Blondin’s Memoirs by Funambulus

In October 1877, Blondin went to Paris, where he gave twenty-four performances and enjoyed great success. His relationships with the Parisian press were excellent, and Paul Dalloz, the director of *Le Petit Moniteur Universel*, proposed to publish his memoirs under his supervision. Blondin agreed, and they were published in this newspaper starting January 2, 1878, under the pseudonym Funambulus. The memoirs appeared as a daily serial in nineteen chapters, running until January 24.

The author warned his readers: "We have told the story, with the help of notes provided by the hero of Niagara, as well as documents gathered from collections of American, English, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and French newspapers, of the adventures of the knight Blondin from his birth to the present day. We have invented nothing, exaggerated nothing, altered nothing."

It was with great curiosity, but also some anxiety, that I began reading this text, aware of the decisive advantage that this memoir writer, a contemporary of our tightrope-walking ancestor, had gained by collecting information directly from his mouth—information my sister and I had painstakingly gathered over more than ten years of combing through numerous archives and thousands of newspapers. I expected this testimony to make obsolete the account of the first 53 years of his life that I had already written and published. However, I quickly realized that the author had not adhered to his commitment and had, on numerous occasions, either indulged his imagination or distorted the facts reported by Blondin, without having the basic courtesy to let him review the text. This, combined with Blondin's evident lapses in memory and his desire to conceal traces of his French family, significantly diminished the value of this testimony. In fact, these impromptu memoirs brought me very little!

Initially, I had planned to include this text as an appendix to the final volume of my biography, but after transcribing its 35 pages, I realized it was so filled with errors that it wasn’t worth including. However, this short biography does deserve a place on this website dedicated to Blondin, and I hope many internet users will enjoy reading it.

Jean-Louis Brenac

January 2nd, 1878 — *Le Petit Moniteur Universel*

Two Hundred Feet Above the Ground
MEMOIRS OF BLONDIN
By FUNAMBULUS

Chapter I

A digression. — Gravelly-Raveily. — The arduous quest for a sobriquet. — A fortunate moniker. — A prodigious lineage. — Unknown son. — Denatured father. — Before the magistrate. — Let us close the digression.

Most men who have undertaken the writing of their memoirs have made it a point of honour to reveal, first and foremost, the date of their birth and the secret of their early years.
The hero of Niagara would not wish to depart from a custom so scrupulously observed by former ministers of state.
Now, the name of Jean-François Blondin, entered in the civil register in the year—
But we were about to commit a grave error: we must, despite our desire to follow established forms, open here a parenthesis whose pertinence no one could dispute.
Blondin is not the name of the celebrated tightrope walker. That nickname, which has gained popularity across the four corners of the globe, was bestowed upon him by a whimsical gymnasiarch, under circumstances we are bound to recount.
At the opening of the 1851 season, the Ravel troupe—no less renowned in those days than that of Franconi—took notice, in a provincial town, of the agility, grace, suppleness, and intrepid daring of the artist who, through his prodigious feats of funambulism, would soon astonish kings.
Old Ravel, after the performance, came to the dressing room of the incomparable acrobat.
"My compliments, my dear fellow," said the veteran director. "I have witnessed many extraordinary spectacles, but never have I beheld acts comparable to those you performed this evening."
The young man, deeply moved to hear such praise from so competent a judge, responded with a respectful pirouette.
"Would you consent to leave France?" continued Ravel.
"Certainly, if…"
"You wish to know what position I can offer you? Trouble yourself not with such details. We sail in three days for the United States. Be in Le Havre at the tide's turning, and I assure you, you shall not regret it. Is it agreed?"
"You may count on me."
The tightrope walker kept his word. On the appointed day and hour—April 8th[1]—he joined the travelling troupe and boarded the vessel.
Upon arrival in New York, Ravel had the newspapers announce the marvels he was about to unveil to the American public. He was about to compose the playbills when he suddenly realised he had forgotten to ask the name of his new recruit.
"What is your name?" he asked.
"Jean-François Gravelé."
"Come again?"
"Gravelé, Jean-François."

1 - I had estimated that date to be the 3rd of April.

“I understood well enough. But that name simply cannot be plastered on posters — the public would burst out laughing; your future would be compromised. We must find something else.”
The impresario bowed his head into his hands and fell into deep thought.
Then, suddenly:
“Saved! I have it! An inspiration!” he cried. “We shall go with *Gravelly*, if you have no objection.”
“On the contrary, sir, none at all.”
Yet the smile that had briefly animated Ravel’s face quickly gave way to a darkened countenance.
“What? *On the contrary*?” he barked in a threatening tone. “You mean you do not find my inspiration ridiculous?... absurd?... idiotic?... Are you unaware that one of my sons already performs under the name *Ravelly*? Ravelly, Gravelly—it’s all the same to the crowd. The public mind grows confused, and when there is confusion, there is no revenue. Let us search further.”
Ravel and his boarder exhausted their imaginations to no avail.
“But,” cried the Barnum in a fit of despair, “surely someone in your family bore a nickname!”
“In the days when my father served in the regiments of the First Empire,” replied Gravelé, “his comrades gave him a sobriquet owing to the colour of his hair…”
“What was it? Speak quickly, for heaven’s sake; can you not see I’m losing my mind?”
“They called him *Blondin*,” the tightrope walker answered.
“*Blondin!* Superb! Astonishing! Irresistible! The day is ours, my friend: gold shall be ours, acclaim shall be ours, glory shall be ours! *Blondin!* What a masterpiece!”
And that very evening, the name *Blondin* was emblazoned in colossal letters upon the walls of New York.
The public met Ravel’s expectations; the theatre speculators of Niblo’s Garden cheered in honour of Blondin. But the man who bore that name soon became the victim of certain misadventures that made him rue the abandonment of his ancestral patronym.
From the dawn of his fame—and of his fortune—Blondin saw a legion of *Blondins* appear at his door. Ragged wretches, perishing of hunger, would present themselves wherever he went, saluting him with a:
“Good day, cousin,” or, “Uncle, brother, nephew,”
And then begging for a few coins to, as they said, sustain them through cruel times.
Never did Blondin close his purse to these supplicants, nor did he seek to dispel their illusions of kinship, though he could easily have proven their error.
One day, however, after his triumph over Niagara, the hero of that perilous feat received, in Breslau, the visit of a woman accompanied by a hulking lad of fifteen or eighteen years, standing a full six feet if he stood an inch.
“Am I speaking to Monsieur Blondin?” asked the woman.
“Yes, madam.”
She then turned her gaze toward the giant who had lingered near the doorway, and with a voice choked by tears:
“Fritz!” she exclaimed, “go and embrace your father!”
Blondin, thanks to his agility, evaded the caresses of the prodigy, and this time he declared plainly that his true name was not Blondin but Gravelé.
“What?” cried the indignant visitor. “You refuse to recognise your own child? Have you forgotten that, before departing for France, you entrusted this unfortunate to my care and swore to return within four weeks to reclaim him?”
“But madam…”
“Have you forgotten, cruel man, the promise you made to pay three thalers per fortnight for my services?”
“I repeat, madam, that my real name…”
“Four hundred and eight fortnights have passed since that time. That amounts to eleven hundred and seventy thalers. Pay up—or I shall keep the boy!”
“And who, pray, is asking you for the boy?” retorted Blondin, now thoroughly exasperated. “Once more, madam, I understand nothing of this entire affair.”
“Ah, you understand nothing! Then I shall make you understand!”
And, passing her arm through that of the enormous youth:

"Come, Fritz," she said. "Come, my dear. I shall not subject you further to the sight of such an unfeeling father."
The next day, the artist received a summons from the chief of police, where he once more encountered the would-be son and his so-called nurse. The magistrate made no secret of his disapproval.
"Has this woman not told you my name?" cried Blondin. "My real name—the only one that is mine? I am called *Gravelé*. Blondin is a stage name, a nom de guerre, invented for advertising purposes!"

Chapter II

Blondin, a compatriot of the Abbé Prévost. — Little Jean! — First games. — Complement of education. — The child makes his début. — Life begins.

Jean-François Gravelé, known as *Blondin*, was born on the 28th of February, 1824.
His father, a former soldier of the Empire, who had faced fire at Wagram and Austerlitz, was at that time travelling across France with his wife and children, offering acrobatic entertainments in the public squares of the nation's great towns.
The troupe had just met with resounding success in the Place d'Armes of Abbeville and was proceeding, in slow stages, toward Boulogne, when, upon entering the territory of Hesdin, Madame Gravelé brought forth her fifth child[2].
Hesdin, birthplace of the witty Abbé Prévost, is a charming and ancient town, situated some twenty kilometres from Montreuil, along the banks of the River Canche, in the department of Pas-de-Calais.
For a few weeks, the family camped beside the ramparts; then they resumed their journey, and never again did the future Blondin behold the place of his birth. Yet he would catch sight of its steeple many times from the height of the railway that links Paris to Calais — and even now, the glimpse of that Romanesque spire, rising in the distance toward the sky, awakens in him the tenderest recollections.
By six months of age, the child could walk.
Not in the fashion of those infants toppled by a wisp of straw — he walked straight and sure, without support, without cushion, without hand to hold.
One September morning of that same year 1824, in the town of Dunkirk, his mother had gone to fetch
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When she returned, the cradle was empty.
One can easily imagine the despair of the poor woman. She wept, she cried aloud, she rushed from the travelling caravan, calling everywhere:
"Petit Jean! Little Jean!"
She ran to the drill field, where her husband was assembling the circus.
Neither Monsieur Gravelé, nor his sons, nor his daughters had seen little Jean.
Together, they scoured the town in search of the child; they were seen in the park and on Couronne Street; on Neuve Street and by the port; on Bergues Street and Jean-Bart Street; at the arsenal and the marine basin; at Saint-Eloi Church, in the Citadel quarter, in the suburb of the Mail, and by the railway line — asking all who passed whether they had news of *Petit Jean.*
But *Petit Jean*, whom his tearful family believed forever lost, was in fact testing his strength behind the family camp, upon the town's fortifications.
When he was found, he was standing atop an overturned chair, in the very pose of the Genius of the Bastille — whose nudity he matched, moreover — with only his right foot poised upon one of the chair's rungs, his left leg flung backward, and his arms extended forward.

2 - We count but four.

In his mother's absence, the rascal had awakened, climbed from his cradle, and hidden himself there, to play at being a performer.
The child was not scolded — they were far too relieved at his return to think of punishment — but his father resolved that henceforth he should leave off his swaddling clothes and don the acrobat's leotard, if only to spare him colds should he once again feel moved to renew his escapades.
And indeed he did renew them — with such agility that even his brothers grew jealous.
Whatever feats he observed during the troupe's rehearsals, to which he was granted admittance, he would imitate at once, instinctively, without instruction, without formal training.
The difficulties of the somersault, of racing atop a globe, of dancing upon bottles — these seemed not to exist for him.
He would stack two, three, even four spheres one atop another, place his head upon the summit of this fragile column, and remain thus for several minutes, legs held aloft in the air.
"That brat could balance atop the point of a bayonet!" said Monsieur Gravelé.
And what astonished the seasoned spectators of these perilous amusements most of all was that he never once lost his balance.
The precocity of such dispositions will all the more surprise those readers of these memoirs who never witnessed Blondin in person.
But those who saw him, two hundred feet above the ground, take his meals upon the rope, will agree with us that a man capable of such feats bears little resemblance to other men.
Yet the months passed; the child grew; his strength increased, his skill matured — and at last his parents granted the prayer he had so often repeated.
The little prodigy appeared before the public.
His début took place in Lyon in 1827, before a modest audience, among whom sat a single spectator destined to determine the boy's future.
The director of the *Grand-Gymnase*, having heard tell of the talents of this three-year-old tightrope artist, had come, intent on mockery. But the moment the lad performed his first vault, the gymnasiarch was convinced of his merit — and at the end of the performance, he approached Monsieur Gravelé to request the privilege of perfecting the child's education[3].
Little Jean spent a full year with his benefactor, training his body in the most fantastic exercises — climbing ladders, scaling masts, leaping over horses with the grace and suppleness of a monkey, running upon taut ropes as if they were velvet carpets.
When he reached his fourth year, his master judged the time ripe for him to confront the public gaze and begin his career…
A career — we beg your pardon! — that even princes would have gladly pursued.
The author of the *Dialogues on the Art of Leaping and Vaulting Through the Air* relates, in fact, that he composed his book to gratify his protector, Charles IX, who, he says, "was as desirous as could be to practise such daring leaps, in which I had the honour of serving him as master."
It is also known that the father of Madame Saqui, the famous Lalanne, known as *Navarin*, had been the instructor of the Comte d'Artois — who would later reign as Charles X.
Little Gravelé thus returned to his father and soon became the most brilliant performer of the nomadic troupe.
He travelled through countless towns, the listing of which would be quite superfluous; yet his dream, his most fervent desire, remained unfulfilled: he had not yet taken to the tightrope.
We shall now see how he rose to the height of his aspirations.

[3] -This engagement at the Grand Gymnase of Lyon has often been cited, particularly in the brief biographies published by Blondin himself in the booklets distributed at the close of his performances. I have not included it, having found no trace of any such Grand Gymnase in Lyon. It is nevertheless possible that the story is true, and I shall introduce it upon the occasion of a future edition.

Chapter III

Journey to Italy — Festivities in honor of the King — Miss Timidella — "If Father would allow..." — Little Jean's new escapade — An improvised net — The child triumphs

The Gravelé family had given a series of performances in the South of France when they learned that the city of Turin was preparing magnificent celebrations for the feast day of King Charles Albert.
It was a fine opportunity for Father Gravelé to visit a country whose splendors had so often been extolled by his fellow soldiers in the barracks.
Their latest takings had replenished the cash box; they had a new wardrobe, and the condition of their props was satisfactory. Nothing stood in the way of the journey.
The very next day, trunks were packed, and the great wagon of the nomadic artists rolled toward Italy, over hill and dale.
Upon arrival in the beautiful capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the monuments, palaces, arsenal, military academy, library, and museum were adorned with flags, garlands, and escutcheons.
Across the main avenues — laid out as by compass and intersecting at right angles — triumphal arches bore broad inscriptions in honor of the sovereign.
All the city's walls were plastered with posters announcing the amusements prepared for the people:
Fireworks.
Illuminated boats.
Horse races.
Regattas.
Chariot races in the antique style.
Military bands.
Processions.
And free performances in all thirteen theaters.
A countless throng of giants, dwarfs, colossi, sleepwalkers, conjurers, bearded ladies, wild beasts, wrestlers, clever dogs, and a whole people of mountebanks crowded the streets and squares.
After earnest entreaties, our heroes secured permission to set up on the Piazza del Po.
Only thirty-six hours separated them from the festivities.
There was not a moment to lose.
By torchlight, they worked through the night to set up their apparatus, and the days were devoted to rehearsals.
Monsieur Gravelé had a surprise in store for the Italians: he wished to display the skill of one of his daughters on the tightrope — not the usual rope stretched between two X-shaped stands, as seen at fairs, but a diagonal cord reaching fifty feet in height.
This ascension, often performed by the renowned Madame Saqui, was then regarded as the pinnacle of rope-walking artistry. Blondin would later innovate with the horizontal cable[4].
Father Gravelé arranged a rope such that one end touched the ground at the northern side of the piazza, while the other was fastened to a fourth-floor window on the southern side.
Armed with a balancing pole, the little girl was to traverse this narrow path, where her father awaited her at the end to catch her in his arms.
As the rehearsal was about to begin:
— "Aren't you afraid the little one might fall?" asked Madame Gravelé, worried.

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4 - Funambulus is, in all likelihood, a former seaman, for he rarely speaks of a *rope*, and almost invariably refers to it as a *cable* — contrary to Blondin himself, who always uses the word *rope* and never *cable*. Indeed, in the navy, the only 'rope' aboard is the bell-rope; every other cordage has its own specific designation, so as to avoid dangerous confusion. The use of the term *rope* is thus proscribed. In the art of funambulism, a *cable* designates a metallic wire. The title *King of the Cable*, applied to Blondin, is therefore vexing. Its use by Funambulus is proof that the author did not submit his text to Blondin for review prior to its publication.

— “One only falls when one chooses to,” replied the old soldier, and he climbed the stairwell of the building to take up his position.
— “Are you there?” he called to the child.
— “Yes, Papa... but I’m afraid.”
— “What if I went up instead?” interrupted Jean.
— “Go take a walk and leave us in peace,” the father retorted.
Then, with a cheerful tone:
— “Come now, Miss Timidella, off you go!”
Mademoiselle placed her left foot on the rope, then the other, took another step — and stopped, trembling.
Jean, arms crossed, feet firmly planted, nose in the air, watched the maneuver with a mischievous look.
At last, unable to resist:
— “Papa, let me try, please?”
His offer was no better received than the first time.
Meanwhile, his sister was making valiant efforts to ascend.
— “Steady now, a thousand thunders!” cried Mr. Gravelé, and to spur her artist’s pride:
— “If you don’t hurry, Jean will take your place before the King tomorrow!”
But this threat failed to restore courage to the dainty performer.
Her father ordered her down and came to renew, in person, the theoretical advice he had given her so often.
Jean, seeing the rope now free, seized the balancing pole and boldly ventured onto the cable.
By the time his mother noticed this daring escapade, the impudent child was already thirty feet above the ground.
While her husband heaped curses upon the boy, the poor woman stood beneath the rope and held out the front of her skirt with both hands, ready to catch him.
But the boy, upright and steady as ever, continued his walk and reached the end of the line in triumph.
Had the rope reached to Heaven, he would have followed it all the way.
Thus was accomplished the first ascent of the future Chevalier Blondin.

Chapter IV

Death of Father Gravelé — Little Jean becomes head of the family — A love story — A new recruit — The future Blondin turns actor — Unfortunate intervention of the authorities

Not long after this episode, Monsieur Gravelé passed away[5], and little Jean, having just turned eleven, became the head of the family.
He made praiseworthy efforts to fulfil his new role; yet perhaps he would not have succeeded, had not the troupe been joined by a character whose administrative talents proved of great assistance.
Jean’s sister — the one we saw so troubled upon the diagonal rope — displayed remarkable skill upon the low wire.
One evening, in a provincial town, a young man, struck by her beauty and grace, fell hopelessly in love with her.
This young man, a law student destined for the bar, abandoned his dreams of glory for the sake of her lovely eyes.
Every day for a month, he attended the performances, always seated in the reserved section, showering the charming acrobat with applause and smiles.
When he learned that she was soon to depart for another town, he resolved to ask for her hand.

5 - André Gravelet died in Castres on the 3rd of April, 1837. Blondin was thirteen years old, not eleven.

The proposal gave rise to animated discussions; yet, after a deliberation in which all the Gravelés took part, the suitor was informed that the young lady did not wish to part from her mother.
— “Very well,” he replied, “if you will allow it, I shall remain with you.”
Three weeks later, upon leaving the church where the wedding was held[6], the defrocked clerk assumed the title of chief manager of the troupe.
Miss Gravelé, now Mrs. [name omitted][7], performed such marvels upon the low rope that even Madame Saqui could not behold her without a secret pang of envy.
Having first seen her at the Funambules, when the girl was but six or seven years old, the famous dancer had visited her backstage after the show and said sweetly:
— “Do you know you are very clever, my dear?”
The child blushed.
— “You shall become someone, I guarantee it. But wait a little, you see, accidents come so quickly. At your age especially, one is still so frail. Here,” she added, “buy yourself a cake — on the condition you don’t go up the rope again until you’re a big girl.”
Madame Saqui may have hoped, with this speech, to rid herself of a rival. She failed.
But let us return to the hero of these memoirs.
Toward the end of 1839, the Gravelé family settled in Lyon, in the Sainte-Claire district.
Madame Gravelé, dissatisfied with the latest tours’ results, insisted that Jean abandon the profession he had always known. Jean bowed to his mother’s will.
He set out, like a new Jérôme Paturot, in search of a respectable position.
— “What can you do?” he was asked.
— “Oh! I can leap over bayonets, climb ropes, perform aerial tricks...”
— “You are not suitable. We’re looking for a clerk.”
Meanwhile, the family’s means were dwindling; hardship loomed.
Jean heard that a café-chantant was seeking performers for comic scenes.
He applied and was hired at a wage of two francs per evening.
A meager sum, no doubt, but within a week, it rose to three francs.
Soon, thanks to the boy’s success — for Blondin had a lovely tenor voice — the owner of another venue, Mr. Gillet, offered him five francs a day.
Young Gravelet did not merely sing at Mr. Gillet’s; he also performed some of his acrobatic feats and quickly won the affection of the Lyonnais public.
At that time, a new theater had just been built in La Croix-Rousse.
Jean was engaged there at a salary of 300 francs per month to act in vaudevilles, walk the tightrope, and sing comic songs.
Sometimes he appeared in *Michel et Christine*, *Le Billet de Logement*, *Derlindindin*, or other plays from the old repertoire; then he reappeared, drum in hand, on a rope stretched to the ceiling, and ended the show with a few lively couplets.
The variety of his roles left him little leisure, but he was content with his lot — until the prefectural authorities ordered the theater closed.
The director, blaming this measure on Gravelé’s daring feats, dismissed the acrobat.
He later learned that the ban, in fact, applied to vaudevilles and comedic sketches.
Deprived of his only income, young Jean, after six months of this life, had no choice but to return to his former profession.
And thus the wandering caravan we had seen at Hesdin, Dunkirk, and Turin once more took to the open roads.

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6 - Pauline was married at the age of eighteen, on the 30th of June, 1838, to Jean Levotre who, according to the marriage record, was not a law student, but a house painter by trade. He was born on the 27th of July, 1808, in Charrey, in the arrondissement of Beaune (Côte-d'Or), and was residing in Lyon, at No. 2, rue de Pazzi. He was the legitimate and of-age son of Benigne Levotre, a farmer residing in Charrey aforesaid, and of Catherine Tiperoudot.
7 - Mme Levotre

Chapter V

Return to Lyon — Visit to the Lalanne Family — The Bertaux Hippodrome — An Extraordinary Performance — Olympus — Napoleon Receiving His Son at the Élysée — Death of Napoleon — The Empress Suspended Mid-Air — She Loses Her Crown — She Is Rescued

The Gravelé troupe travelled through all the towns of the Rhône and neighboring departments, recruiting new performers at every stop, constantly devising novel spectacles to attract crowds and gather coins.

In 1848, upon returning to Lyon after an eight-year absence, they found the Lalanne family well established at the Brotteaux, in a large wooden hippodrome they had had built.

Jean Gravelé went to offer his services to the elder Lalanne — known as Navarin — who curtly rejected his proposition:

— "And what do you suppose you could do here?" he scoffed. "Walk the tightrope? Why, everyone here walks the rope — and better than you ever could."

However, Father Lalanne, having failed to reap the profits he had hoped for, gave up his venture and tried his luck in Toulouse, leaving the Brotteaux hippodrome in the hands of Mr. Dufour, owner of the land on which it stood.

Gravelé went immediately to Dufour.

— "Would you rent me your circus?" he asked.

— "My circus? My dear young friend, are you mad?"

— "Why mad?"

— "Do you not realize that if I granted your wish, you'd be bankrupt within three months?"

— "Why should that concern you?"

— "It concerns me very much."

— "Let me try, at least."

— "Very well — but on one condition: I shall take a share of the receipts, every evening after the ticket office closes."

— "Your terms are mine."

— "And when do you plan to begin?"

— "The day after tomorrow."

— "Heavens! You waste no time, my good fellow. Very well — until the day after tomorrow. Good luck!"

The next morning, the walls of Lyon were plastered with posters announcing the Gravelé troupe's debut at the Brotteaux Hippodrome.

Jean had halved the ticket prices.

First-tier seats were one franc, second-tier fifty centimes, and the third-tier — a mere five sous.

On opening night, the house was full to bursting — and public enthusiasm only increased after witnessing the new acrobats in action.

Gravelé and his brother-in-law had introduced into their program several feats sure to cause a sensation.

One such performance was entitled: Olympus. It proceeded as follows:

An actor portraying Jupiter, armed with thunderbolts, stood upon a platform thirty meters high.

Two masts, spaced about one and a half meters apart, extended from the ground to the god's feet; two ropes, strung between them, served as rails for a Roman chariot, carrying Venus, Mars, Apollo, Mercury, and other mythological deities.

Slowly, the ancient vehicle, drawn by an invisible pulley, rose skyward toward Jupiter; and when it reached the summit, a Bengal flame — its blue or rose hues visible from every corner of the city — suddenly burst forth.

This pyrotechnic diversion caused a sensation. But all things weary the eye, and after the crowd had admired Olympus twenty times, something new was required.
Gravelé and his brother-in-law next devised a tableau titled: Napoleon and Josephine Receiving the Duke of Reichstadt at the Élysée.
For this representation, costumes were rented from the Grand Théâtre.
The masts were doubled, the ropes reinforced, and a second chariot was purchased.
One vehicle, bearing the young Duke, was to be hoisted — like in *Olympus* — via pulley; while Jean and his brother were to draw the Emperor and Empress in the other chariot, walking upon ropes, to a meeting point sixty feet in the air on a platform transformed into the Élysée, where a firework display would conclude the act.
The roles were assigned[8].
A stableboy named Cruche, whose resemblance to Napoleon had often amused the troupe, was cast as the Emperor.
Madame Gravelé's maid, a stout girl from Pézenas, was pressed into service as the Empress.
As for the young Duke of Reichstadt, Jean's little niece played the part.
On opening night, the stands of the hippodrome groaned under the weight of the crowd.
The performances of the acrobats, strongmen, and jugglers went unnoticed.
All waited for the great exhibition.
At last the long-anticipated hour struck.
The chariots rolled into the arena, their wheels affixed to the ropes.
Napoleon appeared, pale — like after Waterloo.
— "Give me a good grip," he said to a comrade, "this might be my last."
— "You're not afraid, are you?"
— "Afraid? No… but one never knows what may happen."
The Empress entered next, greeted by unanimous applause.
She was majestic in a trailing gown, her face serene beneath a crown of cut copper.
Then the little Duke was seated in his chariot, and the two Gravelé brothers, clad in pink tights with wings upon their shoulders, came pirouetting into place.
— "Ready?" cried Jean.
— "Ready."
— "Then onward!"
— "Bon voyage!" shouted the cheeky lads in the gallery.
The two Gravelés harnessed themselves to the chariot of Napoleon and Josephine, and, each walking a separate rope, they began their slow ascent.
Behind him, Jean heard the Empress say to the Emperor:
— "Don't tug at my skirt like that — you'll make me fall!"
— "Let me be! I'm dizzy."
— "Close your eyes."
— "I can't!"
Nonetheless, the two funambulists continued upward.
Suddenly, a great cry of terror rose from the crowd.
Napoleon, stricken with syncope, had fallen to the ground — stone dead.
In his fall, he had snapped the shaft of the chariot, which, now unsupported, tipped backward, leaving the Empress dangling by her left arm from one of the ropes.
Despite the violent jolt this catastrophe gave the cables, despite the anguish of the crowd, the Gravelé brothers did not lose their footing and reached the platform in safety.
As for Josephine, she managed to lift her legs back to the rope to which she clung and, now in a less precarious position, awaited rescue.
A strange girl, that servant from Pézenas.
Once she was out of danger, she cried:
— "That idiot Cruche dropped my crown!"

8 - At the time of this scene, Jean-François had been married to Rosalie for one year, and they already had two children. He is careful not to mention it. She likely played a role in the performance — I am inclined to believe it was that of Joséphine.

For all her apparent cynicism, she wept bitterly at her comrade's funeral and insisted on contributing to the benefit Gravelé organized for the poor man's widow.

Chapter VI

An Investigation — Gravelé Leaves France — Arrival in New York — Jean Becomes Blondin — Some Feats — A Tour de Force — Excursion to Niagara Falls — "He is mad!" — Marriage — Jocko, or the Brazilian Monkey — Blondin Parts from the Ravel Troupe

The death of the unfortunate Cruche became the talk of the town; rumors spread that the future Blondin had been imprisoned, but this was not the case. He was merely summoned before the examining magistrate, and an inquiry was ordered into the causes of the tragic incident[9].
After numerous interrogations and various reenactments — during which the circus doors remained shut — Gravelé's innocence was fully established: a sudden fainting spell, unforeseeable and purely accidental, had alone caused the death of Napoléon.
The Brotteaux troupe was thus able to resume its exploits, and when public interest began to wane, they moved their splendid caravan to other regions.
They were about to leave Mâcon[10] when Father Ravel enlisted Jean into his famed company.
We have already seen, in the first chapter of these memoirs, the circumstances under which young Gravelé took the name *Blondin*. Since that day, he has never been called otherwise, and we may now refer to him by his celebrated sobriquet.
The Ravel family — followed by a large cortege of equestrians, clowns, performing animals, and acrobats — landed in New York on the 10th of May, 1851[11].
By early June, their theater was established at Niblo's Garden, and a mere month later, *Blondin* had become the main attraction of their shows.
At this time, Blondin still performed only on the low rope — yet his feats there were nothing short of astonishing.
At first, clad only in breeches, he would cross the rope in rhythmic steps while beating a drum; then, abandoning the drum, he would seize a violin, play a waltz, and perform forward and backward somersaults — all while continuing to draw his bow across the strings.
At times, he would leap six feet into the air, spin over a yew tree bristling with daggers, and land squarely back upon the rope.
Finally, after dancing a wooden-shoed *bourrée* upon that slender path, he would retrieve a chair from the platform, place it in balance at the rope's midpoint, and there, seated at ease, one leg over the other, he would remain for three, four, five — even ten minutes — his balancing pole resting calmly upon his knees.
These displays thrilled the crowds, who knew not yet of the miraculous wonders the artist would one day accomplish.
Blondin, as we have said, was not merely an incomparable funambulist; he also solved every problem of gymnastics with equal mastery.
One day, he attended a rehearsal of a large military play, featuring the entire troupe.
One of the leading roles was assigned to Antoine Ravel, the eldest son of the director[12], who, in the script, is surprised and surrounded by a squad of soldiers, captured, and escapes through agility.
Fifty armed men took their places upon the stage, and as Antoine made his entrance, they suddenly closed in a circle around him.

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9 -I was unaware that a judicial inquiry had taken place — which, upon reflection, is entirely logical.
10 - We at last know the name of the town where Ravel met Blondin. I had wagered on Nîmes — it was Mâcon.
11 - I had them arrive on the 6th of May. Blondin exaggerated the number of companions: only Gabriel Ravel's family and two dancers from the troupe made the journey.
12 - To my understanding, they are all brothers. I have never come across any source suggesting that Gabriel was their father.

Blondin, leaning against one of the wings, observed the maneuver.
A mad idea crossed his mind. Suddenly, he sprang forward and — without the aid of a springboard[13] — leapt over the heads of fifty soldiers and fifty bayonets.
This unbelievable feat of strength was met with thunderous applause, and Father Ravel — who usually treated all improvisations at rehearsal as acts of insubordination — could not help but commend his daring protégé.
After being applauded in New York, the Ravel family traveled to Buffalo, and it was during their stay in that city that Blondin conceived the project of crossing the Niagara Falls.
It is well known that in America, and especially the United States, the Sabbath is strictly observed.
The mail ceases, ships remain docked, trains stop running, and all theaters are closed by higher authority.
Sunday — *the Sunday* — is to English actors what Good Friday is to French ones.
So it was that one Sunday, Ravel proposed an outing to Niagara, which lay but a modest distance from Buffalo[14].
Dancers, equestrians, male and female acrobats all set off cheerfully at sunrise and by noon had stopped before the wondrous panorama of the falls.
While his companions stood in awe before the majestic spectacle unfolding before their eyes, Blondin — ever seeking a new challenge — was already mapping out his stupendous ascent.
— "Antoine," he said to Ravel's son, "what would you say if I crossed the Niagara?"
— "Ah! That's a bit much!" cried Antoine. "Hey, Father! Do you know what Blondin just said?"
— "What?"
— "He's thinking of crossing the Niagara on his rope."
— "You know he's mad."
— "Just you wait and see."
— "But," Antoine asked, "how would you even rig your ropes?"
— "That's my affair. You'll see."
No more was said of the project, and the Ravel troupe moved on to Boston.
It was around this time (1852)[15] that Blondin, wishing to start a family, married the woman who would later be seen riding upon his shoulders at the Crystal Palace[16]
Madame Blondin was unacquainted with the unpredictable, often perilous life of performers, but she soon adapted to their ways.
By 1859, she was appearing on stage with her husband and their first child in *Jocko*, the touching pantomime in which, years earlier, the acrobat Mazurier had displayed his own skill.
Among the notes entrusted to us, we find the program for that curious performance.
The poster, which we reproduce, shows Blondin disguised as a monkey, leaping to the top of a giant tree to escape his enemy — a serpent.
Madame Blondin's charming grace was much remarked upon, and young Édouard also had his share of the applause.
Our hero had now reached the end of his contract.
Despite offers from Father Ravel, he chose not to renew it.
After a splendid farewell banquet, he parted ways with the companions of his past eight years and made his way toward Niagara — where we shall soon see him work wonders.

13 - I very much doubt it!
14 - A fine bit of oversimplification! In truth, it was eight years later that he made his way to Niagara — and by that time, he was no longer with the Ravels, but with the Martinetti troupe.
15 - 1852 : exact.
16 - Et peut-être aussi celle de la première famille de son mari.

Chapter VII

Niagara — A Traveler's Account — The Little Frenchman — "He is mad!" — Jack Hanlon, a Good Negro — The Ropes Are Purchased — Installation Difficulties — The Kite — The Megde-Mist — The Rowboat — Victory!

Before recounting Blondin's adventures upon the Niagara, it seems necessary to offer a few words about these American cataracts — which, assuredly, very few of our readers have seen.The famous torrent that links Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, and marks the boundary between Canada and the State of New York, runs northward for thirty-five kilometers; the difference in level between the two lakes is one hundred and five meters.Roughly ten kilometers from Fort Erie, the river splits into two branches, enclosing Grand Island, which belongs to New York State, and rejoins itself four kilometers downstream.Goat Island — also called Iris Island, due to the frequent rainbows that form there — divides the Niagara Falls into two unequal arms.
One — the American Falls — is 350 meters wide and 51 meters high at its center; the other, forming the Great or Horseshoe Falls, measures 633 meters in width and 48 meters in height.
At its lower end, the island presents a line of rocks that extends perpendicularly to the very base of the falls.It is estimated that 100 million tons, or 40 million cubic feet, of water plunge into the abyss every hour.The thunderous sound of the cataract can be heard at a distance of five — even seven — leagues, if the wind favors it.
The trembling of the ground beneath one's feet, and the thick mist rising above the seething waters, announce its approach.
To reach this marvel of the New World, a narrow path winds through thickets and pine forest, concealing the view until the last moment.
At the end of that arduous trek, one stands before a spectacle whose grandeur defies all description.
"There exist no words," says one traveler, "to convey the irresistible power of these waves, those whirlpools, these clouds of foam, nor the magic brightness and ever-shifting hues; the immensity and swiftness of the furious torrents; the rising mists that vanish into the sky; the roaring tumult, the dreadful rumbling of these watery avalanches.
This immense liquid curtain falls almost horizontally upon a bed of limestone rock. It is an entire river flinging itself into the abyss."
"To grasp the height of the falls," exclaims another traveler — Monsieur Jules Leclercq, in his engaging volume *A Summer in America* — "one must see it from below, must be dwarfed by it.
I made my way to the bottom of the gorge, near the riverbank, and drew as near as I dared to the cataract.
It shattered just a few steps away; above my head, it unfurled like an immense sheet.
It seemed like a colossal deluge descending straight from the heavens, without pause or respite.
The eye could follow the path of that majestic aerial flood, plunging uninterrupted in its vertical rush.
Sometimes the wind would blow a cloud of spray toward me, glistening in the sun, and there would appear the full arc of a rainbow — not merely partial, but perfectly circular."
"I withdrew," our narrator continues, "soaked from head to toe, ears deafened, eyes nearly blinded.
Then I spotted a boatman who agreed to take me aboard his vessel.
Soon I was adrift upon the convulsed waters of the Niagara.
The gorge beneath our keel was more than sixty meters deep.
The river, still shuddering from its vast leap, resembled a storm-lashed lake: foam-capped waves tossed our fragile boat as if it were a feather."
It was two hundred feet above this very torrent — which, according to native legend, claims two victims each year — that Blondin accomplished his dreadful crossing on June 30th, 1859, after overcoming countless difficulties.

When our hero arrived at the village of Niagara and declared the purpose of his journey, people thought the *Little Frenchman*, as he was then called in the United States, had taken leave of his senses.
— "He is mad!" they exclaimed everywhere.
— "He's insane!"
Blondin let them talk and quietly went about preparing the means to realize his dream.
Once he had confirmed that it would be possible to install his masts, cables, and guy ropes, he approached the owners of nearby hotels and asked whether they might finance the costs of the installation.
His request was met with bursts of laughter and the same cry that now followed him everywhere:
— "He is mad! He is mad!"
Yet one man proved less skeptical than the rest.
A Black man named Jack Hanlon, a grocer in Niagara, came to visit the supposed madman — whom he had once known in the Ravel troupe.
— "Listen," he said, "is it true you can cross the cataracts on your rope?"
— "Of course," replied Blondin.
— "Well, people are getting impatient, you know. If you dawdle too long around here, they might beat the life out of you."
— "I tell you, I'm certain I can do it."
— "No lie? You wouldn't fool an honest negro, would you?"
— "Fool Jack? Never!" cried Blondin, with a proud gesture of indignation.
— "Well then, I'll cover all your expenses," replied Hanlon.
— "You?"
— "Yes."
— "So, you've made your fortune in the grocery trade?"
— "Not in the least — but never mind that."
It is not uncommon in America to see humble and modest tradesmen take the lead in ventures requiring substantial investment.
They accept the enterprise first, if it seems promising — the capital comes later.
And so it was that the Black man Jack Hanlon and his protégé Blondin visited a hardware store — Mr. Facet's — and ordered the necessary ropes.
Soon, the celebrated funambulist was able to begin preparations for his feat.
These preparations lasted no fewer than fifteen days.
Each time Blondin overcame one obstacle, a new difficulty arose.
Even today, he considers the rigging of his cable over the Niagara to be one of his greatest accomplishments.
Eleven hundred feet of distance!
He first attempted to stretch the main rope from one bank to the other using a kite; but the winds over the region always followed the direction of the current, and the kite was invariably blown northward.
This experiment, repeated twenty times, failed twenty times.
Undeterred, Blondin then resolved to use a boat.
At that time, a small steamer named the Megde-Mist offered tourists close views of the falls for one dollar.
Blondin rented the boat.
One end of the rope was tied to a tree on the near bank, and they attempted to carry the other end rapidly across to the opposite shore.
But as soon as the cable touched the water, the current's speed tripled, and the steamer was dragged so violently off course that they were forced to cut the rope.

After renewing the attempt in vain, the captain of the *Megde-Mist* refused any further assistance to the unfortunate *Little Frenchman*, believing — as so many others did — that he was mad.
Blondin, however, undaunted, spotted a rowboat, and with a single oarsman at the helm, resumed his endeavor.
What followed was a scene worthy of high drama, played out against the backdrop of that incomparable setting.

The little skiff, battered by the waves, rocked from port to starboard, tossed like a nutshell upon the foaming waters.
Each time they neared the opposite bank, the current would suddenly hurl them back into the middle of the torrent.
Excited by the gaze of six thousand onlookers, who amused themselves at his struggle, Blondin seized the end of his cable, leapt in one bound onto solid ground, and wrapped the rope around the trunk of a pine tree.
So violent was the leap that the rowboat capsized. The oarsman was now adrift amid the foam, but being a skilled swimmer, he made his way safely back to shore.
Thus, the hero of the cataracts had solved the first great problem of his ascent.

Chapter VIII

June 30th — Official Figures — The Bets — Upon the Rope — "Do Not Move!" — Head in a Sack — A Moment's Rest — The King of the Wire — A Gift from the Reporters — Commemorative Medal — Arrival of the Prince of Wales — An Anecdote — In the Presence of His Highness — A Royal Gift

Blondin first crossed Niagara Falls on his wire on Thursday, June 30th, 1859.
An immense crowd — fifty thousand persons[17], according to official figures — gathered aboard steamers moored near the abyss, upon the island itself, and even in the highest branches of the pine trees.
On both shores, small merchants offered the curious public photographs, medals, opera glasses, and refreshing drinks.
Some went so far as to take bets on the life of the principal performer in this astonishing spectacle.
Suddenly, Blondin appeared upon the platform, clad in a flesh-colored leotard.
All heads turned skyward. A deep silence fell over the assembled masses.
Only the majestic roar of the foaming waters could be heard.
The hero bowed, raised his balancing pole, placed his left foot upon the cable, and began his dizzying promenade.
Suddenly he stopped, holding his balance without a single tremor, without even a movement of his pole.
Then, bending his right knee, he sank down, knelt, stretched out, lay flat, and resumed his course.
Farther on, he crouched again, placed the crown of his head upon the rope, raised his legs toward the sky, spread his arms in a cross, and remained motionless in that position for thirty seconds.
At last, he reached his goal: the narrow landing platform at the other side.
But the halt was brief.
Just enough time to hoist a photographic apparatus onto his back, and Blondin set off again.
Upon reaching the center of the cable, he set down his pole, arranged the lens, pulled a black velvet cloth over his head, focused...
— "Don't move!"
Two hundred feet above the roaring torrent, Blondin took the photograph himself.
— "Unfortunately," the intrepid funambulist tells us, "when I later tried to develop the plate, the glass shattered under the heat."
The crowd erupted into cheers and hurrahs; several women fainted — to Blondin's great surprise, for he found his aerial studio quite comfortable.
All this, to him, was mere amusement, child's play, a passing fancy.

17 - A gross exaggeration on Blondin's part: they number no more than twelve thousand.

He packed up his gear and ran it back to the platform.
By now, the public no longer believed him mad, and began preparing to leave.
But the glorious acrobat was not done yet.
Behold him once more upon the wire, this time with his head covered by a sack, repeating every trick he had just performed.
Now, he carried a chair. He balanced it, sat down, rested both feet on the rungs, stood again, took up his seat, and carried it off the rope.
Surely — are these not incredible marvels of skill?
Yet Blondin was not satisfied with himself after this first attempt.
On July 4th, for the celebrations of American Independence, he introduced new elements to his act.
On July 16th, he crossed Niagara pushing a wheelbarrow before him.
On August 5th, he carried a man — Mr. Colcord — on his back.
It is impossible to enumerate all the marks of enthusiasm and admiration that this audacious feat earned him.
He was henceforth known only as the King of the Wire.
His name, enshrined in rhapsodic ballads, was sung in taverns and salons alike.
All the illustrated journals published his portrait, and the reporters, whom his deeds had enriched, offered him a splendid walking cane topped with a solid gold knob, engraved:

TO J. F. BLONDIN
From his friends
Erastus Brooks, New York Express
N. F. Woods, London Times
Augustus Rawling, Frank Leslie's Paper
William Ward, *R. B. Culeman*, and others

At last, the people of Niagara themselves presented him with a large gold medal, bearing this inscription:
"Presented to Mr. J. F. Blondin by the citizens of Niagara, in commemoration of the extraordinary feat by which he carried a man across the falls upon his shoulders."
Merchants in London and New York gave the hero's name to all manner of goods:
Blondin-candies, Blondin-cravats, Blondin-sauces, Blondin-hats, Blondin-ribbons, Blondin-toys!
Ah! When he passed now, he was no longer met with the ironic cry: *"He is mad!"*
He was greeted with deep bows — as an extraordinary man, and also, let it be said, a most profitable phenomenon.
The very hoteliers who had once turned him away so rudely now placed their safes at his disposal, and printed his playbills at their own expense.
All this noise and renown reached the ears of the Prince of Wales.
The heir to the British throne wished to see the King of the Wire.
His Royal Highness, accompanied by several gentlemen — Lord Lyons, the Duke of Newcastle, the Count of Saint-Germain, among others — arrived on September 12th at Niagara Falls, and stayed at Clifton House, where he was warmly welcomed.
Doctor Karwin placed his horses at the prince's disposal, to facilitate his excursions around the picturesque surroundings of the Canadian side of the falls.
A rather comical incident occurred, Blondin tells us, during these royal excursions.
At every site visited by His Highness, he encountered the same odd-looking Englishman.
Puzzled by this man's persistent presence, the prince ordered an investigation, and it was discovered that the fellow, carrying a pair of scissors, was hoping to cut the tail of the thoroughbred horse ridden by the future sovereign.
Failing to obtain a lock of Albert Edward's hair, he would have settled, as a souvenir, for a tuft from the steed's tail.
On Saturday, September 14th, the Prince of Wales attended a performance of the famous acrobat.
The crowd was even larger than on the first day — not only because His Highness was present, but also because some hotel-keepers had falsely announced that Blondin would carry the prince on his shoulders.

We need not say that the gullible spectators lured by this fabrication were disappointed.
Instead of seeing the Little Frenchman bearing a prince, they saw him — as usual — with Mr. Colcord, his agent.
Still, Blondin gave them ample compensation.
He had promised to walk his wire on stilts.
After setting his human burden down upon the platform, he performed this terrifying feat.
The prince applauded loudly and wished the perilous act to be stopped, but the marvelous stilt-walker insisted upon keeping his word — and it was only after he had crossed the cable upon those fragile extensions that he went to speak with his royal spectator.
A few days later, Blondin received a letter, sealed with the arms of England.
Upon the envelope was a cheque, accompanied by the following note:
"Major-General Bruce has been instructed by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to send this cheque to Mr. Blondin, and to inform him that His Royal Highness watched with the deepest interest the display of skill and courage which he gave at Niagara."
Signed: Major-General Bruce
Blondin had not only earned the admiration of the Prince of Wales; he had also won his sympathy — and we shall later see the services this royal favor brought to the hero of these memoirs.

CHAPTER IX

Blondin in Montreal. — A Most Uncomfortable Passenger. — Eighty Kilograms. — The Philadelphia Medal. — The Emblem of the Washington Grays. — Nocturnal Exhibitions. — How the Hero of Niagara Turned Cook. — Omelettes from the Heavens. — A Frog That Would Be an Ox… — Mademoiselle Spelterini.

During the winter of 1859–1860, Blondin, ever in pursuit of new and more perilous feats, journeyed to Canada.
One day, in Montreal, he carried Colcord across upon his shoulders; and having set down his faithful agent, he turned to the crowd and inquired whether there was any gentleman among them willing to undertake the same voyage.
A sailor, staggering forward from the throng — his gaze vacant, his tongue thickened by drink — presented himself with unsteady step.
"He is drunk! Dead drunk!" cried the onlookers from all sides.
"I can see that well enough," replied Blondin. "And what of it?"
"He will drag you down with him!"
"Come now!"
"You're mad!"
"I've heard that said before," responded the acrobat with a smile. Then turning to the sailor:
"Well, are you ready?"
"Y…es," stammered the drunkard.
Blondin hoisted the fellow upon his shoulders.
"One, two… Heavens, what a weight! What do you weigh, my good man?"
"Eigh… eighty… ki…los."
"You must be jesting."
"I tell you… eigh…ty… ki…los."
"Sober weight, I suppose! No matter — onward!"
The acrobat grasped his balance pole and stepped out upon the tight-rope. The sailor, gently rocked, soon fell asleep, resting his heavy head upon Blondin's right shoulder…

Blondin leaned to the left. The man now clung by one arm alone, the other dangling limply in the void.
A second, deeper inclination to the left.
By the time they reached the centre of the cable, the two travellers bore a striking resemblance to the letter Y.
The crowd gasped in horror, expecting to see the daring ropewalker fall to his doom — yet he reached the other side without mishap, albeit utterly exhausted.
The sailor, for his part, was eager to go again, declaring he feared neither the pitch nor the roll… roll…roll…
The whole New York press related the adventure; we invent nothing.
From Montreal, Blondin passed on to other cities where his arrival was greeted with wild enthusiasm.
In Philadelphia, he was presented with a magnificent medal.
At Washington, the soldiers of the First Regiment of Washington Grays conferred upon him their insignia.
Everywhere, the spectators of his aerial exploits expressed their admiration in tangible ways.
During the summer season of 1860, Blondin returned once more to Niagara, where he performed nightly exhibitions.
After achieving the marvels of dexterity which we have endeavoured to recount, he would don the armour of a medieval knight, every piece of which contained a pyrotechnic device.
His balance pole bore a sunburst at either extremity, and within a wheelbarrow which he pushed before him were bombs, Roman candles, and skyrockets piled high.
At the moment when he reached the centre of the wire, this entire artillery ignited in sudden brilliance, and he, shaken by the successive detonations, stood proudly amidst a rain of fire reflected upon the torrent below.
It was during this second stay at Niagara that Blondin conceived the project of preparing an omelette upon the cable.
One evening, conversing in the dining room of the Cataract Hotel with a group of travellers, one of them pointed to a large stove and said:
“There, that is what you ought to carry across the abyss. It would have a greater effect than a man on your back.”
“What!” cried Blondin. “That monstrous contraption? Why not a merchant vessel while you’re at it?”
Yet the traveller’s odd suggestion took root in our hero’s imagination, and he began to study how it might be done.
A few weeks later, large illustrated placards announced that the King of the Tightrope would perform the art of cookery two hundred feet in the air.
On the appointed day, at the appointed hour, he appeared dressed as a chef, with a stove upon his back.
When he had reached some thirty metres above the ground, he halted, set down his equipment, lit his coals, and stoked the fire.
Smoke, in light puffs, issued from the cast-iron pipe and ascended softly.
Soon he was seen breaking eggs, tossing them into a pan, stirring briskly…
A magnificent omelette, golden, rolled and sweetened, fell from the heavens onto the deck of a steamer crowded with two hundred spectators!
A true melee broke out among the passengers. They fought with their fists for a morsel of this celestial confection.
To this day, in both America and England, there are fervent admirers who preserve, beneath glass, fragments of omelettes prepared in 1860 by the Hero of the Cataract.
During his time at Niagara, Blondin saw more than one unfortunate imitator arise around him.
First came a fellow by the name of Delave. This rash amateur, desiring likewise to carry a man upon his back, succeeded only in giving his companion an impromptu bath and then swam away to the opposite shore.
Shortly thereafter, an Irishman attempted the feat alone, and with his very first steps upon the rope, plunged headlong into the abyss.
Finally, a certain Professor Donaldson proclaimed he would perform the aerial promenade upon a wire.

Five thousand curious souls gathered to witness this bold undertaking and gazed skyward for an hour.
At last the professor appeared.
“Hurrah!”
He ventured two timid steps.
“Hurrah!”
But he turned and quickly regained the flat surface of the rooftop from which he had set out.
“Ladies and gentlemen,” he cried, “I am unable to proceed — the wire is not taut enough.”
The cheers of the disappointed crowd gave way to loud and mocking whistles.
Meanwhile, Blondin continued to amaze the throngs drawn to Niagara by his genius.
And yet, one day, he accepted a challenge from one of those frogs so eager to rival the ox.
This particular frog was named Blunt — known also as Farini.
Some four thousand persons attended the contest.
At precisely four o’clock, Blondin departed from the American side and traversed the cable, performing the usual feats which had made him famous.
He returned with Colcord, once more, upon his back.
At five o’clock, Farini undertook the same exploit.
A Canadian named MacMullen seated himself upon his shoulders.
They set out — but after only a few paces, Farini caused the Canadian to descend, clinging to him as he moved a bit farther along, then mounting once more, and again dismounting.
This tiresome pantomime was repeated for three interminable quarters of an hour, at the end of which Blunt-Farini and MacMullen finally set foot on solid ground.
More recently, in 1876, a woman — Mademoiselle Spelterini — renewed the attempt upon a velocipede.
Her enterprise met with complete success.
It must be noted that the wheels of her device were fitted with weights of forty kilograms, which rendered any fall all but impossible[18].

CHAPTER X

The Appearance of Henry Coleman. — An Engagement at the Crystal Palace. — One Hundred Pounds a Day. — Miss Adèle Blondin. — The Horse-Guards. — A History of Wigs. — A Catastrophe.

Having taken his leave of Niagara, Blondin proceeded to New York, where he gave a few performances.
One day, as he strolled through Niblo’s Garden, he encountered one of the sons of his former director, Gabriel Ravel.
The two old friends spoke at length of bygone days, of triumphs achieved, and of dreams yet to come.
“Ah!” said Blondin at last, “if only I had an interpreter, I would tour the world. You cannot imagine how difficult it is to conclude business when one cannot make oneself fully understood.”
“Why not take on a cicerone?” replied Ravel.
“I would, were I to find one that suited me.”
“Shall I introduce you to Henry Coleman?”
“Henry Coleman?... Never heard of him.”
“He’s a very clever fellow and a fine manager.”
“Very well — let us see this Henry Coleman.”

18 - I have found no mention of this detail anywhere, yet it remains within the bounds of possibility. It would be but fair to acknowledge that she, too, crossed the Niagara!

The next day, Ravel brought the interpreter to Blondin.
Sir Coleman was then a man of some three-and-thirty years, with an intelligent countenance and refined bearing.
He spoke fluently, and the thoughts he conveyed were in perfect accord with those of the Hero of the Cataracts.
Eight days after this encounter, Henry Coleman, vested with full powers from Blondin, set sail for London to negotiate an engagement at the Crystal Palace.
An hour after his arrival in the British capital, he was already in contact with Mr. George Grave, secretary, and Mr. Rowley, stage manager of that splendid exhibition hall. That very evening he dispatched the following telegram to the King of the Wire:

Blondin — New York

Provisional engagement concluded: twelve hundred pounds sterling (20,000 francs) for twelve performances. Come. Eagerly awaited.
Clearly, Henry Coleman was inaugurating his new duties in the most auspicious fashion.
Blondin arrived in London toward the close of April; on the 1st of June, he made his début at the Crystal Palace.
An alluring programme was plastered upon every wall, every omnibus, and upon those mobile panels borne through the streets by hired men.
The celebrated acrobat was to reprise his feats of Niagara before the London public, this time at a height of 170 feet.
The band of the Coldstream Guards lent their musical accompaniment to this great attraction.
Long beforehand, all seats — their prices having been doubled — were booked at the box offices.
Some ardent enthusiasts paid up to ten pounds for admission. At the opening of the gates, there was such a crush that the constables struggled mightily to prevent injury.
Throughout the twelve performances, Blondin was the object of the same fervent excitement.
In light of this success, Mr. John Russell offered the King of the Cable a two-year engagement at the princely rate of one hundred pounds per day, or:
One Million Eight Hundred Thousand Francs.
Needless to say, Blondin accepted this splendid proposal, and spared no effort to earn the honours showered upon him.
Throughout these Memoirs, we have beheld our hero in many an astonishing feat:
Standing, seated, lying on his wire; with his head enclosed in a sack, his body beneath a rain of fire; carrying a man across his shoulders; preparing an omelette; taking a photograph.
Yet all of that seems to us but little, compared with what he attempted at the Crystal Palace.
At this time, Blondin had a charming little daughter, five years of age: Mademoiselle Adèle.
He lifted her up beside him upon the platform, settled her into a dainty wheelbarrow, and bore her thus across the abyss, upon his rope!
Is that not a hundredfold more dreadful than all that has come before?
And does it not demonstrate, more than any other example, the unshakable confidence of this marvellous funambulist upon what he calls his aerial parquet?
Later, in Madrid, he would carry his wife upon his back — a feat that nearly cost him his life.
But we are not yet to follow the reader into Spain.
We must recount a few more events relating to Blondin’s sojourn in London.
To whet the curiosity of the English even further, the directors of the Crystal Palace announced that the famous acrobat was at the disposal of any person who wished to cross the great nave of the exhibition hall upon his shoulders.
All the Horse Guards — none of them less than six feet tall — presented themselves and were welcomed.
These exhibitions gave rise to many a comical episode.
Wishing not to be recognised, these elite soldiers donned wigs or false beards.
But midway across their journey, Blondin would begin to sway so vigorously that wig and beard would fly from their heads and tumble down among the spectators — who erupted in laughter and cries of "Hurrah!"

On the 31st of October, 1861, the astonishing artist gave his farewell performance to the patrons of the

Crystal Palace.

He resolved to reprise that nocturnal display he had once given at Niagara.
At ten o'clock, he appeared clad in his medieval cuirass.
His servant, upon the platform, prepared the wheelbarrow of fireworks and placed it upon the wire — but, due to a clumsy manoeuvre, he stumbled against the acrobat, and Blondin fell backward!
A dreadful cry burst from every chest.
All expected to see the unfortunate ropewalker plummet to earth, broken.
But Blondin did not fall thus. He had bent his left leg and now swung, suspended, upon his cable.
The next day, the Hero of Niagara received a voluminous correspondence.
His many admirers congratulated him upon having escaped death so miraculously.
A sumptuous banquet was offered to him by the directors of the Crystal Palace.

CHAPTER XI

The Great Medal of the Exhibition. — Coxwell the Aeronaut. — A Mad Idea. — The Aerial Promenade of the Lion Tom Sayers. — Rivalry with the Bulls. — Tokens of Affection. — A Present from the Queen.

Among the many decorations which adorn Blondin's breast, there is one of which the Hero of Niagara is particularly proud:
The great gold medal of the London Universal Exhibition.
Only two such medals were struck; the first belongs to Queen Victoria, the second was presented to the celebrated acrobat on the day he embarked, with Mr. John Russell and Henry Coleman, upon his tour through the principal cities of England, Scotland, and Ireland.
In nearly all these places, the King of the Cable — in order to preserve the universal renown he already enjoyed — introduced new and ever more daring feats into the programme.
At Birmingham, a few sceptics had expressed the opinion that Blondin was deceiving the public, that his shoes were weighted with lead.
The funambulist invited all such doubters to come see him work upon the rope.
None presented themselves — but the aeronaut Mr. Coxwell was requested to make observations from above, in a balloon.
That day, Blondin lay prone upon his wire and, thus positioned, performed his most vertiginous feats beneath the keen gaze of Mr. Coxwell.
A month later, strolling through the zoological gardens of Liverpool with his agent, Blondin paused before a young lion whose lively play had long attracted the public's attention.
The animal was about eighteen months old and bore the name of Tom Sayers — after the famed pugilist.
"Mr. Blondin!" cried Henry Coleman suddenly.
"What is it?"
"I have an idea!"
"A good one?"
"Lunatic… Alas, impossible to realise."
"Let me hear it nonetheless."
"Well, I was thinking what a sensation you would make if you crossed the rope with this little lion in your wheelbarrow."
"And why should that not be seen?" replied the marvellous acrobat. "Come with me, Coleman."

Blondin and his agent went directly to the director of the zoo.
“Sir, we wish to request a favour.”
“Speak, gentlemen.”
“We should be greatly obliged if you would consent to lend us, for a few hours — though truly we scarce dare express the request…”
“Go on, gentlemen, I pray you.”
“If you would allow,” added Henry Coleman, “Mr. Blondin to borrow your young lion, Tom Sayers.”
“Tom Sayers!” exclaimed the director. “And what do you intend to do with him?”
“To take him for a promenade upon the rope, in a wheelbarrow.”
“That is madness, sir — pure folly!”
“Not at all.”
“In any case, I cannot grant your request. You must take your petition to higher authorities.”
The two supplicants followed this advice — and to their benefit.
Tom Sayers was permitted to leave his mother’s side, and on the morrow, the little lion, comfortably seated in a wheelbarrow, was seen majestically traversing the rope.
From Liverpool, Blondin travelled to Sheffield, Glasgow, Dublin — and thence to Spain.
His triumphs were no less brilliant in the South than in the North; the people scarcely knew how to express their admiration.
As he went out only in a four-horse carriage, soldiers presented arms as he passed, and military bands came to play beneath his windows.
In Barcelona, he was engaged by the director of the Liceu Theatre — one of the grandest in the world — to perform not within the theatre, but outside, in the Plaza de Toros.
Whilst the opera *The Prophet* was sung beneath glittering chandeliers, Blondin would execute his feats beneath lantern light and fireworks.
It so happened that, while the singers performed Meyerbeer’s opera before a few benches, the usual public of the theatre flocked en masse to the bullring.
When the same occurred on successive nights, Blondin was invited by his impresario to install his ropes inside the theatre itself — and the crowd, having deserted the opera, came to applaud the famous funambulist.
In Madrid, he was no less fêted. In Catalonia, he nearly ruined the singers; in Castile, he rivalled the bulls.
His début took place before all the highest personages of the Madrid aristocracy. Queen Isabella, the young Prince Alfonso — who governs Spain today — and the infantas occupied a place of honour.
The King of the Cable was determined to justify his title. He appeared as a cook, a knight, a stilt-walker — not above the waters of Niagara this time, but above a sea of fluttering fans like wings.
And from his observatory, Blondin saw thousands of dark eyes fixed upon him.
His marvellous skill had kindled more than one tender flame.
The following morning, he received a mountain of letters at his hotel.
Several noble ladies offered him their hand, declaring they would be proud to wed a man so highly placed.
We shall later see how he dashed the hopes of these fair admirers.
The Queen herself wished to express her satisfaction. On the eve of his departure, the Hero of the Cataracts was summoned to Her Majesty’s palace.
There he was received by the young Prince Alfonso[19], then five years old, who presented him, in his own name and that of his mother, with a set of coral and diamond buttons.
Blondin, having taken leave of Spain, proceeded to Lisbon, then to Italy — and the memories he brought back from Rome are all the more interesting in that they feature Cardinal Antonelli, Pope Pius IX, and the Prince of Wales.

19 - I was not aware of this invitation.

CHAPTER XII

Arrival in Rome. — Wherein It Is Shown That the Cicerone Coleman Is No Cicerone. — Visit to Monsignor de Mérode. — By Order of Cardinal Antonelli. — Intervention of the Prince of Wales. — Pius IX at the Campo Pretorio.

The King of the Cable returned to Italy at the beginning of the year 1863.
This time he did not proceed to Turin, where we saw him perform his first ascent, but to Rome.
Having been cheered by Americans, Englishmen, and Spaniards, he now aspired to win the applause of Pope Pius IX himself.
No sooner had Blondin taken up residence than he began, with Henry Coleman[20], to search for a suitable site for his acrobatic displays.
He finally fixed upon the spacious courtyard of an ancient convent, now owned by Monsignor de Mérode.
All that remained was to secure authorisation to occupy the grounds.
This was the business of Coleman, engaged by Blondin chiefly as an interpreter.
Henry Coleman replied, in the manner of Donizetti's *Maître de chapelle*:
"I do not speak Italian[21]…"
Already, in Madrid, the Hero of Niagara had discovered that his agent knew no Spanish either.
"What languages do you speak, then?" he asked.
"I, sir? English[22], of course!"
Despite the shortcomings of his collaborator, Blondin would not part with him.
"We shall go together to see the Monsignor," he said. "We shall make ourselves understood."
And so well did they succeed that Monsignor de Mérode granted them the very authorisation they sought.
The next day, the baggage of the celebrated ropewalker was transported to the convent courtyard, and a dozen labourers set to work at once.
After three days of toil, Blondin received from Cardinal Antonelli an order to quit Rome within twenty-four hours.
It was, said the Prime Minister, unseemly that a saltimbanco should come to leap and cavort in the City of the Popes.
To depart — within twenty-four hours!
His Eminence spoke easily of it, no doubt unaware that Blondin travelled with forty tonnes of equipment, and that the removal of such an apparatus was no light matter.
Our hero went to recount the incident to his patron.
Monsignor de Mérode intervened, but to no avail: the cardinal's decision was final[23].
"Well then!" cried Blondin. "I shall not yield. I have resolved to win the applause of Rome — and Rome shall applaud me, or I shall forfeit my name. Good heavens! Having passed above the Niagara, surely I can overcome the will of a cardinal!"
"Let us find a means," murmured Coleman.
"No need," replied Blondin. "I have found one already."

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20 - Blondin displays a most surprising lapse of memory — or, more likely, Funambulus takes very great (indeed, excessive) liberties with the narrative. At that time, Blondin was in Italy with Stefano Parravicini, and no longer with Henry Coleman. The latter had parted ways with him upon their return from Spain, as Blondin himself declared before the bankruptcy court on the 3rd of January, 1865. This observation is serious, for it compels us to question the reliability of all that Funambulus relates.
21 - The anecdote is quite obviously a fabrication by Funambulus — in Rome, everyone speaks French!
22 - He must, however, have spoken French — otherwise, Blondin would never have hired him.
23 - I knew that Cardinal Antonelli was opposed to Blondin's exhibitions, but I was unaware that he had gone so far as to forbid them altogether.

And the King of the Cable addressed a petition to the future King of England[24] — who, as we have seen, had shown him much sympathy in America.
The prince's reply, addressed directly to Pius IX, informed His Holiness of Blondin's presence in Rome.
"Why would you expel this man?" asked the Pope of Cardinal Antonelli.
"A saltimbanco, Holy Father."
"Nonsense! On the contrary, he is said to be a most marvellous performer. The Prince of Wales spoke highly of him. Let him proceed. One ought not to deprive the people of their amusements."
The cardinal was obliged to bow before the Pope's wish, and Blondin resumed preparations for his performance, to the great delight of Monsignor de Mérode.
"Each morning," Blondin would later say, "Monsignor came to see me oversee the installation of the cables. He asked a multitude of questions. One day, he attempted to walk a cord lying upon the ground — but could not manage three steps, no doubt because he had neglected to take a balance pole."
The population received the famous acrobat so warmly that he performed in Rome for several weeks — either in the palace of Monsignor de Mérode or at the Campo Pretorio, a vast field enclosed by walls and bordered by a few dwellings.
In the month of July, as he was giving his final performance there, Blondin noticed that all eyes turned away to fix upon the façade of a nearby house. A murmur rose:
— "The Holy Father! The Holy Father!"
Pius IX, desiring to see the strange artist so warmly praised by the Prince of Wales, had positioned himself behind a window[25].
The next day, he said to Cardinal Antonelli:
"Had you forbidden this brave funambulist to remain in Rome, you would have deprived me of a most thrilling diversion."

CHAPTER XIII

Departure from Rome. — Blondin in Saint Petersburg. — A Ball at Princess Orloff's. — The King of the Cable and the Emperor of Russia. — The Effect of Snow. — Blondin, the Liberator of the Poles. It was not solely to acquire greater fame or fortune that Blondin transported his cable to the four corners of the globe

Many a time, he might have remained for months in a city without seeing any decline in his receipts, had not an imperious need for motion suddenly borne him off four or five hundred leagues away.
The Italians most assuredly did not wish his departure when he quitted Rome; but he had gazed long enough upon azure skies.
He now longed for the northern chill, grey clouds, and snowy landscapes — and set off for Saint Petersburg.
It is well known how warmly Russian society receives foreign artists.
Blondin, on the banks of the Neva, was greeted no less warmly than in any of the capitals we have followed him through.
The Tsar, informed of his arrival, desired to attend the prodigious spectacle, and granted permission for Blondin to erect his rigging in the square of the First Corps of Cadets — one of the grandest and most aristocratic in the city.
Justly proud of this favour, our hero gave special care to the arrangement of his theatre.
He imagined a new décor: flags and garlands of foliage tastefully disposed.

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24 - I had come across a mention of this intervention, but it struck me as improbable; for that reason, I did not retain it. It is, however, likely to be true.
25 - I was unaware of this appearance. The same remark applies.

The work lasted ten days. At last, the programme for the opening performance was posted upon every wall and printed in every newspaper.
On the eve of the appointed day, Blondin was invited to a grand ball held in honour of the sovereign by Princess Orloff.
As he entered the sumptuous galleries of the palace, the King of the Cable felt more tremulous than when he stood two hundred feet above the Niagara's foaming torrents.
Nonetheless, he regained composure, and before the procession of officers in brilliant uniforms and women resplendent with grace and beauty, his mind turned back to Petit-Jean, old Gravelé, Mademoiselle de la Poltronnerie, and the tenants of that rolling house in which he had spent the joyous years of his childhood.
Suddenly, Princess Orloff, leaning on the arm of the Emperor[26], passed near him and paused.
"Sire," she said, "permit me to present to Your Majesty Monsieur Blondin, the hero of Niagara Falls."
"Ah! It is you, sir? I am most pleased to meet you — the more so as I shall be unable to attend your performances; I am expected tomorrow in Moscow. But I hope that the welcome of Saint Petersburg may induce you to return to Russia."
Blondin, deeply moved, bowed.
Emperor Alexander withdrew with the princess.
The following morning, the sky had taken on that slate hue which heralds snow.
At the hour appointed, Blondin made his way to the square of the First Corps of Cadets to oversee the final preparations for the performance.
Nevertheless, the crowd of spectators was vast.
It was known that the Tsar had spoken warmly of Blondin, and this mark of favour had aroused even greater public curiosity.
All the stands, galleries, and balconies were filled when the bold funambulist appeared upon his tautened rope, clad in his flesh-coloured maillot.
He advanced, balance pole in hand — and soon faced a difficulty such as he had never before encountered.
Suddenly, snow began to fall [27]with great force.
The ground was soon covered; the white deluge became so thick that all one could perceive upon the cable was a moving shadow.
Blondin, heedless of the storm, indifferent to the cold that stiffened his bare arms and the frost that clung to the wire, continued his perilous promenade.
The performance was in aid of disabled veterans, and Blondin was determined that those who had contributed to this charitable cause should not be deprived of a single feat.
This new eccentricity of the Hero of the Cataracts only increased his popularity in Russia.
And in the spring of 1864[28], he went on to gather the acclamations awaiting him in Poland.
He related to us an anecdote from his time in Warsaw, which well illustrates the prestige he had gained.
At that time, Warsaw was under martial law. No Pole was permitted to leave the city.
Blondin petitioned for permission to appear at the racecourse.
But this required a large audience — and none could pass the city gates.
The Governor Mouravieff granted a temporary lifting of the restriction — on one condition:
That every inhabitant be provided with a passport.
That passport bore a single word: Blondin.
It was an admission ticket to our hero's performance.

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26 - None of this holds water: we know from a dispatch by the *Standard*'s correspondent in Saint Petersburg that the Tsar returned on Wednesday, August 31st, from a journey to Moscow, and departed again on the morning of Saturday, September 3rd, for his residence in Darmstadt. Blondin gave his first performance in Saint Petersburg on Sunday, August 28th, and, due to persistent rain, was only able to perform once more the following week before departing for Moscow around the 8th of September.
27 - - De la neige début septembre, c'est plutôt étonnant : Blondin confond Saint-Pétersbourg et Moscou où il s'est rendu ensuite.
28 - That is correct, but he subsequently proceeded to Saint Petersburg at the end of August 1864.

CHAPTER XIV

Departure from Saint Petersburg. — Sojourn in Hanover. — In Belgium. — Blondin on the Plateau de Gravelle. — A Feuilleton by Théophile Gautier.

Having been the idol of the public in every city he had traversed, Blondin might reasonably hope to receive, in Paris — that most curious of all capitals — a welcome worthy of his renown.
Upon leaving Saint Petersburg, he travelled to Hanover, where the blind King George V, moved by the tale of his prodigious feats, presented him with a superb sapphire mounted as a pin.
He then gathered, in Brussels, an audience of two hundred thousand spectators around his aerial theatre.
In Paris, it was only with great difficulty that he obtained authorisation to erect his ropes at Vincennes, upon the Plateau de Gravelle.
Théophile Gautier, the illustrious critic, attended his début. On the morrow, in *Le Moniteur Universel*, he devoted six full columns of his feuilleton to the celebrated acrobat.
We cannot resist the desire to reproduce these pages; our readers, assuredly, will raise no complaint:
"At the far end of the parade ground of Vincennes, upon the Plateau de Gravelle, beyond the steeplechase grandstand, Blondin had stretched, at a height nearly equal to that of the Vendôme Column, a rope one hundred metres in length. Two great square masts upheld it at either end. This rope was held taut every five metres by cords, tracing the skeleton of a vast tent, yet without a covering.
"At the appointed hour, a sort of mannequin was seen rising into the air, hoisted by a pulley along the western mast. The mannequin alighted upon a narrow platform at the level of the rope, and, grasping an enormous balancing pole in both hands, advanced in measured steps.
"The mannequin was the acrobat. He had donned a costume in the style of a Crusading knight — troubadour fashion, still accepted in America. His legs, imprisoned in a mesh of shining mail, glittered in the last fires of the sun, while his helmet, surmounted by a tricolour plume, cast back the rays that struck it.
"A great burst of laughter greeted the first steps of this aerial Mangin, who lacked only a Vert-de-Gris playing a barrel-organ behind his back. But soon, astonishment, admiration, even stupefaction, replaced this initial and quite legitimate amusement among the spectators.
"To see this knight pacing his airy path slowly and majestically, one might have imagined a hero from Ariosto striding through the clouds in pursuit of some Angelica — a Roger without a Hippogriff, sustained in his impossible course by the invisible hand of some beneficent genie. To the transported imagination, all coarse means of ascent disappeared. No more poles, no rope, no balancing pole — the hero alone remained, impassibly performing his superhuman task.
"Having reached the end of the cable, Blondin paused. Casting a swift glance at the throng below, and then gazing to the horizon, he beheld one of the most magnificent spectacles that nature affords.
The Marne unrolled its silvery ribbon at his feet, fringed with green reeds and water plants; the fortresses guarding Paris — and Paris itself, limitless and bluish, with its tumult of roofs, towers, and steeples — lay spread beneath him like a vast topographical map.
From the height of his rope, he dominated all. The empire of the air was his, and he beheld a spectacle reserved only to eagles and aeronauts.
It was less wildly grandiose than Niagara plunging into its abyss — but no less beautiful.
"Soon, the acrobat resumed his progress upon the cable — this time at a brisk pace.
Having returned to his starting point, he changed costume beneath a tent swiftly erected upon the chimney platform, and reappeared in the true garb of his profession: a flesh-coloured maillot adorned with medals upon the chest, and short dark-coloured tights.
"The hero had given place to the funambulist gymnast — no less marvellous, no less admirable.
Upon reaching the centre of the wire, Blondin lay down upon it, abandoning his pole. Remaining

motionless, he supported himself with both hands upon the transverse bar, placed his head upon the cable, lifted his legs into the air, and remained for some moments quite still. Then he began to writhe like an aerial telegraph transmitting its mysterious signs.
“At the end of the rope, Blondin had his eyes bandaged and a sack thrown over his head and shoulders, pierced at the arms to leave them free.
When the blinded acrobat, holding his balancing pole, stumbled forward along that narrow path — as perilous as the dread Bridge of Alsirat which true believers must cross to reach the paradise of Mahomet — a murmur of terror, even horror, arose from the chests of the throng watching him.
They had come seeking sensations — but found them too intense.
Many turned away, fearing to witness the fall of the intrepid ropewalker.
Even the street urchin of Henri Monnier, who once said: ‘I have never seen anyone fall from the fifth floor,’ would have shut his eyes before Blondin’s audacity.
“Yet he, having reached the middle of the wire, thus hooded, repeated the very feats he had accomplished with open eyes: lying down, crouching, pirouetting on his head, and falling astride the rope.
“When Blondin, returned to his platform, removed sack and blindfold, he was greeted with thunderous applause.
To the silence born of stifled emotion — bordering on anguish — there now succeeded a loud and jubilant ovation that must have reached, like a murmur, the triumphant acrobat lost in the blue sky.
“Then the gymnast took up a chair, fastened it to his shoulders, advanced to the middle of the cable, and sat down upon it, holding it in balance.
Then, placing it diagonally so that only one front leg and one rear leg touched the rope, he climbed its rungs and stood atop its back, inclined, arms outstretched, heel lifted — like a Victory bereft of wings, yet still poised in flight.
“The Genius of the July Column offers a fair image of this posture, which seems impossible for a wingless being.
Blondin vindicates Nadar’s axiom: ‘To fly, one must be heavier than air.’
“Having returned to the platform, he performed his final feat: carrying upon his back the companion with whom he had thus crossed Niagara, undaunted by the furious waters and the howling of the outraged abyss.
“At that moment, it was hard to know which was more admirable — the acrobat traversing his aerial thread with so heavy a burden, or the man so full of trust as to entrust his life to the skill of a funambulist.
Even for the promise of eternal deliverance from writing feuilletons, and a rich sinecure to boot, we would not accept the offer of such a perilous promenade through empty space.
“What sets Blondin’s talent apart is his perfect ease; his movements are so natural, so supple, so assured, that his devilish feats appear effortless — and one feels tempted to be hoisted upon the rope to try them oneself.
Yet this would be most unwise.
The profession of funambulist is not one in which the illusions of self-love may be indulged.
One must pay in full, with one’s person.
The trick is done — or it is not.
And the smallest fault is punished by death.
“One may err upon the stage — but not upon the wire.
There are ten ways to deliver a soliloquy — but only one way to cross a rope stretched thirty metres high.
Truly, the acrobat is not sufficiently esteemed.
He is a serious artist: he fulfils what he promises — or he dies.
His feats are beyond dispute, and he deserves the applause for which he risks his life.
Let us, then, accord to Blondin, the Hero of Niagara, the honours of the feuilleton.”
Despite the eloquence of the master, the crowds did not flock to the woods of Vincennes.
The space allotted to the King of the Cable was so open that one might, without paying a sou, witness his vertiginous acrobatics.
Now, Blondin already possessed a modest fortune, yet he could not resign himself to gain nothing from his dreadful toil.

His situation became difficult — but he was determined to win applause in Paris, and sought some diabolical means of awakening public attention.
Blondin was, in Paris, under the patronage of Baron Taylor.
When he resolved to abandon the Plateau de Gravelle, he went to his benefactor and said:
— "Come what may — even death — I must be applauded in Paris."
— "Well?"
— "Well, I have the honour of requesting that you obtain permission for me to walk my rope from the Arc de Triomphe to the Palais des Tuileries."
— "Three kilometres! You are out of your mind."
— "Request it nonetheless."
— "I shall try."
Baron Taylor made his way to the Tuileries.
The Emperor was then at Vichy.
M. de Bassano, Grand Chamberlain, transmitted the petition to Napoleon III, and the head of state returned a favourable reply by telegraph.
However, when Blondin approached M. Haussmann to request financial participation in erecting the masts to support the cables, the Prefect of the Seine objected that such an enterprise might have grave consequences — damage to monuments, perhaps.
He refused his assistance, and Blondin, who had intended to offer this astonishing performance freely, was forced to abandon the project.
But he did not abandon it forever.
And he still hopes that, during the Exhibition of 1878, he may yet carry it out.

CHAPTER XV

In the Park at Asnières. — A New Blondin. — A Theatrical Pseudonym. — Gravelet and Corelly. — The Hero of Niagara vs. Arnault & Co. — Pleadings. — Judgments.
Lacking a grander stage, Blondin took up residence in the park at Asnières, and there astonished the Parisians in holiday retreat.

It was certainly not the triumph he might have secured had he been authorised to undertake his solitary promenade through the Champs-Élysées, but he contented himself with his lot — until he saw arise… another Blondin.
The directors of the Hippodrome, Mr. Arnault and associates, having engaged a certain Corelly at the time of the 1867 Exhibition, had bestowed upon him the name *Blondin*, seemingly unaware that the true Hero of Niagara might lay claim to the pseudonym he had rendered illustrious through sheer courage.
Yet so it came to pass. On the 15th of June, 1867, the Civil Tribunal of the Seine, at the suit of Jean-François Gravelet, known as Blondin, condemned Messrs. Arnault & Co. to remove from their posters, announcements, advertisements, and other promotional materials the name upon which they had, no doubt, built many a castle in Spain.
On the 17th of July, Mr. Arnault petitioned the Consular Court and obtained a partial reversal of the original judgment.
Here is how *La Gazette des Tribunaux*, dated 21st August, reported the case:
"Blondin-Gravelet brought suit before the Commercial Tribunal against Arnault, who had engaged the acrobat Corelly to perform in his arena and, in order to attract a larger public, had caused him to assume the name of *Blondin*.

“Gravelet requested that Arnault be compelled to strike the name from all posters and be condemned to pay 5,000 francs in damages.
“By a separate action, Gravelet brought suit against Corelly himself, to prohibit him from appearing publicly under the name Blondin, and to claim 10,600 francs in compensation.
“After hearing Maître Schayé for Gravelet-Blondin, Maître Marraud for Arnault, and Maître Buisson for Corelly, the court rendered the following decision:
“The court receives Arnault & Co. in their opposition to the default judgment rendered on June 15th. Given the connection of the two cases, joins the causes and pronounces a single judgment.
“As to the suit of Gravelet against Arnault:
“Considering that Gravelet has for many years borne the pseudonym *Blondin*, under which he is generally known, and that he has, as an acrobat, made this name famous in many countries;
“Considering that, in a spirit of competition, Arnault, director of the Hippodrome, had announced, for June 15th, a spectacle featuring an acrobat whom he designated as *Blondin*;
“Considering that Arnault, in announcing that the performer presented was the real Blondin, could not have been ignorant that he was misleading the public he sought to attract — and that the tribunal, in its prior judgment, rightly ordered him to remove from all advertisements, posters, and promotional materials the name *Blondin*;
“And that damages are indeed due, which the tribunal, with the means at its disposal, fixes at 300 francs;
“Therefore, the court, ruling in first instance, declares itself incompetent regarding the action of Gravelet against Corelly, refers the matter and parties to the competent court, and condemns Gravelet to the costs of that action;
“Rejects Arnault & Co.'s objection to the June 15th ruling;
“Orders that the provisions of said ruling stand, to wit:
The suppression of the name *Blondin* from all public material, under penalty of authorising Gravelet to remove the same with police assistance;
Damages reduced to 500 francs;
Costs awarded to Gravelet.”
But the matter was not yet finished. It returned, on 30 December 1868, before the Imperial Court, which upheld the original judgment.
This time, the Hippodrome director was represented at the bar by Maître Lachaud.
The distinguished advocate argued that the name *Blondin* was so widely used as a pseudonym that it was impossible to determine which man had crossed Niagara.
Messrs. Arnault & Co., he contended, had received many applications from acrobats styling themselves thus, and had acted in perfect good faith — no harm had been done, since only a single, unsuccessful performance had taken place.
Maître Papillon, for the true Blondin, recalled that his client had executed, under the very name in dispute, those feats which had brought it fame — that he had been granted in America official diplomas and certificates establishing his identity under the pseudonym, and that the name *Blondin* was now his, by right and usage, within the acrobatic profession.
Moreover, he reminded the court that as early as 1864, Mr. Arnault had been warned by Mr. Gravelet against the misappropriation now challenged in court.
Finally, Maître Papillon noted that the two men had met face to face at one of the fêtes celebrating the opening of the Universal Exhibition of 1867, and that Mr. Gravelet had introduced himself personally to Mr. Arnault.
In such circumstances, the Hippodrome director could not plead ignorance.
The court, having deliberated, ruled thus:
“The Court,
Adopting the reasons of the lower judges,
Sets aside the appeal,
Orders the judgment under appeal to be fully enforced,
And condemns the appellants to fine and costs.”
Thus, our hero received complete satisfaction.
He had sworn to forfeit his fortune before surrendering the glorious sobriquet.
The Imperial Court upheld his claim — and did so without diminishing his purse.

Yet his natural generosity, his kind and trusting heart, would soon rob him of the dollars, the pounds, the louis d'or, the thalers and the reals he had so diligently amassed.

CHAPTER XVI

Blondin Parts with His Whimsical Cicerone. — Let Them But Take a Foot in the Door… — Coleman's Flight. — The King of the Cable Is Ruined. — A New Interpreter. — Return to Spain. — Again the Admirers of the Hero of the Cataracts. — Madame Blondin on the Rope. — A Frightful Accident. — The Cross of Isabella the Catholic.

In France, as in every other land he had visited with Henry Coleman, Blondin came at last to recognise the inadequacy of his cicerone.
Everywhere, the funambulist's scant knowledge of foreign tongues had sufficed to express the thoughts of both men.
But with the legal proceedings in the affair of Gravelet vs. Arnault & Corelly — the visits to the magistrates, the consultations with solicitors and barristers, the endless journeys to the Palais de Justice — Blondin had to see to everything himself, while his interpreter and agent read the *Times* or *New York Herald* in some café.
This situation grew more and more untenable, especially since the Hero of Niagara still planned to tour Spain, India, Australia, New Zealand, and Brazil.
In September 1867, upon arriving in London to rejoin his family after the Asnières performances, Blondin informed Coleman[29] that he must relinquish his services.
It was a terrible blow for the poor dragoman — yet he bore it with fortitude.
"I shall not attempt to change your mind," he said. "You need a polyglot, and I speak only English. But since I have had the honour of serving you, I believe I have been of some use. Will you do me the kindness of lending me ten thousand pounds? With that sum, I mean to enter the wine trade and establish an honourable position."
Blondin did not hesitate for a moment.
Coleman still held the acrobat's funds.
"Take ten thousand pounds," he told him, "and may they be the seed of a great fortune for you."
Touched by such generosity, the whimsical interpreter flung his arms about Blondin's neck.
The next morning, he had vanished — carrying not ten, but fifty thousand pounds: one million two hundred and fifty thousand francs.
Let them but take a single gold piece…
Though a legion of constables was dispatched in pursuit, no trace could be found.
A year later, it was learned that he had died in Constantinople, having squandered to the last penny the wealth he had so audaciously appropriated.
Blondin was ruined.
The fruit of seven years' toil, the material comfort of a beloved wife, the future of five cherished children — all had collapsed and must be rebuilt from naught.
The King of the Cable — unhappy king! — then engaged as interpreter a man of true worth, Mr. Pananti[30].
After a few performances in England, he returned to Spain — the land of his conquests.
It was in the summer of 1870.
Blondin had stretched a tarred rope which, under the heat, snapped just as the performance was about

29 - Utter nonsense: for the past four years, Coleman has been a wine merchant on Regent Street — and has even had time to go bankrupt, bringing Blondin to ruin in the process. All that follows is pure fabrication on the part of Funambulus.
30 - Parravicini

to begin.
The intrepid acrobat, undeterred by the protests of the crowd, tied a knot and completed his feats.
His boldness rekindled the love he had once awakened in the hearts of his admirers.
As before, a hundred Spanish ladies offered him their hands.
He made no reply to these flattering declarations, but devised an ingenious means of dashing such romantic dreams.
The following Sunday, the famous ropewalker was to appear at the Circo Price.
By poster, he announced that he would carry not a man, but a woman upon his shoulders — and that this woman would be Madame Blondin.
What! Madame Blondin? Then he was married!
The whole city wished to see the wife of this hero, to judge whether she were worthy of him.
Long before the appointed hour, the stands were filled with the loveliest women in Madrid.
Their impatience was great. At last, he appeared upon the platform — and beside him, Madame Blondin, in tulle skirts and rose-coloured maillot, ascended gracefully by means of a rope.
All opera glasses turned upon her.
“How do you find her?”
“Not bad — but she'd be better with dark eyes.”
“Look at her legs.”
“Well-shaped, too well perhaps — there must be padding.”
“And her arms?”
“Pretty, yes — but not well set.”
Meanwhile, the acrobat strapped to his back a narrow board; Madame Blondin seated herself upon it, as upon a saddle, and the Hero of Niagara advanced slowly between sky and earth.
Cheered by the applause of the entire hall, he reached the end of his voyage — then turned back.
As he reached the centre of the cable, the rope suddenly snapped.
A dreadful crash was heard upon the floor of the circus.
Blondin lay prostrate.
His wife, suspended thirty feet in the air, swung from one end of the broken rope.
Both had miraculously escaped death.
Had the rope broken behind him, they would have fallen together, backwards — and perished.
But it broke two metres before the acrobat. He fell upon his back and was shielded by the board, while the recoiling rope, winding furiously, caught Madame Blondin by her skirts and held her fast until help arrived.
This dramatic adventure delivered the King of the Cable from the sighs of his Spanish admirers.
And he swore never again to carry his wife upon his shoulders — even if all the women of Spain sought his hand.
Upon leaving Madrid, Blondin was decorated with the Order of Isabella the Catholic by Marshal Prim.

CHAPTER XVII

Sir Blondin. — To India. — A Rajah’s Gift. — Biographies and Ballads. — A Shipwreck. — At Brisbane. — A New Feat. — Return to England. — A Performance at Sea.
Blondin — now styled Sir Blondin — brought his little family back to London, and thence set sail for India.

Two hundred feet above the Hooghly (western branch of the Ganges), he prepared omelettes for the citizens of Calcutta.
Two hundred feet above the Tjiliwong River, he rode a velocipede upon his wire before the astonished

natives of Batavia.
Two hundred feet above the port of Bombay, he bore a man upon his shoulders.
Everywhere, the people were astonished; they would willingly have bowed before this strange being as before a god.
Portraits of him were sold throughout the land, accompanied by laudatory biographies printed in Indian characters.
One enthusiastic rajah presented him with three shirt studs — sapphires the size of hazelnuts, set in diamonds.
Upon his departure, ten thousand persons accompanied him to the port, singing a refrain composed in his honour:
Long live Blondin, hero of the skies,
May his fame ever increase.
Friends, let us sing together,
Let us raise this chorus:
Long live Blondin!
The *hero of the skies*, pleased by this success and the profits he had realised, embarked for Brisbane, Australia.
After three weeks at sea, the steamship upon which he sailed was wrecked near Cleveland Point, and the passengers remained several days upon the rocks, awaiting rescue.
At last they reached port.
A great crowd awaited the King of the Cable upon the quay, eager to behold the courageous funambulist whose fame had reached the farthest corners of the globe.
Thirty-six hours sufficed for Blondin to erect a theatre.
In April 1875, he made his début in Brisbane, before a public overwhelmed with terror and admiration.
The next day, while visiting a merchant's warehouse, he marvelled at the mechanism of a small harmonium that could play polkas, waltzes, quadrilles and marches, though the player possessed not the slightest knowledge of music.
"How ingenious!" he exclaimed. "And what is the price of this instrument?"
"Oh, nothing."
"Nothing?"
"Nothing, sir — on one condition."
"And what is that?"
"That you play a polka upon your cable."
"Perfectly. I shall do so tomorrow."
And Blondin kept his word.
Having made photographs, omelettes, carried lions, children, men and women upon his shoulders, with no carpet but a hempen cord thick as a cane, he might well — in such a situation — carry an organ and extract melodies from it.
To the people of Brisbane, the spectacle seemed a vision.
It was evening. Lanterns, torches, and garlands of light illuminated the hero upon his wire.
Suddenly — without warning — he lifted the little instrument to his back and bore it to the centre of the rope, where he poised it with care.
Then the lights were extinguished, and the deep notes of the harmonium rose into the night.
One might have believed the vault of heaven had opened, and that one heard a divine duet between King David and Saint Clotilda.
None applauded, for fear of dispelling the charm of that solemn harmony.
But when the lights reappeared, the audience burst into cheers, and Blondin was borne in triumph.
So delighted was the glorious funambulist by this ovation that he resolved to settle in Australia.
He is, as we have seen, prone to such ideas.
Wherever he finds himself, he dreams of being elsewhere.
Be that as it may, he soon departed once more for England, where Madame Blondin awaited him, resolved to return to Australia with his entire household.
At the close of September 1875, he embarked at Southampton aboard the *Poonah*, a steamship of 400 feet, accompanied by eight persons.

The voyage was long. To pass the time, passengers danced, gave concerts, played charades.
One day the captain said to Blondin:
“Will you not grant us, sir, a little performance?”
“A performance? But I do not work thus. I need cables.”
“Cables! We have more than enough aboard — every thickness at your disposal. Could you pass from the mizzen-mast to the foremast?”
“Why not, if the sea is calm?”
“Smooth as glass, sir — look for yourself.”
Indeed, the ship slid gently through the water.
“Well then,” said Blondin, “give me four men; by tomorrow the cables shall be ready, and I will contribute to your diversions.”
The captain shared the joyous news.
The prospect of such a spectacle filled the vessel’s company with glee.
“This will be greater even than Niagara!” they exclaimed. “Blondin, above the sea!”
And from stern to bow, from port to starboard, a vast hurrah rang out for the Hero of the Cataracts.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Drama at Sea. — From Mizzen to Foremast. — The Storm. — Above the Waves. — A Cure for Seasickness.

A cable, some three hundred feet in length, unsupported by stays, swayed in the air.
On the horizon, the sky was thick with heavy clouds, like the steam plumes rising from the *Poonah’s* smokestack.
The ship, making eleven knots, neared those perilous waters off New South Wales where so many vessels are lost.
Suddenly, the wind rose.
The passengers, shaken by the roll of the sea, could scarce maintain their footing upon deck.
And yet Blondin appeared — clad in rose-coloured maillot, his face pale.
“Are you unwell?” he was asked.
“No, no — a touch of seasickness, but it’s nothing.”
“Rest, then.”
“Rest? And what of the performance?”
“It may take place tomorrow, when the storm abates.”
“What nonsense! I am always punctual. One, two — and up!”
With an agility that astounded even the veteran sailors, the King of the Cable climbed to the mizzen-top, his chosen platform.
The smoke rose about him in opaque billows; he was obliged to remain still for a moment to accustom his eyes to the gloom, and perhaps also to recover his strength.
“Come down, Mr. Blondin!” cried the captain. “You are courting death!
There remain not fifty souls on deck — most passengers have retreated below.”
Blondin made no reply. He seized his balance pole and took ten steps upon the cable.
At that instant, a terrible pitch of the vessel hurled him backward.
A cry of horror burst from all present.
But he resumed his walk — slowly, solemnly.

A furious squall heeled the *Poonah* over; passengers and crew rolled to port.
The wind howled in the sails; everything groaned and creaked.
The heroic acrobat now hovered above the waves.
Spray lashed his face, forcing him to close his eyes.
His pole, like a thread over the grey vastness, dipped and swayed, rising and falling — now horizontal, now vertical.
Yet Blondin, ever upright, pressed forward.
With a sudden shift, the vessel righted itself.
The prodigious acrobat now stood above the deck.
Another lurch drove the stern deep into the sea; the helmsman was thrown backward.
Blondin, high above, surrounded by empty space, did not move.
At last, after twenty-three minutes of this fantastic labour, he reached the fore-top.
Our hero had accomplished a feat even more extraordinary than the crossing of Niagara.
A punch was offered to him in the ship's grand salon.
When asked if he had been afraid, he replied with perfect candour:
"A little, yes — but I no longer feel seasick."
All witnesses of that dramatic scene recounted it upon arrival in Sydney, where Blondin first intended to settle.
Public curiosity, already stirred by the reports in the press, grew ever more intense.
The Hero of the Cataracts spent several weeks in Sydney, then went to Melbourne — capital of the colony of Victoria — where he was presented with a splendid jewel in gold and diamonds, bearing the city's arms and a graceful dedication.
From there, he passed to Adelaide, then to New Zealand: Wellington, Brisbane, Auckland, Christ-Church.
In 1876, a sudden desire for new lands took him to San Francisco, Lima, Valparaiso, Montevideo, Buenos Aires.
At the beginning of last year, he achieved fresh triumphs in Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro — then returned once more to London, bearing a new fortune.
He had not performed in public for several months when he returned to Paris, where a hundred thousand spectators applauded him beneath the great nave of the Palais de l'Industrie.
We shall not enumerate the marvellous feats he performed before the Parisians.
Whatever we might say would fall short of the impression made upon those who beheld them.
One remark characterises the nature of his art.
On the day of his farewell performance, a lady — trembling with fear even before Blondin appeared upon his platform — exclaimed, the moment he had crossed the rope:
"Oh! Is that all it is? Why, I could do as much myself!"
Indeed, the Hero of Niagara — Sir Blondin — displayed such assurance upon his wire that one might believe it enough to take up his pole and repeat his miraculous feats.

CHAPTER XIX

January 24, 1878

We have recounted — with the aid of notes furnished by the Hero of Niagara himself, and by consulting materials drawn from the pages of American, English, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and French journals — the adventures of Sir Blondin, from his birth to the present day. We have invented nothing, exaggerated nothing, altered nothing.
Should any among our readers find themselves reluctant to accept our word alone, they may confirm the truth and sincerity of our account by consulting the *Opinion*, the *Gaxeta de Madrid*, the *Javaasche*

Courant of Batavia, the *Indépendance belge*, the *Times*, the *Pall Mall Gazette* of London, the *New York Herald*, the *Cologne Gazette*, the *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna, the *Journal de Genève*, the *Journal of Saint Petersburg*, most of the newspapers of Paris, and a multitude of other papers, the list of which would fill a volume.

It remains for us now to summarise the prodigious existence of our hero, and to depict him as he appears in private life.

Since he first took to the high rope — that is to say, since 1859 — Blondin has successively travelled through:

England, North America, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austria, Bavaria, Prussia, Hanover, Russia, Poland, Belgium, the Indies, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Peru, Brazil, and France.

Among his spectators, in these several nations, were:

President Grant; His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales; His Majesty Louis II, King of Bavaria; His Majesty Don Luis I, King of Portugal; Her Majesty Isabella II, Queen of Spain; His Royal Highness the Prince of Asturias; His Majesty the Czar Alexander II of Russia; His Majesty William I, King of Prussia; His Majesty George V, King of Hanover; His Majesty Francis Joseph I, Emperor of Austria; His Majesty Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy; His Holiness Pope Pius IX; His Majesty Leopold I, King of the Belgians.

As tokens of their admiration, these sovereigns bestowed upon him:

The commemorative medal of Niagara;
The grand gold medal of the London Exhibition;
The medal of Melbourne;
The medal of Montevideo;
The star of the First Regiment of the Washington Grays;
The cross of knighthood of Isabella the Catholic;
A ring from the Czarevitch;
A ring from the King of Bavaria;
A set of shirt studs from the Rajahs;
And a multitude of other jewels of considerable value.

The number of ascents he has made since Niagara now exceeds three thousand.

If one considers that the rope upon which he performed his feats was never less than one hundred metres in length, and that he always traversed it six times, it may be estimated that Blondin has travelled no fewer than two thousand four hundred kilometres between heaven and earth — the distance, in fact, from Paris to New York.

All the ropes he employs have been made in London under his supervision.

They are of various dimensions and different materials — some of hemp, others of wire; the principal one being composed of aloe fibre.

In the shed he owns in London, these various appliances, carefully arranged, recall the hold of a man-of-war.

Blondin’s shed itself is a curiosity.

Constructed from ship sails, numbers 1 and 2, it covers an area of over 2,000 square feet. It is 50 feet in height, 400 feet in length, and 300 feet in width.

Its interior bears a close resemblance to the nave of the London Exhibition Hall. A host of flags from every country are joined by copper fastenings.

Their total length is twenty-four feet, and their weight forty-one pounds.

There are few who have not, at least once, seen the Hero of Niagara. Yet some have written to us requesting his portrait.

We here provide his description, taken from the passport by which he travels:

Age: 54 years
Height: 1 metre 65
Hair: blond
Forehead: broad
Eyebrows: blond
Nose: regular
Beard: blond
Eyes: blue

Chin: round
Face: oval
To this portrait, traced by an official hand, there is yet wanting the essential trait — *expression*.
Blondin's countenance speaks, above all, of a great good nature. The King of the Cable is kind — as indeed we have seen throughout these memoirs.
Becoming the head of his family at the age of eleven, following the death of his father, he supported his mother, and raised his sister and two brothers. Today, he has secured a fortune for his wife and five children.
Blondin resides in London.
In one of the finest quarters of the city, he occupies a well-appointed apartment; he has his horses, his carriages, his servants.
Yet he never forgets the time when his lodging rested on four wheels, and his life remains of the simplest kind.
His greatest pleasure is to remain at home, where his cheerfulness and witty remarks enliven the household.
It was he who once said:
"Though I may make a fortune, own shares, mounds of gold, mines of diamonds — I shall ever be naught but a man of sack and rope."