

HOW TO ORGANISE A VOLUNTARY FIRE BRIGADE.



HO has not felt the exciting influences of a large fire? We have most of us, at some time or other, been intensely interested as spectators in the fate of a blazing building — even where human life is not directly in peril — and been inexpressibly eager to do what we could individually to avert the destruction.

There are few more salutary lessons than that conveyed by the rush of by-standers to take their turn at the pump-handles of the old-fashioned fire-engine, or to assist in conveying articles of value beyond the reach of hungry flames.

Englishmen cannot bear to stand with their hands in their pockets at such a scene as this, which seems to stir every soul to energy, and to call upon able-bodied men to be up and doing. This spirit of activity is quite natural. It has found its vent within recent years in a very reasonable direction; it has prompted the formation of highly efficient fire brigades, not only started but maintained by volunteer or unpaid labour. Such voluntary aid is as free from the imputation of unnecessary rivalry with the rate-supported brigades, as from the absurd charge of pecuniary self-interest. The brigades seem absolutely necessary to supplement an acknowledged deficiency in the public resources; and this may be seen, at all events with regard to the Metropolis, by a brief reference to statistics.

The population of London within the Metropolitan and City Police Districts was 3,885,641, according to the census of 1871; at the same date the number of inhabited houses was 528,794, and the total value of property in the Metropolis amounted to the enormous sum of £1,620,000,000, two-thirds of which amount are credited to the City. Here we have some idea of the lives and property to be protected from fire. Now let us see what means of protection are provided for us.

From a recent report of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, we find that the total number of firemen paid and in the employ of the Metropolitan Board of Works (to which an Act of Parliament of 1865 has committed the control of the means applicable to the extinction of fires in the Metropolis, including the City

of London) is 406, of all ranks, including chief officers and superintendents. So that at the present time there are, roughly speaking, only 400 men engaged to preserve life and property from fire in the largest city and port in the world, containing nearly 4,000,000 inhabitants. Out of the many miles of riverside wharves, a single mile has been found sufficient to tax to the utmost the resources of the Metropolitan Brigade. The City of London, paying as it does one-ninth of the cost of maintenance of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, and on account of the wealth it contains and its numerous public buildings, naturally monopolises the largest share of the existing means applicable for fire extinction. But in the present day the suburbs of London denude the City at night-time of nearly the whole of its population, and it is in the hours of night that the majority of fires occur. Hence, a fire in the suburbs, which involves greater jeopardy of life, calls for as good a protection, at least, as is bestowed on edifices which, though valuable as property, are chiefly tenantless at night-time. Volunteer brigades, we are assured, can be maintained at a third of the cost of the stations of the Metropolitan body, and can be made equally efficient, their paid staff being nominal, and their strength capable of augmentation as occasion may require. It seems, therefore, to the interest of rate-payers to obtain by voluntary subscription the protection which, if provided by the Metropolitan Board of Works, would cost so much more and involve a compulsory payment. It would be impossible to impute inefficiency or incapability to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade; it is quite sufficient, we believe, for all ordinary emergencies. No more efficient, zealous, and praiseworthy body of men exists, and they gain the esteem and admiration of all with whom they come in contact. They are, however, too few in number, and their power and endurance have a limit.

One of the best of existing voluntary brigades is the Tufnell Park Volunteer Fire and Salvage Brigade, "an auxiliary protection for the North of London;" and we may take it as a type here, for the purpose of describing the manner and results of volunteer work. The energy with which this organisation was effected is remarkable. A public meeting in the district resolved upon the formation of the brigade in February, 1877; so early as the following May the station of the brigade was formally opened, and on New Year's Day, 1878, the first report was issued, containing the names of all subscribers to that date. These subscribers, we need hardly say, provide the working income. The brigade had at starting, it is true, the advantage of a loan for the purposes of equipment from the lord of the manor of Islington, Mr. H. A. Tufnell, who is also its honorary captain; but to the householders of the district do the firemen turn, and quite rightly, for the annual funds necessary to keep the service afloat. The voluntary members place

themselves, as they say, unreservedly at the service of the public, "without any other reward than that which arises from the consciousness of being useful to their fellow-men." That this appeal has not been in vain is evidenced by the fact that the subscriptions for 1878 trebled those collected in the previous year.

The equipment of the fire station is such as to allow of assistance being rendered by the brigade at two separate fires, presuming them to occur simultaneously, by night or day. It includes an improved Metropolitan Brigade escape, capable of rescuing a person from fire at a height of 77 feet, and another portable escape, which can be taken to any part of the district by hand, immediately an alarm of fire is given, and which is capable of rescuing life from fire at either the back or the front of a house. This escape also carries appliances for extinguishing the fire in addition to its life-saving properties. The houses in Tufnell Park and neighbourhood, it appears, are generally built without trap-doors in the roof; and the front gardens, in many instances, render the ordinary escape used by the Metropolitan Brigade useless. The machine in question has been specially built and adapted to the houses in this locality. Horses are always kept in readiness; a small staff of paid firemen is on duty day and night at the station, and is ready at all times, with voluntary members of the brigade, to render immediate service.

To encourage the transmission of the earliest intelligence of fires to the brigade, a reward is given to any one who may first discover an outbreak of fire in the surrounding districts, and who causes information to be transmitted without delay, by telegraph or otherwise, to the fire station. And a further reward will be paid if, in consequence of such information, the Tufnell Park Brigade be first to reach the scene of the fire. An "Occurrence Book" is kept at the station, in which every occurrence in connection with the work of the brigade is entered, with particulars of the time, date, and so on. The calls upon the brigade for attendance at fires during 1878, exclusive of chimneys on fire, amounted to 32; and the members have, on one or two occasions, rendered service outside their local sphere of action, the magnitude of the catastrophe in each such instance having rendered their assistance desirable. That the drills are not neglected is quite certain. The brigade, in 1878, turned out, horsed and fully equipped for drill, 57 times, exclusive of escape and other drills; if the latter are included, they show a total number of 104 drills for the year.

A curious yet useful development of this suburban movement is "chimney indemnification." As most Londoners are aware, the Statute 28 and 29 Vict., c. 90, enacts that: "If the chimney of any house or other building within the Metropolitan is on fire, the occupier of such house or building shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding twenty shillings." Subscribers of five shillings or upwards to the Tufnell Park Brigade are freed from their liability under the 23rd section of the Act above quoted, as the brigade undertakes to pay the fine imposed on any householder subscribing such

sum, and who may be summoned for having his chimney on fire. It also renders gratuitous assistance at such fire, and the householder is thus saved the expense which would have to be incurred by the attendance of the Metropolitan Brigade. On application by letter to the chief officer, a fireman is sent, with the necessary appliances for the rapid extinction of fire, to attend any public or private building during the performance of any ceremony or entertainment entailing more than ordinary risk by fire. The members of the brigade are always willing, when invited, to acquaint themselves with the available means applicable for the extinction of fires occurring at any public or private buildings within a reasonable distance from the station, with the express object of being better able to discharge their self-imposed duties for the benefit of the local inhabitants.

The second annual report of the brigade, an instructive little document to which we owe most of these details, contains some hints for the preservation of life from fire. The following "instructions to inmates" are sufficiently useful to be reproduced *verbatim*.—

"All the inmates of a house should be accustomed to reflect on the best line of conduct in the event of a fire, and should be made well acquainted with every outlet, both on the roof and otherwise; and in securing the house for the night, care should be taken to leave these outlets as easy of access as possible. Immediately upon an alarm of fire, send for the nearest fire engine and escape. In the midst of much smoke, free breathing may be obtained by applying to the face a *wet* silk handkerchief, a worsted stocking, or other flannel substance unfolded, or a *wet* sponge. It is also useful to remember that smoke, being lighter than air, ascends, and in consequence, if on your hands and knees on the floor, you may find the air moderately clear. When unable to escape by the street door or roof, all in danger should assemble at a front room window, closing all doors after them, a window over the doorway, rather than over the area, being selected; and it should then be ascertained that every individual is present. In this position all should remain without precipitating themselves from the window, waiting the arrival of the fire escape; and even at the last extremity sheets or blankets may be joined together, one end being made fast to a piece of furniture; this will enable one person to lower all the others, and himself also, without much risk."

The volunteer brigade we have been here describing is said to be "authorised by the Metropolitan Board of Works to attend London fires;" but it seems strange that no volunteer fire brigade in this country receives any encouragement whatever from the Government. With the volunteer firemen we may ask: Why is it not desirable to protect life from *fire* as effectually as from water or any of the other dangers which surround us, and which various philanthropic societies are so liberally encouraged to keep away from us? "Why should not equal perseverance in a good cause be commended and supported, when its object is to combat an enemy which may attack any one at any time, if not all in turn, and which at least needs the

vigilance of all to guard against it? Each year closes with its list of lives lost by fire, which often could have been saved had means been ready when required." Pecuniary loss may be covered by insurance, but the value of life may be regarded as worth a few shillings voluntarily subscribed each year to insure its preservation. Volunteer riflemen are encouraged and supported by the Government; they are recognised as a necessary item in the public service. Volunteer firemen, on the other hand, whose

mission is to preserve rather than destroy human life, and whose foe is by no means imaginary and is always ready for attack, at present receive no pecuniary support from those in authority. Whatever may be the future of the voluntary fire brigade service, it is certain that the public are already beginning to see the advantages of the additional protection afforded by it. In this encouragement we unreservedly concur, and heartily wish God-speed to so excellent and useful a movement.



CHRISTMAS EVE.



NE hour in all the year is sweet,
And passing sweet the rest beside :
When loving friends, long parted, meet,
And hearts with wealth of welcome beat
At Christmas-tide.

Dear Christmas Eve ! When love is strong,
And strife and falsehood pass away,
And kindly actions round us throng,
And memories of ancient wrong
Die out for aye !

And yet in this wide world we know
There must be always some who grieve,
Who all unloved, unloving, go,
Or sit enthroned amid their woe
On Christmas Eve.

God grant to hearts thus overcast
Such love and joy as we receive,
That, free from spectres of the past,
They, too, may find sweet peace at last
On Christmas Eve !

G. WEATHERLY.