

We must say that, as far as we could see, every possible care is being taken to preserve the Buildings from fire. A patrol is kept inside and outside of the Buildings day and night continuously. There is special provision also for water-supply, hoses are ready for use in different parts of the Buildings, buckets of water are kept always full, at convenient distances apart, in various corridors throughout the Buildings, chemical fire-extinguishers are placed at different points, the May-Oatway system of fire-alarm is installed, and direct telephonic communication exists between the Buildings and the Fire Brigade Station. Immediately the rooms are vacated by the officials in the evening, all doors are thrown open, so that any light in the rooms may be seen by the night-watchmen on their rounds. The only measures that could be adopted, according to the information that we have obtained, to further reduce the risk of fire are in connection with the heating of the Buildings. This at present is done by means of ordinary grates with coal fires in the various rooms. There is a big risk of fire from faulty chimneys, and it would be very much safer if the Buildings were heated by hot water. This, according to an estimate that was furnished to us, could be done for between £1,300 and £1,350, and we were advised that the annual saving of fuel which would be effected if a hot-water system were installed would pay the interest on the cost and establish a sinking fund that would, in a comparatively short time, wipe out the cost of the hot-water system.

Notwithstanding all the care that is exercised, the evidence went to show that there is great risk of fire. Here we may remark that the rule prohibiting smoking in the Buildings is not rigidly enforced as it should be. If a fire started in any part of the Buildings, with a gale of wind blowing, the whole question would be decided in the first five minutes. If a fire once obtained a hold in such a large, old, wooden structure, with a gale of wind to fan it, no fire brigades or water-supplies could check it. The whole building and its contents would be destroyed within a very short time, and the heat set up by such a large mass of wooden material would be so intense that nothing but the best strong-rooms would resist it.

In addition to the main Government Buildings, the fireproof accommodation for records in many of the other Government offices is insufficient. Records in the Public Service have to be kept for such a long period that the fireproof accommodation required for their protection has to be constantly increased. We think it is a question for consideration whether the plan which we understand is adopted in some other countries, of going through all records after they have become ten years old and destroying everything except the most important, should not be adopted in this country. The whole question of providing the necessary fireproof accommodation for the public records throughout the Dominion should, we think, be looked into at once by experts, and the necessary steps taken for their proper protection without a day's delay longer than is absolutely necessary. If this is not done the result may be to the lasting regret of the Government and people of the Dominion.

#### CONCLUSION.

As a necessary preliminary to the carrying-out of the programme that we have outlined, certain legislation will be required to provide the necessary machinery. Probably it may be found better to consolidate and amend the numerous Acts dealing with the Public Service and the various branches of it. We have considered that this is outside the scope of our labours, and that it is our duty to merely point out what we think should be done. At the same time it may not be out of place to indicate shortly the lines that, in our judgment, legislation on the subject should follow. What is wanted is a condition of things which will tend to develop and bring out the best qualities that the officers of the Service possess, and at the same time avoid the deadly results of routine, red-tape, and slavish adherence to precedent. The hard-and-fast rules and regulations for everything, which notoriously obtain in most Government offices,