

## THE FIRE ESCAPE.

ABRAHAM WIVELL was a man whose name we should not let die, for there is in London a monument to it of unspeakable value, though overshadowed by the title of the happily well-established and prosperous "Royal Society for the Preservation of Life from Fire," which he called into existence, and whose admirable doings are so frequently and honourably brought into public notice. The metropolis is dotted with their stations, as seen for ready reference in the map which accompanies the annual accounts of their proceedings. In the four districts into which the great city is divided, at each station, from nine o'clock at night in the four summer months to six o'clock in the morning, and from eight o'clock to seven in the other eight months, there is kept an efficient conductor, with the fire escape and all necessary adjuncts, whose duty is to hasten to the scene of action on the first alarm. In the year ending March, 1860, 524 fires were attended, and 94 lives were saved; and over five-sixths of the space covered by our millions of population there had been established efficient assistance for escape within a quarter of a mile of every house. The money support amounted to £7280, and the expenditure to £7180. But it is very satisfactory to learn from the latest statements that progress is making in every direction, and improvements accumulating in the adaptation of the instruments, the effective training of the force, and the general management for speedy and effectual assistance, whether in preparation or action. There are now 70 escapes, and the cost of each is about £55.

Medals and rewards were abundantly earned by the intrepid firemen. It would be an insult to humanity to attempt to enlist fine language in the description of an institution, the blessings attendant upon whose efforts are so palpable and so affecting. The abolition of suttees in India, where a single victim was superstitiously destroyed amidst stupefaction and clamour, was a subject for universal gratification; what, then, need we say to induce the right-minded liberally to co-operate in the extension of an association through whose excellent and brave ministrings, on three appalling occasions alone—viz. in Leather Lane, Cheapside, and Whitechapel High Street—there were snatched from a dreadful death 25, 14, and 11 awfully imperilled fellow-creatures.

Well, this is as it should be. Public meetings are held; the advantages explained; the gallant fellows who have most distinguished themselves honoured and rewarded, and subscriptions solicited in support of the benevolent cause. In the printed papers distributed, there is mention made of improvements patented upon Wivell's original escape; but we miss an adequate tribute to the man himself to whose ingenuity, energy, and love of his kind, the whole is due. Poor Abraham, I knew him well; he was a "dreamer," and your "practical" folk kept aloof from him; and, "as this world wags," who dare blame them? for one of his wild notions was, that if all the common shores (as he called them) emptied themselves into the Thames, the Thames itself must become the great and only

common shore for all London, and that, if he had his will, London should be drained independently of the river, and the refuse carried down beyond sea-reach; "ay, far away;" and then, he would add, "the stream would be quite pure: why, in every age but ours, people have thought the river worth attention. I'd have it pure enough to make old Izaak Walton fond of it, that I would; but people won't believe me, that they won't." Such is a specimen of Wivell's *fooling*, about twenty years ago; yet the grand secret seems only to have crept out within the last three years, and there is no apparent Wivell to supply plan or device to accomplish the grand desideratum.

Another piece of this same sort of "fooling," with which we have more especially to do, culminated in the fire escape. None but the very few who put faith in him could tell how strenuously he worked, how zealously he invented, spending all he had and all he could borrow on his day-dream. Doubters said, as doubters ever have said, and ever will say, "Show me the thing in full size and well at work: small models may be very pretty, clever toys perhaps, but nothing more; but for an escape from a raging fire, my good friend, excuse me!" It is a common and an easy matter thus to think and thus to speak, and the disheartened enthusiast can only repeat, like Sancho Panza with his unanswerable proverbs, "There is no more to be said."

But a few words from the story to the person. Wivell had a deep love for art. He understood it. He had collected, during many years, rare prints and books, culled from stalls or purchased at sales, and these were his heart's treasures. But when the new project arose, he sold them all to devote himself to what he deemed a public good; from his cherished volumes and engravings the first fire escape was matured into a demonstration. It was a proud day for him when his finished essay left the wheelwright's yard, all new, and red, and paid for; and that huge uncouth machine ran easily in his own hand, and turned corners in a style of empty wheelbarrow celerity. How pleased he was, although purchased by such sacrifices, to witness it rest at last against the dwelling where he had lived, and schemed, and thought.

That very noon, up went the inventor to the topmost spoke of the ladder, to exhibit how firm it was; from windows and from roof he brought his children down in safety to the street, and then some bold fellows were inclined to risk all hazards to prove that there was no danger in the ominous-looking machine. Now there could be no doubt it was a success; but, poor Wivell! "what was he to do with it?" What do with it? Why, hire a map of London, divide it into districts (it is so now), and here are fifty stations suggested; and the utmost efforts are made to get up a subscription of five shillings a-year to launch and sustain this most precious design. "If but one in twenty of those who enjoy wealth assist me," he estimated, "there will be enough, and more than enough, to secure thousands, especially of the poorly lodged, from the most calamitous of deaths. Make me inspector; I will see that the duty's



ABRAHAM WIVELL'S IMPROVED FIRE ESCAPE.

done; my whole heart is in the work." Even such provision was not to be. The "respectability" of his neighbourhood (some of whom he had pestered enough with his invention) consented to attend a meeting, were it only to humour and see what could be done for him; and the strong heart of this man sent him forth on his distressing mission. He secured a public room and paid for it; he posted bills upon the walls with his own hands; he left notices at every likely house. At the meeting, when convened, he explained for a full hour all that he had done, and all that he proposed to do. The consummation arrived; a committee was appointed, and a treasurer also, and Wivell was appointed to collect the money, out of which he was voted to be repaid the expense of his escape, and a gratuity of ten pounds for himself!

Would that this were a solitary example of the destiny which awaits the great benefactors of man-

kind; but it is rather the common lot: the reverse furnishes the rare exceptions. At this distance of time, it remains an astonishment how the finale could be endured. How sad and full of sorrow his mind must have been when it flashed upon him that such was to be the result of his anxieties and toils; and, more strange is it to record, that those whom his importunities had lugged into the "concern," but who had now become its masters, made an almost insurmountable difficulty of lending the inventor his own invention, in order to evidence its capabilities in the city of London. This trial, tardily granted, however, was so far fortunate; for the citizens, more liberal than the dwellers on the waterside, presented Wivell with £100 to relieve his pressing necessity. It was worth a thousand to him then! He was farther commissioned to make them several "first-rate sound escapes." He was happy now, and achieved a bright green

suit of clothes. He designed a medal as the acknowledgment of enterprise; and, though we cannot be quite sure that Philip Van Artevelde was right when he asserted that "the world knew nothing of its greatest men," yet it must be owned that the eminent in rank and intellect, as well as the general body who assist at the meetings of the Royal Society for the Preservation of Life from Fire, have scarcely heard a whisper that Abraham Wivell, through long years of labour and struggle and the oppression of poverty, made it what it is.

And, after all, what a noble lesson of what may be done by unwearied energy and perseverance does his example afford. He was brought up a barber, and in that capacity first became acquainted with Nollekens the sculptor and Northcote the painter—both eccentric persons, who liked him, and left him legacies when they died. From their intercourse he acquired the tastes we have alluded to. He could write, could draw, could model, could paint, could engrave. The first of these qualifications is witnessed by his two volumes, entitled, "An Enquiry into the authenticity of the Shakespere Portraits"—a work of considerable research, and the most valuable on the subject. His engraved portrait of Northcote is, we believe, the best extant of the old parsimonious R.A. He has exhibited on the walls of the Royal Academy; and a series of engravings of the Cato Street conspirators, and circumstances that happened on the trial of Queen Caroline, have been very popular; beyond all which, many a poetic fancy and brilliant epigram have proceeded from his pen. Reader, do you not think with us that his life was a remarkable one—that he has conferred a most providential benefit on his country and fellow-creatures, and that the name of Abraham Wivell is one which our gratitude ought not easily to let die? All honour to the inventor of the fire escape, and may its usefulness increase tenfold!

### JUAN DIAZ;

OR, THE SPANISH FRATRICIDE.

THE old-fashioned city of Ratisbon, lying on the south of the Danube, at its confluence with the river Regen, in Bavaria, was long known as the place of meeting for the diets and conferences of the empire. Here, early in the year 1546, a conference was held, at the desire of the emperor Charles v, between some of the learned divines of the Romish and reformed churches, with the professed view of settling the points in dispute between them. The parties met, but without any desire on the one side, or any hope on the other, of effecting an agreement. Charles was covertly preparing to put down Protestantism by force of arms. Previous conferences had abundantly proved to the reformers how little was to be gained from disputations with churchmen, who came determined to impede all fair discussion, and who, after breaking up the conference by insisting on conditions which they knew could not be consistently allowed, went off boasting of a triumph, and proclaiming their opponents a set of

impracticable fanatics, who ought to be put down as the disturbers of the peace of Christendom. Neither Luther nor Melancthon, therefore, were present on this occasion. But Bucer had come from Strasburg with three of his brethren; and at the time when our story begins, they had just arrived, attended by a few friends, when the following encounter took place.

At the corner of one of the crooked streets of Ratisbon, where the old houses, closely piled up on each side to a great height, left but a narrow pathway for the passenger, two Spaniards unexpectedly met, and immediately recognised each other as old acquaintances. One of them was evidently an ecclesiastic; but there was a pomp in his gait, and a careless swagger in the style in which he wore his costly robes, that savoured more of the court than of the cloister. This was Peter Malvenda, one of the Romish doctors who had come to meet the reformed divines in conference. Peter had studied theology, such as it was then taught, in the university of Paris, and had there acquired, along with his degree, the art of quibbling upon words, and twisting plain truths into endless meshes of sophistry, after the manner of the ancient schoolmen. Like many of his class and age, he was too enlightened to be superstitious; but the light which had flashed up all around at the Reformation had not penetrated into his heart; it had only served to endear to him the more the darkness in which Catholicism would have shrouded the abhorred Bible, and inspire him with a more bitter and intense hatred of those pious men who had brought the rays of this heavenly lamp to bear upon the errors and corruptions of the Church. Unprincipled and coarse-minded, looking on religion merely as a stepping-stone to church preferment, and on church preferment as the avenue of worldly pleasure, this Spanish hidalgo added to the haughtiness for which his country is proverbial, the insolent airs of a minion of the court. He was constantly boasting of his favour with "Caesar," as the emperor was styled, and his familiarity with the imperial confessor, the Dominican monk, Peter of Soto.

Very different was the character of his countryman whom he now met on the streets of Ratisbon. Juan Diaz was a young man of good family, modest, amiable, and ingenuous. He had studied with Malvenda at Paris; but the wretched subtleties and puerilities of scholastic theology had filled him with disgust. He had acquired the knowledge of Hebrew, and after a close study of the Scriptures in their original languages, and residing for some time at Geneva and Strasburg, he had, from sincere and deep conviction, embraced the Protestant faith. Struck with the talents and the engaging manners of the Spanish stranger, Bucer had prevailed on the Council of Strasburg to include him in their commission to Ratisbon.

Malvenda, who had seen him in company of the reformed divines, and suspected his errand, pretended, on now meeting him, to be overwhelmed with astonishment.

"What!" he exclaimed, lifting up his eyes and hands to heaven, "am I in a dream, or do I really behold thee in the flesh, Juan Diaz?—in Germany,