glued for life to his work. It's a kind of a passion.

"Some of our boys, bridge builders, and skyscraper workers alike, are forever moving all the way from 'Frisco to New York. Often a bridge builder goes on a skyscraper job, and again it's the other way round. But the skyscraper work is the hardest, and it's getting to be more and more a trade all by itself."

Later I had a long talk with one of the men who directed the work on the "Singer."

"Cowboys," he said, "is about the right word. The more you see and hear, the better you like 'em. There's not a job from Broadway to the moon they wouldn't jump at. The higher it is, the windier, the more ticklish, the better. The only trouble is, they take too many chances. In our firm we check 'em up as much as we can. When the Singer building was half-way up I called in the foreman.

"'Look here,' I said, 'you've made a record job so far. Keep it up, finish it without killing a man, and it's worth a hundred dollars. We'll call it pay for good luck.'

"He got the money."

The danger comes not only at the spectacular moments. It is there all the time. The girders, before they are riveted tight, have a way of vibrating in a strong wind; the men walk along them as on a sidewalk, and more than one has been snapped into space. Here is a story I heard from a man on the White hall building, down at the tip of Manhattan:—

"It happened like this:- Mack had picked up a coil of rope an' t'rowed it over his shoulders an' was startin' out on a girder. This was eighteen stories up, an' the wind was blowin' guns straight in from the harbour, an' the girder wa'n't extra steady. So I yelled over to him:—

"'Heigh, Mac! Why don't you coon it?' To 'coon it' is to get down on your bonkeys an' straddle. But that wa'n't fast enough for Mac. He laughed kind of easy.

"'Well,' he said, 'if I go down I'll go down straight, anyhow.' An' out he walked.

"When he had about reached the middle there come a gust of wind that hadn't stopped since leavin' England. An' Mac he was top-heavy because of the rope, an' when the gust caught him he leaned 'way out into the wind to balance. So far, so good. But you see he was leanin' on the wind, an' the wind let up so unexpected he hadn't time to straighten an' not a blamed thing to lean on.

"Poor old Mac. He went down straight all right, you bet."

In the same easy spirit of unconcern a man often jumps on a girder down in the street, when the foreman's back is turned, and rides on up with the load. And cables sometimes snap. In the airy regions above, when you want to come down or go up a few "tiers," it is far easier to grab a rope and slide, or go up hand over hand, than it is to go round by the ladders. Only now and then the rope is not securely tied. Up on the thirtieth floor of the "Metropolitan Life" I saw a man walk out on a plank of a scaffold to be built. He seized a rope that dangled from two floors above him, gripped it with only one hand, and then jumped up and down on the plank to make sure it was solid.

On the pinnacle of the Singer building a lofty steel pole was erected with a brass ball on top. The foreman, who wanted that "hundred dollars for luck," used all the powerful words he knew to keep men from climbing up. But in vain. He could not be in all places at once, and time and again on returning he would find some delighted man-monkey high up by the big brass ball, taking a look out to sea.

But this is only half the story. As you watch them at work on the girders, clinging to massive steel corners, perched on the tops of columns, or leaning out over the street far below, it is not the recklessness, but the cool, steady nerve that you notice most. Under all the apparent unconcern you can feel the endless strain. It shows in the looks of their eyes, in the lines of their faces, in the quick, sudden motions, in the slow, cat-like movements. Endlessly facing death, they are quiet and cool by long training.

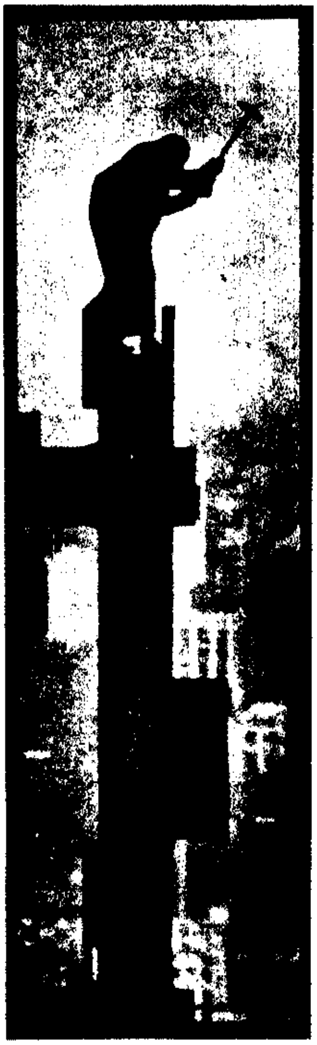
Up on the "Metropolitan Life," some twenty-five tiers above the street, an enormous circle of stone was being built in as a frame for the clock. A dozen men were at work on the scaffold that hung outside, and projecting from overhead was the boom of the derrick that hoisted the massive stone blocks. Suddenly the cable caught, and the full power of the engine below was brought to bear on the derrick. All this in an instant, but in that instant somebody saw what was going to happen. With a quick, warning cry he made a leap from the planks to the solid steel beams of the building. There was a rending and tearing above, and, just as the last man leaped into safety, the derrick crashed down, bearing with it the scaffold and part of the stone. One empty, breathless moment, then a roar from far below, and a cloud of grey dust came slowly drifting upward to the group of tiny men still clinging to the girders. For a moment longer nobody moved. Then some one broke the spell with a husky laugh, another gave an explosive halloo—and the gang set about repairing the damage.

Down in the city the evening papers ran front-page stories describing it all in vivid detail, with eloquent praise for the "hero," who, by seeing one instant ahead, had saved a dozen lives. But some days later, when I went up to the scene, hero hunting, I was met with expressions of deep disgust.

"Naw," said a workman, "nothin' at all but a derrick an' a few planks an' maybe a little stone. Them fool reporters said there was 'giant blocks of it thunderin' down to the street.'" One of his eyes showed the ghost of a twinkle. "Jest to prove what liars they are, I saw that stone on the street below, an' there wasn't one chunk as big as your fist—nothin' but little pieces. . . . . Hero? H —! Was anyone killed? Naw. Then leave it alone. We don't want any heroes or hairbreadth escapes in our business. What's the use of these yarns that get men to thinkin'? That's what smashes their nerve!"

"Queer what nerves can do," said a man I met in a steel plant. "I used to work on sky-scrapers. I fell forty feet one day, and broke a rib, but I got up and went back to the job, because I knew if I didn't tackle it then I'd likely lose my nerve for good. It's the same in the circus with the boys up on the trapezes.

"That time it worked all right. But another time, in October, when night was coming on, I stepped into the air by mistake. I only fell about twenty feet then—down a shaft—but I broke a leg, so I couldn't go back up. And besides, the way it happened, unexpected-like in the dark, kind of got me. Anyhow, when at last the hospital let me out and I came back to the job, they had got to the fifteenth floor, and I was worse than a baby. I had no head at all. Twice I came within an ace of getting killed. At last I just missed killing one of the gang. And then I quit. Nerves is a mighty queer thing.



Cowboys they are in job and in soul, these men who work on the pinnacles.

Men climbing out over the water, taking all kinds of daredevil risks—this game beats the circus.