

Foreign Letters

LONDON

(From Our Regular Correspondent)

May 31, 1930.

Use of the Thomas Splint in Peace Time

One of the discoveries in the war was the value of the Thomas splint for the treatment of fractures of the femur. In the early days the mortality from compound fractures of the femur was in the neighborhood of 82 per cent. The introduction of the Thomas splint as a first aid measure reduced the mortality to 12 per cent. In a letter to the *Times* a surgeon, Mr. T. E. A. Stowell, points out that this lesson, taught fourteen years ago, has not yet been learned. This was demonstrated by an automobile accident at crossroads recently. Two persons suffering from compound fractures of the femur lay at the roadside and were being attended by uniformed members of an ambulance organization. The ambulance men were intelligent and doing their best, but their services were inadequate because there is no official ambulance training in the use of the Thomas splint. Mr. Stowell makes a plea that every roadside aid post and every ambulance shall be equipped with the simple apparatus which we owe to that surgical genius, H. O. Thomas, and that all ambulance workers shall be trained in its use as a first aid measure.

Compensation Act to Be Extended to Asbestosis

The workmen's compensation act applies to all diseases due to exposure to silica dust, but it has been ascertained recently that the dust of asbestos, which is a silicate, produces similar effects. Hence a bill has been introduced into parliament extending the silicosis provisions of the workmen's compensation act to processes involving exposure to asbestos. Supporting the bill, Lord Russell for the government said that many processes in silica working could not show a mortality approaching that for the asbestos industry, in which 14 fatal cases had now been reported and in addition 3 deaths from asbestosis associated with tuberculosis. In 8 of the 17 fatal cases the disablement before death varied from six months to several years and in 4 cases from a few days to a few weeks. The incidence rate of this disease was 1 in 8 among those actually employed and at work, or, if those employed less than five years were excluded, the incidence rate was 1 in 3. While the fibrosis associated with silicosis was in more or less isolated nodules, asbestos fibrosis was a fine cobweb ultimately permeating the greater portion of the lungs and leaving little sound tissue. A special scheme of medical inspection by experts will be set up. It is thus hoped that cases which previously would have been certified as tuberculosis or pneumonia or other disease of the lungs will now be certified as due to asbestos fibrosis. The disease hardly becomes definite before five years' work in the industry, and if it is detected early and the man removed from it compensation will not be necessary.

The Danger from Fatigued Automobile Drivers

The standing committee of the house of commons, which is considering the road traffic bill, has discussed the clause which limits the time during which public service and other heavy motor vehicles can be on duty continuously. There is a clause which provides that drivers of such vehicles must not be on duty continuously for a period exceeding five and one-half hours. Mr. Morrison, minister of transport, said that it had been found necessary to insert this clause to meet a serious state of affairs. Cases had come to the notice of the minister of transport in which there was reason to believe that accidents had been caused by the fatigue of drivers owing to long hours of continuous work. Mr. Llewellyn Jones said that his experience in con-

ducting inquiries into fatal accidents led him to believe that automobile drivers had often practically fallen asleep when driving, owing to the long hours during which they had been on duty. The clause was agreed to, but an amendment excepting automobiles used for fire brigade or ambulance purposes was accepted by the government.

Another Opportunity for Women Physicians

Under the new local government act, all the municipal hospitals of London have now been taken from under the control of local bodies and put under the London county council. The public health committee of this body has decided that all the numerous appointments to the hospitals and district medical services shall be open to women as well as to men physicians. This decision means that women will be eligible to rise to the highest grades in the service and may become superintendents of hospitals. For the first time they will not be subject to restrictions.

International Veterinary Congress

An international veterinary congress will be held in London, August 4-9. Official delegates have been appointed by Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, South Australia, Irish Free State, Albania, Austria, Belgium, China, Denmark, Ecuador, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Holland, Nicaragua, Roumania, Sweden, Turkey and Yugoslavia. The government has granted free visas to all foreign delegates, who are expected to number more than a thousand. The congress will be the eleventh of its kind, the first having been held in Hamburg in 1863 immediately after the great European outbreak of cattle plague. The problems to be discussed include foot-and-mouth disease, infectious abortion, tuberculosis, and the control of meat and milk production and distribution. Besides these subjects, on which general meetings will be held, there will be sectional meetings for the discussion of rabies, poultry disease and deficiency disease. The corporation of the city of London will give a reception to all delegates and the government will give a banquet.

Employment for the Tuberculous

The employment committee of the joint tuberculosis council, which consists of seven physicians, has issued an important report on care and after-care in tuberculosis. It finds that the most difficult problem and at the same time the most urgent one awaiting solution in the after-care of the tuberculous is employment. The primary object of all schemes should be to increase the percentage of cases likely to be reabsorbed into ordinary industry rather than to embark on ambitious schemes for the permanent employment of the disabled. There are many tasks under modern industrial conditions which the consumptive can perform if the disease is in a state of quiescence, and there is no task for which he is better equipped than that to which he has devoted the greater part of his life. No consumptive realizes this better than the physician who falls a prey to tuberculosis. He takes the common sense course and attaches himself to the staff of a sanatorium. There appears to be little hope economically for the consumptive unless he is able to resume his previous occupation and be employed on his own merits. A further point which eliminates him from the ordinary industrial market is that the great majority of trading concerns demand either a high degree of intellectual capacity at some particular job or a high standard of physical fitness. With regard to village settlements, the committee finds that the results are excellent. Even the advanced case is able to weather the storm of life for a much longer period under settlement conditions than he would in the outside world. But so-called employment schemes as at present administered, handicraft classes, vocational therapy centers, training colonies and village settlements can give permanent employment only to an insignificant number in comparison with the magnitude of the problem.