of the letter; he is the tallest of the three, and therefore will frequently be found doing duty in a similar capacity. Sam is creeping between his legs; and Sam's own shapely members form the





lower out-stroke of the letter. When this was done, Harry climbed upon Percy's shoulders and extended himself down his back; then stretching out his own legs and

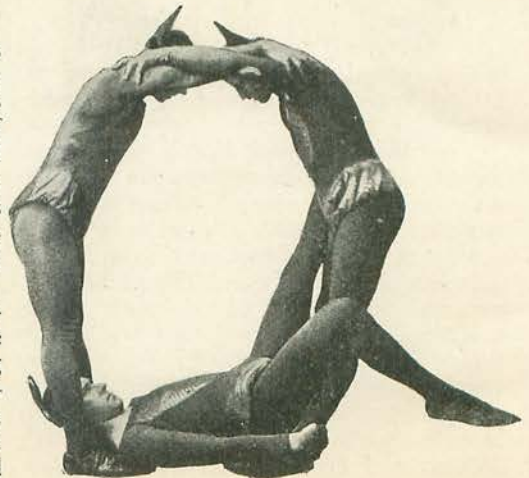


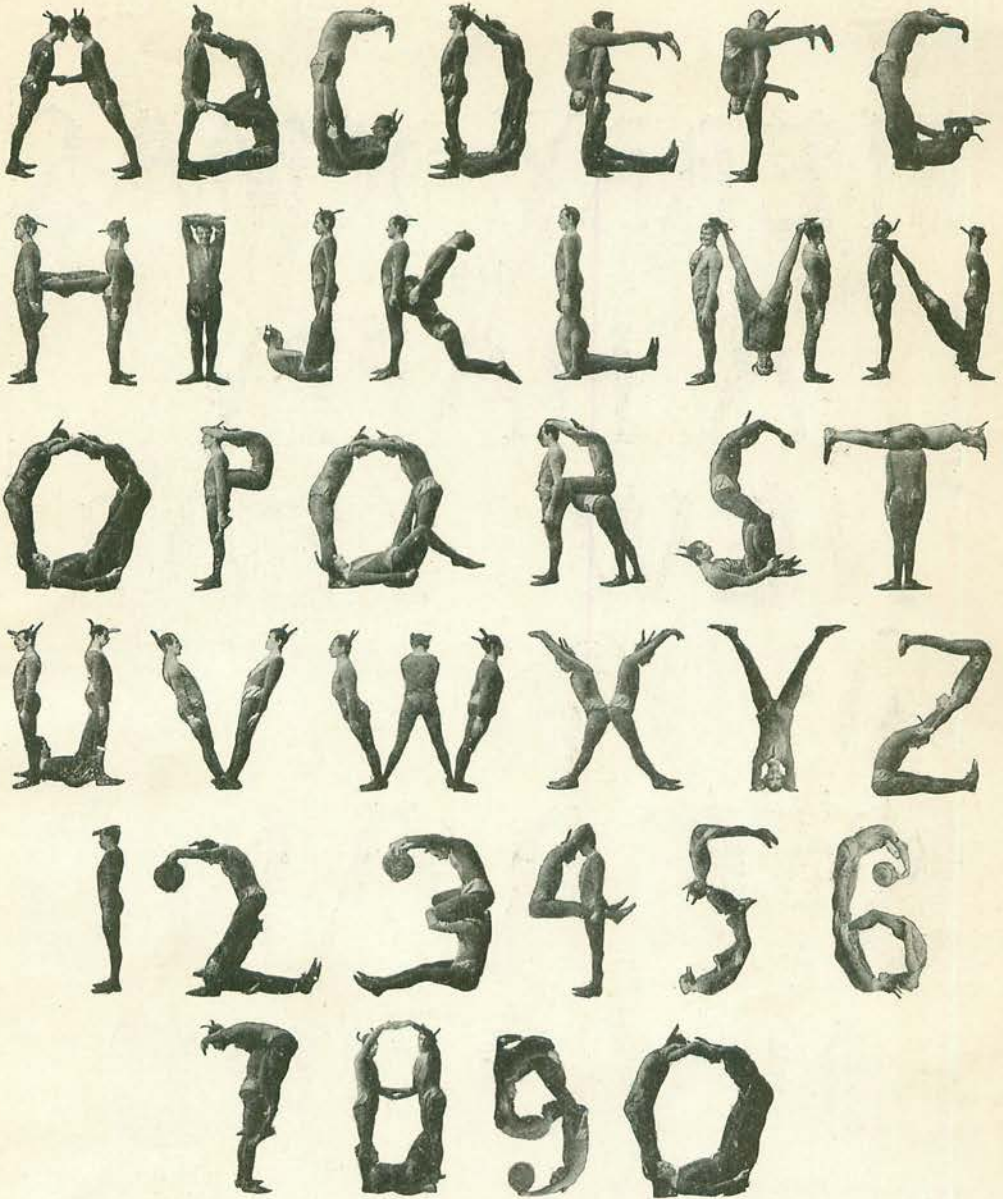
arms in the way shown, the letter was triumphantly completed. It is rather a pity that Mr. Harry Delevine's body is so prominent, thereby making the upper part of the letter unduly thick. But what would you? It was quite unavoidable. Remember, the "bricks" out of which we built our letters are human beings, and occasionally a troublesome body or limb was very difficult indeed, if not impossible, to get rid of.

The letter K, which is next seen, is beautifully sharp and clear-cut. Mr. Percy Delevine is again the shank, while Sam is kneeling *behind* him in an attitude of touching devotion. Harry is kneeling on Sam's shoulders, and inclining himself back at a perilous angle. Poor Sam is looking towards our artist and

protesting in a choked voice that "he can only stand it a moment or two longer."

The letter M, which is next shown, is a particularly fine specimen. This time we want the tall man in the middle. It was rather an onerous position, but Percy said he could do it on his head; and he did. On the left-hand side Harry Delevine is seen, wearing a quizzical expression. The right-hand support is his brother Sam. Notice how the feet of the outer men add to the appearance of the letter—a capital one in two senses. The unfortunate Percy was obliged to remain upside down for at least some twelve seconds. Almost simultaneous with the snap of the camera a groan burst from the interior anatomy of our M, and Mr. Percy Delevine righted himself, looking perfectly purple in the face. You should turn the M upside down and study his expression. He tried to smile, poor fellow.





The next letter reproduced large is P, which is at once simple and effective. Percy is again the long stroke, and he is holding Harry at his back in order to form the loop of the letter. It was perfectly marvellous, by the way, how still these gallant fellows kept, even under the most trying circumstances. Like a pair of Greek wrestlers, Sam and Harry form the greater part of the letter Q, which is next seen. In order to complete the circle with human material, Percy has extended himself from one pair of legs to another; and to form the tail of the letter he thrust

his own leg out of the circle in a perfectly delightful manner.

We now give the whole human alphabet, from A to Z, together with numerals from 1 to cipher. We would venture to say that each and every one of these letters and figures will well repay careful individual study. Each one had first of all to be thought out and designed, then built up in a way which satisfied the author, and finally "snapped" by our artist, for the slightest movement of a head or limb altered the physiognomy of a letter in a surprising way.



When the human components had so grouped themselves that the result really looked, even "in the flesh," like the letter it was supposed to represent, then the author gave the word "Go," and immediately afterwards, with a sigh of relief, the Three Delevines "stood at ease," wondering how on earth the next on the list was going to be formed. Neither time nor trouble was spared in the preparation of this most unique of alphabets. Observe that, while we *might* have inverted the M to form a W, we did *not* do so; and we think everyone will agree that the last-named letter was well worthy of being designed separately. Fortunately,

these trained athletes could not only support heavy burdens, but could also remain perfectly still beneath them—a circumstance which contributed much to the success of the photos. *quâ* photos. In the case of the T, the posturing was particularly arduous, as Mr. Sam Delevine had to balance himself crosswise on the nape of Percy's neck, whilst both had to remain perfectly still and rigid for at least seven seconds.

Will it be believed that some of the letters and figures—notably O, S, Z, 3, and 5—we were almost on the point of abandoning in sheer despair? It was only by dint of trying one combination after another, and exercising

a vast deal of patience, that we were enabled at length to get results which are, we venture to say, as satisfactory as could possibly be obtained, without the use of adventitious "properties." We would draw the reader's attention to the fact that the figure 9 is *not* an inverted 6. Every letter and figure received

The next experiment we tried with our living letters was to photograph them down very small and make them into a rhyming couplet—one which should have a seasonable lilt and swing. So successful is the result, that a sub-title or "translation" would be a work of utter superero-



its full share of attention, and however much we were tempted to resort to makeshifts, we persevered until an independent satisfactory design was found and worked out.

After showing the whole of our human alphabet and figures, let us now turn to the building-up of words. The greeting which appears on the preceding page is one of the most extraordinary ever placed before the public. Here will be seen the splendid perfectness of finish which characterizes each letter and figure. We need not weary you by recounting the very technical details of the way in which we obtained duplicates. Only one set of originals was necessary. The greeting speaks for itself. We wish the

gation. It will be seen that altogether our artist must have taken at least thirty-five separate photographs—twenty-six letters and nine figures. The letter O does duty for the cipher, by the way.

The next thing was to prepare sets of both alphabet and figures in various sizes. We were by no means sure that the letters would bear reducing, whereas it is a curious fact that the smaller they are brought down, the more perfect they become as letters. Observe the extraordinary human type in which each letter of the Christmas couplet is printed. Who shall say that our living letters must be kept large in order to be recognised? We marvel that no one has thought of a human

CHRISTMAS COMES BUT ONCE A YEAR
AND
WHEN IT COMES IT BRINGS GOOD CHEER

merriest of merry Christmases to the readers of THE STRAND MAGAZINE all over the habitable globe, and we would gently impress upon them that the very letters which form our greeting are built up of sentient beings, each one glancing anxiously or merrily (according to the position he holds in the letter) towards the camera of our artist.

We next spell out in our human letters the name of a visitor whom every child in England is expecting with exceeding interest—good old "Santa Claus."

alphabet before—say, for advertising purposes. Eminent artists have been called upon to design posters, and authors of some standing have prepared commercial "puffs." We, too, have engaged "men of letters," but only to advertise the warm feelings which we entertain, more particularly at this festive season, towards our readers in all parts of the English-speaking world.

Our human alphabet may also suggest to hard-worked teachers of infants a novel way of imparting to little ones their letters; or,

perhaps, a complete set might be reproduced upon a sheet and pointed out to the children. To others, however, we leave the potentialities of the thing. Perhaps some enterprising publisher would like to publish a whole novel in "living" type. Such a work might, or might not, command a huge sale; but, at least, there can be no two opinions about the human interest of the work.

The last greeting is appropriately enough "God Save the Queen," reproduced in the letters of our human alphabet. Now, our beloved Sovereign, in the course of her long and illustrious reign, has received an enormous number of addresses of congratulation and welcome; but we are under the impression that there is a killing sameness about these costly documents. The phraseology is usually bald and stilted, and the

donors are often self-seeking bores. Would not the following be a highly original notion? Suppose the inhabitants of a certain place were about to present an address to the Queen, and that they wanted to strike out a new line for themselves. Very well. Why could not the leading men of the town form themselves into living letters of this kind, and so make up the wording of the address? They would at least be certain that their address possessed original points which Her Majesty could not overlook; and furthermore, they would bring themselves directly under the notice of the Queen, which, we take it, is an important consideration. However, we offer our own humble tribute, and we conclude our article with the sentiment that should animate every loyal Briton at the close of this year of Jubilee.

