A CHAT WITH BLONDIN.

HOW THE TIGHTROPE WALKER LOOKS.

HE CARES NOW MORE FOR MONEY THAN FOR GLORY — SOME OF HIS DARING EXPERIENCES.

"If zey would pay me I would cross Niagara again, but for ze gloire, J'eu at asser."

Of course only one man in the world could have made that remark and although it is a distinction to have done what no other man of woman born, in all the ages has ever done, Jean Francois Blondin seems to have in a measure survived himself. When in his intrepid prime he walked the narrow path of hemp above the mad swirling waters so dizzily far beneath him, both the American and Canadian shores were black with beholders who watched him with bated breath. Now when he returns to America after decades and exhibits the even more startling nerve of tripping blithely on the tight-rope with sixty-five years on his back, a sparse gathering of Coney Island visitors look with languid interest at the doughty funambulist, before the Sea Beach Pavilion.

Sad to reap such aftermath of glory! No wonder that his mellowing years care not for "ze gloire," but look with something of prosy solicitude at the more commercial gain which his doughty legs and nerves may win. There is much of the same dissonance between the Blondin of to-day up aloft on his aerial pathway, and the Blondin who treads the earth. There, clad in tights, and softened by the enchanting touches of distance, there is something of the quasi heroic about his physique despite his protuberant abdomen. Straight as a Crow Indian, motionless as the statue of Memnon, he stands until the braying band on the portico of the Pavilion breaks into a tumultuous strain. Then grasping his long balancing pole he steps forth hardily and with an elastic abandon on the rope. The cords stand out on his legs and arms, his hair has a sort of wind-swept look and his straight ahead gaze is as firm and confident as the unblanching look of Fate.

"DISTANCE LENDS ENCHANTMENT."

But on earth!—alas, he is stripped of all that. As he came forth from the weather-stained tent at the foot of the mast afer he had completed his performance, he was a middle-sized, stocky, elderly man, vulgar after the type of a ward politician—pale blue eyes with small pupils set lightly in his head, his nose a bit awry, and under the bristles of his imperfectly dyed mustache the gleam of teeth which art had not made beautiful. No. Blondin is not heroic when he treads the earth, though the breast of his black frock coat was plated with dozens of medals of honor. Still in the bourgeois commonplaceness of the rope-walker there is something that is attractive. His wonderful preservation, the agility which invests his six and a half decades with the robust vigor of a youth, tell of his moderate, carefully regulated life.

In the morning he takes a breakfast of eggs and wine or something equally light, and then touches nothing till after he has walked in the evening, when he takes a hearty dinner and lingers at the board with friends over some cordial, quiet, restful, content. It was thus I saw him in Hertzberg's restaurant. His Italian manager, Palavicino, half a dozen newspaper men, his son Henry, a modest, unassuming young man of twenty-seven, and a lady in a baby-blue and maroon velvet "confection," and small cornets worn as ear-rings, were his associates. The lady is the present wife of Levy the cornetist. The band played "En Revenant de la Revue," and a reportorial sphere of good nature and cordiality visibly contracted under it, while Blondin's faint blue eyes twinkled. He applauds vehemently at the end, his hands glittering with large jewelled rings. He meets in a straightforward unassuming way a small battery of questions levelled at him.

"Do you feel any weakening of your powers?"

"None. There is nothing that I have ever done which I can not do equally well to-day," answered Blondin, in French. "I am slightly heavier, but I feel as active as I have ever felt."

"Do you ever use stimulants?"

"No. Nothing more than a glass of some liqueur after my dinner. The music of the band is of some slight assistance, of course, in walking on a rope, just as it is to any other sort of walk. But I have never employed stimulants of any kind and my diet is very moderate and simple."

A TRYING POSITION RECALLED.

"Have you never felt any trepidation on the rope?"

"No. Of course there is a certain tension of nerves, but I am as cool as I could wish. I have never had any accident or been hurt. Once or twice I lost my chair. I did this at Niagara. Occasionally some of the gear or guy ropes have given way, but I have never been injured. The rope is always subjected to a good test first. This one is capable of standing a pressure of forty tons, so I am not likely to break it down. My son superintends all of these details now, and I can feel the most perfect confidence in the safety of everything."

"Well, there must be some feat more difficult than others, is there not?"

"Balancing with the chair is the most difficult so far as equilibrium goes. But the bicycle work is the most dangerous, as recovery in case of a slip won't be so difficult if not impossible."

"How do you tell when the chair is just balanced in the middle?"

"I am not so particular about that so long as my centre of gravity is right. I tell that by my shoulders and my balancing pole. There is a sense of being balanced which assures me it is as it should be."

"In carrying a person over on your back, are you indifferent as to who it is, or do you have a person who is trained or specially qualified to be carried? I don't suppose you find many who covet the trip."

"Oh, yes. There are plenty who are willing to take it. I would as soon carry one as another if he has nerve. But when I feel anybody trembling or showing any trace of vertigo, I advise him not to go. Although their legs are run through straps they could slip out of them if they were to get faint, and fall backward. The mast sways somewhat, and a person subject at all to vertigo will show it when he gets up there. I generally carry over my son, though his wife is decidedly opposed to his taking the trip. But it is perfectly safe. I am not as dangerous as a bob-tail car as a means of transit."

WALKING THE ROPE AT DIFFERENT HEIGHTS.

"Is your life insured, Monsieur Blondin?"

"No. There is not a company who will take the risk."

"When you crossed Niagara did you find the rush of the water below you a nerve-trying thing?"

"No. For a fortnight before I crossed I used to go and look down and see the waters sweep over; but I found that they had no unpleasant effect on me. It has been a little annoying here at Coney Island when some friends have taken me up into the tower and then asked me if I felt the height. I would as lief walk a rope at one height as another. The difficulty is in stretching a rope securely at such great height. At the Crystal Palace my rope was 145 feet high; and in Russia it was 125 feet. But at St. Petersburg there was something much harder than that to contend with. It was so cold I could hardly hold the pole, and there were snow-flakes whirling in my face and blinding me all the way across. The Empress wished me not to attempt the walk, but I did not like to give it up on account of a little difficulty and I did it."

"Have you ever changed your method at all?"

"No. My method is the outcome of experience rather than theory. I began walking when a child. There is such a thing as a genius for rope-walking as there is for everything else. I think I have it," said Blondin modestly. "Now my son, though he can get over a rope, is not a rope-walker. He is a good all-round athlete, but he has no decided talent for the profession and would rather go over a tight-rope on my back than on his feet."

"When you were walking blindfolded, at the place you pretended to fall, I noticed that you put your foot straight along the rope instead of taking it with the hollow of your foot."

"That was because I had to determine very carefully my balance and to be sure where the rope was. This rope is not very good. The guy lines are shorter on one side than the other, and the oscillations are bad."

BLONDIN AS SEEN ON THE ROPE.

When Blondin walked across the rope the first time, he was done up in a queer cross between the costume of a togaed Roman and the garb of a wild Indian, and he wore a plume of cock feathers in his helmet. His gait was very like the walk of some barnyard cock. He had the same sort of nervous high-step combined with the deliberate grace o' th minuet movement. He raised his leg high, straightened it out ahead of him, the muscles tightening as he grasped the rope with his foot. His other gait was a comical sort of trot. With the first, it took him five minutes to traverse the way, while with the other he got over in a little over one. He keeps his eye fixed on the rope about thirty feet ahead of him

"How heavy a pole do you carry?"

"The one I had to-day is twenty-eight pounds. I have used a thirty-six pound pole. Over Niagara I carried one of thirty-four pounds. If I am carrying a heavy man I like a heavy balancing pole, as you may naturally suppose. My son weighs about 150."

"Have you ever found a prejudice against rope-walking in any place where you have wished to exhibit?"

"I did in Rome. Antonelli positively refused to give me leave to walk. He evidently thought it was flying, or walking, in the face of Providence. But Pio Nono insisted that I should walk. My rope was stretched in the Campo Pretoria, the Government grounds. Cardinal de Meorde was then Secretary of the War Department. There were 42,000 people present, including the Papal Court. All the stores were closed and it was an immense fete."

Blondin was born near Calais but has not been there for years, and has never walked there. When he came to this country first it was under an engagement to the famous Ravels.

"What is your name on the stage," asked Gabriel Ravel of him.

"My name is Jean Francois Gravelet. I have no stage name. But my father was such a light-haired clear-complexioned man that in the army they called him Blondin."

"Blondin will do first rate," said Ravel. From that time to this Gravelet has been Blondin, and his son is Blondin. The story of his entering his profession, while savoring slightly of the veracity of the Arabian Nights, does not go beyond the limits of possibility, and is doubtless truer than most things told of Mahomet. When he was an urchin of four years of age, his sister was performing on one of the ropes which they used to stretch from the ground to the top of a circus tent. She was embarrassed in some way, and the baby Blondin toddled up the rope filled with all the brotherly affection his young soul could carry to her relief. This was his first step on the narrow way of hemp which he has since trodden to fame upon. Pretty, whether true or not.

HUGE COLUMNS OF FIRE.

From Golden Days.

"On deck there!"

The hail came from the foretop of a little full-rigged ship of the old-fashioned New-Bedford type that was ploughing along the waters of the Atlantic, hurling the bright, phosphorescent waves ahead of the broad bow in a loud and boisterous manner.

"Aye, aye," was the answer, followed by a gruff "What's the matter?" from the sleepy mate.

"Light on the weather bow!" came from the lookout.

"We're a good two thousand miles from land in that direction," muttered the mate, as he swung himself into the rigging.

But when he wiped away the spray that lashed his face there was the light, and one so strange and unfamiliar that he stood there for several seconds, buffeted by the waves, yet peering at the strange visitor. Then swinging around and dropping from the shrouds to the quarter-deck, he put up his big hands to form a trumpet and roared: "Ready about."

A moment later the ship was trembling in the wind, the blocks hammering the yards viciously, the cordage groaning, the sails snapping like firearms, while the lunging and pitching covered the decks with a gleaming golden spray. The roar and confusion brought the skipper on deck, and in explanation of his order the mate pointed at the strange light that was now astern. The men, too, were looking at it, having made everything snug, and of all the crew not one had seen anything like it before.

When first seen it looked like a luminous buoy floating upon the surface, but it had gradually lengthened out, grown more attenuated, as it were, until now it seemed taller than the mainmast of the ship, of a yellowish tint—a most striking object against the jet-black sky.

Some of the men looked at the strange form with grave apprehension. To them it boded no good, perhaps harm; others were not so easily disturbed, but every one on board was at least astonished at the curious apparition that every moment seemed to grow larger and taller.

"Keep her away a point," said the captain to the helmsman, and the vessel fell away and slightly increased her speed. "Whatever it is," he continued, "it's coming after us. It looks to me like a waterspout, but I never saw one that was on fire, and that one is if anything ever was."

The curious object was rapidly gaining on them, and now presented an appalling appearance—a huge column of ghastly light, hundreds of feet high, of a dark, golden-yellowish hue—standing out in strange contrast against the sky, or the intense darkness of the night. It came on so quickly, evidently before the breeze, that the vessel was hauled on the wind, just in time perhaps, for the strange column went hissing and roaring by not a thousand yards astern, its base where it joined the water surrounded by a seeming mass of fire, while the upper portion bent gracefully and was lost in the clouds. In a short time it had entirely disappeared from view. The column was, as the skipper had suspected, a waterspout; a midnight visitor, coursing over the ocean like some weird phantom. Since then several have been seen at one time, veritable pillars of fire, moving rapidly over the surface. It finally occurred to a scientist to examine the water in which these fiery columns were seen, and he found it completely filled with the forms of two minute plants known to science as pyrocistis pseudonoctiluca and P. pisiformis, whose nucleus, the little spot seen in the centre, was vividly luminous.

Here, then, was the secret of the column of fire—a waterspout had been formed and enormous masses of the little light-givers borne aloft, giving the entire spout a fiery appearance. These spouts differ in color, depending on the intensity of the light of the various animals; some are a dull yellow; others, on moonlight nights, quite pale, while others again, on the extreme dark nights when the sea is high, present a truly frightful appearance, resembling a pillar of fire, the base representing a caldron of seething flame.

CORROBORATING HIS DOG STORY.

From The Chicago Herald.

"Well, gents," said Joe Beasley, after several persons had told highly imaginative stories, "them dogs as you mention was no slouches, that's a fack—that's to say, they showed what you call remarkable instinck; but when it comes to reasonous dogs nary one of 'em had any business to stand up afore a newfundlun' that I used to own. That dog, gents, was the knowin'est animal that I ever seen, and I reckon that you'll allow that he lays right over all them critters you've been talkin' 'bout when I tell you some of his doin's.

"That dog, gents, knew as much as a human. I could go on and tell you 'bout him for hours; but I'll just mention one or two things as a sample lot of his intelligence. One day I gave him a plate of hot soup, just to see what the critter'd do. He put his nose to it, but it was too hot and he drew back pretty quick, you can b'lieve me. He smelled around it for a minute or two, and then he laid down and begun to think. I allus knew when he was thinking 'coz he looked so quiet like. Well, pretty soon he jumped up, and goin' up to the soup, he w'eeled about and turned tail to it—he had a nice bushy tail, you know—and he began a-fannin' that soup and kept it up for fifteen minutes or so. By that time the soup was cool enough for him. Then he lapped it all up, leavin' the dish as clean as a whistle, and after winkin' at me in a knowin' way, as much as to say, 'You can't fool this child,' he laid down on my dish-cloth and went to sleep.

"But that was nothin' to what he did another time,' continued Joe, somewhat hastily for him, seeing that the captain was going to say something. "That was before the war. It was in summer, and Jack—that was the dog's name—had been wearin' a muzzle owin' to the hydierphoby that was ragin' up our way. He had n't worn it for a month or two, however, at the time I'm speakin' of. Well one day the boys were playin' base ball, and the feller what ketched didn't amount to shucks. Jack looked at him like he was disgusted, and fust thing we knew, Jack was runnin' off home like all possessed. Pretty soon he came back, and with his muzzle on. He walked just as deliberate as you please up behind the batter—with his muzzle on, d'ye mind—and gettin' onto his hind legs, he held out his fore paws and ketched the ball beautiful, every time. You never see such ketchin', gents, in all your life. All the fellers allowed that they never see anythin' like it.

"Oh, you need n't laugh, gents," said Joe, seeing the smiles that went round. "It 's gospel truth I'm tellin' you; an' I can prove it, too, when we get home, 'coz I've kept the muzzle, and I can show it to you.

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