
THE STORAGE OF GASOLINE

June 10.

IN reviewing the annual report of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce two months ago, our readers will recollect that we drew particular attention to the question of the storage of gasoline or as it is called in the trade benzine, in tanks, for which the Asiatic Petroleum Co. was pressing, to replace the present wasteful and expensive storage in steel drums. As the report showed, the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce was, on first consideration, opposed to the desired change. Since last year, however, the Chamber has reconsidered it, and after a good deal of careful investigation has completely altered its former opinion, and is now strongly in favour of bulk storage, of course under the proper and usual precautions. The scheme is one in which the public generally are much interested and some explanation of the main points at issue should be acceptable.

As the Harbour Regulations now stand, gasoline has to be brought to Shanghai in large steel drums and is stored in these at the Asiatic Petroleum Co.'s lower wharf, to be decanted as

required into the small tins used by the retail trade. The Standard Oil Co. does not come into the present discussion, as its storage wharf is outside harbour limits. There is, however, no question that Secony must ultimately be affected by any decision regarding storage by the Asiatic Petroleum Co. Now it is easily understood that the transport, storage and general use of steel drums is unnecessarily costly. They mean less gasoline on board the ship that brings them, added cost in handling, more space in storing, the expense of returning the empty drums, depreciation, and actual loss of gasoline in transferring it from big drums to small. The remedy suggested, as approved by wide experience and by the now greater scientific knowledge of how best to handle gasoline, is to use tanks surrounded by earthen ramparts, which would contain far more gasoline than the tank, thus preventing escape of the liquid in the event of fire. The gasoline is then brought by tank steamer, discharged by pipe direct into the tank and the wastage involved in the use of drums eliminated. Both on the score of economy and safety the tank system is now generally upheld by experts and is in use in many of the largest docks of the world, such as Rotterdam, Bristol, Calais and Karachi, no objection having been found to the installation of the tank even in the midst of crowded docks and warehouses.

There appears no question on a reasonable consideration of all available data that the tank system might with safety and with enormous advantage to all consumers be introduced in Shanghai. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that, unless it is permitted, the business of the port may in the near future be seriously hampered. The increased demand for petrol, only during the past year or two, can only properly be appreciated by those who have to meet it. But the fact that motor-lorries alone increased in number from ninety-one at the end of 1919 to one hundred and ninety at the end of 1920, and will undoubtedly increase yet more rapidly with the growing realization of its economy for most kinds of heavy traffic, is a part indication of the rising need of gasoline. The approaching development of aviation, with its accompanying need of petrol, is a certainty,

while the visible Chinese appreciation of motor transport, in towns away from Shanghai, will mean a new demand concurrently with the movement for good roads that will make it possible. In this connexion it is interesting to note that a motor-road to Yangchow is in course of construction from "the model city" of Nantungchow, where already a flourishing motor-omnibus service is in operation.

The Asiatic Petroleum Company's wharf being a little distance within harbour limits, the Customs authorities could not, in the existing state of the Harbour Regulations, give permission for the desired tanks. They were accordingly asked to indicate a locality nearer Woosung where tanks might be installed. But to this they replied that they could give no such indication until the findings of the international Harbour Commission, which is to investigate and report on the whole case of the port of Shanghai, are known. Now to wait for these is to incur a very long delay. The Commission does not meet until the autumn, its findings can certainly not be expected for several months after that date and even then they must submit to the still longer process of being adopted by the Chinese Government and Legations. It might easily be two years before the A. P. C. got permission to instal tanks for bulk storage. The issue, therefore, at present lies between the shipping community as represented by the General Chamber of Commerce and the Customs, with the decision left to the Consular Body whether the Harbour Regulations should not be altered so as to make bulk storage possible. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the change ought to be made. The case of gasoline is somewhat that of a dog with a bad name, the legacy of early years when the proper method of handling it was imperfectly understood. Those days are long past. The storage and handling of oils has been reduced to an exact science, and there appears no valid reason why bulk storage should be less practicable in Shanghai than in the crowded localities mentioned above. Indeed in Shanghai there is even less room for possible objection than in other ports, as complete isolation of the tanks and their surrounding ramparts is more easily attained.