

THE DOCTOR AND THE AUTOMOBILE

A DISCUSSION is going on in the English press regarding the propriety of allowing physicians to exceed the legal speed-limit when hurrying to attend an urgent case. Opinion seems to differ. Says *The Hospital* (London, July 9):

"The point arose originally when a well-known surgeon was prosecuted for this offense and excused himself upon the ground



THE INTERIOR OF THE KAISER'S MOTOR-KITCHEN.

that he was hurrying to see an urgent case. This original defense so captivated the bench that the offender was let off. On a good many subsequent occasions the same defense has been put forward by medical motorists, with varying degrees of success. In the main, public opinion seems to have inclined toward allowing some license to the doctor who can show that he is really traveling at speed to see a patient, tho a good many people have been rather skeptical as to the urgency of many of the cases in which this has occurred; and, to speak frankly, it is practically certain that the tacit privilege has been a good many times abused by the profession."

A letter in *The Daily Mail* (London) puts the matter from the lay standpoint with what appears to be common sense. The writer asks: Did any one ever see a doctor breaking speed records except in an automobile? Did any one ever see a doctor lashing his horse or scorching on his bicycle to gain a few minutes or seconds in the race of life and death? He goes on:

"It is strange that as soon as he becomes the possessor of a motor-car the doctor gains a new sense of the urgency of his mission. He can travel twenty miles an hour where previously he could only go eight, but this does not satisfy him. He feels that considerations of humanity entitle him to get the very top speed out of his engine. The fact of the matter is, it is because he is a motorist, not because he is a doctor, that he wants to exceed the speed limit."

On this *The Hospital* comments as follows:

"This indictment, severe tho it may appear, contains a

half-truth which it is all the more difficult to rebut. To assert, as *The Daily Mail's* correspondent does, that a doctor is never known to hurry himself until he has a car is a libel on the profession and a most unjustified one. But, for all the exaggeration, the last sentence of the paragraphs quoted above sums up very neatly a view of the question which many people have felt without being able to voice so articulately as has here been done.

"But the thrust is prest still further home by the Salisbury letter-writer. He proceeds to point out that if the doctor hurrying to the relief of his patient is entitled to rush along at forty miles an hour, surely the patient seeking the assistance of his doctor has the right to make the same speed. For it is not the doctor's right, but the patient's urgent need, that demands the excessive speed. If every patient on his way to the doctor's consulting-room is to be entitled to go as fast as he likes, it will be an unimaginative motorist who will not be able to provide himself with a convenient qualifying ailment. And, it may be added, it will prove the opening of an era of rare prosperity for doctors."