

At the invitation of the executive of the United Fire Brigades Association I attended their annual conference and biennial demonstration, held in Hokitika on the 3rd March and following days, delivering an address, relating to methods of fire protection and fire-brigade work in general, before the delegates, who represented 111 New Zealand brigades. As at the conference held in Hastings the previous year, strong testimony in favour of the Fire Brigades Act was given by delegates representing brigades working under the control of Fire Boards. During the progress of the conference a report was brought down by a committee proposing a number of amendments to the Fire Brigades Act, with the object, amongst others, of enabling a greater number of brigades to take advantage of its provisions, and the report was unanimously adopted by the conference.

Whilst quite recognizing and giving every credit to the United Fire Brigades Association for the good work it has done in the past, and is doing at present, towards increasing the efficiency of the fire service of the Dominion, there is a direction where, in my opinion, considerable improvement could be effected, and that is in the method adopted in certain of the competitions held at the biennial demonstrations. A number of these competitions are carried out in a special manner and with special appliances, and not, as they should be, with both work and gear approaching as nearly as it is possible actual service conditions. These demonstrations, which are most enthusiastically looked forward to by the members of the various brigades, who go through a long course of hard training and practice, attaining a high degree of efficiency, include some competitions wherein the method adopted is quite at variance with the work as carried out in their brigades in actual practice at fires. There can be no doubt the more practical the conditions are made the more they will meet with the approval of the officers of the fire service, and of those competitors who realize that these competitions are one of the means to the end of turning out efficient firemen; and I would respectfully submit that the executive of the association would do well to give this matter their serious consideration.

The following comparisons, taken from results of the two last demonstrations, go towards proving that in smart competition-work those teams drawn from brigades working under the control of Fire Boards more than hold their own :—

Auckland Demonstration, March, 1909 : 87 brigade teams entered for the competitions, and out of that number 20 were those under Fire Board control. Out of 36 prizes, 18 were won by these latter teams.

Hokitika Demonstration : 63 brigades entered, only 11 of which were Fire Board brigades, but out of 42 prizes they secured 16.

About the usual number of accidents, mostly of a slight nature and none fatal, have been sustained by firemen in the execution of their duty.

The following casualties to civilians have been reported by Superintendents of Brigades as having occurred in their respective districts :—

*Auckland.*—February 16, 1911.—Ponsonby Road.—Fire in fish-shop with dwelling attached : Two children, aged seven and five and a half years respectively, burnt to death; and four adults, including parents of above, were severely burnt. They were removed to the Hospital, and have since recovered.

February 18, 1911.—Hobson Street.—Fire in a boardinghouse : An elderly man was suffocated by smoke.

*Christchurch.*—December 6, 1910.—Matheson's Road, Linwood.—Dwellinghouse : Married woman burnt to death.

February 5, 1911.—Hereford Street.—Office buildings : Two men, one severely and the other slightly burnt; both have since recovered.

*Dunedin.*—January 1, 1911.—Upper Dowling Street.—Cottage dwelling : Aged married woman burnt to death; husband slightly burnt, and has since recovered.

During the course of my inspections it was apparent that a steady improvement is taking place in the discipline, drill, and method of work in the large majority of the brigades, and more attention is being paid to that part of ambulance-work essential to fire-brigade requirements.

The principal improvements that have been effected in equipment are as follows : New central fire-stations have been built and occupied in the following fire districts : Palmerston North, August 31, 1910; Feilding, September 12, 1910; and Masterton, November 3, 1910. The new central station in Dunedin is approaching completion, and should be ready for occupation shortly. In addition to the foregoing, plans have been completed for new central stations in the Dannevirke, Greymouth, and Hastings Fire Districts. A motor hose-and-ladder car of 110-horse power, and carrying a turbine pump with a capacity of 800 gallons per minute, has been purchased for Auckland; also another hose, ladder, and chemical motor-car of 30-horse power for Christchurch. A street fire-alarm system, with circuits having twelve call-points in all, has been installed in Masterton. Detailed information on the subject of equipment will be found in an attached summary.

Considerable difficulty has been experienced by a number of the Fire Boards in obtaining money by way of a loan, due to the opinion obtaining amongst prospective lenders that the Fire Brigades Act in its present form does not provide for adequate security, and as a consequence there has been and is considerable delay in obtaining very necessary equipment and in the building of much-needed fire-brigade stations.

As taken from the returns, there are installed throughout the fire districts a total number of thirty-six thermostat automatic fire-alarms connected up to the fire-stations; of these, twenty-two are in Dunedin. There are several patterns of these automatic systems that have reached a high state of efficiency, and have been the means of saving an enormous amount of valuable property as the result of giving brigades timely warning of an outbreak of fire, and it is to be regretted that more of these safeguards are not installed in the large warehouses, department stores, &c.