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## THE HIGHER LIFE

### Window-Cleaners at Work

"IT'S no use trying to talk to Arthur — he's too uppish.

See him, there he goes now, right up in the air\*the minute you speak to him. Look at me, now; no high and mighty business for me—to-day at any rate. I know my own level and keep to it as often as I can. So you want to know something about my job?"

"Yes, anything you care to tell me, Mr. — er."

"Make it Bill."

By this time Arthur had reached the second story of a tall building while Bill was still on the ground, doing things with a rope, some rags and a bucket. They were two street trapeze artists who cleaned windows for a living.

After a chat for half-an-hour to Bill, and declining to try my hand at the trade, we had learned something about a very necessary but little-noticed business.

Any day, in any New Zealand city or large town, the men of the cloth, the ladder, the rope and the bucket can be seen at their risky job. Some of them have been sailors; others simply took it up for the sake of doing something different. And some have been at it for years.

"I know a chap," said Bill, "who has been at this game since he was a school kid. Now he sits in his office while other chaps do the circus tricks, and hands out the cash on pay-days. I've seen some very funny things through windows . . . very funny. There, was the chap—no, I suppose you couldn't publish that."

And that reminded him that when he first took on the job of window-cleaning, he was not a bit happy about it. It was in the slump years—about 1932—when a man was glad to take on anything at all. He graduated from "squibs," which cleaners call two-storied buildings, to really big jobs of six and seven stories.

But even now, after all that experience which would be invaluable to a cat burglar, there were times when great heights put him off colour, and on his off days, he elected to do the insides while his mate, who liked climbing about, did the ledges.

It happened, sometimes, that a man became a bit nervous. Then, for his own sake, as well as others', he went down for a spell. Perhaps he had been lucky, he mused, for he had never had a fall or even a slip.

In the four principal cities of New Zealand some tall buildings have grown up, but they are mere cottages compared with overseas skyscrapers. There a window-cleaner's job called for an iron nerve and the skill of a steeple-jack.

Arthur, who had come down to get his tobacco and cigarette papers, explained that he did not wear any special equipment. No fear, he couldn't be bothered



with safety-belts or anything of that sort. There was quite enough to do, reaching overhead and to left and right without being hampered by gadgets. But he always wore a pair of sandshoes, or had rubber soles on his shoes. They gave all the foot-grip needed. That, and a lot of confidence, did the trick. Once you gained confidence, you could scale anything.

His worst job? Well, that was cleaning several small windows in a dome on top of a high building. Two men were slung from ropes tied to a flagstaff. They had to work in stockinged feet so that they could feel places to stand on. The job took eight hours because the biggest part was manoeuvring for position. Of course the time would come when window-cleaners could sit in helicopters and just hold out a rag while the aircraft bobbed up and down! Quicker ways of doing jobs than that had come out of all these labour-saving stunts!

What looked dangerous from the ground was not at all risky. Some of the window ledges which, from the street, seemed to be only an inch wide, were really from two to three feet. Modern glazing, too, was a help. The iron frames offered plenty of hand-holds. But in hot weather, working on a wall facing the sun! Not so good. The glare on the glass was terrific. However, the men developed an arm movement designed to protect the eyes, and when the people in the street were sweltering, there was often a pleasant breeze. No, not a bad sort of life at all.

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