

THE FIRST CHANNEL CROSSING.

DR. JEFFRIES' OWN NARRATIVE.

THE first aeronauts to cross the Channel were, as our readers know, Dr. Jeffries and M. Blanchard, who travelled from Dover into the forest of Guines on January 7th, 1785. The account of that aerial voyage, which was the second undertaken by Dr. Jeffries, is to be found in a pamphlet written by Dr. Jeffries himself, a copy of which can be obtained, by anyone anxious to add this interesting old work to his library, from Messrs. Wm. Wesley and Sons, who have kindly sent the book to us for inspection.

The narrative is written in that quaint old-world style, wherein the author takes the reader completely into his confidence. It begins with a statement of how Dr. Jeffries undertook to defray the expenses if M. Blanchard would act as pilot. From December 17th to January 7th, when the trip took place, the two enthusiasts were stolidly waiting for a favourable day, and in the interim it seems that there were not wanting busybodies who tried to use more than mere verbal persuasion against what they considered to be a foolhardy undertaking.

Ballasting the Pilot.

Poor Dr. Jeffries had a rather unpleasant time of it, as may be judged from one of the footnotes, which begins as follows:—

"After various artifices (one of which was secretly to increase the weight of M. Blanchard by loading him with a concealed heavy girdle) had been clandestinely attempted to deceive, deter, and prevent me from this enterprise, and to prejudice the minds of some of the principal gentlemen of the county of Kent, and of the city of Dover, insinuating that, from the incapacity of the balloon, it was madness to attempt the experiment with two persons, unless the balloon could carry a hundred pounds weight of ballast."

All things considered, the aeronautical world owes a good deal to Dr. Jeffries, for apart from being subjected to all this inconvenience, and many quite unmerited and totally incomprehensible insults as well, he actually undertook the trip after binding himself by an agreement with Blanchard, "that in case of necessity on our passage, I would get out of the car for his preservation." A man who will do this, it may be fairly said, is no coward, and yet such is the prejudice against new ideas, that Dr. Jeffries actually had to go to the Governor of Dover Castle before he could get that assistance, and it may almost be said protection, which by that time was becoming necessary.

The Start.

The morning on which the trip was made was fine but intensely cold, and the wind about north-northwest. Scudding clouds overhead, however, were travelling in the direction of France, as also was the smoke from Dover Castle, and after one or two tests with kites and a Montgolfier fire balloon, it was decided that the day was favourable. "The balloon being filled a little before one o'clock, we suffered it to rise, so as to be disengaged from the apparatus, &c., for filling it, and to be drawn down again just at the edge of the cliff, where we attached the wings or oars, with the moulinet and gouvernille, to the car. And exactly at one o'clock (having in the car with us three sacks of sand ballast of 10 lbs. each . . .) we rose slowly and majestically from the cliff." Dr. Jeffries, ever patient and forgiving, in referring to the spectators who came to see him off, states that

the cliff was covered with a "beautiful assembly." Referring to the apparatus on board the car, Dr. Jeffries says that he did not take any other "philosophical instrument" except a barometer and a mariner's compass. When the ascent was made the neck of the balloon was not untied at once, as it is in modern practice, and Dr. Jeffries makes quite a point of the fact that this vent was only opened when the balloon became distended to its utmost. He considered it a very cute way of avoiding unnecessary loss of gas by opening the valve, as may be gathered from the following remarks:—"We also had the further satisfaction to observe that by this method no more of the gas or inflammable air would escape than was absolutely necessary to relieve the balloon and to prevent it from bursting."

The First Ballast.

Halfway across the Channel they had to cast out a sack and a half of ballast to check descent, and a little later on they had to cast out the other $1\frac{1}{2}$ sacks and also a bundle of pamphlets. Still more pamphlets had to be jettisoned at a quarter past two in the afternoon, when "we had not now anything left to cast away as ballast in future, excepting the wings, apparatus, and ornaments of the car, with our clothes and a few little articles; but as a counterpart to such a situation, we here had a most enchanting and alluring view of the French coast, from Blackness and Cape Blanez to Calais." Surely Dr. Jeffries was an artist as well as a sportsman.

Still the balloon descended, and it became the turn of the "little articles and ornaments" to go overboard. One of these was a bottle, about which Dr. Jeffries relates the following curious incident. "After which, we cast away the only bottle we had taken with us, which, in its descent, appeared to force out a considerable steam, like smoke, with a hissing or rushing noise; and when it struck the water, we very sensibly (the instant before we heard the sound) felt the force of the shock on our car; it appearing to have fallen directly perpendicular to us, although we had passed a considerable way during its descent."

The Last Ballast.

Even thus the natural laws of gravitation were not appeased, and after casting away everything they could lay their hands on, "we began to strip ourselves, and cast away our clothing, M. Blanchard first throwing away his extra coat with his surlout; after which his other coat and trousers; we then put on and adjusted our cork jackets, and prepared for the event." Happily for them, the "event," as Dr. Jeffries terms it, never took place, for just at the last moment the balloon ascended once more, and carried them over the French coast, and finally landed them in the forest of Guines, in Artois.

The Laurels—A Comparison.

Here the two aeronauts met with a very warm reception, and Blanchard was not only presented by the French Government with "a present of 12,000 livres, with a pension annexed of 1,200 livres per year," but "as a perpetual memorial of this event, the place where we descended to be called in future the Canton of Blanchard."

Dr. Jeffries himself received nothing—thus do we encourage our pioneers.

The same book contains a still more extensive account of Dr. Jeffries' first journey, also with M. Blanchard.