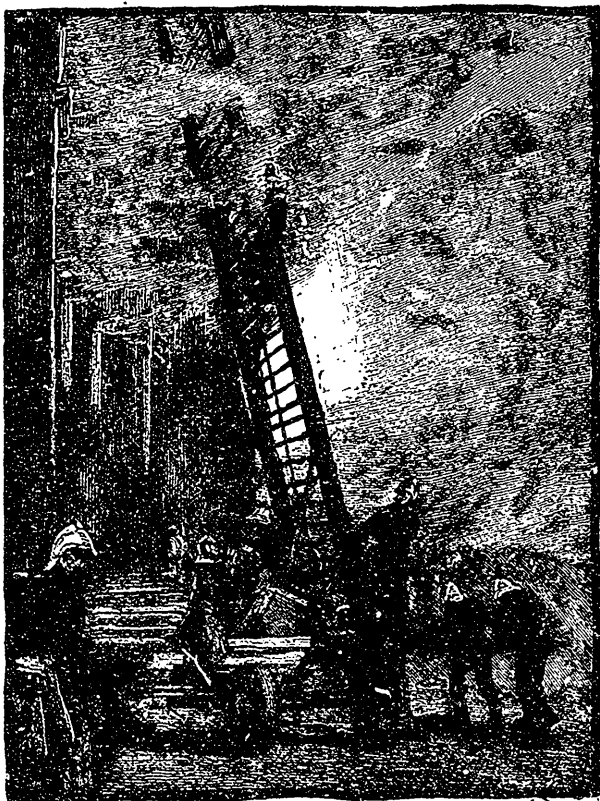


If you had inspected the engine you would have found everything ready for instant departure—the fire laid, axes, hose, and apparatus, in position; but you would also have found two things which perhaps you would not expect. Under the boiler is placed a movable gas jet, which keeps the water always hot; and by the funnel is a large fusee.

"Carelessly put there by a smoker," you say. Not so. It is placed there on purpose, and plays a very important part in the prompt preparations. When the alarm sounds, one of the men on duty ignites the fusee at once—he knows exactly where to find it—and drops it down the chimney. The fusee is certain to flame well, and lights the material below, already prepared to receive its fiery touch. The quick rush of the engine through the air does the rest; for the speed creates such a strong draught that the engine fire soon roars in its box, and raises the heated water to steam. No doubt the British housemaid on cold winter mornings would be glad to light her fire as quickly as the fire-brigade men kindle theirs. But, among other things, the engine fires of the Fire Brigade are like foundation stones—they are "well and truly laid."

The steam in the fire-engine is used for pumping the water and throwing it on the burning building. But, successful as it is, the steam fire-engine has not superseded the use of manuals; while for small fires—of which there are a great number in the Metropolis—the little portable hand-pumps are said to be of the greatest value. These little pumps can be used anywhere, and taken into rooms where the fire may be burning. Speedily used, they will, in ordinary circumstances, quickly extinguish the flames, and prevent a little conflagration from becoming a big one. The water for their use is contained in a bucket, which is supplied by other buckets of water handed up by assistants.

Valuable as these little pumps are for small fires, however, there is need, of course, for the glittering and powerful steam fire-engine for bigger fires; and of these "steamers" the Brigade have fifty on land, and about ten floating on the Thames. There are also a large number of manuals. As an instance of the care and forethought displayed in their arrangements, it may be mentioned that their wheels are broad, and tired with wavy iron bands, which project in some places beyond the sides of the wheels themselves. Many persons, no doubt, would puzzle for hours over the reason for these strange iron tires; but the reason is simple—when you come to know it. They are used to prevent the wheels from canting or tripping at the tramrails, which seam so many London thoroughfares. It would be a bad accident, and a terrible hindrance at a critical time, for a fire-engine to be overturned when driven at a headlong pace to a fire. In the same way, should a horse fall



"SOMEBODY IS IN THE BUILDING!"