gifts of secondhand clothing, boots and shoes in good condition, also household linen. The gifts should be sent to the Secretary, Royal Medical Benevolent Fund Guild, 43, Bolsover Street, W.

MOTOR NOTES FOR MEDICAL MEN.

BY H. MASSAC BUIST.

THE PETROL SITUATION.

THE petrol situation is becoming somewhat aggravated. The first hint received by the public was the circular of the Asiatic Petroleum Company referring to a possible shortage, which in turn brought forth a statement from the Anglo-American Oil Company that there was no shortage, but that such statements were likely to send up prices. The situation thus revealed remained an enigma to the public, particularly when, about a fortnight later, all the petrol companies save the Asiatic Petroleum Company (Shell and Crown brands), advanced the price of their fuels approximately 4d. a gallon. Then the Shell people issued a circular again insisting on the need of economy, also claiming that they were supplying four-fifths of the fuel required by the British forces, and concluding with the announcement that in consequence they would make it their best endeavour to supply the public with one-third of its normal peace-time consumption of Shell and Crown spirits.

If pleasure motoring were the only thing to be considered, one-third of peace-time supplies would more than suffice for all the driving that is done nowadays. But altogether apart from the enormous demands for motor fuel for the navy and army, alike at home and overseas, our home consumption of petrol for civilian use is unprecedentedly high, primarily because the wholesale commandeering of horses for war service has compelled the community to take to the employment of utility motor vehicles to an extent that has never obtained before. As regards consumption as reflected by the shipping accommodation problem, for a given amount of work done the utility motor vehicle consumes appreciably less than half the tonnage it is necessary to import in the way of food-stuffs for horses doing the same amount of work, so there is a direct gain under that head.

RIISING FUEL PRICES AND SHIPPING RATES IN AMERICA.

But against this the Government has had to take over approximately half the fleets of tank steamers possessed by the fuel companies, and may have to take more yet, so that there is a real shortage of shipping accommodation for the motor fuel supplies of the civilian community. In wide terms, the tank steamer building for the year will add approximately a third to the world's fleets; but that will barely keep pace with the growing demands under all heads for motor fuel before an allowance of any sort is made for possible losses of tank ships due to enemy enterprise. It therefore follows that in the present situation a very sharp look-out has to be kept on the activities of those oil refiners in various parts of the world who own tank steamers; the bidding for their services for a voyage is very high in consequence. As giving a notion of the extraordinary state in which the freight market is in this connexion I may point out that within the last month I have seen contracts placed ranging from £3 15s. to no less than £6 10s. a ton for petrol to be brought here from America. Both rates are, of course, quite abnormal. Yet the lower figure is the lowest at which business has been done.

Nor is this all; for when the use of a single steamer is secured to bring a cargo of oil here it is, of course, always a condition that the fuel shipped is purchased from the refiner owning the given steamer. For example, not all the petrol imported by the Anglo-American Oil Company comes through the Rockefeller groups. Supplies are purchased from about four separate and independent sources.

Despite the fact that in 1915 and in 1916 there will be added to the motor vehicles in use in the United States alone a total of two million machines—over 800,000 were added last year, and over a million will be added this year—it is a fact that all the petrol we need is obtainable in the world. Put in few words, the situation is simply

this: We can get all the fuel we need and are able to transport, but that fuel is worth just as much as it will fetch on the open market, and we must pay accordingly. In face of the figures I have given concerning the rate at which America is increasing her use of motor vehicles, naturally the oil refiners are not throwing their stocks on the market, but instead wait for bids. They know that they can dispose of all their stocks at home. On the other hand, they have such an enormous foreign demand that the price of home consumption has risen from 15 cents per American gallon in New York a year ago to 35½ cents to-day, and 40 and 50 cent petrol is being spoken of. We have to add one-fifth to every American gallon to make an English one of it, apart from which most of this 35½ cent petrol is equal to only about our third-grade spirit, therefore it has to be refined again when brought over here, which further reduces the quantity.

WHY TALES OF SHORTAGE DO HARM.

The importers claim that the rise of 4d. a gallon barely takes up the advance that has occurred during the last twelve months in the cost of the fuel in the primary markets where they purchase it, and makes no allowance whatever for the current abnormal shipping rates and for the heavier distribution costs in this country. Those costs embrace the two gallon tins in which the petrol is kept and of which there is a great shortage, owing, first, to the heavy demands and destruction in connexion with those supplied for war service in the early days of the campaign, and, secondly, to a section of the motoring community having laid up large fuel stores in two gallon tins, which are accordingly out of circulation for an unduly long time. The authorities solved their own tin problem by taking two steps. The first consisted of organizing adequate repair depôts so that the wholesale scrapping of tins was stopped, and the second was the taking over of the supplies of tin and the tin works, so that for some time past the Government has been making its own petrol cans. In consequence the petrol importers have had to import their tins, which is comparatively a very expensive process.

In face of all these points, therefore, the only marvel is that the civilian community has come thus far through the war without having to pay more than half a crown a gallon for its first-grade motor fuel, particularly as in France considerably more has had to be paid. It will be appreciated that nothing could more adversely influence this matter from our point of view than putting abroad stories concerning shortage of petrol, since the refiners in America are only waiting for such information to hold back their supplies until they can demand still more extortionate prices. In this connexion it must not be forgotten that in the United States they have very very full knowledge of the manner in which munition producers there have coined money out of this war, some large orders having paid not only for the cost of production and materials, but also for the factory buildings in which and for the machinery with which they have been produced; and have, besides, left over a balance of 25 per cent. profit on a single order. With the example of successful plundering on such a scale it is not surprising that sundry oil refiners in the New World consider their present game not only absolutely legitimate, but also positively philanthropic by comparison.

"TIN-GRABBERS" AGGRAVATE THE DIFFICULTY.

The "tin-grabbers," as the petrol trade describe those members of the community who have aggravated the position at home by laying in stores of petrol sufficient for anything from six to eighteen months and with a view to dodging increases of import duty, should become objects of special attention on the part of the authorities now that the motor fuel situation is having to be dealt with by the Ministry of Munitions. Such individuals have acted against the public interest; therefore their stocks should be seized, if only for the reason that every user of motor fuel should pay duty on it at whatever rate obtains for his given class at whatever time he uses that fuel. In Germany laying up stores of this kind, which are estimated by the Royal Automobile Club to total over a million cans, would be punishable by heavy fine, for with the total number of cans in the country enormously diminished by reason of the army's needs at the beginning

of the war, the having an additional million withdrawn from use by these undesirable tactics of comparatively a small section of motor users becomes a very serious thing to the community. Every additional can has to be imported into these islands, consequently each one should be made the vehicle of distributing two gallons of petrol as frequently as possible in place of containing the same two gallons of petrol for month after month. This is one of the first points that should be made by the medical profession when making a move, as it must do, to have its case specially considered by the authorities at the present juncture.

MEDICAL MEN MUST BE ASSURED OF SUPPLIES.

Next it should bring out the need for supplies of petrol being assured to medical men throughout these islands according to their several needs. The Commercial Motor Users' Association, which claims that more than 75 per cent. of the petrol used by the civilian community of these islands is required by the industrial and commercial motor vehicle users, has been invited by the Ministry of Munitions to submit a scheme to secure a more efficient distribution of petrol. The fact is overlooked that of the balance of less than 25 per cent. used by the civilian community at the moment by far the greatest proportion is needed for professional uses, foremost among which are doctors. Motors are besides needed by veterinary surgeons, surveyors, civil engineers, and all manner of other professional men, whose collective requirements nevertheless do not come within the scope of the Commercial Motor Users' Association's claims.

The Motor Trades' Association did well in advertising the limit which motorists ought to pay for their petrol supplies in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland at the present time. But the association is, of course, unable to compel local retailers who desire either to favour certain customers or to hold up supplies to release what stocks they may have in hand. To put the retailing of petrol into the hands of the Government by any sort of machinery that could be devised would only be adding expense to expense and creating a number of paid posts for officials, which form of national extravagance must be stopped at all costs, now we have gone thus far in the war and all realize that every penny must be looked at twice before it is spent.

Of course, the main causes of the, at present, admittedly unequal distribution of petrol are unavoidable. They arise from certain consignments intended for civilian use being diverted at the last moment to some point or other where the Government desires them to be placed for its own disposal for military purposes, whereby a month or two may pass before it is possible to arrange for another cargo to be brought to the given centre. This difficulty could be obviated as far as medical men are concerned, however, by arranging that each shall be allowed to accumulate anything from, say, two to four dozen tins, according to his situation, whereby it would be possible to carry on for a matter of weeks in the event of any temporary interruption in local distributing arrangements.

THE Chile Minister of Justice has appointed a Commission for the study of crime. A laboratory of experimental pathology is to be established at Santiago.

It appears from a report by the Medical Officer of Health of Vienna, Dr. Böhm, that during the first twelve months of the war the health of Vienna was in many respects better than might have been expected. The number of patients treated in public and private hospitals was 79,169, as compared with 119,935 for the preceding twelve months. Many men had left the town on active service, and the conditions of labour and pay were much improved for those who stayed at home. The death-rate was 14.5 per 1,000, as compared with 13.6 per 1,000 for the last twelve months of peace. Of the infectious diseases commonly associated with warfare, only small-pox assumed alarming proportions; and for this the lack of universal vaccination was to blame. In the first twelve months of the war 1,613 cases were notified in Vienna, 1,538 in the civilian population, 50 among soldiers, and 25 among civilians not domiciled in Vienna. There were 351 deaths, and the mortality was, therefore, 21.7 per cent. Only a few cases of cholera, typhus and dysentery occurred, and the incidence of typhoid fever among the civil population was nearly normal.

THE REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON VENEREAL DISEASES.*

(Continued from p. 346.)

II. PREVALENCE (continued).

Distribution of Venereal Disease.

THE crude death-rates from syphilis per million for the year 1910 are stated to be 46 for England and Wales, 42 for Scotland, and 22 for Ireland. Such consequential diseases as general paralysis, locomotor ataxia, and aneurysm follow syphilis closely in relative order of distribution, except that aneurysm stands highest in Scotland, and, together with general paralysis, is markedly low in Ireland. The table brings out the fact that syphilis is essentially a town disease. It is concluded that the excess of urban mortality from syphilis is due largely, but not altogether, to the high proportion of institutional deaths returned by them. For gonorrhoea no similar statistics are available, but the trend of the evidence is to show that, like syphilis, it is essentially a town disease.

The infantile mortality returns due to syphilis again show the striking immunity of the rural areas: it is one-half that in urban areas. The mortality of illegitimate infants is from 8 to 10 times as high as that of the legitimate.

A most striking table gives the recorded death-rate per million for syphilis and three consequential diseases in classified groups of the population above 15 years of age. The rate is heaviest for unskilled labour; next in heaviest incidence comes the upper and middle class which includes clerks and insurance agents; then follow in order skilled labour, textile workers, miners; and last, with the lightest incidence, agricultural labourers. "As the figures were standardized to allow for the varying age distribution among classes whose average duration of life differs, they may be accepted as correctly representing the relative incidence within the limits of accuracy permitted by the present system of registration. . . . Viewing these figures as a whole, we consider that there are good grounds for believing that the prevalence of syphilis is greatest amongst the highest and lowest of the social classes. . . . Incidentally the figures help to confirm and explain the geographical distribution with which we have dealt."

Defects in Registration.

The report comments on the bad system of death registration in the United Kingdom; not only does the publicity of the certificate reduce its possible value, but there is no uniform method, and no provision for collating and analysing the returns as a whole. In England and Wales the doctor gives the certificate to the friends of the deceased, in Scotland he is supposed to send it to the registrar, but it is not confidential and a copy may be got for a small fee. In 1893 a Select Committee of the House of Commons commented on this unsatisfactory state of affairs, and "recommended that medical practitioners should be required to send certificates of the causes of death to the registrar, instead of handing them to representatives of the deceased." No official action has been taken, and bills presented by private members made no progress. But none of these attempts laid stress on the necessity for the document being confidential. The report points out that under a proper system "this certificate would be confidential, and access to it would only be possible on the order of a court of justice. A number of witnesses gave evidence in favour of confidential certification of the cause of death, and we understand that a reform of this kind has for some years been advocated by the British Medical Association, and is generally supported by the medical societies." Strangely enough, the view of the life assurance societies, so far as it was expressed, was opposed to confidential registration. But the Commissioners state: "We are not convinced by the alleged objections, and we consider that any improvement in the accuracy of vital statistics must, in the long run, benefit the life insurance companies, who could adopt their methods to the system of confidential certification as in all other great European countries." The Commission recommends that the Notification of Births Act should be made universally operative, and this has been done. It

* Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases. Final Report of the Commissioners. [Cd. 8189.] Price 1s. 11d.