

'AIRSHIP' IS CAPTURED

It Alighted Yesterday in the Ninth Ward.

SQUIRE BASS AND OTHERS PERPETRATED THE JOKE

With Other Small Boys He Fooled People for Whole Week—Nothing But Paper Balloons Sent Skyward for Fun.

Airships, aeroplanes, dirigible balloons, planes and aerial craft of all kinds must take a tumble in the minds of Chattanooga for the time being. Those things in the sky which thousands of people in this city and vicinity have been accepting as the real, genuine all-wood and a yard-wide airship were not real airships at all. They were no more than toys sent up as a practical joke. The perpetrator was Squire Ed Bass and some more of the small boys out in South Chattanooga.

The 'squire and a very few others who must have been "on" have had lots of fun. The gullibles whose name is legion, may have enjoyed the stunt, too, but just how much they will appreciate the humor of the situation now remains to be seen. It will depend largely on the temperament of the victim. A joke is a joke, but when the victim gets wise the effect is more or less doubtful. Doubtless the joking 'squire's ears will turn with an exceeding warmth today, because of the many he so thoroughly fooled there will be some to express themselves plainly, forgetting the Sunday school lesson yesterday.

Murder will out, doncherknow, and her matters not as serious do, not ways remain a mystery. The cat has scratched and chewed her way clean out the bag of the dirigible balloon business. Truth once more reigns supreme and sits at the tiller of the aeroplane, driving out the spirit of humor and silliness which has been steering the airships all over the sky in the region about Chattanooga. The cat got out of the bag and the genius at the steering gear gave way to the truth yesterday when a cigar-shaped paper balloon, some fifteen feet long and four feet through, at the maximum, alighted gently, peacefully, without shame or embarrassment, in the neighborhood of the Ninth ward fire hall.

It was not long before the presence of the strange object was discovered by

the natives, and they began to congregate.

There was much interest and amusement manifested, coupled with a certain form of admiration of whoever it was who had succeeded in fooling the people for so long. For it was very apparent that in the collapsed paper structure lay the secret of the airships which had been seen over the city.

Now, the good people of Highland Park who saw the paper balloon and realized its significance did not know who was back of the joke. Even before the discovery in Highland Park The Times had learned the identity of the juveniles who perpetrated the joke and was preparing to inform its readers on the subject. Then word came that the inevitable Ninth ward had come again to the fore and had material evidence of the nature of the airships which have been causing so much commotion and talk for the last few days.

My, what people in a dry town will see, and, seeing, what mountains they will make out of mole hills that come into their line of vision. Chattanooga can console itself in the knowledge that other towns, dry like Chattanooga, have been victimized lately in the matter of sky-craft. Dry Knoxville has been a recent airships lately. Dry Huntsville has been peering aloft to the detriment of its necks and collars at strange craft in the big dome.

Amid the commotion caused by the frequent appearance of the what seemed to be an airship with a strong liking for this vicinity, Squire Bass and his fellow conspirators have been saying nothing and laughing up their sleeves at the mystification of their townspeople. Like Mr. Hyde, they have stood around among the wondering victims and hearing accounts of their Dr. Jekyll doings.

Squire Bass, arch-conspirator of them all, perhaps had the biggest share of amusement in this way. It was no unusual thing for him to hear people describe the airship in the minutest detail. His amusement was in their gullibility, and the power of their optics. Some of them declared that the craft was a biplane and that they could plainly discern the man at the steering gear, and even hear the chug-chug of the machinery.

That so many people were successfully deceived by the toy balloon was due to optical delusion. Tricks which the eye will play in certain circumstances are certainly delusions and snares.

In reality a 14-foot affair, the little balloon, perhaps a few hundred feet high, looked like a monster affair. And, then, too, like looking at the Maelstrom, the more one looked the more there was to see. The man in the rigging, and other details described by some, were natural consequences.

Squire Bass' joke was simply that and nothing more—a practical joke. It has been the opinion of many that the alleged airship, or whatever it was, would resolve itself finally into some sort of an advertising dodge. But the worthy 'squire has no brand of soap, panacea, cigar or breakfast food to hoist upon a purchasing public, so far as known. The craft which ambled into the camp of the Highland Parkers yesterday bore no advertisement. It was very inconsiderate of that balloon to land in an enlightened community like Highland Park, anyway. Had it gone further the 'squire's joke might have lasted longer. But in the midst of thousands of wide-awake and strenuous folk it could only result in discovery and limelight. It was a case of "If we're discovered we're lost," as Squire Bass may have said.

Squire Bass' balloon was not made lighter than air by the use of hot air about the prison commissioner's job, either. The balloon which landed among the Parkers owed its powers of navigation to the gases arising from a bunch of waste soaked in some liquid, presumably gasoline, kerosene, benzine, or some other old sene, and ignited.

By perpetrating such a joke upon an unsuspecting public, especially as the joke was so successful, Squire Bass lays himself open to a variety of more or less succulent and pithy flings. Any time today it will be pertinent to eject sarcasm and hitting sentences about the airship man. There will be some to say that he was trying to get high enough up to get his grasp on the prison commissioner plum. Others may hint that he was looking around for more love-amitten couples in order that he might join their two lives in one, and get a nice fee.

The balloons of the Bass persuasion were sent up from the rear of Stong's drug store, Main street. The forests, mountains and streams of the vicinity could probably divulge the landing place of the others, the ones turned loose before that which opened the Ninth warders' eyes.