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Letters From The People

Editor Evening Herald:

Permit me to remark that as a citizen on the side-line I have noted that the representatives of the State Fire Marshal's Department have come and gone. Their report on conditions as found to exist was given to the public through The Herald of September 29 and presumably will be filed with the council on or about October 6.

The report contains, at least, two very pertinent statements, to-wit:

"It needs no argument to demonstrate that fire once started carries serious possibilities of destruction. It makes no difference how or where, fire is always dangerous."

"Every city must learn for itself that it will pay very dearly for cheap structures in the congested district, insufficient fire apparatus or an incomplete water system."

Unquestionably those two statements sum up the fire situation pretty accurately, and are general in their application.

This city has had several serious fires; so has Portland, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Baltimore; I was going to mention Seattle, but concluded not to—where the fire-fighting facilities had reached the scientific cone of perfection where, presumably, municipal ordinances designed for the minimizing and suppression of fire hazards were enforced without fear or favor; where nothing but fire-proof class "A" buildings were permitted in congested districts.

So it appears, that even where all precautions are taken, disastrous conflagrations have occurred with alarming frequency. This fact, however, in nowise justifies any relaxation of efforts in precautionary measures to prevent such catastrophes or excuses neglect on the part of any city to enforce precautionary measures to the limit of its executive ability.

There appears in the report one

other very pertinent suggestion, which follows the specifically itemized statement of the apparently very numerous shortcomings of this city, in the matter of water supply, construction of buildings, poor and inadequate fire-fighting equipment, back of authority in fire chief etc.

"If this condition is to be minimized the power lies 'solely' in the hands of those who have the legislative control of the common welfare and safety of the community."

This statement, read in connection with the whole report, is calculated to give one the impression that there has been a total lack of legislation on the part of the council of a fire-precautionary nature, while as a matter of fact the contrary is the exact truth of the situation, as witness the following data along those lines which Police Judge Leavitt has kindly furnished for the purpose of this review of the report. This excerpt of ordinances now in force is inscribed with the idea of according to our legislative body the credit denied by the report:

Ordinance No. 28, adopted March 2, 1892, is about the first legislative action taken by the council to minimize the fire hazard. The ordinance provides for the appointment of two fire wardens, whose duties require them to examine as often as once every six months, and as much oftener as they shall deem necessary, all houses and structures, fire places, stove pipes, flues, boilers, and all other apparatus which may be dangerous in causing fires. It confers sufficient power on the marshals to enforce their orders and subjects offenders for failure to comply to a fine of not less than \$15.00.

Ordinance No. 90, adopted October, 1906, established fire limits and prescribed kind of buildings allowed therein, etc. This ordinance was subsequently amended by Ordinance No. 203 to include all lots on either side of Main street, from the bridge to Ninth street back to the center of the block on either side.

Ordinance No. 100, adopted on

March, 1907, provides for protection of hose and other fire apparatus while employed in the extinguishment of fires and carries a sufficient penalty.

Ordinance No. 285, passed October, 1912, provides for the employment of a competent person to look after and keep in repair all fire apparatus of the city.

Ordinance No. 345, passed October, 1915, authorized the installation of an electric bell striker and alarm system.

Ordinance No. 372, adopted February, 1916, established fire alarm districts with numbers corresponding with the alarm system in the city hall, requiring residents to keep posted over each telephone in the district a card in the various fire alarm districts.

Ordinance No. 374, adopted March 7, 1916, established a fire department consisting of a fire chief, assistant chief, and ten additional firemen to be appointed by the mayor on recommendation of the volunteer fire department; fixing the compensation of the firemen and authorizing the council to make rules and regulations for the government of the department, and gives the fire chief police power and prescribes his duties.

Ordinance No. 382, adopted June 1916, authorized the purchase of the Seagrave fire truck, at a cost of \$2,950.

Ordinance No. 407, adopted March, 1917, relates to fire hazards, and fire prevention, makes it unlawful for any person or persons to deposit ashes in combustible receptacles or on the ground less than ten feet from any wooden building or other combustible material. Makes it unlawful to permit accumulation of shavings, waste paper or other refuse and trash in or about any building or premises, and to all intents and purposes makes the fire chief the fire marshal of the city. Giving him authority to enter all buildings for the purpose of inspection for fire hazards and risks, and to serve notice on the owner or occupant to make necessary repairs, and to abate any fire

hazard found to exist within 48 hours.

All of these aforementioned ordinances provide penalties upon conviction for their violation, and a careful reading will convince the most skeptical that the Common Council of Klamath Falls has not in the main been unmindful of its duty in regard to the prevention of fires by providing rules and regulations for the minimizing of fire hazards, and have provided fire extinguishing apparatus as rapidly as the finances at their disposal would admit of.

But, what boots it that legislation is ample in volume and variety if not enforced and tested as to its wisdom and sufficiency? One would be safe in asserting without fear of successful contradiction that the enforcement of the ordinances of the city now in force would result in converting into the city treasury a sum of money equal to that produced by the "Occupation Tax Ordinance," or the incarceration of approximately nine-tenths of the population for periods of time varying from two to ten days. It has been a popular diversion periodically ever since the inauguration of the system during the reign of Oswald West as governor, for all classes of executives, especially those of small inland towns to send in an S. O. S. call to the governor on what they are pleased to term emergency situations. As a matter of fact, it amounts to a confession of inability and the possession of a well developed propensity for "passing the buck."

Dropping back for a moment to one of the assignments of neglect, your attention is called to the fact that the city has a very excellent electrical ordinance which provides for proper and adequate inspection of all wiring before a certificate may issue.

Now, as a matter of fact, if the inspector does his duty, it makes no difference who does the wiring. The owner of the building is entitled to a certificate; or he is not, at the conclusion of the inspection.

The same test is applicable to plumbing. It is either sanitary or it is not, to be determined from the manner of its installation. In either case the safety from fire or sewer gas depends first and last on inspection. Possibly he should be clothed with authority to send an S. O. S. to the governor as occasion may seem to demand.

The transition of Klamath Falls from the good little inland town of Linkville to its present ranking position as the most progressive, live city south of Portland, north of Marysville and east of Marshfield, has been rapid; and we believe it compares very favorably with other places of greater population, with greater commercial advantage, and with more adequate rail and water transportation. A reference to the legislation in force and herein cited certainly entitles the legislative body to the credit of having made an honest effort to keep up with the procession.

That the city is fast outgrowing its fire-fighting equipment is hardly open to denial. What it needs in that regard and in the matter of a more adequate water supply, must of course be provided, but that cannot be done perhaps as soon as we would like to have it done.

As The Herald said: "The survey of the city by the state fire warden was a good thing, and will perhaps stimulate the installation of needed improvement."

But just why this city should be singled out, condemned and advertised as a conflagration city is not quite plain to one on the side lines. It certainly will have the effect of giving the insurance companies a real basis for increasing insurance rates. There is no indication in the press that other cities in Oregon have been advertised as conflagration cities but what of that? If this city needs fixing, who's got the fixing to do, and who's money is going to pay for the fixing? I came pretty nearly suggesting something maybe I better let you guess at it.

Poor old Klamath Falls has had quite a varied experience along ref-

ormation line. There has ever prevailed, in the methods employed to make this an ideal town, an insistent demand that the outside world be made fully cognizant through the local press of the damnable rottenness of the place, as compared with other cities of like age and proportions. The method employed to maintain our reputation for picturesqueness would have killed off any other town. The only instance the writer can recall wherein Klamath Falls had an even break with the rest of the state in pitiless publicity was during the flu epidemic last fall and winter.

Getting back to the report for a moment, and considering its recommendation for additional equipment: It occurs to the writer to offer the following suggestion along those lines calculated, he believes, to increase the effectiveness of the equipment we now have.

It goes without saying that the menace of a general conflagration is confined primarily to the congested district, and it should be understood that the operation of the Seagrave fire truck, our most effective weapon, be confined to the hydrant zone. That it will not be permitted to run to outlying districts where its pumping power cannot be utilized, and from which it could not be promptly recalled in case of fire in the congested quarter. Even with that precaution it has seemed to the writer that the policy of relying solely on the truck for the whole city, and the removal of the hose carts and hose from the congested quarter was a mistaken policy. In case the truck is at Shippington, Mills addition, on the West Side, on Conger avenue, or in Fairview addition, and a fire starts in the congested district the city is helpless, for there is not a line of hose or a nozzle on Main street for use in such emergency. It is the unexpected that always happens and the congested district, wherein a fire now started may result in a general conflagration, should be safeguarded as much as possible in the absence of its main reliance—the truck—to an outlying district.

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