

WHAT WE DID IN THE GREAT WAR—continued.

ments of falling rafters fall with terrible crashes and send showers of sparks away over the town. A weaker man than the Sandgate Chief would have quailed before the prospect. What can be done? The building is half consumed; the fire every moment grows stronger; thousands of eyes are upon him; the crowd roars its appreciation; valiantly a little group of Comedians strive to guard the liquor stores that have been carried out into the road; bravely they fight against an overwhelming number of drunken civilians bent upon the consumption of that liquor, until they are swept aside and the liquor—oh, sorrow of sorrows—all that remained of it could with ease have been carried away in a thimble. In the midst of this turmoil and confusion Sandgate's fire expert has never for a moment lost control of those splendid mental faculties that are the awe and envy of the village. Someone must go into Folkestone, he announced, and borrow a nozzle there. It is but an hour's walk. He calls for volunteers and a score of soldiers leap forward. With a glance of contempt at the civilians whose drunken condition cannot fail to arouse the disgust of any decent man, the Chief selects a Comedian, and he reels away in the wrong direction amid the excited cheers of the crowd.

Time passes—the fire has now almost consumed the building, the crowd is surging through the roadway; great clouds of sparks ascend from the crashing beams, the roof has fallen in, and still the brave messenger has not returned. What can have happened to the courageous Comedian? Has he found a bottle en route? Anxious whispers go round the crowd, but suddenly a shriek of joy rends the night. A nozzle has been discovered high up on the roof, hidden cunningly away. Down it comes into the crowd, quickly the firemen attach it to the hose and a wild yell goes up as they scatter in all directions to search for the hydrant. The joyful shrieks are redoubled—no sign of a hydrant can be found; but is the Sandgate Fire Brigade daunted? Are they downhearted? You know them not nor their mighty chieftain. Like a flash an inspiration strikes his Napoleonic brain. "Place an end of that hose in the drain channel, and when the tide comes up we will have a splendid pressure," he yells. The crowd stand appalled—mediocrity and stupidity paying humble tribute to genius, and his hirelings spring to do his bidding. But in a moment comes a frantic shout—one that "shivered to the stars," as Virgil remarked a few years before his death. A fireman had fallen over the hydrant in another and less frequented road where he and an intoxicated civilian were consuming a little Mineral Water, and all was well! What if, in the meantime, the roof and walls of the building had fallen in, and interior was but a heap of smouldering ashes and twisted iron? With a rush the Brigade tottered across to the ruins and directed a stream of water over the crowd. Two of the Canadians gallantly undertook to help, although they were owing to the lateness of the hour, a trifle uncertain as to the exact location of the fire, and, chiefly through their efforts, very little of the colourless fluid struck the cinders. For the first time since their early childhood those heroes tasted water—it flew at them from all directions—friends in the crowd who cheered them on were drenched through and through for their pains; a fireman

who had climbed over their heads and was appealing to them to hand him up the hose, received a gusher that brought him tumbling down again; madly the Comedians who could stand cheered the efforts their two gulant friends were making to help the fire along. And then sharply outlined against the sky, the figures of three firemen appeared on an adjoining roof. They were signalling frantically for something. What? Their arms waved wildly above their heads—they gesticulated, they howled, they danced in the moonlight. Still none could understand their distress. One Comedian, through whose brain surged confused memories of a former career before the mast—under the impression that he was taking part in a shipwreck—ran up and down the road, begging some person to throw a life belt to the poor fellows—then a great light burst upon us. They had forgotten their hose in their eagerness to serve! Again and again they signalled, then drew together in a little group and finally one of their number came down—cheered to the echo by the crowd, and began to draw up the hose. In this they were aided by the Comedians who did all in their power to tie the hose into a hopeless series of knots or drag it apart, in fact to do anything to help. At length another stream was playing on the blackened ashes and bricks and gradually the fire having consumed everything consumable, gave up the ghost and departed this life.

But what of the gallant messenger who long ago had left for Folkestone? What sad fate was his? Let us follow him. Blindly he hurried on—the cheers of his comrades ringing in his ears, a vision of immortal fame leading him down the long road like a will-o-the-wisp, fatal, alluring, irresistible; ever before him the thought that all might depend upon his efforts—that thousands waited anxiously his return; past rows of houses he hurried none of which he knew, and a few public houses which he did know. Into these he turned mechanically only to bang against the locked doors and hasten on and ever on, spurred by the tale he had once heard—a vile and actionable slander, which insisted that one could always get a drink from the Folkestone firemen at any hour of the day or night. Once or twice he almost despaired and only that unspeakable libel urged him to his duty. How often in the world's history have men trodden the paths of glory with a less compelling motive driving them to fame or death! Finally he reached a building, official and pretentious, and in he rushed. Throwing open a door he dashed into a blue uniformed man and gasped out his story. Had they a nozzle? Yes. Would they lend it to the Sandgate Fire Brigade? No. What—why not? Well it's a Sandgate fire. You fellows put is out yourselves and good luck to you. Overcome by his exertions, his amazement, his disappointment, and his rapidly fading dream of glory, he sank down to the floor beaten, abject, miserable, and only recovered sufficiently to accept the hospitable glasses that were offered him. Later he came home in a taxi—and men passing to their work on one side of the street stood still to watch a taxi go past with a pair of large feet emerging from the window, while those on the other side betrayed actual surprise when they beheld a rubicund countenance ornamented by a broad satisfied drunken smile thrust helplessly through the other aperture.