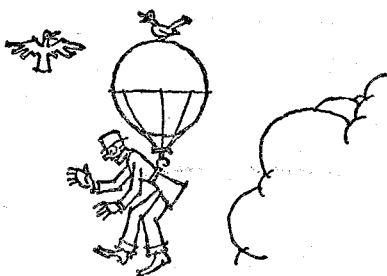


OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

Balloon Jumping as a Popular Sport

FREDERICK S. HOPPIN

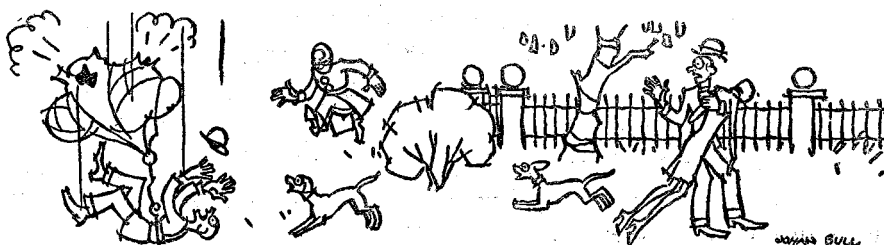
Drawings by Johan Bull

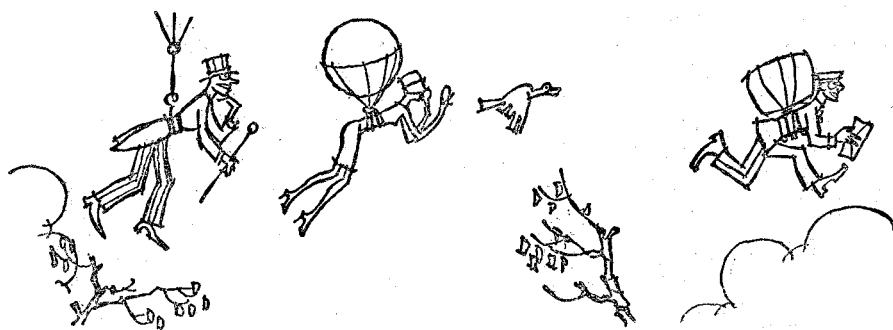


EVERY now and then there bursts upon us a new sport with enough danger, exhilaration, and novelty in its enjoyment to attract adventurous spirits. The very latest thing in sport the last form of outdoor excitement to catch the imagination of the old world, is "balloon jumping", and it has all these qualities in a supreme degree.

With balloons, of course, we are all entirely familiar. They have been in the world a long time and we think of them as a cumbrous, unwieldy, old-fashioned, historical method of rising above the earth. But this newest of adventures, which offers a fresh sensation and a new experience, brings back the balloon into active existence as the instrument of a fascinating sport that combines the delights of flying with all the thrills of cross-country riding.

A small balloon about eighteen feet in diameter and holding approximately three thousand cubic feet of hydrogen gas is attached by ropes ten or fifteen feet long to a sort of harness that can be fitted around the body and legs of the man who is going to jump in a way that supports him and yet leaves him free to move easily about. A thousand cubic feet of hydrogen gas will lift about seventy pounds, and this size of balloon will raise itself off the

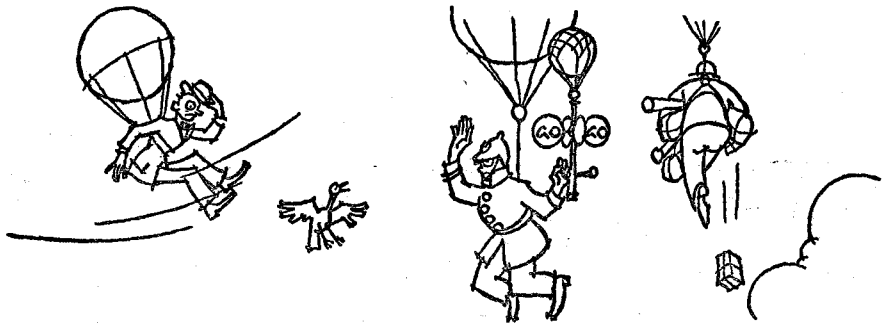




earth and take with it a man weighing one hundred and forty or fifty pounds. If the man jumping is too light, they hang enough extra weight of little bags of sand around his waist to keep his feet on the ground as he walks along, and to make certain that if he does go up in the air, he is sure to come down again, — at least within a reasonable time.

Now, floating in the basket of a balloon is the most perfect of all the methods of transportation yet devised by man. In absolute peace, breathing the exhilarating air of the mountain tops a mile or so above the earth, looking off over miles of billowy clouds all gold and white in the sunshine and opening here and there to show glints of the forests and lakes, the rivers and plains of the world far below, moving gently with the wind, the perfect silence unbroken save for the faint bark of a dog or the crow of a cock thrown up by the great sounding board of the earth far away, you drift across the sky, like the gods, without any control over your direction or destination, entirely in the hands of fate. The adepts say that by resigning himself completely to the will of heaven, man can attain perfect peace. The balloon is the complete and delightful physical realization of that philosophical attitude.

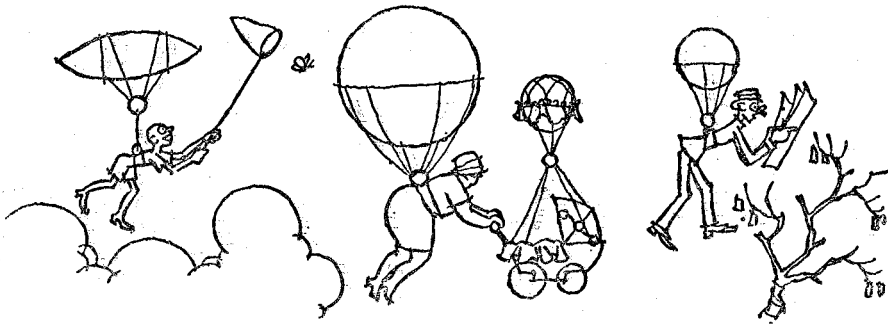
All these sensations are within the reach of the balloon jumper. He has the quiet, the smoothness of motion, a rather nearer view of the landscape, and, in addition, the extraordinary exhilaration of lightly surmounting all those terrestrial obstacles which ordinarily obstruct travel across the surface of the earth, and of engaging in what is really a sublimated form of point to point race.



On a fine Summer day when a little breeze, moving not faster than fifteen miles an hour, is blowing across the country the balloon jumper settles himself in his harness and attaches it firmly to the balloon. He stands with his feet spread slightly apart like a frog, the balloon floating above him. A little gust comes along. He bends his knees and springs easily up into the air. The balloon bears him up gracefully a hundred feet or so above the ground and together they drift across the landscape over fields, fences, and ditches, till they come gently down again a hundred yards or so from where they left the earth. In front of him stands a tree. He walks forward a few steps while the balloon regains its balance and begins to rise again. Then, as it tugs for freedom, he steps leisurely up into the air towards the tree. He reaches the upper branches and, resting his foot lightly on the most extended one, steps slowly and dignifiedly toward the top, and there pushes carelessly off into space and floats gracefully down to the ground. So Peter Pan must have crossed the treetops.

A few steps down the field a barn looms ahead. This time the jumper takes off a little farther away and, with a strong spring, upborne by the wind, he and the balloon rise majestically to the roof-tree and there, for a moment, he poises on one foot. The lightest of shoves and he floats off and upwards, to sail serenely a hundred feet or so before alighting again upon the turf.

Glittering in the distance straight ahead, lies a pond a couple of hundred yards wide. The jumper takes this just as carelessly as the rest. Rising into the air before he reaches the pond, he drifts



half-way across and then floats down lightly as a sea gull to the surface of the water. He hardly touches it with his feet, and the obedient balloon turns upward again and bears him far beyond the other shore.

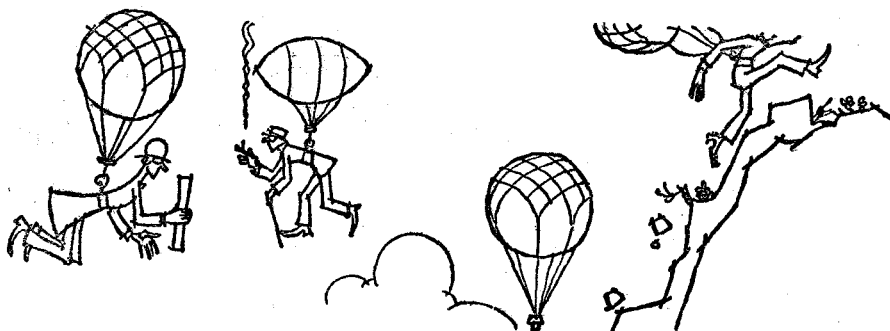
And so he progresses down the countryside, like the giant in his seven-league boots, topping fences, walls, trees, brooks, and even a kindly and indifferent cow, over whom he jumps as easily as her ancestor did over the moon.

Each time when he alights after a jump, the jumper takes a few slow steps until the balloon stops descending and begins to rise again, just as a flyfisherman waits for his line to straighten out on his back cast. Otherwise this game demands no special skill or technique, but just a little practice. A gentle wind, an open country, and a very slight balance of weight in favor of the man over the balloon are the essentials. Besides, the tradition of the dangers of the large balloon has made men provide the jumpers with all kinds of safety devices, — bags of sand to further balance the upward pull of the balloon, safety catches to enable the jumper to slip easily out of the harness if, on landing, a sudden gust of wind begins to drag him along with it, and even a rope around the waist attached by its other end to some one on the ground, to keep the jumper from being turned by too strong a gust into the tail of a runaway kite.

Ski jumping and high diving give something of the same joyful flying thrill as balloon jumping but with them the return to earth or water is, like the collapse of any ideal, distinctly jarring.



Complete Physical Realization of Perfect Peace

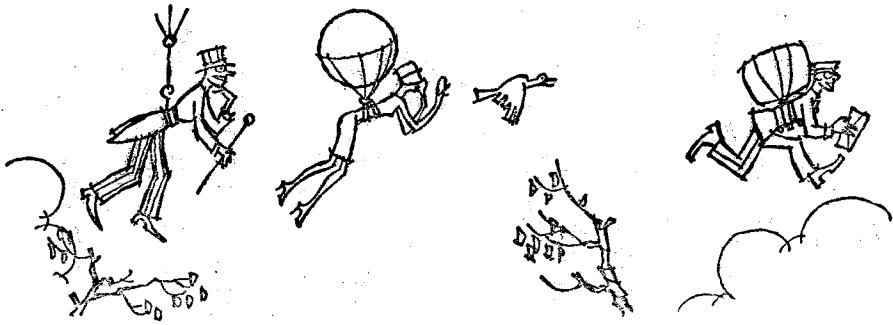


In balloon jumping the coming back to solid ground is like a gull lighting on the water, like a leaf drifting down softly on a still day in October. The wind is your slave and the genii of the balloon take you up and put you down as deliciously as Aladdin's did the Princess, asleep in her royal bed.

Unfortunately, just as you can only toboggan down hill or ski jump from a higher level to a lower, so you can only do balloon jumping with the wind. Then, after that wonderful progress through the air, you must slowly and painfully tug the balloon back on foot or tow it carefully behind a car along roads free from wires or overhanging trees. Wires, indeed, are a peril which has already caused accidents, not only to balloons but to the jumpers, and they lie in wait on every side.

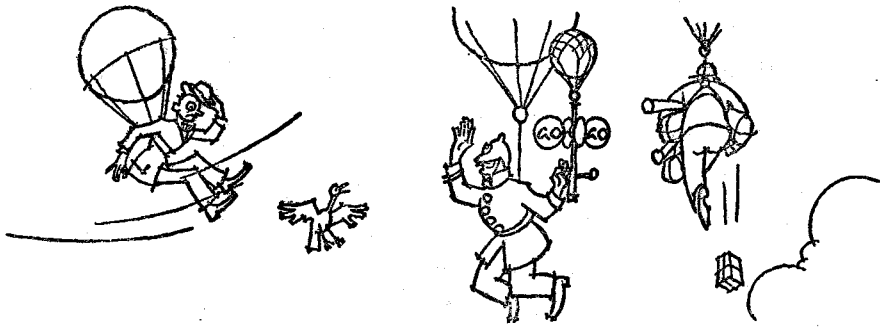
Still, in spite of its difficulties and limitations, balloon jumping is not only the newest but one of the most thrilling of sports, alluring and exciting from its very uncertainty and uncontrolledness, just as motoring was in the early days when there was still a thrill in fifteen miles an hour. And apart from this sporting phase, there may be also a great practical future for the idea in its less daring use, not by trying to lose all our weight at once so that we can make these huge jumps like aerial kangaroos, but by using it to gain merely a slight alleviation of the weight of years and good dinners, and to help to make our progress over the earth just a little lighter and gayer.

Why should we not in time perfect a moderate sized knapsack filled with some highly volatile non-inflammable gas which,



strapped comfortably to our back, would be able to lift some twenty, thirty, or forty pounds off our burden of flesh? Fitted with one of these knapsacks, a stout, elderly gentleman could saunter from his house in the country and stroll up a steep, high hill more easily than he can now tramp down it. Should a fence bar his way, he could rest his hand on it and spring lightly over. If a brook crossed his path, he could jump it as carelessly as if it were the gutter. He would feel as if thirty years, not thirty pounds had dropped off him. The same muscles that had been carrying a hundred and seventy pounds would be carrying only a hundred and forty. He would have to be careful only about putting the precious knapsack on and off, lest he should release it too recklessly and then have to watch it sail gaily away to join the Pleiades.

It looks rather as if Sir Isaac Newton's gravity, already somewhat groggy from the Einstein attack, were going to receive another staggering blow. If the present balloon jumping apparatus should hold the same relation to its future development as the Wright plane to the trans-Atlantic flyer, or as the Montgolfier balloon to the Zeppelin, then we are on the threshold of a fascinating new phase, not only of sport but of existence. Years ago, Frank R. Stockton with the foresight of a Jules Verne, anticipated this very idea in *A Tale of Negative Gravity*. The hero of his story succeeded so well in his attempt to overcome gravity that he found himself suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, some fifteen feet above the ground, unable to go either up or down. His faith-



ful wife retrieved him by throwing aloft a fish-line, catching the hook in his trousers, and drawing him safely back to earth.

That is just the sort of thing that will happen if we should ever have knapsacks of unlimited power. Our whole present day world will be turned upside down. Middle-aged gentlemen, knapsack on back, will go floating through the empyrean; old-fashioned, unmechanically minded mothers will be found bumping around against the parlor ceiling; the sky will be filled with poets, definitely out of touch with reality; second story men will ply their trade with ease; children, like cherubs, will be found perching on the housetops; no cherry tree will be safe. All the legislatures will be busily engaged in passing laws prohibiting people from leaving the earth too freely, or rules for the right of way up and down and sideways, or regulations against landing on the head of a fellow citizen or planting a foot on any part of him as you rise. And then there will be all the new rules of etiquette: should you pass over or around a lady?

Moreover, as history always repeats itself, reproducing the same phenomena under each period's disguise, we should see a new St Martin sharing his knapsack with the beggar, a Jonah rising from his whale by his own power, a George Washington crossing his Delaware on a favorable breeze, a Sheridan reaching his Winchester in one long hop.

There is no end to the probabilities and the possibilities, but the interesting thing is that the beginning of it all is here before us to-day.

WOODROW WILSON'S FORD BOOM

A. R. PINCI

WILL the Democratic donkey be exchanged for the democratic flivver as a party emblem? In this article Mr. Pinci indicates that Woodrow Wilson once picked Henry Ford as his successor to lead the Democratic Party. Though the two men had little in common, Ford's international idealism and his profound knowledge of the common people made him Wilson's choice. At the time of his death, says Mr. Pinci, Wilson was grooming Ford for the presidential race and we may yet see him enter the lists.

ON Thanksgiving Day, 1926, many Republicans and not a few Democrats professed to be thankful for the election results of four weeks before. By Christmas they were speculating about the identity of the presidential candidates they would find in their respective stockings. Consequently there was talk of whom the political Santa Claus had picked or would pick for the occasion. Names already more or less familiar were duly catalogued: Charles E. Hughes, John W. Davis, Herbert Hoover, Alfred E. Smith, Leonard Wood, Oscar W. Underwood, John J. Pershing, William G. McAdoo, Frank O. Lowden, Atlee Pomerene, and, of course, Calvin Coolidge. As a matter of fact, the last congressional elections have little bearing on the presidential candidacies of 1928. It will be much easier, two years hence, to understand what happened in 1926, and why, than to decide now how the new line-up in Congress determines the 1928 results. But since the latter is the politicians' standard of reckoning, it is necessary to delve deeper and say that the foregoing list is quite incomplete. It lacks at least one name, and possibly two.

Of these, Henry Ford's is one, — and the foremost. William E. Borah's may be the second. A campaign with either or both of these men as candidates would be thrilling even to the gods, but Henry Ford would win against any contender, upsetting all accepted partizan calculations and "systems".

The presidential campaign that lies ahead will not be a campaign of issues, because there are no issues. Law and order, tariff, prosperity, economy, and the League are no longer issues, — they are useless catchwords. The campaign of 1928 will be a campaign of men, if it is to be a campaign at all; and that party will win which nominates the man who compels votes on his own