

## LXVII.

## THE METROPOLITAN FIRE DEPARTMENT.

ITS ORIGIN. — THE NEW FORCE. — THE HORSES. — THE ENGINE HOUSES. — AT A FIRE. — THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT.

## ITS ORIGIN.

THE act creating a paid fire department was passed March, 1865. It disbanded the volunteer companies, and created a force under the control of commissioners appointed by the governor. The old force was very corrupt and unreliable. The engine houses were filled with loafers of every description. The noise and confusion on the streets on occasions of alarm were very great. Citizens were annoyed, and the sick and dying disturbed, by the yelling of runners who attached themselves to the engines. Racing and fighting between companies were common; disputes between companies hindered operations at fires, and often ended in blows. False alarms were frequent, to bring out the machines. Thieving was generally practised by hangers-on who got within the lines, and runners meddled with the duties of firemen. The organization of runners was very large, and very formidable, and very profitable. On the

coming in of the new department it was violently resisted. The constitutionality of the law was tested in the Court of Appeals. When the act was sustained by the court, an effort was made by bold, bad men to disband the volunteer organization at once, and leave the city without protection against fire. In the Metropolitan Police Department were many old firemen, and they were organized to meet the emergency of the occasion. From July to November, 1865, three thousand eight hundred and ten volunteers were relieved from duty as firemen.

## THE NEW FORCE.

The new department was organized with a chief engineer, at a salary of four thousand five hundred dollars, an assistant engineer, and ten district engineers. There are thirty-four steam fire engine companies, each composed of a foreman, an assistant foreman, an engineer of steamer, a driver, a stoker, and seven firemen, in all twelve men. There are twelve hook and ladder companies. The engines and apparatus are drawn by horses. The Metropolitan Fire Department is composed of five hundred and four men, and one hundred and forty-six horses. The steam engines, costing four thousand dollars each, are built in Manchester, New Hampshire, by the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, and are the cheapest and best that are built in the country. The foreman of each company receives thirteen hundred dollars, the engineer twelve hundred dollars, the assistant engineer eleven hundred dollars, and the firemen one thousand dollars each. The department demands the whole time of the men. It cost, in

1867, eight hundred and ninety-three thousand dollars to run this department.

#### THE HORSES.

The horses connected with the fire department are among the most remarkable in New York. They are the best that can be found, and are selected with great care for the work. One person is employed to make purchases, and to it he devotes all his time. The docility and intelligence of the horses are remarkable. They are never unharnessed, but stand in the stable ready for a start. They are fed twice a day — at six in the morning and six at night. The movement of the the engines is regulated by telegrams from headquarters. On an alarm of fire, the station that gets the notice does not telegraph to other stations, but to the headquarters. A gong is attached to every station-house, and the ringing of that gong is as well understood by the horses as by the men. As soon as it sounds, the horses back with a bound, and tear out of their stalls in a furious manner, rush to their positions at the engine, and are harnessed in an instant, without a word being spoken. If the gong does not sound, the word "Back!" produces the same effect. When the alarm sounds, the men can be seen loitering on benches or lying down. They spring for their caps, the horses rush for their places, every part of the harness is fastened with a snap, and in fifteen seconds from the time the alarm sounds, the men are in their places, horses are harnessed, the driver is in his seat, the fire lighted, and the steamer on its way to the fire. After ten o'clock at night the firemen are allowed to go to bed. A strict

watch is kept, and but thirty seconds are needed to arouse, to harness, and to get under way. The drivers are forbidden to go beyond a certain speed. The foreman runs on foot before the engine. The driver may keep up with him, but he must not go past him. The horses are groomed with great care, and are daily exercised when not used before the steamer. They are not allowed to be harnessed or rode under the saddle, but must be exercised by walking gently before the engine-house. These horses, fiery and spirited, are so trained that they will stand all day and all night in the midst of the confusion of a fire, the crackling of the flames, and the crash of falling buildings. The chief engineer has to attend all fires. He keeps his horse ready harnessed, and when the alarm-bell sounds he knows exactly where the fire is, and moves towards it at once.

#### THE ENGINE HOUSES.

These rooms are models of neatness, and some of them are very elegant. They are no longer scenes of debauchery and dissipation, nor are they crowded at night by herds of loafers, who lodge at the expense of the city. Twelve men occupy the room. They have each a specific work to do, which occupies their time. The basement contains the kindling-wood and the furnace which keeps the water in the engine hot. On the ground floor are the engine-house and the stables. Everything is ready for a start. The engine is in perfect order. The kindlings and coal are placed under the boiler. A swab, saturated with turpentine, lies on the platform on which the stoker stands. Four firemen's caps hang on the engine. They belong to the

engineer, assistant engineer, fireman, and stoker. Two of these men are always in the room. If the fireman goes to dinner, the engineer remains. If a fire breaks out in his absence, he does not return to the engine-house, but starts for the fire, the alarm signal telling him where it is. No fireman is allowed to appear at the fire without his cap. This he will find on the engine when he reaches the conflagration. A large dormitory over the engine-room, fitted up with every convenience, furnishes the sleeping quarters of the men. Great care is taken in securing persons for the department. They must be in sound physical health, have good moral characters, be quiet and industrious. No person not a member of the force, without a permit from headquarters, is allowed to enter the engine-houses. The telegraph system connected with these places is as perfect as can be conceived. The telegraph is under the charge of the foreman. When an alarm is telegraphed from any station, it must be repeated, and the number of the station-house that sends it given, or no attention is paid to it. If it is a false alarm, the foreman who sent it is held responsible. Every message is recorded, with the name of the sender. No station-house or engine-house can be certain when a message is coming, therefore they must be continually on the watch. If a response is not immediate, an officer is sent to the delinquent station for an explanation. While I was at the headquarters, to show how rapidly the communications were made, the superintendent of the fire alarm called the roll of every station, bell-tower, and engine-house in the district, including New York, Harlem, and Westchester County. Answers came back from every

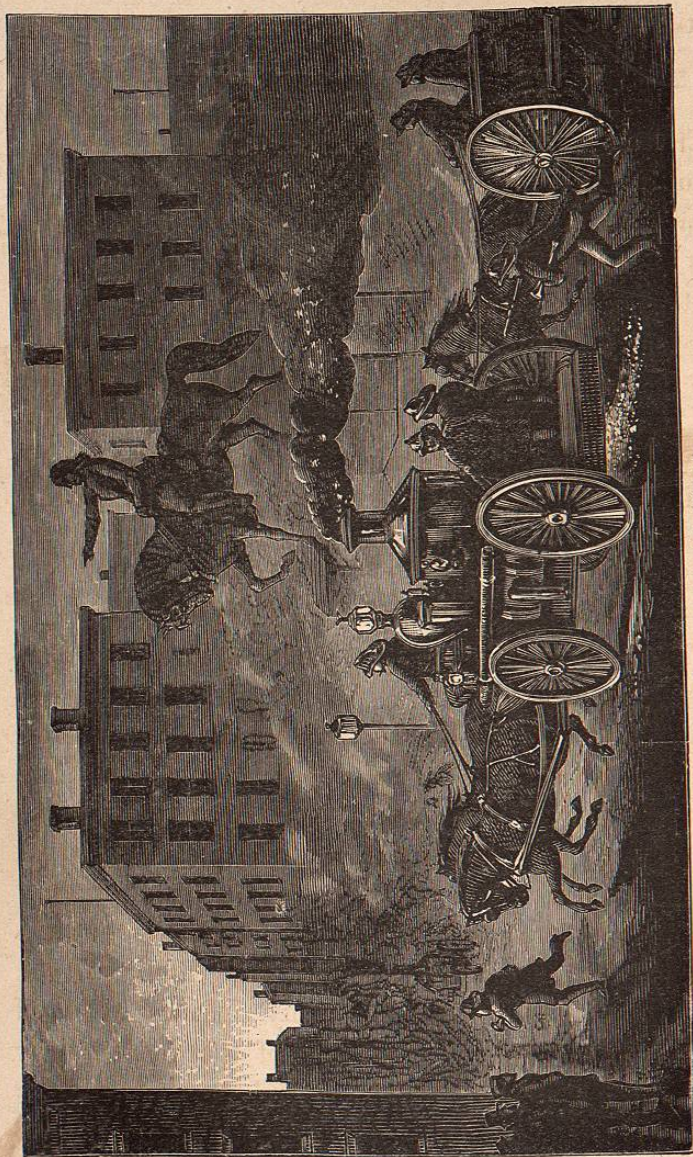
station, and the time consumed in calling the roll and getting returns was just thirty seconds.

## AT A FIRE.

The police of the city have charge of the order to be observed at a fire. Ropes are drawn at a proper distance, and no one allowed inside the lines except the firemen and officials, who wear their badges on their coats. Thieving and robbery, which were so conspicuous in former times, and so profitable, do not now exist. The men are not allowed to shout, or make any demonstrations on their way to or from the fire. Only certain persons are allowed to ride on the engine. Furious driving subjects the party to immediate arrest, and if repeated, to dismissal.

## THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT.

The whole department is under the charge of a commission, of which General Shaler, the efficient commander of the First Division of the New York State troops, is president. Every department of the force is run with military exactness. Men are tried for violations of duty and breaches of law before the full board. The officers are held responsible for all the property under their care, and nothing is furnished to them except on a requisition, signed and countersigned after the regulation of the army. Rules are laid down for the exercise and drill of the horses, their grooming, when they should be fed, how much they shall be fed, and what shall be given to them. The men are drilled and exercised in everything that pertains to their duty. They are daily exercised in



FIRE-ENGINE ON DUTY

the manner of hitching up the horses to the apparatus, which exercise, with the intelligence and intuition of the horses, enables this to be done in a time so slight as to seem incredible. New York may, indeed, congratulate herself upon having one of the most complete, efficient, and well disciplined fire departments in the world.

## LXVIII.

## FIRST DIVISION NATIONAL GUARD.

FORMATION OF THE DIVISION. — THE MILITARY AS A POLICE FORCE. — THE MILITARY AND RIOTS. — THE SEVENTH REGIMENT AND THE ASTOR PLACE RIOT. — MAYOR WOOD'S RIOT. — AN EPISODE. — THE FINALE. — FIRST DIVISION AND THE WAR. — PRESIDENTIAL RECEPTION. — THE PARADES.

NEW YORK has always had occasion to be proud of her military organizations. Since the Revolution there has been a corps of volunteer soldiers, on whom the authorities have relied to enforce law and preserve peace. For many years New York was without police. A few watchmen patrolled the streets at night, most of whom were laboring men through the day, and added to their scanty income by guarding the city at night. In all cases of brawls, riots, and all disturbances of the peace, the magistrates relied entirely upon the military. This force were voluntary soldiers, in every sense of the word. They purchased their own uniforms, when they had any, and their arms and equipments. They paid for their armories, and the expenses for music and parades were borne by an assessment on each member. Yet for eighty years the city military has been sustained, and when the new organization took place in 1862, the volunteer city troops numbered