

# A FIERY ORDEAL

There was a big fire—to speak correctly, two big fires—in London on the night when "Emergency" Walford went to see his beloved. Walford's baptismal name was Henry, and the sobriquet he recalled was one which a few college friends had once suggested in memory of what had once struck their thoughtless minds as a salient phrase in his conversation. Among flimsy and meaningless epithets none perhaps stick closer than an ironically "practical" nickname to a frivolously impractical, individual, whose precious "ideas" as to what he or his friends "could" or "should" do in any given improbable crisis of affairs are apt to appear a trifle too ingenious for an imperfect world.

As he stood upon a pillared island in the thoroughfare opposite the oldest church in metropolis, his ear caught the harsh and jarring cry—partly of excitement, partly of warning—which usually heralds the approach of a fire engine. The phenomenon is not an unfamiliar one to the habitué of London streets; but Walford had for many years, in after close hours, cherished a passion for dramatic adventure by practicing among the few privileged amateurs attached to the Fire Brigade. He was, therefore, not much surprised to recognize the engine and horses of his own company, and shot an inquiry at the mail-clad Jehu as the latter pulled his pair into a hand canter to avoid colliding with an unwieldy van. "Amberwell wharf warehouses; well light," retorted a sailor with half-turned head, holding on to the rail behind. "Yah-h-h!" said the foot passengers from the pavement to left and right, and to the accompaniment of a sump diminendo roar, the smoking, clanging, glittering chariot tore away to the eastward.

The course of true love had run quite smooth for Henry Walford; not that he and his fiancée were meeting to-night merely for the idle pleasure of the thing. There was a business in hand most serious to the female, and not indifferently to the masculine mind—no less, in short, than the adaptation of the furniture of his own roomy bachelor apartments of their new "bijou" family residence in a distant square in Baywater. Meeting, as it were, by appointment at the door of the little ivy-covered house in Old College street, Walford and his fiancée were soon on their way to the very different yet not very remote "neighborhood" of Gloria road, a large thoroughfare leading directly away into the heart of the wild and unfashionable southwest. As you follow it, walking away from the clock tower, the fifth or sixth turn to the left brings you to the front of a large but not very prosperous looking edifice called St. Michael's Mansions, Catchbrook street, on the seventh floor of which were situated the chambers above mentioned. This cheap and airy altitude Walford naturally spoke of as St. Michael's Mount.

"Something's gone wrong with the lift," said Walford, "and the man's away. So you'll have to walk up. You won't mind that?"

As a matter of fact, when they reached the door she tripped up lightly before him, and he ran after her, which appeared to cause her to run faster, and so they both reached the fourth floor in a condition so breathless as to be incapable of intelligent conversation. She was a sprightly, active little woman, with jet black hair, now a little discoloured, and dark eyes, eyes solemnly impressive till she laughed—then they were both laughing now—and then disturbing in quite another way to your very vitals.

That being so, there should, strictly speaking, have been a chaperone (who, whoever, could not have been expected to run up six flights of stairs), for in the whole house there were probably not more than two other people—a caretaker and his wife—somewhere downstairs, all the other occupied floors being (fices, which were naturally deserted at such an hour. Not that any chaperone could have shown more anxiety for her safety when they had reached the happy top.

"It's a wonderful height up, isn't it? But I wouldn't lean out of that window."

It appeared, however, that he would upon certain simple conditions, and with his arm encircling her small person in the most natural manner imaginable. He drew it closer, indeed, as at that very moment another murmur swelled up from the under world. Again a ringing, metallic vibration mingled with the rapid beat of horses' feet, and craning out of the window they both caught sight of a second fire-engine threading its way—the driver half erect over his dancing steeds—along the channel so deep below them, while struggling pedestrians scattered this way or that. Scarcely had he drawn his precious visitor into the room, when there was a louder roar, this time quite a cheer of triumph, as a third driver entered on the scene by a side street from the north, and seeing the roadway clear, spread his team into a racing gallop over a straight bit of easy-going. Walford leant out again just in time to catch the gleam of flying brass and a faint trail of vapor floating upon the evening air.

"They'll be having a night of it," he said, half sadly.

"How dreadful!" murmured the Distracted, who was reclining at length in the best lounge-chair after the exertion of so unusual an ascent. "I say, Hal, what capital arms you—I mean your chairs—have."

"The better to—," his quotation, which caused her to blush, was cut short by a severe fit of coughing. "Ahem! By the way, Nellie, when your rested, let's go up, and I'll show you the roof."

Inside Walford's small "flat" which shut its own front door upon the public stair and lift-well, there was a private trap door, accessible to a short ladder, leading on to the level plateau above. Around it ran a shuddersomely low balustrade of masonry, which he would hardly allow her to touch, all the more that he remembered once tempting the Providence lovers are so anxious to conciliate, by dancing on the top of it with a few thoughtless friends after dinner.

They sat down—she close at his side, and not unimpressed by the eerie height—upon some lead-covered erection in the middle. To the east stretched an oblong promontory, the other wing of the "Mansions," separated from the "Mount" on which they sat by the deep gulf of a passage some twenty feet wide.

On all other sides, London stretched a-

way beneath them, north, south, and west, a level, dusky forest of gable and chimney, dotted here and there with church spires like giant trees, and cut into innumerable deep "ridges"—regular fissures up which the thousand illuminations of street and shop were just beginning to throw their mysterious glow.

But under existing circumstances it was only possible to look in one direction—where over the wharves of Amberwell brooded and blossomed a crimson and golden rose of flame, blood-red at the heart low down, where it showed against a jagged outline of black, and purpling the long banks of cloud overhead.

For five, perhaps ten minutes, they sat and watched the finest spectacle that any great city can afford, and then descended to the sitting-room for the transaction of the business in hand. To this they betook themselves, when he had lighted the lamp, with a delightful air of seriousness, sitting each on one side of the room, she with a pencil in hand and piece of paper before her, he drumming on the table in pensive abstraction. The occupation had little of the romantic in it, yet the moments flew quickly.

"That small knee-hole table would go nicely into the bay-window of the drawing-room," said she.

By rights they should both have been looking at the knee-hole table, and thinking of the bay-window. As it was, each caught the other looking at him, and her, respectively, in an absurdly surreptitious manner. This had happened before, and was followed by a resolution on the part of both to fix their whole minds upon the furniture question; and again the moment flew.

Several items had in fact been satisfactorily disposed of—partly through his having shifted his position to one nearer, but not opposite to her—when Walford started up with a wild howl and ran to the window.

"Oh, Hal," she cried, frightened and startled by his vehemence, "what is it?"

"Paper," he said, recovering himself with a quite unsympathetic promptitude. "Paper, and perhaps chemicals."

Some three and a half miles away, from one of the heights of north London a stream of flame shot fiercely up into the night, and swayed and bleated, a pillar of fire, that seemed to connect earth and sky; and again for five minutes they sat and gazed.

"How awful!" she said "but it doesn't look so bad as the other."

"All the same," said he, "they'll want more engines to it."

"Why?"

"Because there's no pressure up there, not enough to wash the ground-floor windows with."

"Pressure!" she answered innocently. "I thought it was the engines always pumped the water up."

The amateur fireman smiled sweetly. "So they do," he explained, "when they've got to, but not when the water will go up of itself. Don't you see, Nellie, dear, it all depends on the fall. You send a manual or steamer to most fires, because they are usually wanted, and to take the men, fixings, hose, etc., but if the standpipes from the street were enough—by Jove! it's lucky there's no wind; doesn't it flare up straight!"

"But, Hal," she persisted, with the air of a studious learner, "would a standpipe send water up here if we wanted it?"

"No," he mused, meditatively, "not up here, but anywhere near the river-level, you know, the hydrants will throw sixty gallons a minute over the tops of any of the houses."

"Hal," she said, looking up suddenly, with a subdued and quite respectful chuckle, "I wish you'd put on your fireman's things—you've got them here, haven't you? And I should like to see how you look in them."

And he, liking to see that mischievous sparkle in her little black eyes, and not unwilling to give her some remembrance of himself in a character in which he did not expect to appear again, retired and donned the familiar uniform, at least the jacket, felt, axe, and helmet of glittering brass, wearing which he re-appeared in the doorway at "attention."

"Now if you only had a spear," she said, laughing with delight at his heroic appearance, "you'd look just like Achilles or some person out of 'Days of Ancient Rome'!" and she insisted on handling the helmet to see it was real gold.

They had been in the room altogether nearly an hour and a half, and it was by common consent time for them to get back to Old College street, before she paused again to glance out of the window.

"You can smell it strongly from here, Hal."

"Ah, the wharves," he said, sagely: the wind that way, you see, after a pause of infinitesimal embarrassment, "all there is of it."

She stood for two seconds before the window still with the measure in her hand, musing as if in doubt, and resumed more quickly. "Oh yes, I think that'll be the very thing. Now we really must be—Hal, what's that funny white stuff falling? It looks like snow."

Long, long, did Walford remember how the tinkle of those trivial words had rung upon the curtain on the great tragedy of their lives.

Snow does not usually fall in early autumn, even in Great Britain. Was that why his face turned the color of the two or three fragments of ash, one the size of half a postage stamp, that fluttered into the room and fell upon the dark tablecloth under the lamp?

At the same instant a brazen drum down in Catchbrook street seemed to strike up a sort of muffled alarm, and before three of its panting pulsations had echoed up the walls, Walford realized that the "Mansions" were well alight, and that one engine had already got to work in front of the house.

Cursing his own negligence, he flew to the inner door, to find the lobby wreathed with smoke. He flung wide the close-fitting outer door, and there rolled in, not wreaths, but volumes, dense and dark, streaming up from below. He craned over the stair-rail and looked down as well as he might through the stifling cloud. From the lower floors came a dull, roaring sound that seemed to stop the very motion of his heart. He ran down to the next landing; there he could hardly face the smoke, and the heat was already alarming. The roar of a conflagration below grew louder; he could even make sure that the noise came

chiefly from the warehouse at the back. It must then have been on fire for some time, and have burnt sideways into the "Mansions." The iron balustrade was warm to the hand, the long tongues of flame flashed up here and there through the blinding waves, which now compelled him to beat a hasty retreat. The well was beginning to draw like a blast furnace.

"Can't we get down?" she cried to him in a faint voice, struggling with her fear. "Impossible," he panted shortly, raising and almost carrying her inside the flat, while he slammed the door heavily with his back. Don't be frightened," he added, settling her on the sofa; "they've got an engine or two to work, and an escape will be here in two minutes, only we must let them know."

He put his head out of the window, and yelled lustily: "Help! Help! Stair—case—on—fire—woman—here," and, after a pause, "the—long—escape—quick!"

The newly invented American "Telescope," as the men called it, recurred to his mind. "That," he thought to himself, "would get us down, and it's about the only chance."

Perhaps it was. At that very moment a family of children were spinning down it, one after another, from the top story of a house in South London.

But a fireman below, staring a bit, made answer, making a speaking trumpet of his hands while he shoved across the roadway with his booted feet a palpitating python-coil of hose, from which the spray squirted at every crack some thirty feet into the air. "All right," he shouted, "Bill's got 'er."

"Easy there!" (As another pair of foaming horses trampled and splashed the broad and shallow rapid coursing down the kennel, and the sucker of a third engine was hauled into the boiling dam.) "Stand by, below there! Ah! my Lord!"

Walford, unable to distinguish the words addressed to him, looked straight down below his window, and saw a sight of terror. There was a woman imprisoned on the fourth floor, to which a ladder had been reared that fell short by some ten feet of the window at which she stood leaning half out, afraid to retreat, for the flames were close behind her, and afraid to fall. The ladder seemed almost erect against the wall. But "Bill" was a hero, though accident or the stress of circumstances provided him with such poor resources for action.

"Let yourself drop, mum," he cried hoarsely to the wizened elderly female trembling above him.

"No, no," shrieked Walford, momentarily absorbed in a more acute peril than his own. "No, no, wait; get a rope up."

Half giddy with fear, the woman sprang, instead of falling; it was but a little, but that was enough. The man leant back to catch her; these gymnastics were little to him. With a catlike effort he grasped the falling bundle of clothes, locked his feet in the rungs of the ladder, and stifled his back to break the blow. Probably he knew by the fraction of a second that all was over. The top of the miserable ladder leapt out from the wall, balanced for the space of half a breath, quivered, undulated, and fell backward with a crash on to the pavement.

Walford shut his eyes, till a groan of horror from the street, audible above the drumming of three engines, the stamping of horses, and the cries of men, concluded the agonizing suspense. The whole scene had not occupied a minute.

There was a minute of maddening interval, during which Walford—the girl helping him, like one in a dream—collected blankets and sheets from the bedroom and soured them with water. Having done it, as there seemed no other use for the apparatus he heaped it up against the outer door, under and around which the smoke was now being forced in fine dark swirls like curling black hair. Such activity merely occupied the hands, while his brain seemed to be racing like a weaver's shuttle, spinning that wary of useless "whys" which, crossed with the web of unanswered "hows," soon makes up the web of despair. "Why has no proper fire-escape arrived? Why had the men only ladders, and ladders which were too short?" He caught himself half smiling, lost in a wild momentary reverie, from which the sharp imperative "foot-rot" of a steam-whistle awoke him. "Signal," thought Walford, "putting another length on one of the hoses up in Catchbrook street."

In fact, from the top windows of the side street round the corner a flood of water was being poured upon the now blazing wing of the "Mansions." Nevertheless, the particular engineer with his hand on that shrieking valve was one of the body encamped in Gloria road, around whom a dark hedge of stalwart and serious police kept off the struggling and yelling crowd, and he was looking up at Walford's window. And Walford, mechanically donning the helmet which lay on the table, attended to his call obediently as a fireman balanced on some roof-top to the familiar note which warned him that the leaping and pulsating monster his arms could hardly direct will next minute be an inanimate log with a decided "list" streetwards. He looked out, leant out, and distinctly heard a final answer from a superior official in uniform, who shouted calmly, and as it seemed, desperately. The girl within, from the sofa at which she knelt unseen, heard him mention two Parliamentary divisions of the metropolis, Amberwell and North Brington, and, a second or two later, during momentary cessations of the turmoil below, had learnt the worst. "The roof at the back . . . a rope over . . . that's all you can do . . . perhaps in twenty minutes."

"What is it?" she asked, idly, with pursed and quivering lips.

"Come along," a strangely faint voice answered. "We must get on the lads."

It was now dark, but the swelling crowd in the street, impelled by curiosity or the blind passion that for centuries peopled the amphitheatres, pressed heavily and vociferously upon the living barrier that girl the "ladder" of the fire brigade. To the chief just arrived on his rounds, and anxiously glancing up at the iron framework (now rapidly being stripped to the bone) of the "fire-proof Mansions," a grave-eyed officer of nautical build was curiously explaining the situation.

The warehouse, a huge building stuffed with inflammable material, of which only one and the smallest side abutted upon Catchbrook street, had had an hour's start, or something like that. The fire had begun at a point some twenty yards removed from

# General Agency

BOARD OF TRADE BUILDING, CANTERBURY STREET, ST. JOHN, N. B.

Controlling the largest line of

## BICYCLES REPRESENTED IN THE DOMINION.

Send Your Address for our

# 1896 Catalogue

Which we will forward as soon as published.

General Agent for the Maritime Provinces for

**The Yost Writing Machine Co.,**

**American Typewriter Co.,**

**The Blickensderfer Typewriter Co.,**

**The Edison Mimeograph Typewriter**

**The Edison Automatic Mimeograph,**

**The Edison Hand Mimeograph,**

**The Duplograph Manufacturing Co.,**

**The Electric Heat Alarm Co., &c., &c**

All kinds of bicycles, Typewriters and other intricate machines carefully repaired

# Typewriter and Mimeograph

Supplies of all kinds.

**IRA CORNWALL, General Agent,**

**I. E. CORNWALL, Special Agent.**

the street, at the back of this right wing of the "Mansions," into which it had burnt deeply before they (the narrator and his friends) had had a call. There was a hope of saving the left wing. "And we've lost two lives, one of our—"

"Yes I heard," said the chief. "That was bad." He bit his grizzled mustachios, and there was pain in his eyes.

"And we'll lose two more if we don't—"

"Where?" said the superior sharply.

"Top window, left wing, this near side. There, sir, you can see the girl. If we don't get the South Street escape in a quarter of an hour—" he broke off.

"Who's to get at 'em? We're short of everything 'cept water," and he glanced at the rapid stream coursing over his feet.

"That's in use," said the chief; "small fire, top floor. Lord Campdown's in Granville Square."

"Granville Square," muttered the man.

"Lord! what a night!"

"Well, I suppose you'll manage it somehow," said the superior, with an accent of reassurance. "I must be off north. You'll have the first four engines I can spare, and mind," he half turned back on his heel, "I wouldn't give those second floor girders another ten minutes, they're pulling in now; and they will fall outwards. Get your men away." And he was gone.

Walford grasped Nellie's arm, and together they stumbled through a stifling cloud up the little staircase with an oppressively intense consciousness that a hundred years ago, in a remote sphere of existence, they had gone through an exactly similar process, which was somehow more real than the present. To her indeed the delusion was less actual, for when they reached the roof she collapsed an unconscious burden into his ready arms. Wildly he looked about for a spot of temporary safety and shelter during this fatal delay. He could not leave her reclined against the iron balustrade, for sheets of smoke seemed drifting up the wall from the lower windows. Hastily he scrambled, holding her in one arm, over a ledge of lead, and reached a secluded spot behind a huge stack of chimneys, some yards further from the nearest signs of fire, and within but a few paces of the crevasse-like passage which separated the burning wing of the Mansions from that beyond, deserted in the last half hour by its few alarmed denizens on the ground floor, but presenting to Walford's eyes the nearest refuge, if it could be reached.

With this reflection in his mind he had dashed back across the leads and down the stairs, fighting his way this time through the smoke which surged up from the lift well. To judge from the smell and the heat the outer door and the flooring of the bedroom were already smouldering. He seized a jug of water, and having found a flask of brandy, and, as an afterthought, hastily stuffed a few valuables into his pockets, fled back across the roof. To his inexpressible relief he found her sitting up, white and tear-stained, on a grimy ledge below the chimney-stick.

"I'm all right," she said, struggling after a respectable bravery. "I think it was the smoke. Where have you been, Hal? When will they come and fetch us?"

For all answer he pressed some brandy to her lips, and then pointed across the dark gorge in front of them.

"It's not far," he said; "only on to the other roof. The men will be there soon with ropes and a ladder."

Twenty minutes, he thought to himself, must have elapsed, but what was the help promised in twenty minutes? He had not distinctly heard—was it the American fire escape, or what? Further communication with the street was impossible. He turned and looked back, the girl following his eyes.

From the whole area of roof behind them, on two sides, rose a seething wave of fire and smoke that rolled steadily towards them. It was only a matter of time now. The hostile breeze had freshened, and a hot draught met him everywhere as he hastily explored in the failing light all accessible tracts of the roof.

He could not have told how long it was before the situation in a flash loomed definitely fatal. He could see flames streaming from the staircase by which they had twice ascended. The rooms in which they had sat and trifled an hour ago, and those

adjoining them, now formed an extended wing of the general conflagration, cutting off all approach (had that been of any use) to the wall fronting Gloria Road. Some thirty yards away on the other side, the warehouse—four stories, with all the roof fallen in—roared to heaven in a vast cloud of flame, which shut out all view in that direction, and made their voices scarcely audible to one another. Immediately behind them the first high ridge of chimney-stacks stood out a jetty black against the seething waves and forked tongues of flame that, fanned by the freshening breeze, steadily clutched and devoured the mainland of roof.

At that moment a red-hot wire struck him smartly in the back. Looking up, he saw towering above him an object familiar indeed to his eyes, but worth description to a reader unacquainted with the monstrosities of a modern capital.

From a point on the roof, about fifteen or twenty feet back from the wall, rose a huge mast, some fifty feet in height, surmounted by a spire, and supported by stays of iron wire from various parts of the building. Across the upper half of it were fastened, one below another and about a foot apart, eighteen stout cross-bars of wood nearly seven feet in length. On each bar were fixed half-a-dozen large earthenware "insulators," and the whole framework—which now with smoke, clouds rolling about it resembled the mast and rigging of a burning vessel—supported over a hundred telephone wires.

"Wait! wait!" shrieked Walford nonsensically enough, with a wild light in his eyes, vaguely fearful that his last antics might have robbed the girl of her last scrap of self-control. "Wait!" he forced his voice through the hoarse murmurs of rushing flame, and the faintest tumult from the streets. "I see!"

She did not, and at first thought him mad, as, unbuckling his axe and pulling tighter the buckle of his helmet, he rushed to the foot of the gigantic telephone pole, measuring the height to the first crossbar, and then back to the passage, anxiously scanning its width. Twenty, thirty, forty times did she hear the sound of the axe swung with hearty good-will upon that stout Norwegian pine. Then he strode towards her again. His voice had a different accent, a touch of the agonized bitterness of a relapse into despair. "Half the wires are down," he said, and one of the back supports; "I can't get at the other."

Flames surrounded it and drove him back. Indeed, the foot of the pole itself was blackened on the far side, and a rain of sparks drove past it.

He groaned aloud. "Water, water!"

"A minute, mate," sounded a stentorian voice from the opposite roof.

Walford turned as if at a shot. The short figure of a Wapping mariner, clad in dark blue uniform, carrying in one hand a heavy and gleaming musketoon, and closely followed by an anaconda of fabulous length, appeared against the skyline. The splendid dawn of the conflagration flashed a quiet celestial brightness upon his brass buttons, his red nose, and even the thick wedding ring on his left hand.

"A minute!" he grunted in the same level tone; "one long and two short Jumbo's ticket, and when you hear that I'll give you all the water she can send up." He adjusted the musketoon in both arms, casting an eagle eye over the territory to be attacked.

"Hello! 'ow will you get the lady over?" He spoke as if the interval between them was a mere mile in which she might wet her feet.

"Lay down."

As the black coils behind him stiffened, the man chuckled the words at Walford like a four of tricks. He lay down on his elbows, till a passing glade from the back directed on to the leads just in front of him drove all the breath out of his body, and almost lifted it into the air. Recovering, he staggered back, axe in hand, through the sparks, and in a moment was desperately at work again. Two feet to one side of him the rigid glistering torrent hung and thundered with an explosion of hisses in the burning aperture of the roof. The mightier waves of the fire beyond made the surging roar of a stormy sea. The sound of blows was audible above it. As the current first wavered, Walford

looked up, shaking a red ash from his sleeve. The fireman was addressing him, but he could only hear part of his remarks. "Cw did yer get up? . . . ain't no use . . . fix up this a bit, and go fetch."

He shook his head, and bowed back grot-sque and di-jointed replies. "I'm not fireman. Keep on a minute," and a second later, as he stooped over the iron stay, "Your axe, quick!"

It was bowed over adroitly. Walford deliberately chipped its edge against the edge of his own, and in a trice was at work a fling the twisted iron wire. The sweat poured over him and dropped upon the leads like rain, yet still he worked on. Three minutes passed, and the quab redness man who had been murmuring to himself, "I'm not a fireman! Then 'oo the doose in el might you be?" beginning to fear that he had to do with some one naturally lunatic or deranged by the terror of the catastrophe, began to protest in his own language. With face rubicund as the flames that illumined it, he implored Walford (who had begun again) to leave off chopping at a sanguinary pole which wasn't in the way, and must clearly (whatever happened) be burned in another quarter of an hour. To his despair the lunatic, whom he now began to regard as dangerous, continued to dance about, axe in hand, in a state apparently of mingled exultation and indignation.

"Nellie," he shrieked hoarsely, "get out of the way, their, to the left!" and to the thunders/ruck man from Wapping. "Shut up, you cursed fool; now then! It's coming down! mind yourself!"

There was a sudden crash as of a rotten forest tree struck and felled by an October gale, and the inevitable, which was also the astonishing, had once more come to pass.

Of the one hundred and eight telephone wires, a great number had already subsided, in a more or less liquid state, into the huge furnace over which they had stretched.

The stays on the further side being cut away, and the timber itself half severed, the strain of the unbroken wires or supports brought the whole framework down at right angles across the wall and the passage. The virtue of this operation of the law of gravity lay in the simple fact that the distance of the base of the mast from the first crossbar and from the wall was about the same, in which coincidence also was not remarkable. But when an earthly discage of grape and canister in the form of flying insulators and broken shreds of earthenware had smashed the windows and started the pavement a hundred feet below, it became apparent that there lay across the dreaded gulf, like a drawbridge unexpectedly let down from the skies, a solid causeway, across which four men abreast might easily walk with no possibility of falling through, and even a small vehicle might have been driven.

At the sight of this dangerous miracle, the man from Wapping reaped his hose and fled. Cautiously returning, he kicked aside the broken spire and grasped the new structure to test its solidity. As there seemed no likelihood of its moving further, he nodded in a reassuring manner to the two figures advancing towards him, blackly silhouetted against the background of fire.

With a frezied light of triumph in his eye, Walford himself tramped upon the first crossbar to be sure that this wondrous inspiration would not vanish back into the fairyland of fancy from which it had so so swiftly been bodied forth. Then he turned and said simply, "Come along . . . come along . . . like that . . . step on bars, not on the pole . . . because they're flat . . . from one to the other."

But the transit was not to be accomplished so calmly, for as they reached the middle of the gulf, a long, grinding roar shook the building behind, and the bridge beneath them. Crouching down, they both clutched at the trembling woodwork till the shock passed by, and the thunderous noise died down into a distant chorus of cries and the rustling as of a mighty wind just getting up. At the same moment, a new and towering aura of light filled the sky behind, and threw the black outline of the two figures, half on the crossbars, and half on the opposite wall below.

"All right, sir; all right, lady," cried a husky but cheering voice. "That's the