

If you should be taken up as a madman and consigned to a madhouse, you would endure terrible suffering, and find it very difficult to secure release."

"I am perfectly sane," said Ephraim, "and I cannot comprehend why you think what I have said strange. I wanted my letters, and I wished in their absence to correspond by telegraph, because I am expecting a cargo of wheat to-day, which I am to ship to Liverpool by steamer."

"By steamer! There you go again. Nobody can know what you mean by 'steamer.'"

"Steamer! Steamship! A ship that crosses the ocean by steam, without sails. You know what that is, certainly?"

"I have heard some talk about a rattle-trap invention which used steam to make a little boat paddle about on the river here; but as for crossing the ocean—well, my dear sir, that is a little too ridiculous."

"Ridiculous! Why—"

"Pardon me," said the man, "I see you are incorrigible; I must bid you good morning;" and he bowed politely and walked quickly away.

"Well, well!" said Ephraim, standing still and looking after him helplessly. "It's queer, very queer. I don't begin to understand it at all, I am half inclined to believe that the world has conspired to make game of me, or else that my poor wits really are astray. I don't feel as certain of them as a clear-headed man should."

While he spoke, the bells of the city rang out an alarm of fire with furious clangor, and in a few moments he saw, dashing past him, an old-fashioned hand-engine, pulled by a score or two of men who held a rope. The burning building was not many hundred yards distant from Ephraim, and he felt an inclination to see it. When he reached the scene, men with leathern buckets were pouring water into the engine, while other men were forcing the handles up and down, with the result that a thin stream fell upon the mass of flame.

He had an impulse to ask somebody why the steam fire-engines were not used, but every one seemed to be excited and busy, and he remembered what his friend had said to him about steamers.

So he expressed his disgust for the stupidity of these people

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