MOTOR NOTES FOR MEDICAL MEN.

By H. MASSAC BUIST.

EXPERIENCE OF THE NEW LIGHTING REGULATIONS.

THE restrictions introduced in January by the Home Office Order concerning lights on motor cars form the subject of complaints by many doctors, on the ground that these new regulations make it impossible for them to drive on dark country roads, with their lighting equipment masked in accordance with the new regulations. It will be recalled that the Medical Secretary of the British Medical Association wrote, on December 31st, 1915, to the Home Office stating that a number of letters had been received by the Association from practitioners in rural areas pointing out the inconveniences and dangers which might arise from the new Order that has come into force this year, and asking for some relaxation of it to be made as regards the cars of doctors when in use for professional purposes. The official reply claimed that in the framing of the new regulations the needs of medical practitioners who had to travel by road at night had been specially had in mind, that the new Order permits the use on country roads of sidelights giving a brighter light than has been allowed in many areas under the existing orders, and will be found to allow sufficient light for driving at ordinary speeds, even on narrow and winding roads; and concluded with an expression of the Secretary of State's regret that he could not authorize any general exceptions from the provisions of the Order. This correspondence was published in the SUPPLEMENT to the JOURNAL on January 15th. Subsequently a question was asked by Mr. Perkins in the House of Commons on January 19th. In commenting on it editorially in the JOURNAL it was remarked that it was understood that experiments had shown that, by suitable alteration of side-lamps, the full amount of light allowed by the Order could be obtained.

FALSE PREMISES AND REAL DIFFICULTIES.

Now there come complaints from many doctors concerning the new regulations. These objections differ from former medical comment on the subject in this important particular, that they are the result of actual individual experiences of the working of the new regulations. Inasmuch as the sum of the whole is the allegation that the new restrictions are frankly impracticable in many cases, and as there appears to be some doubt as to the manner in which the degree of restriction imposed was arrived at, I ought to make it clear that the authorities did not confine their preliminary experiments to the experience of a single make of very powerful and considerably expensive electric lighting equipment, as appears to be rather widely assumed. Not only was advice, criticism, and suggestion sought from the Royal Automobile Club and the Automobile Association, which is the largest organization of motorists in the world, but the leading lamp makers, including those not concerned with the electric variety, were besides called on to assist. Each placed its technical experts at the disposal of the authorities.

It is necessary to point this out because, if the Order were the result of an experiment with only one variety of an expensive electric lamp, it would be practically equivalent to compelling medical men, in common with other motorists, to scrap their car lighting equipments, and, at heavy expense, to fit something at least as costly as the electric plant wrongly assumed to be the only type tested.

The real difficulty appears to be that medical men in general, like other motorists, have relied hitherto mainly on their headlights for night driving. It is only of recent years that the power of sidelights has been sufficiently increased to render them really serviceable, especially when equipped with discs in accordance with the new regulations affecting wide areas. The oil lamp is admittedly lacking in sufficient power. It is therefore in any case a choice between the acetylene variety and the electrical. Acetylene is the cheaper sort if the car is not already fitted with accumulators, if not a dynamo.

COST AND AVAILABILITY OF ACETYLENE LAMPS.

But the acetylene variety is perhaps not so absolutely steady as the electrical sort on more or less indifferent road surfaces, such as the medical practitioner has to reckon

on traversing in these days. The cost to the medical man who has hitherto had only oil lamps is, for example, £5 17s. 6d. for the English-made Lucas "King of the Road" acetylene side lamp, specially designed to comply with the new lighting order, this price including generator and tubing, but not new brackets should the dimensions of the existing ones be unsuitable. Without the generator the cost is £4, the aim of the design being to meet the requirements of motorists whose cars are not electrically lighted. These lamps are fitted with Mangin lens mirror-reflectors and provide a light sufficient for careful night driving. They fit standard flat brackets, can be supplied with frosted glass if so desired, and have a glass diameter of 5 in. That there is a considerable demand for this acetylene lighting is evident by the fact that immediate delivery cannot be given, though sets can be supplied at about a week's notice.

Admittedly the cost involved is a serious item to the country doctor; but it is scarcely comparable in importance to him with the rise of 4d. a gallon for petrol that has occurred this week. Discarded acetylene side lamps of unsuitable patterns are, of course, of no realizable value; but discarded oil lamps are in more demand now than they have been for many years. This is evident by the rush there has been on some of the secondhand dealers for oil lamps for service on the most luxurious types of town cars off which the electric lights have been taken temporarily because of the lighting regulations that are in force in the metropolis itself. For my part, I could not recommend the medical practitioner having oil lamps adapted to acetylene; at least, I have not yet come across anyone who has had absolutely satisfactory experience from this method of procedure. The best thing to do is to sell unsuitable oil lamps to dealers in the metropolis, where there is some use for them.

THE POSITION TO DATE.

As far as the position goes to date it does not appear to be gainsaid that, if suitable electric or acetylene side-lamps are installed, the new regulations are practicable, though not desirable, from the individual driver's point of view. In point of fact, no restriction of lighting could be desirable when considered from the sole aspect of driving as driving. The practical point, from which there can be no getting away, is that during this war, in face of the advent of aerial navigation and of the enemy's enterprise in that connexion, we must all make shift with lighting that is frankly inadequate. The contention that all this insistence on darkness at night is mere "fussiness" and quite unnecessary fails in face of the fact that Paris, hitherto illuminated at night, is henceforth to be kept dark, like London. This has been found necessary in the light of experience of the last Zeppelin raid on the French capital. Likewise, during the last raid on the midlands, through distribution of authorities, one important manufacturing centre was illuminated as usual in a manner that could be seen by aerial navigators for more than thirty miles away, and which gave them exact bearings for attacks on neighbouring centres. Hence the measures subsequently taken to ensure uniformity of town darkness. Therefore the vital question is, How inadequate can we have car lighting? From the military aspect, there ought to be no lighting of vehicles at all; from the civilian one, there ought to be no restriction on the average amount of lighting employed in peace time; from the point of view of the medical man, in common with other motorists who have need to drive at nights in the areas where the new regulations obtain and whose present sidelights are not sufficiently powerful when employed according to regulations, those regulations are equivalent to a cash levy on him of anything from £4 upwards. It is harsh, but there are worse things in war time. Further, unquestionably the new regulations have not been in force sufficiently long to establish evidence of a sufficiently strong and general character to call for any remodelling of them yet. We may have to do so at a later date, but this thing must be given a fair trial. The authorities cannot be blamed justly as imposing a hardship on individual motorists because they refuse to allow them to use old and less powerful lamps in other ways than are laid down for lamps in general in the areas in question.

MAKING EXCEPTIONS SPELLS CONFUSION.

To attempt to make exceptions would only lead to hopeless confusion. Proof of this is furnished by the fact that

there appears to be some variation on the part of local authorities as to points of detail in the interpretation of the new regulations. The first thing to do, therefore, is to collect evidence concerning given points that a case may be made for the Home Office to issue instructions that shall ensure uniformity of interpretation.

In regard to discs, on application most of the lamp makers supply their customers with these gratis, while the Automobile Association and the Motor Union supply specially prepared lamp-dimming discs alike to members and to non-members on application—a fact that may be of some service to medical men whether members or not. These discs are equally suitable for use with electric or gas lamps. I know of no means of increasing the power of inadequate oil or acetylene lamps not up to the standard of power allowed by the Home Office regulations; nor do I know of anything material yet being done by the industry towards evolving means of so improving inadequate sets in current use.

It has been alleged, apart altogether from the matter of cost, that new acetylene lights, specially designed in the light of the regulations, cannot be obtained in any case; but I have given above an example of a type that could be got at a week's notice at the time I inquired concerning the point, which was Tuesday of this week. Thus the unavoidable delay cannot be described as of unreasonable or impracticable duration.

THE RISE IN THE PRICE OF PETROL.

The sudden and practically all-round rise of 4d. a gallon in the price of petrol is a very serious thing for the medical profession, because it is an increase of a character on which the doctor can get no rebate on professional grounds such as he receives in respect of the Government duty on motor spirit. Moreover, even in cases where supplies are contracted over a period of a year or more the contracts that have been made recently all stipulate that the price of the fuel shall vary according to the price obtaining at the time at which each delivery of it is given.

It will be recalled that last autumn, when Mr. McKenna introduced his supplementary Budget embracing increased petrol dues, the wholesale firms thereupon advanced the retail price of fuel twopence a gallon more than the total amount of the increased duties, an act which called forth much criticism. A fortnight ago the proprietors of Shell spirit—who have imported somewhat less fuel this year than before because of the temporary cutting off of their supplies from Roumania, and passing difficulties with such of their supplies as derived from Mexico—issued a warning as to the need of every one to economize the use of petrol to the utmost, and hinted that there might be a shortage. The chief rival concern—the proprietors of Pratt's spirit—thereupon announced that there was no shortage as far as they were concerned. Yet a week ago the first intimation of the rise of fourpence in the retail price of fuel came from the group which announced there was no shortage, and the week-end passed without any announcement as to a corresponding advance in price on the part of the firm which had first issued a warning as to possible shortage, and had thereupon been accused of being panicky! Of course, the price of all petrol is going up in accordance with this fresh advance. It is an open secret that the tank steamers in which it is brought to these shores are needed more than ever to convey supplies of fuel for use in the various theatres of war, which are increasing in number so appreciably. Further, the big reduction in the amount of so-called pleasure motoring in these islands and the very appreciable percentage of cars that have been laid aside altogether this year means that the retail trade in petrol will tend to shrink all the time.

AN ANTICIPATORY MEASURE.

It has been alleged that it does not pay the wholesale distributors to sell petrol through the retail trade in this country nowadays. It should be pointed out, incidentally, that after the rise in the price of fuel last autumn the retail distributors, who were then receiving no more profit per gallon than in the days when petrol cost half as much, made an organized protest and received a concession, which also acknowledged a principle to the effect that the higher the price of petrol the more was to be their profit per gallon. Thus every time the Government increases the duty on petrol we are to look for the wholesaler to put on an increase of his own under some excuse

or other, and for the retailer also to have his proportion of the increase—three increases for and in one. Where is it to end? Obviously the future use of petrol appears as a competition in which all but the very rich will fail to continue. The few will be paying prices which will presumably yield as much profit to the trade as was derivable for the much greater quantities of petrol sold when professional men and the public were collectively consuming much more than they are to-day.

Another Budget is due in a month or six weeks, and it will certainly concern the question of imports. In its own interests the Government should see to it that the price of fuel is no longer raised to the consumer, especially of the professional class, other than by Government duty. Thanks to the British fleet, during the war the seas have been open. We have received better motor fuel supplies even than the good ones we had before the campaign commenced. The number of tank steamers in the world has been increased, and the maximum extra duty the Government has imposed in respect of petrol is 3d. a gallon, yet the price of that commodity to the general public has risen 9d. a gallon, which is an additional 6d., and it does not find its way into the Exchequer! The Government should take steps to protect itself and the public, for the importation of petrol yields a substantial revenue. Possibly the present increase in price may be due in measure to an anticipation that the Government may fix a limit of the extent to which the price can be advanced. The present figure, of course, constitutes a record in the story of the motor movement. The amount of the advance made this week in the price to the consumer can scarcely cost a medical man less than £5 a year. It will cost the majority at least twice as much.

As we go to press the Asiatic Petroleum Company, Ltd., has issued a circular to its clients, in the course of which it is pointed out that of the motor spirit requirements of His Majesty's forces the company is supplying five times as much as the whole of its competitors put together. In spite of the great and constantly increasing claims upon the firm's resources, it has determined to maintain unchanged the prices at which it has been selling Shell motor spirit to the public. It will be its constant endeavour to secure that garages shall receive at least one-third of the quantity of spirit which they have been accustomed to receive from the firm and at the old prices, which enables the retailer to sell to consumers Shell I at 2s. 2d. a gallon, Shell II at 2s. 1d. a gallon, and Crown spirit at 2s. a gallon. Obviously, however, these curtailed supplies cannot suffice for all the requirements of medical men and the public, and therefore the majority of motorists will undoubtedly have to pay the higher prices which have already been instituted in the case of other brands of motor spirit.

APPLICATION BY THE ASSOCIATION TO THE BOARD OF TRADE.

In view of the seriousness to many members of the medical profession, especially those in country districts who have to make long journeys, of the rapid increase in the price of petrol, the following letter has been addressed to the Board of Trade:

February 3rd.

Sir,—On January 22nd last I wrote asking whether the medical profession could have some assurance that no obstruction would be put in the way of their buying petrol. To that letter I have up to the present merely received an acknowledgement. A new development has occurred. I am informed this morning that petrol has gone up 4d. per gallon. This is an extremely serious thing for members of the medical profession, most of whom are engaged on work which may accurately be described as national work, for probably more than half of them are now helping to carry on the practices of men who have accepted military service, while in addition many of them are engaged on part time military service. To these men, and particularly men in country practices, an additional 4d. per gallon is a very serious tax, and I am instructed to ask whether some arrangement could not be made whereby medical men could be allowed to obtain petrol on cheaper terms.

The Association is emboldened to make this request because it believes that the recent rapid increase in the price of petrol is due, not to ordinary commercial reasons but to the fact that the Government is anxious to restrict the use of petrol for purposes other than necessary work. If this is so, the Association feels that the medical profession has a claim which is only less justifiable than that of the military authorities. The Association would be very grateful if you could give it at an early date some assurance that members of the medical profession will be given special facilities to obtain petrol for the purposes of carrying on their practices at a special price, and thus relieve the minds of the profession on a point which is causing them considerable anxiety.

I am, yours faithfully,

ALFRED COX,
The Secretary, Board of Trade. *Medical Secretary*