

OUT WITH THE FIRE BRIGADE.

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"FIRE! FIRE!!"

THERE is the alarm bell!

The startling clang rings through the room and a tablet has fallen on the wall, not far from your head, revealing the name of the London street whence the alarm was given.

Some one has broken the glass and pulled the handle of the fire-alarm post in that thoroughfare, and instantly all the arrangements of the station for proceeding to the fire are set in motion.

There are always men on duty, and more alarm bells ring, with noise enough to wake the proverbial Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. A pair of horses are always in readiness, their noble heads, full of animation and expectancy, turned towards the stable door, and the light, but sufficient, harness hanging over them, and ready to descend at a second's notice, is dropped on their backs.

The intelligent creatures know the ring of the alarm bell as well as the men, and are as eager to be off. The preparations are so complete that when a rope is pulled, down falls the harness. Full of excitement, the steeds are led to the engine, which, in its turn, is as fully prepared as are the horses. The traces are hooked on, the men jump to their seats, and with the startling cry of "Fire!

Fire!" screamed as only a London fireman can utter it, the engine tears out of the station and into the street. Less than two minutes has elapsed since the ringing of the alarm bell; and the engine is already on its way.

Most exciting is the rush through the streets. Quick movement through the air is usually exhilarating at any time, and to this is added the excitement of the fire and the startling cries of the firemen. Everything scatters before us. Even the red carts of the Post Office—which may trespass on the thoroughfares reserved for royal processions—have to give place to the dashing Fire Brigade.

With steam hissing from the boiler, with horses all aglow with excitement, and with alarming cries of "Fire! Fire!" ringing along the street, a pathway opens as if by magic through the most crowded thoroughfares; and almost before you know it you have arrived at the scene of the fire.

Here the excitement is no less; but the men are as cool as cucumbers.

"Play on that part of the building," comes the order, hardly sooner said than done. The engine, which a few minutes ago was quiet at the station, is now at vigorous work some miles distant from its home.

The flames burst out through the veil of smoke, and leap upward to the sky. The gathering crowd press forward with excited faces, and are with difficulty kept back by the few policemen on the spot. A cry rises: "Somebody is in the building!" And here comes the fire-escape, which will reach the highest windows. It is placed against the house, and quickly a fireman mounts. See! he has rescued a mother and child, and he brings them down amid excited cheers. Sometimes he has a much harder task; for he enters the burning building and gropes amid the blinding smoke and scorching heat to rescue the half-suffocated sufferers from the flames.

Meantime, other engines have arrived. Each fulfils its part. While some are playing on the fire itself, others are drenching surrounding walls with water, to prevent the fire from spreading; and ere long the officer in charge will be able to report that the fire is localised and mastered.

Every engine, as it thunders up, seems quite ready for its work, and appears to have left its station but a comparatively short time before. Wise forethought, as well as smart promptitude on the part of the men, have contributed to these satisfactory results.