

# HAZARDOUS EMPLOYMENTS

By **JOSEPH C. O'MAHONEY**

"I'm goin' to live anyhow till I die," was the rather terse way in which a popular song of a few years past expressed a bit of sound philosophy. It furnishes an explanation of the happy go lucky air that characterizes most men engaged in dangerous lines of business; and a cursory examination of the employments that many men choose apparently of their own free wills leads one to believe that it is really a widespread sentiment.

On what other grounds, for instance, can one explain the extreme nonchalance with which the baseball umpire follows his profession? Within his sphere of influence he is a veritable Czar; but, like the unfortunate Nicholas, he is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. Counsellors he has galore, urging him on with various threats and bats in diametrically opposite directions. Behind him and in the stands is the mob ready to persuade him at a moment's notice with all the ginger ale bottles and pink lemonade glasses it can lay hands on. Yet unperturbed he continues to earn his daily bread by the sweat of his throat. The American citizen may be apathetic and easy going in his religion and his politics; but in his sport or amusement he is a thoroughly alive and serious partizan, a fanatic. It is whole hog or none with him then. To the baseball umpire falls the unsavory duty of standing in the way of his desire, and handing out only half a ham.

On the other hand, however, there is the circus performer, who undertakes untold risks to feed the very flames of this desire. Without the satisfaction of being arbitrary boss of the game, like the umpire, the circus performer endangers life and limb continually—in billboard "thrillers," which grow every year more nerve racking. The loop the loop is already a thing of the past, by far too tame for the up to date circus; and it is no longer sufficient to have men place their lives in the balance, but young women must needs be impressed also. Take Miss Isabel Butler for instance, who day in and day out looped the gap in an automobile, turning upside down in mid air.

## The Public Wants Thrillers

MODERN psychologists declare that violent contrasts and great nervous shocks are craved by a large proportion of the people. It is to satisfy this craving that the circus managers search the wide world over for men and women of daring to introduce the "thrillers." One of the latest has been a Norwegian, who travels the country exhibiting in "a leap for life on slender skees." From a platform more than one hundred feet above the ground, he coasts on narrow wooden runners, eight feet in length, down a long slippery runway tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees, to within hardly a yard of the level of the arena, and then shoots out one hundred feet through space, describing in his flight an arc thirty feet high at the center.

The high diver who plunges from an elevation of fifty or sixty feet into a tank of water as shallow and as narrow, it would seem, as can be built and still allow one chance for life to remain, is of course a constant attraction. Few of those who follow this mild pastime live to make use of an accident in quite the same way as did one Edward L. Pape. After receiving an injury to the fifth vertebra which raised a lump on the back of his neck, he toured the big cities with two confederates to serve as witnesses, and mulcted street railway companies for large amounts in damages by falling off their cars and simulating the actions of a man whose spine had just been injured.

## Steeple Jack and Ironworker

IF their managers are to be believed, men and women that perform these feats receive proportionately high salaries, and are thus in a measure repaid. But the steeple jack and the structural ironworker labor in really useful fields for day wages which, to the ordinary prosaic mortal at least, seem not at all commensurate with the risks they run. Only a year or two ago a nonchalant steeple jack climbed up and down the face of the Flatiron Build-



ing in New York city with no other aid than that of his hands and feet—for two dollars.

No less heedless of their lives are the ironworkers, who in the every day course of work run round on narrow iron girders one hundred feet and more above the level of the street, throwing redhot rivets from one to another, and driving them home with giant swings of sledges that would cause the ordinary man to lose his balance even on terra firma. Not content with these risks they often ride through mid air on the long iron beams that the derrick raises from the ground and lowers again into position ten, twenty, stories above. High in the air, without visible means of support, they engage in mimic fights for the benefit of the open mouthed bystanders. They have even been known to stand on their heads on the very highest upright of a skyscraper.

## The Placid Well Shooter

THE business of well shooting deserves mention. Here the perils center not so much about the men that do the actual work as about those who carry nitroglycerin to the wells. With a few dozen cans of this extremely high explosive on his mule wagon, the driver sits placidly beside a catastrophe comparable only to the crack o' doom. Driving through mountainous country, he is in constant danger of being blown to atoms: for the slightest jar is likely to cause an explosion.

A few years ago, one of these muleteers approaching the town of Newton, Pennsylvania, along a straight road, halted his team and alighted, intending to be gone only a moment. Left without guiding hand, however, the mules became frightened and started toward the town at a wild pace.

Some one saw them coming, and, recognizing the danger, turned back toward the village, shouting to the inhabitants to flee for their lives. In the very center of the town the road swerved in a curve, and it was impossible that the mules could make the turn without upsetting the wagon. The inhabitants, expecting every minute the destruction of their homes, fled in hopeless confusion toward the woods, forgetting that at the curve in the road, right in the path of the disaster, stood a school house filled with children too young to make their escape. The schoolmaster, who had been apprised of the danger, saw that it would be impossible to remove them in time, and seized the only alternative. Grasping his umbrella, he rushed down the road toward the advancing team, flapping it in their faces. It was one chance in a hundred—and it proved to be that one. The mules slackened their pace until one of those who had not yet left the scene was able to catch them by the bridles and bring them to a standstill.

## Risks Run by Loggers

IN all rural communities on the edge of civilization, life is a matter of chance; for the men that take upon themselves the upbuilding of the frontier are a brawny, hardy lot, fearing neither God nor the devil. They live and work only by the sufferance of their companions, and when one becomes in any way objectionable he had best make precipitate tracks for some other settlement if he does not care to take up his abode suddenly in a six-foot plot of ground. Their sports are rough, and their work is rough.

Few modes of life, for instance, are less gentle than is that of a logging camp, and few trades call for more nerve, strength, and agility than that of the logger. In driving timber down steep and rapid streams he must be able to walk or run across a bobbing, shifting field of floating wood, many sticks



of which are of themselves too small to carry his weight. He must often be ready to stand in swirling, eddying water almost on the brink of a cataract to free a log jam, with the knowledge that at any moment one of the logs is likely to break away and carry him with it down the stream. Once he loses his footing, the logger is lost. Yet so expert do they become that a man is considered incapable unless he can ride on a single log without getting wet.

## Perils of the Diver

PERHAPS not quite so spectacular as logging, but certainly just as precarious, is the life of the diver. In modern times this calling has been deprived of much of the romanticism that surrounded it in earlier days before the diving suit was brought to its present state of perfection, when sunken galleons in tropical waters were an attraction for the adventuresome. The diver usually finds his labor nowadays in busy harbors where he is no longer under the necessity of battling with sharks and cuttlefish; but he still has to undergo dangers enough to satisfy the most daring spirit. Once attired in his suit and below the surface of the water, he is helpless and absolutely dependent upon his fellow workers above at the air pump. The slightest carelessness on their part, a failure to read his signals aright, a mistake in the supply of air, and his life hangs by a thread. Nevertheless, though loaded with

almost two hundred pounds of lead and copper, with an air hose and a life line easily entangled dragging about after him wherever he goes, and with his head incased in a ponderous and impenetrable helmet, he goes about his work with all the gaiety of the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker in the old rime.

Indeed, divers have been known who had such a distaste for work that after making a descent they would pick out a soft spot in the river bed, or wherever they happened to be, and lie down for a nap. Alone under the water, they were safe from the prying gaze of any employer, and could dispose of their time as they saw fit, until the invention of an electric system of signals.

If he wishes to sing or joke over his work, the diver must be his own audience; for from the moment the heavy helmet is fastened to his shoulders until it is taken off again, his loudest shoutings are inaudible to his comrades. If an accident occurs, he can only pull at his life line, and then wait while his rescuers are at work, unable to offer the slightest suggestion.

In 1904 a diver lost his life at the Boonton, New Jersey, reservoir, and though a single word spoken to his comrades might have been his salvation, the helmet effectually prevented its utterance. He had been laboring under seventy feet of water to close the opening of a large intake pipe with a huge ball of wood and lead weighing several tons, when in some manner his leg was caught between the ball and the flange of the pipe. The force exerted on the ball by the suction of water was so great that the divers who came to the rescue were unable to overcome it, and the unfortunate man could only lie there on his back hopelessly waiting, his life slowly ebbing away. For three days he lay imprisoned, and during all that time until he died his only communication with the outside world was a handshake with the divers when they came down, or when they flitted into the green haziness above.

## Aëronauts Scoff at Danger

THE sense of separation from human companionship that forces itself upon the diver in such a position is also a part of the experience of the aëronaut, and is even more complete. The world below him is only a miniature toy world; all familiar sounds have died away, and he is in the midst of a great silence. Round him are the uncontrollable forces of nature, and there is no hand to aid. He is at the absolute mercy of wind and weather, and can trust only to his lucky stars. Whatever precautions he may take in the construction of his balloon, his parachute, or airship, there are always a thousand sources of unforeseen danger. Yet the aëronaut goes about his task with the greatest equanimity imaginable, denying that there is any danger, and insisting that his profession is the greatest of sports.