

THE FIRE.

The main facts concerning the disastrous fire which, on the morning of the 11th December, 1907, destroyed the greater part of Parliament Buildings, but which so fortunately spared the Library wing, are doubtless well known to members. There are, however, two or three points in connection with the fire which have a special reference to the Library and which I would now mention.

Had the wind been blowing from the south instead of from the north, the efficacy, as a safeguard, of the bricking-up of the stack-room building windows, recommended by me and carried out last year, would have been very severely tested. Even as it was, the window of the Hon. Mr. McNab's room, which was gutted, was only three or four feet away from one of these bricked-up windows. Had this window not been thus protected the flames would most certainly have swept through the upper floor of the Library building, and done an immense amount of damage.

Several members of the staff were early on the scene, and when it appeared that the Library was likely to be endangered by the spread of the fire along the roof of the main lobby, I ordered the removal of the books. Some fifteen thousand volumes were taken out, in an order previously laid down by myself. Some were temporarily stored in buildings in Hill Street, and others were sent down to the Government Buildings. Valuable assistance was given by the public, and, everything considered, the damage done to the books was very small.

By half-past 9 I had arranged for a cover of insurance, for £1,000, on the books removed, and later on the State Fire Department contributed a sum of £30 towards the cost of repairing or re-binding the volumes damaged by removal. Very fortunately, these were old books not frequently called for and the repairing of which can be spread over a couple of years.

I would again point out that my recommendation made last year, and confirmed by the Library Committee—namely, that the wooden doors to the basement and at the lobby entrance to the ground-floor stack-room should be replaced by iron doors—has not yet been given effect to. I would a second time urge that these additional safeguards against fire be provided.

No addition has been made to the amount of insurance on the books and printed documents in the Library. The insurance now stands at £4,000. In last year's report I remarked, "I am of opinion that the lowest insurance on the Library-contents should be from £10,000 to £12,000, and that the cost of insurance should be defrayed by the Government, and not be taken, as are the present premiums, from the Library vote of £600, which should, I maintain, be applied solely to the purchase of books and periodicals."

GENERAL REMARKS.

But a very few years ago it seemed as if the "space problem" were not likely to cause any anxiety for some considerable time to come; but it is now evident that it must receive serious consideration in the near future. The sociology and main reading-rooms are practically full; the accommodation for newspaper-files is already deficient; the stack-rooms are rapidly filling-up; and the basement, to which sets of official volumes not now much in demand are from time to time transferred, is also within measurable distance of being crowded. More space could, however, be provided in the basement were the shelving rearranged. This is a matter which must receive attention during next recess, or serious inconvenience will occur.

The yearly increase of books is about 2,500, and the probabilities are in favour of this number being greatly augmented as the years go by. Whatever the decision of Parliament may be as to the site of the new Parliament Buildings, the provision of much greater accommodation for the ever-increasing collection of books and newspapers will, I trust, receive careful consideration.

The Seddon Memorial Tablet, presented by the men of the Newport Railway Workshops, Victoria, has been erected in the Library, the site chosen being at the foot of the main staircase.

I should like, in conclusion, to formally express the thanks of the Library to the High Commissioner and his staff for their prompt attention to my numerous requests during the year; to Messrs. Sotheran and Co., and Messrs. Street and Co., for their careful execution of our orders; to the various members of the Library staff, who have had an exceptionally busy time during the recess; and finally to the Chairman of the Recess Committee, who, as usual, has devoted much of his private time to supervision of Library matters.

LIBRARY ACCOUNTS.

In an appendix will be found the Library balance-sheet for the year ended 31st March, 1908, with a copy of the Auditor's certificate.

I have, &c.,

CHARLES WILSON,
Chief Librarian.