

PEARSON'S MAGAZINE

CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1899

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A Study, by M. Henri Dumoutet, of the shooting stars seen over Paris between 2.30 and 4 a.m. on Nov. 15th, 1899.

BALLOONING AFTER SHOOTING STARS.

BY ELLSWORTH DOUGLASS.

Illustrated from Sketches made in the Balloon, by Henri Dumoutet, Painter-in-chief of the French Society of Aerial Navigation.

ABOUT every thirty-three years the earth passes through an unswept corner of the heavens which is filled with star dust and nebulous cobwebs. At such times the friction of our atmosphere burns up such nebulous particles as come in contact with it. During this process (which lasts but a second or two) these particles appear to us to be shooting, or falling stars, which leave a faint trail of fire, like that of a rocket, behind them. These fragments are not worthy the name of stars, as they are at best but a hundred or two miles above our surface. Nevertheless, in order to reassure timid persons who imagine at such times that the heavenly bodies are about to punish them for their sins, our astronomers have calculated that no such nebulous particle could possibly reach the earth's surface in a solid state.

A magnificent display of shooting stars is calculated to take place in November, 1899. In 1799, it is somewhat strange that none were seen in Europe, whilst in America Humboldt saw several hundred thousand of them in a single night. They were again observed in 1833 and in 1866, and they are due in their full brilliancy on the nights of the 14th and 15th of next November. But

the last time they were observed they were also quite plainly visible exactly a year before and a year after the date when they were due. This fact gave rise to the belief that they would be seen in November, 1898.

It will be remembered that last winter our astronomers announced a special pyrotechnic display of shooting stars for the nights of the 13th and 14th of November. Only one astronomer, a German by the name of Berberich, dissented from this prognostication. He declared that Saturn had swept within 62,000,000 miles of these harmless fire-flies of space, which gave this planet a claim over them that the united powers of the other planets could not dispute. Saturn was believed to be capable of grouping them into another ring for his own personal glorification. This theory lent a special interest to the observations last November.

Once before Schiaparelli had taxed Jupiter with attracting these self-same shooting stars, and forming them into a comet. Was Saturn about to do likewise? That was the question in the minds of astronomers who awaited November 13th with impatience.

The outcome was that though Berberich's

theory was shown to be incorrect, the expected display was a total disappointment as far as the inhabitants of Great Britain were concerned. In America the shooting stars were plainly visible, but in England, owing to the fog, the phenomenon was veiled from the sight of observers.

France was also cloudy and fog-wrapped, but the scientific balloonists who were on the *qui vive* there, promptly resolved that if the falling stars could not come down to them they would go ballooning up to the falling stars. A night balloon ascent struck them as a novel idea. It was poetic, not only with the thought of rising above the fogs and mists to the clear blue of the starry night, but also with the idea of observing the first coming of the morning and studying, above the clouds, the changing colours of the picture which the rising sun would paint upon them.

Evidently, to appreciate and report on all these aspects of the ascent, there was needed, besides an experienced aeronaut, an astronomer to make scientific observations, and a cloud-artist to make sketches on the spot.

This ascent was the joint idea of the director of the Observatory of Meudon (near Paris) and of the vice-presidents of the

French Society of Aerial Navigation. These gentlemen chose for the expedition the three men shown in the photograph on this page. The man on the right is Victor Cabalzar, aeronaut of the Central Ballooning Establishment of Paris, who had charge of the ascent. In the middle stands Alexis Hansky, a young Russian *savant* who at that time was the scientific delegate from the Observatory



The three occupants of the car—Henri Dumoutet, cloud artist; Alexis Hansky, of the Odessa Observatory; and Victor Cabalzar, aeronaut.

of Odessa to the Observatory of Meudon. The eldest man of the party is the well-known aerochromograph painter of the French Society of Aerial Navigation, M. Henri Dumoutet, whose ascents and cloud studies are widely known.

I have had the pleasure of reading the reports made by all three of these gentlemen on this interesting ascent, but I am principally indebted to M. Dumoutet for information obtained from his log-book of the trip and twenty-two rough sketches which he made in the

basket during the journey. By his kindness we are able to reproduce here five of his most interesting sketches made *en route*, which give a good idea of life above the clouds. Of course, the absence of daylight made photography impossible.

A new balloon was used and it was christened "The Alliance" to typify the



The balloon over Paris. The top of the Eiffel Tower and the dome of the Cathedral of Sacré Cœur are seen above the fog.

union of France and Russia as well as that of science and art in the project. On the afternoon of the 14th of November, at the gas works of La Villette, in the northern part of Paris, the balloon was inflated with twelve hundred cubic metres of gas and confined in readiness for the ascent very early the next morning. At 2.10 a.m. a thick fog enveloped Paris, and the night was absolutely black. The three passengers took their places in the basket nevertheless, bade adieu to their friends, and when the ropes were loosened, they disappeared instantly from view.

And now shall we take our place in the basket with these explorers of the night?

The inky blackness has suddenly changed to a deep liquid blue which is studded with myriads of stars, for in one brief moment the fog has been passed. The aeronaut estimates its thickness at less than 500 feet. He has stopped our ascent, and, as the wind is scarcely perceptible, we soar very slowly across Paris. The black curtain of the fog covers every thing below from sight. The stars seem strangely to be all about us, below as well as above. But upon closer scrutiny the stars below us prove to be the strongest lights of the city, which pierce the fog.

The loudest and sharpest noises also rise up to us, such as the blasts of tram-horns, and locomotive whistles. Those large white spots of dim light, which we see, must be the glass roofs of railway-stations. It seems so strange to realise that Paris lies below

there, completely covered with a veil of fog. We wish we could see some of her largest buildings, or tallest monuments, so that we might make out just where we are.

Suddenly, lifting out of the fog, a great dome looms up directly in our path. We instinctively feel for the tiller, or steering wheel, and then realise that we are powerless to change or control our direction. The trained eye of the aeronaut judges better than we can, and, without even rising to avoid the obstacle, we drift past the dome of the Cathedral of Sacré Cœur, which stands on the heights of Montmartre, missing it by scarcely a hundred feet. Everyone knows there is only one taller monument in Paris, and almost in the same breath we shout out: "Look out for the Eiffel Tower!" Though it is quite on the other side of Paris, we are soon able to make it out, stretching above the fog fully 500 feet toward the stars.

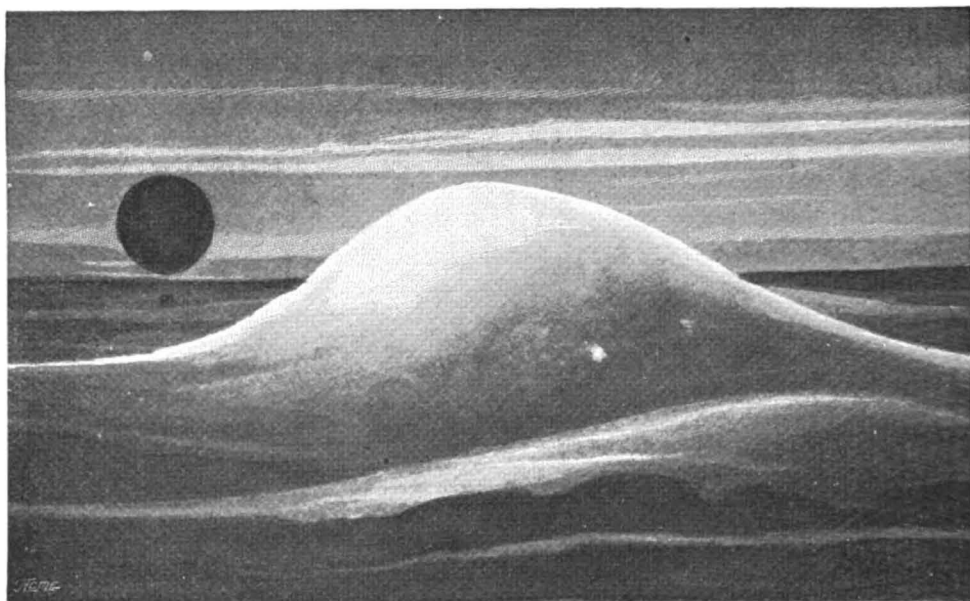
At last the lights below us vanish and the noises are hushed. The perfect calm betokens the open country, and Paris is left behind. The balloon soars at a height of 600 feet, carried rapidly now by the wind which has freshened and changed direction. A large part of the heavens is covered by the balloon, but M. Hansky stands watch over all that part towards the constellation of the Lion, and M. Dumoutet over that part towards Orion. Each counts and registers in his notebook the infrequent appearances of vagrant stragglers across the heavens. On previous occasions the shooting stars have

been seen in perfect showers, covering the entire heavens; therefore the results to-night are quite disappointing, for after more than an hour of watching the astronomer has counted but fourteen, while the artist has noted on his side but ten. Saturn gets the blame, but the next day, when news comes from America, he is somewhat exonerated, for eight hundred truant sparklers have been counted at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Meantime we have been travelling rapidly, but the earth is still veiled from us, and we have not the least idea where we are. About six o'clock we hear coming up from below shouts

immense cloud wave more than fifty feet high, which has been reproduced in the accompanying illustration. Gradually the grey light of early dawn melts to lilac, and finally glows with all the iridescence of opals and mother-of-pearl. Our artist has scarcely time to note the colours when the whole picture is veiled in new tints.

And with the sun comes a shadow, a reproduction of the balloon on the clouds below. It changes in size as we approach or recede from the clouds, and when the sun is well risen a yellow ring of light incloses the shadow.



A great wave in the sea of clouds, with the morning twilight illuminating its crest. Sketched by M. Henri Dumoutet.

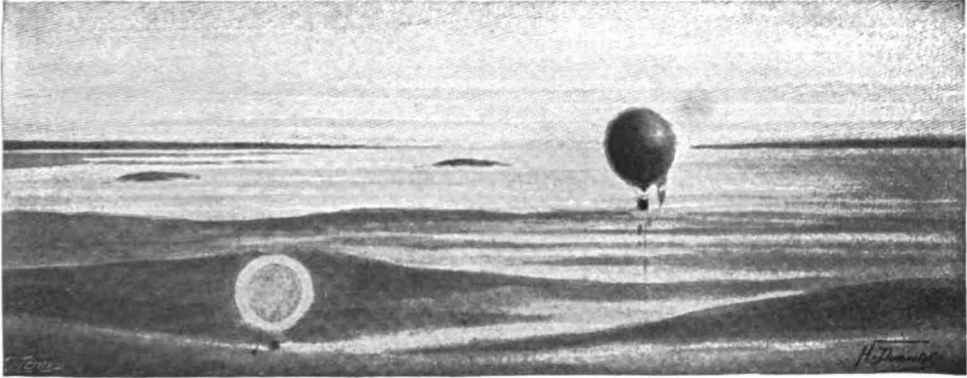
of "A balloon! A balloon!" Down through the layer of fog we shout back to the unseen man: "Where are we?"

"Five miles from le Mans, department of Sarthe," comes back the answer. In that case we have been travelling south-west, and towards the sea.

At last the stars begin to pale as the dawn draws near. The clouds, above which we float, are deeply involuted into great waves, which do not move, but rest as if frozen. Their crests are tipped with the pearly grey light, but the troughs between them are still dark. Soon after M. Dumoutet sketches an

At last the earth appears to peep through the fog, and long cliffs are seen in the distance. Between them are stretches which glisten like sand. M. Dumoutet thinks he recognises the cliffs and beaches of St. Malo and Granville, which he saw on a previous aerial journey. We are now a third of a mile above the surface, and, if the sea lies beyond those cliffs, no time is to be lost in making the descent.

M. Hansky examines the cliffs with the glass, and a landing is at once decided upon. The valve is opened, and we sink rapidly. As we drop through the mist, what is our surprise



After dawn. The shadow of the balloon on the clouds below.

to see below us, instead of the sea or open stretches of country, the towering tangle of an immense forest! Ballast is quickly thrown out and we rise a little to reconnoitre. No traces of cliffs, or sand, or sea, can now be found; scarcely an open place is seen anywhere, and certainly none large enough to land and anchor a balloon in safety. No descent is so difficult as one among trees; the least wind lashes the balloon against the branches and tears it to pieces.

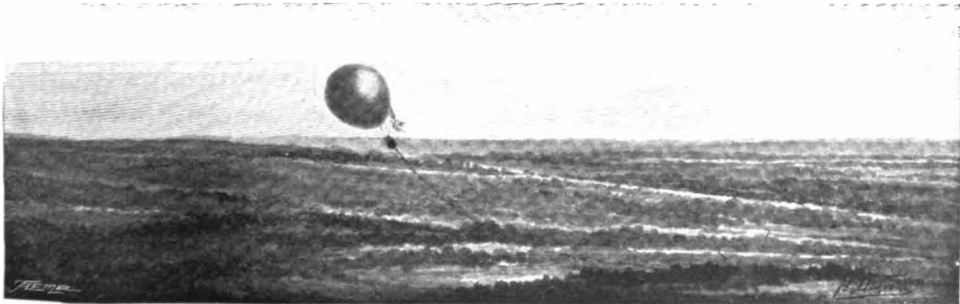
Little by little we sink to the level of the tops of the highest trees and throw over one bag of sand so that we can float just on that level. Then by dragging ourselves along from tree-top to tree-top with our hands, we gain a narrow opening at last, where a railway crosses the forest. A tug at the valve sends us quickly to the ground and, with the assistance of peasants who have been attracted by the sight of the balloon, it is securely lashed to the ground.

To our astonishment our landing has been

made in the great forest of Perseigne, near Neufchatel, in the department of Sarthe, many miles from the sea. An optical illusion of the sun, illuminating some clouds brilliantly, and leaving others in darkness, has caused us to think we saw stretches of sand and beetling cliffs. We find that we have traversed 112 miles in the seven and a half hours of the journey.

The Mayor of Neufchatel receives us cordially and tenders a public reception that evening. Unfortunately he cannot tender the gas we most desire to enable us to re-ascend. Therefore the balloon must be deflated and sent back to Paris, where in due time each of the balloonists makes his report to the French Society of Aerial Navigation.

Will the shooting stars next November confine their exhibition to holders of balloon seats, or reserved stalls in the Eiffel Tower, or will the house-tops help us to see them? Let us hope that no Saturnine influence will entirely cheat us out of the unique display.



The balloon traversing the forest of Perseigne.