

THE CAB SERVICE OF THE METROPOLIS.

WARRANT OF APPOINTMENT.

REPORT

COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY

APPOINTED BY

THE HOME SECRETARY.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.



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We find that the present inspection of horses, which is confined to the animals when bringing up the cabs for licence or as they are seen at work on the streets, is inadequate, and that satisfactory results can only be looked for from a periodical inspection of the stables of the cab proprietors.

Our attention has been called to the insanitary condition of many cab yards. It appears to us that the Chief Commissioner of Police, on receiving from an inspector a report that a cab yard is in an insanitary condition, should direct the attention of the local authorities to the matter, and that the power of these authorities to deal with it should, if necessary, be increased by legislation.

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3239-44.

We further find that a practice which exists in the cab trade—to what extent we have been unable to ascertain—known as sub-letting, and described in the evidence of Mr. Scott, is a hindrance to the proper supervision of the service and is detrimental to the interests of all classes concerned in the trade.

(c.) We think that more strictness in the granting of licences to drivers is shown to be desirable, and that careful enquiry should be made into the character and qualifications of applicants.

We are informed that the standard of examination as to an applicant's knowledge of London is sufficiently high. In knowledge, however, of driving—the other chief qualification which is nominally required—it appears that applicants are not practically examined as in Liverpool, Berlin, and other cities. At present an applicant must produce a certificate from two persons to the effect that they believe him to be a skilful driver, and three sergeants of police are required to report as to the value of this certificate, and must be able to say that the persons certifying state that they have had frequent opportunities of observing the applicant's capabilities as a driver. It is obvious that under this system it is easy for a man with little or no knowledge of driving to obtain a licence to act as driver. Many drivers who gave evidence before the Committee put the proportion of drivers who had no previous experience of horses, harness, or driving as high as 50 per cent. of the whole number. It is fair to state, on the other hand, that, on an average, about one complaint only in the course of a year is received by the licensing authority from the public of a driver's unfitness to drive, and that the return of accidents prepared after the late strike in the cab trade proves, so far as it proves anything, that cabs are not responsible for the majority of street accidents.

The results that, in our opinion, might be expected from the imposition of a driving test would be, as regards the public, to increase the safety and efficiency of the service, and, as regards the driver, to give his trade more of the character of a skilled profession than it possesses at present. The question also is one that has an important bearing on the question of limitation. Such a test would be required only in the issue of *fresh* licences which at present average 700 a year, or 14 a week among all the divisions of the police district.

(d.) The limit of age for drivers is fixed by Statute at 16, but we find that in practice licences are never granted to persons under the age of 17, and to persons under 21 only when the applicant has been guaranteed employment by some proprietor. The drivers themselves appear to be generally desirous that the limit should be raised to 21.

The evil, if it exists, must of necessity be small. The juvenile drivers licensed in 1893 numbered 131 only, and of these 60, it is supposed, drive only in the suburbs.

It will be seen that in the opinion of the Assistant Commissioner of Police the limit should be fixed at 18, the minimum adopted in most of the provincial and foreign cities of which we have information, and that Sir E. Bradford sees no objection to its being fixed at 21. In any case a saving should be made for the present holders of juvenile licences.

(e.) The question of the renewal of licences to men who have been convicted of offences, and to men who have failed to use their licences, was repeatedly brought before the Committee.

We think that this is a matter which should receive the earnest consideration of the licensing authority. To license men who have proved themselves, by conviction of the more serious offences, to be unfit for the work, is to discredit the whole class. At the same time we feel that much must be left to the discretion of the Commissioner, and that it is impossible to fix either a minimum number of offences, or the degree of seriousness of offence, which should disqualify for a renewal.

The increased stringency in this respect which we consider desirable will doubtless tend to improve the conditions of the trade, by reducing the number of drivers and raising the standard of character, and we think this end might be further secured by the elimination of those whom the drivers call "Loafers" or "Butterfly-loafers"—