

The Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

ITS HOME AND ITS WORK.



IRE! Fire!"

This startling cry aroused me one night as I was putting the finishing touches to some literary work. Rushing, pen in hand, to the window, I could just perceive a dull red glare in the northern sky, which, even as I gazed, became more vivid, and threw some chimneys near at hand into strong relief. A fire undoubtedly, and not far distant!

The street, usually so quiet at night, had suddenly awakened. The alarm which had reached me had aroused my neighbours on each side of the way, and every house was



CAPTAIN SHAW.

"well alight" in a short space of time. Doors were flung open, windows raised, white forms were visible at the casements, and curiosity was rife. Many men and some venturesome women quitted their houses, and proceeded in the direction of the glare, which was momentarily increasing, the glow on the clouds waxing and waning according as the flames shot up or temporarily died down.

"Where is it?" people ask in a quick, panting way, as they hurry along. No one can say for certain. But just as we think it must be in Westminster, we come in sight

of a huge column of smoke, and turning a corner are within view of the emporium—a tall, six-storied block, stored with inflammable commodities, and blazing fiercely. Next door, or rather the next warehouse, is not yet affected.

The scene is weird and striking; the intense glare, the shooting flames which dart viciously out and upwards, the white and red faces of the crowd kept back by the busy police, the puff and clank of the engines, the rushing and hissing of the water, the roar of the fire, and the columns of smoke which in heavy sulky masses hung gloating over the blazing building. The bright helmets of the firemen are glinting everywhere, close to the already tottering wall, on the summit of the adjacent buildings, which are already smoking. Lost on ladders, amid smoke, they pour a torrent of water on the burning and seething premises. Above all the monotonous "puff, puff" of the steamer is heard, and a buzz of admiration ascends from the attentive, silent crowd.

Suddenly arises a yell—a wild, unearthly cry, which almost makes one's blood run cold even in that atmosphere. A tremor seizes us as a female form appears at an upper window, framed in flame, curtained with smoke and noxious fumes.

"Save her! Save her!"

The crowd sways and surges; women scream; strong men clench their hands and swear—Heaven only knows why. But before the police have headed back the people the escape is on the spot, two men are on it, one outstrips his mate, and darting up the ladder, leaps into the open window.

He is swallowed up in a moment—lost to our sight. Will he ever return out of that fiery furnace? Yes, here he is, bearing a senseless female form, which he passes out to his mate, who is calmly watching his progress, though the ladder is in imminent danger. Quick! The flames approach!

The man on the ladder does not wait as his mate again disappears and emerges with a child about fourteen. Carrying this burthen easily, he descends the ladder. The first man is already flying down the escape, head-first, holding the woman's dress round her feet. The others, rescuer and rescued, follow. The ladder is withdrawn, burning.

A mighty cheer arises 'mid the smoke. Two lives saved! The fire is being mastered. More engines gallop up. "The Captain" is on the spot, too. The Brigade is victorious.

In the early morning hour, as I strolled home deep in thought, I determined to see these men who nightly risk their lives and stalwart limbs for the benefit and preservation of helpless fire-scorched people. Who are these men who go literally through fire and water to assist and save their fellow creatures, strangers to them—unknown, save in that they require help and succour?

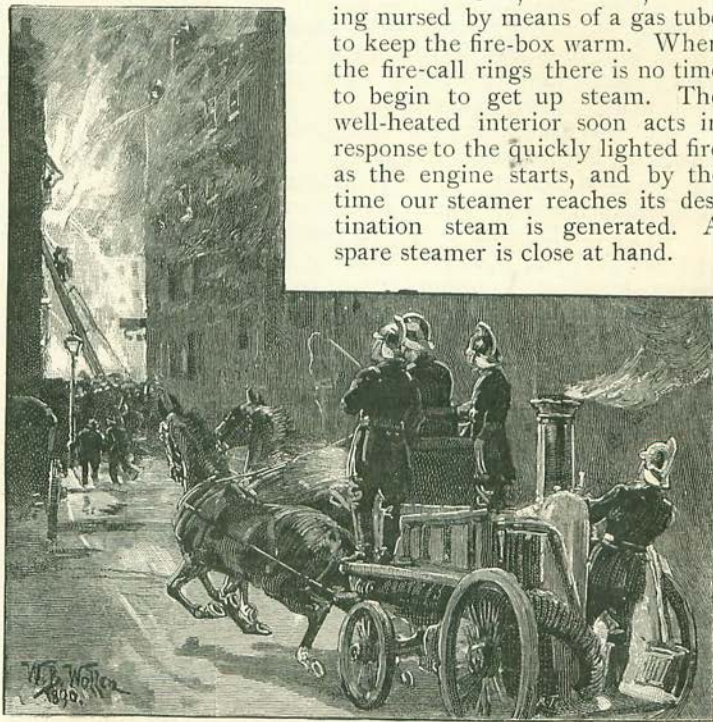
I determined there and then to see these brave fellows in their daily work, or leisure in their homes, amid all the surroundings of their noble calling. I went accompanied by an artistic friend, to whose efforts the illustrations which accompany this record are due.

Emerging from Queen-street, we find ourselves upon Southwark Bridge, and we at once plunge into a flood of memories of old friends who come, invisibly, to accompany us on our pilgrimage to old Winchester House, now the head-quarters of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, in the Southwark Bridge-road. On the bridge—once a "tolled" structure known as the Iron Bridge—we find "Little Dorrit" herself, and her suitor, young John Chivery, in all his brave attire; the young aspirant is downhearted at the decided refusal of Miss Amy to marry him, as they pace the then almost unfrequented bridge. Their ghosts cross it in our company, with Clennan and Maggie behind us, till we reach the Union-road, once known as Horsemonger-lane, where young John's ghost quits us to meditate in the back yard of Mr. Chivery's premises, and become that "broken-down ruin," catching cold beneath the family washing, which he feared.

The whole neighbourhood is redolent of Dickens. From a spot close by the head office we can see the buildings which have been erected on the site of the King's Bench Prison, where Mr. Micawber waited for something to turn up, and where Copperfield lost his box and money. The site of the former "haven of domestic tranquillity and peace of mind," as Micawber styled it, is indicated to us by Mr. Harman—quite a suitable name in such a connection with Dickens—by whom we are courteously and pleasantly received in the office of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

Our credentials being in order there is no difficulty experienced in our reception. Nothing can exceed the civility and politeness of the officials, and of the rank and file of the Brigade. Fine, active, cheerful fellows, all sailors, these firemen are a credit to their organisation and to London. The Superintendent hands us over to a bright young fellow, who is waiting his promotion—we hope he has reached it, if not a death vacancy—and he takes us in charge kindly.

Standing in the very entrance, we had already remarked two engines. The folding, automatic doors are closed in front of these machines. One, a steamer, is being nursed by means of a gas tube to keep the fire-box warm. When the fire-call rings there is no time to begin to get up steam. The well-heated interior soon acts in response to the quickly lighted fire as the engine starts, and by the time our steamer reaches its destination steam is generated. A spare steamer is close at hand.



ENGINES GALLOP UP.

Very bright and clean is the machine, which in a way puts its useful ally, the "manual," in the shade; though at present the latter kind are more numerous, in the proportion of seventy-eight to forty-eight. Turning from the engines, we notice a row of burnished helmets hanging over tunics, and below these, great knee-boots, which are so familiar to the citizen. When the alarm is rung, these are donned rapidly; but we opine the gates will occupy some time in the opening.

Our guide smiles, and points out two ropes hanging immediately over the driving seat of each engine.

"When the engine is ready the coachman pulls the rope, and the gates open of their own accord, you may say. See here!"

He turns to the office entrance, where two ropes are hanging side by side. A pull on each, and the doors leading to the backyard open and unfold themselves. The catch drops deftly into an aperture made to receive it, and the portals are thus kept open. About a second and a half is occupied in this manœuvre.

We consider it unfortunate that we shall not see a "turn out," as alarms by day are not usual. The Superintendent looks quizzical, but says nothing then. He gives instructions to our guide to show us all we want to see, and in this spirit we examine the instrument room close at hand.

Here are fixed a number of telephonic apparatus, labelled with the names of the stations:—Manchester-square, Clerkenwell, Whitechapel, and so on, five in number, known by the Brigade as Superintendents' Stations, A, B, C, D, E Districts. By these means immediate communication can be obtained with any portion of the Metropolis, and the condition and requirements of the fires reported. There is also a frame in the outer office which bears a number of electric bells, which can summon the head of any department, or demand the presence of any officer instantly.

It is extraordinary to see the quiet way in which the work is performed, the ease and freedom of the men, and the strict observance of discipline withal. Very few men are visible as we pass on to the repairing shops. (Illustration, p. 29.) Here the engines are repaired and inspected. There are eleven steamers in the shed, some available for service, and so designated. If an outlying station require a steamer in substitution for its own, here is one ready.

The boilers are examined every six months, and tested by water-pressure up to 180 lbs. on the square inch, in order to sustain safely the steam pressure up to 120 lbs., when it "blows off."

Passing down the shed we notice the men—all Brigade men—employed at their various tasks in the forge or carpenters' shop. Thus it will be perceived that the head-quarters enclose many different artisans, and is self-contained. The men were lifting a boiler when we were present, and our artist "caught them in the act."

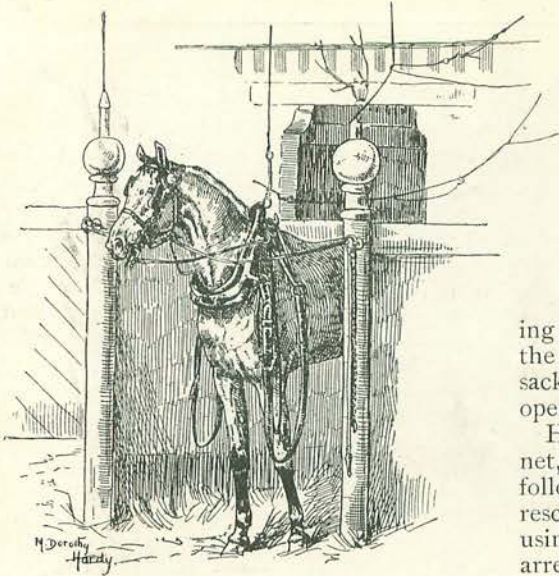
Close to the entrance is a high "shoot" in which hang pendant numerous ropes and many lengths of drying hose. The impression experienced when standing underneath, and gazing upwards, is something like the feeling one would have while gazing up at the tops of the trees in a pine wood. There is a sense of vastness in this narrow lofty brick enclosure, which is some 70 ft. high. The hose is doubled in its length of 100 ft., and then it drains dry, for the moisture is apt to conceal itself in the rubber lining, and in the nozzles and head-screws of the hoses.

No precaution is neglected, no point is missed. Vigilant eyes are everywhere; bright responsive faces and ready hands are continually in evidence, but unobtrusively.

Turning from the repairing shops we proceed to the stables, where we find things in the normal condition of preparedness. "Be ready" is evidently the watchword of the Brigade. Ready, aye ready! Neatness and cleanliness are here scrupulously regarded. Tidiness is the feature of the stables. A pair of horses on either side are standing, faces outward, in their stalls. Four handsome, well-groomed, lithe animals they look; and as we enter they regard us with considerable curiosity, a view which we reciprocate.

Round each horse's neck is suspended his collar. A weight let into the woodwork of the stall holds the harness by means of a lanyard and swivel. When the alarm rings the collar is dropped, and in "half a second" the animals, traces and splinter-bar hanging on their sleek backs and sides, are trotted out and harnessed. Again we express our regret that no kind householder will set fire to his tenement, that no nice children will play with matches or candle this fine morning, and let us "see everything," like Charles Middlewick.

Once more our guide smiles, and passes on through the forage and harness-rooms,



IN THE STABLES.

where we also find a coachman's room for reading, and waiting on duty.

It is now nearly mid-day, and we turn to see the fire-drill of the recruits, who, clad in slops, practise all the necessary and requisite work which alone can render them fit for the business. They are thus employed from nine o'clock to mid-day, and from two till four p.m. During these five hours the squads are exercised in the art of putting the ladders and escapes on the wagons which convey them to the scene of the fire. The recruit must learn how to raise the heavy machine by his own efforts, by means of a rope rove through a ring-bolt. We had an opportunity to see the recruits raising the machine together to get it off the wagon. The men are practised in leaping up when the vehicle is starting off at a great pace after the wheels are manned to give an impetus to the vehicle which carries a burthen.

But the "rescue drill" is still more interesting, and this exhibited the strength and dexterity of the firemen in a surprising manner. It is striking to notice the different ways in which the rescue of the male and female sexes is accomplished. The sure-footed fireman rapidly ascends the ladder, and leaps upon the parapet. The escape is furnished with a ladder which projects beyond the net. At the bottom a canvas

sheet or "hammock" is suspended, so that the rescued shall not suffer from contusions, which formerly were frequent in consequence of the rapid descent.

One fireman passes into a garret window and emerges with a man. He makes no pause on the parapet, where already, heedless of glare and smoke and the risk of a fall, he has raised on his shoulders the heavy, apparently inanimate, form, and grasping the man round one leg, his arm inside the thigh, he carries him steadily, like a sack of coals, down the ladder as far as the opening of the bag-net of the escape.

Here he halts, and puts the man into the net, perhaps head downwards, he himself following in the same position. The man rescued is then let down easily, the fireman using his elbows and knees as "breaks" to arrest their progress. So the individual is assisted down, and not permitted to go unattended.

The rescue of a female is accomplished in a slightly different manner. She is also carried to the ladder, but the rescuer grasps both her legs below the knees, and when he reaches the net he places her head downwards and grasps her dress tightly round her ankles, holding her thus in a straight position. Thus her dress is undisturbed, and she is received in the folds of the friendly canvas underneath, in safety.

There is also a "jumping drill" from the windows into a sheet held by the other men. This course of instruction is not so



FIRE ESCAPES



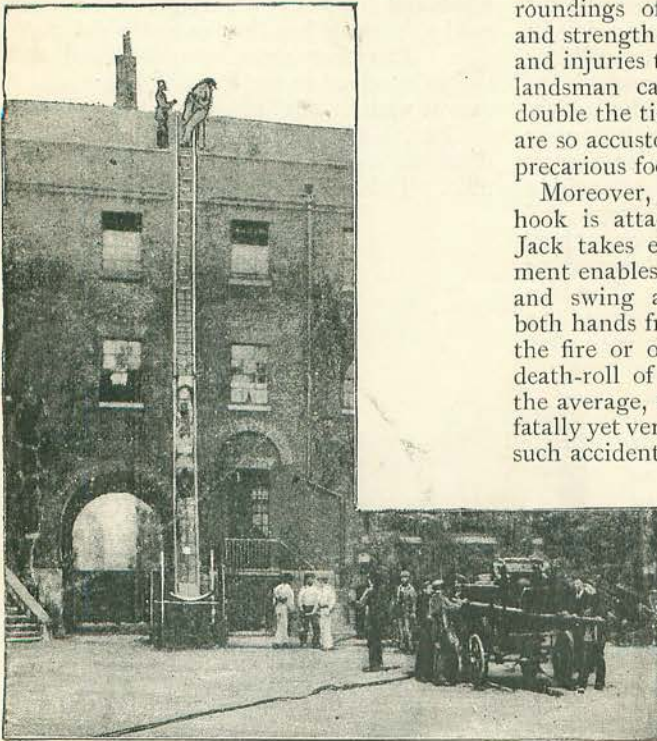
RECRUITS DRILLING.

popular, for it seems somewhat of a trial to leap in cold blood into a sheet some twenty feet below. The feat of lifting a grown man (weighing perhaps sixteen

stone) from the parapet to the right knee, then, by grasping the waist, getting the limp arm around his neck, and then, holding the leg, to rise up and walk on a narrow ledge amid all the terrible surroundings of a fire, requires much nerve and strength. Frequently we hear of deaths and injuries to men of the Brigade, but no landsman can attain proficiency in even double the time that sailors do—the latter are so accustomed to giddy heights, and to precarious footing.

Moreover, the belt, to which a swivel hook is attached, is a safeguard of which Jack takes every advantage. This equipment enables him to hang on to a ladder and swing about like a monkey, having both hands free to save or assist a victim of the fire or one of his mates. There is a death-roll of about five men annually, on the average, and many are injured, if not fatally yet very seriously, by falling walls and such accidents. Drenched and soaked, the men have a terrible time of it at a fire, and they richly deserve the leisure they obtain.

This leisure is, however, not so pleasant as might be imagined, for the fireman is always on duty; and, no matter how he is occupied, he may be wanted on the engine, and must go.



RESCUE DRILL.

Having inspected the American ladder in its shed, we glanced at the stores and pattern rooms, and at the firemen's quarters. Here the men live with their wives and families, if they are married, and in single blessedness, if Love the Pilgrim has not come their way. Old Winchester House, festooned with creepers, was never put to more worthy use than in sheltering these retiring heroes, who daily risk their lives uncompainingly. Somewhat different now the scenes from those when the stately palace of Cardinal Beaufort extended to the river, and the spacious park was stocked with game and venison. As our conductor seeks a certain key we muse on the old time, the feasts and pageants held here, the wedding banquet of James and Jane Somerset, when the old walls and precincts rang with merry cheer. Turning, we can almost fancy we perceive the restless Wyatt quitting the

pad we see all that remains of the brave Fireman JACOBS, who perished at the conflagration in Wandsworth in September, 1889.

It was on the 12th of that month that the premises occupied by Messrs. Burroughs and Wellcome, manufacturing chemists, took fire. Engineer Howard and two third-class firemen, Jacobs and Ashby, ran the hose up the staircase at the end of the building. The two latter men remained, but their retreat was suddenly cut off, and exit was sought by the window. The united ladder-lengths would not reach the upper story, and a builder's ladder came only within a few feet of the casement at which the brave men were standing calling for a line.

Ashby, whose helmet is still preserved, was fortunately able to squeeze himself through the bars, drop on the high ladder,



A SAD RECORD.

postern-gate, leaving fragments of the mutilated books of Winchester's proud bishop. These past scenes vanish as our guide returns and beckons us to other sights.

Of these, by far the most melancholy interest is awakened by the relics of those brave firemen who have died, or have been seriously injured, on duty. In a cupboard, in a long, rather low apartment, in the square or inner quadrangle of the building, are a number of helmets; bruised, battered, broken, burnt; the fragments of crests twisted by fire, dulled by water and dust and smoke. Here is a saddening record indeed. The visitor experiences much the same sensations as those with which he gazes at the bodies at the Great Saint Bernard, only in this instance the cause of death is fire and heat, in the other snow and vapour, wind and storm; but all "fulfilling His word," Whose fiat has gone forth, "To dust shalt thou return."

Aye, it is a sad moment when on a canvas

and descend. He was terribly burned. But Jacobs being a stout man—his portrait is hanging on the wall in the office waiting-room in Southwark—could not squeeze through, and he was burned to a cinder, almost. What remained of him was laid to rest with all Brigade honours, but in this museum are his blackened tunic-front, his hatchet and spanner, the nozzle of the hose he held in his death-grip. That is all! But his memory is green, and not a man who mentions but points with pride to his picture. "Did you tell him about Jacobs?" is a question which testifies to the estimation in which this brave man is held; and he is but a sample of the rest.

For he is not alone represented. Take the helmets one by one at random. Whose was this? JOSEPH FORD'S? Yes, read on, and you will learn that he saved six lives at a fire in Gray's Inn-road, and that he was in the act of saving a seventh when he lost his life. Poor fellow!

STANLEY GUERNSEY; T. ASHFORD; HOAD; BERG, too, the hero of the Alhambra fire in 1882. But the record is too long. *Requiescant in pace.* They have done their duty; some have survived to do it again, and we may be satisfied. . . . Come away, lock the cupboard, good Number 109. May it be long ere thy helmet is placed with sad memento within this press.

Descending the stairs we reach the office once again. Here we meet our Superintendent. All is quiet. Some men are reading, others writing reports, mayhap; a few are in their shirt-sleeves working, polishing the reserve engine: a calm reigns. We glance up at the automatic fire-alarm which, when just heated, rings the call, and "it will warm up also with your hand." See? Yes! but suppose it should ring, suppose—

Ting, ting, ting, ting-g-g-g!

What's this? The call? I am at the office door in a second. Well it is that I proceed no farther. As I pause in doubt and surprise, the heavy rear doors swing open by themselves as boldly and almost as noiselessly as the iron gate which opened for St. Peter. A clattering of hoofs, a running to and fro for a couple of seconds; four horses trot in, led by the coachman; in the twinkling of an eye the animals are hitched to the ready engines; the firemen dressed, helmeted, and booted are seated on the machines; a momentary pause to learn

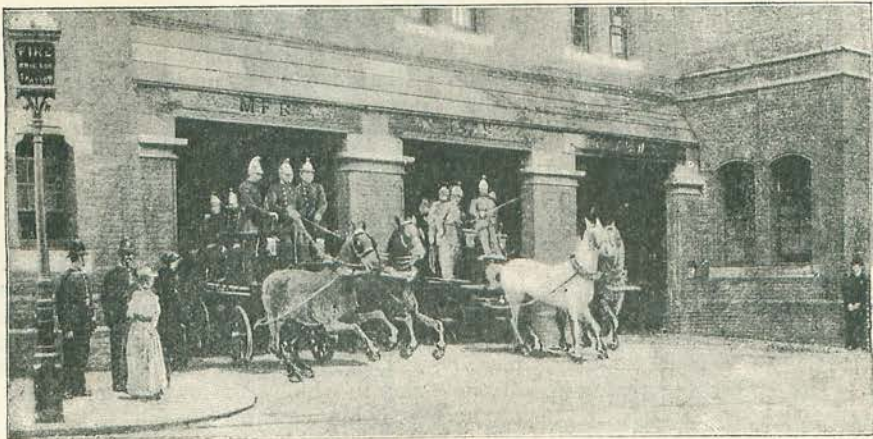
at the traces; the passers-by scatter helter-skelter as the horses plunge into the street and then dash round the corner to their stables once again.

"A false alarm?"

"Yes, sir. We thought you'd like to see a turn out, and that is how it's done!"

A false alarm! Was it true? Yes, the men are good-temperedly doffing boots and helmets, and quietly resuming their late avocations. They do not mind. Less than twenty seconds have elapsed, and from a quiet hall the engine-room has been transformed into a bustling fire station. Men, horses, engines all ready and away! No one knew whither he was going. The call was sufficient for all of them. No questions put save one, "Where is it?" Thither the brave fellows would have hurried, ready to do and die, if necessary.

It is almost impossible to describe the effect which this sudden transformation scene produces; the change is so rapid, the effect is so dramatic, so novel to a stranger. We hear of the engines turning out, but to the writer, who was not in the secret, the result was most exciting, and the remembrance will be lasting. The wily artist had placed himself outside, and secured a view, an instantaneous picture of the start; but the writer was in the dark, and taken by surprise. The wonderful rapidity, order, discipline, and exactness of the parts secure a most effective tableau.



A TURN OUT.

their destination ere the coachman pulls the ropes suspended over head; the street doors fold back, automatically, the prancing, rearing steeds impatient, foaming, strain

After such an experience one naturally desires to see the mainspring of all this machinery, the hub round which the wheel revolves—Captain Eyre M. Shaw, C.B.

But the chief officer has slipped out, leaving us permission to interview his empty chair, and the apartments which he daily occupies when on duty in Southwark.

This unpretending room upstairs is plainly but comfortably furnished—though no carpet covers the floor, oilcloth being cooler. Business is writ large on every side. On one wall is a large map of the fire stations of the immense area presided over by Captain Shaw. Here are separately indicated the floating engines, the escapes, ladders, call points, police stations, and private communications.

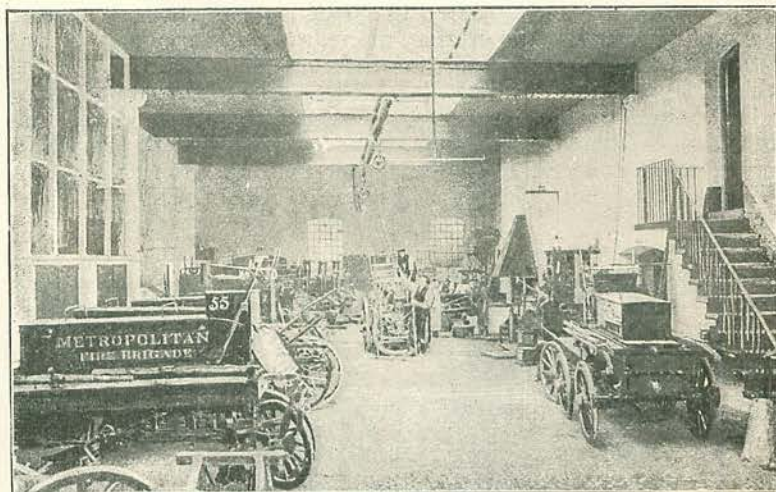
The chair which "the Captain" has temporarily vacated bristles with speaking tubes. On the walls beside the fire-place are portraits of men who have died on duty; the chimney-piece is decorated with nozzles—hose-nozzles—of various sizes. Upon the table are reports, map of Paris, and many documents, amid which a novel shines, as indicating touch with the outside world. There is a book-case full of carefully arranged pamphlets, and on the opposite wall an illuminated address of thanks from the Fire Brigade Association to Captain Shaw, which concludes with the expression of a hope "That his useful life may long be spared to fill the high position in the service he now adorns."

With this we cordially concur, and we echo the "heartfelt wishes" of his obliged and faithful servants as we retire, secure in our possession of a picture of the apartment.

There are many interesting items in connection with the Brigade which we find time to chronicle. For instance, we learn that the busiest time is, as one would expect, between September and December. The calls during the year 1889 amounted to 3,131. Of these 594 were false alarms, 199 were only chimneys on fire, and of the remainder 153 only resulted in serious damage, 2,185 in slight damage. These calls are exclusive of ordinary chimney

fires and small cases, but in all those above referred to engines and men were turned out. The grand total of fires amounted to 4,705, or on an average 13 fires, or supposed fires, a day. This is an increase of 350 on those of 1888, and we find that the increment has been growing for a decade. However, considering the increase in the number of houses, there is no cause for alarm. Lives were lost at thirty-eight fires in 1889.

The *personnel* of the Brigade consists of only seven hundred and seven of all ranks. The men keep watches of twelve hours, and do an immense amount of work besides. This force has the control of 158 engines, steam and manual of all sorts; 31½ miles of hose, and 80



THE REPAIRING SHOP.

carts to carry it; besides fire-floats, steam tugs, barges, and escapes; long ladders, trolleys, vans, and 131 horses. These are to attend to 365 call points, 72 telephones to stations, 55 alarm circuits, besides telephones to police stations and public and private building and houses, and the pay is 3s. 6d. per day, increasing!

From these, not altogether dry, bones of facts we may build up a monument to the great energy and intense *esprit de corps* of Captain Shaw and his Brigade. In their hands we place ourselves every night. While the Metropolis sleeps the untiring Brigade watches over its safety. Whether at the head-quarters or at the outer stations, at the street stations, boxes, or escape stations, the men are continually vigilant; and are most efficiently seconded by the police.

But for the latter force the efforts of the firemen would often be crippled, and their heroic attempts perhaps rendered fruitless, by the pressure of the excited spectators.

We have now seen the manner in which the Metropolitan Fire Brigade is managed, and how it works; the splendid services it accomplishes, for which few rewards are forthcoming. It is true that a man may attain to the post of superintendent, and to a house, with a salary of £245 a year, but he has to serve a long probation. For consider that he has to learn his drill and the general working of the Brigade. Every man must be competent to perform all the duties. During this course of instruction he is not permitted to attend a fire; such experience being found unsuitable to beginners. In a couple of months, if he has been a sailor, the recruit is fit to go out, and he is sent to some station, where, as fireman of the fourth class, he performs the duties required.

By degrees, from death or accident, or other causes, those above him are removed, or promoted, and he ascends the ladder to the first class, where, having passed an ex-

amination, he gets a temporary appointment as assistant officer on probation. If then satisfactory, he is confirmed in his position as officer, proceeds to head-quarters, and superintends a section of the establishment as inspector of the shops, and finally as drill instructor.

After this service, he is probably put under the superintendent at a station as "engineer-in-charge," as he is termed. He has, naturally, every detail of drill and "business" at his fingers' ends. The wisdom of such an arrangement is manifest. As the engineer-in-charge has been lately through the work of drill instructor, he knows exactly what is to be done, and every other officer in similar position also knows it. Thus uniformity of practice is insured.

There are many other points on which information is most courteously given at head-quarters. But time presses. We accordingly take leave of our pleasant guide, and the most polite of superintendents, and, crossing the Iron Bridge once more, plunge into the teeming thoroughfares of the City, satisfied.



CAPTAIN SHAW'S SANCTUM.