

Science Siftings

By 'VOLT.'

Where Amber Comes From.

Most of the world's supply of genuine amber comes from the strip of East Prussia lying between Memel and Cranz. At one time it was gathered only along the coast; but in 1883 a Junker owning land near Memel was induced to mine for amber on his estate, with such profitable results that six years later the Prussian Government bought his mine for £520,000. Subsequently amber was created a State monopoly; and every fragment found on the sands or dragged up in a fisherman's net must now be taken to the nearest Government depot if the finder wishes to avoid the risk of imprisonment. Whenever stormy weather is felt off Memel a posse of officials is dispatched post-haste to gather in the amber washed up on the beach.

Supply of Thymol.

Thymol is an important antiseptic. For years it has been manufactured almost exclusively in Germany, from a plant cultivated in India. At the beginning of the European war the price of this medicinal chemical rose from 8s to £3 10s a pound. 'Yet during all these years,' says Professor E. Kramers, of the University of Wisconsin, 'while we (that is, the United States) have been importing about ten thousand pounds of thymol annually, a weed growing on the sandy areas along the lower course of the Wisconsin River has probably been producing enough thymol to have supplied the entire United States in the present crisis.' Although attention has been directed again and again to this medicinal agent, this weed has been allowed to go to waste. Because of its thymol content it is not even touched by grazing cattle or sheep. Yet after the thymol has been removed the exhausted plant is eaten by animals, and may thus be converted into a useful agricultural product.

Does Wireless Cause Explosions?

A well-known scientist recently suggested that the mysterious explosion which destroyed the British battleship, the *Bulwark*, might have been due to the influence of wireless waves. The theory that wireless causes explosions was put forward some time ago by a French engineer. To prove his point, he called attention to the fact that the disaster to the British steamer, the *Volturno*, which was burnt in the Atlantic, took place just on the junction point where the wireless waves from the Eiffel Tower and Glace Bay meet. The French engineer also points out that in his opinion wireless has a strange effect on the mind, and he considers that it is for this reason that collisions between ships have greatly increased of recent years. Many of these mishaps have taken place at the junction of wireless wave routes, and it is said that the wireless so affected the brains of ships' commanders that in critical moments they lost control of their vessels. This theory is confirmed by the fact that birds flying near wireless stations move in an uneasy, agitated fashion, as if their senses were under some strange influence.

Clothing the British Army.

The manufacture of clothing for the new armies is proceeding in the West Riding of Yorkshire on a colossal scale. It is estimated that between 250 and 300 miles of khaki cloth and its substitutes, from 54in to 56in wide, are being woven every week, and that at least 80 per cent. of all textile machinery is engaged on the Army work. Over 12,000 looms are busy, working on an average nearly 'time and a-half.' One mill alone produces forty miles of cloth weekly. Some 50,000 tailors and tailoresses are making up the material into garments, working in most cases from 8 a.m. to 9 or 9.30 p.m., the work as a whole being supervised by a committee of experts appointed by the War Office. In regard to Army boots, some 200 factories in the kingdom are devoting about 60 per cent. of their total output to their manufacture. About twenty factories in Leeds

alone produce some 40,000 pairs a week. Army contracts have been booked and will take from three to six months to complete. A Leeds firm was recently asked to tender for the supply of 2,000,000 pairs for the Russian army, but the request had to be refused.

THE NEUTRALITY OF THE HOLY SEE

Some days ago a cable message from Sydney gave us the views of his Grace Archbishop Cerretti, Apostolic Delegate, with regard to the neutrality of the Holy See in the war. When interviewed (says the *Melbourne Advocate*) his Excellency said he was not prepared to express an opinion on Italy's intervention in the war.

The policy of the Vatican was always that of the observance of strict neutrality when nations were at war with one another. For this reason he did not give credence to the cabled report to the effect that the Pope had subscribed £4000 to the Italian war fund, and had allotted £40,000 to Italian victims of the war.

When Archbishop Cerretti's attention was drawn to the Paris message wherein it was stated that it was understood that the Pope was about to issue a manifesto approving of Italy's intervention in the war, he said it was unlikely that it was correct. He explained that these were matters of which, if they were correct, he would in all probability have been officially informed by the Vatican. When acts of injustice and barbarities were committed during the progress of the war, it was the province of the Pope to enter a protest, and to do all in his power to stop such practices. The Delegate explained that this had been done in the present war, notably in the Vatican's protest regarding the bombardment of Rheims Cathedral and the internment of Cardinal Mercier, the Archbishop of Malines.

Following the bombardment of Rheims, Cardinal L. H. Lucan, Archbishop of Rheims, wrote to the Vatican beseeching the Pope to enter a protest to Germany. The Pope replied at once, expressing his deep sympathy, and intimating his intentions. The letter never reached the Cardinal: possibly the censor, or someone interested in suppressing the letter, stopped its delivery. The non-receipt of the letter, however, created a very bad impression in France and Belgium, and the report became current that the Vatican was openly sympathising with Germany and Austria.

In order to set matters right, the Pope had his letter of protest against the bombardment of the Rheims Cathedral published in the *Osservatore Romano*, official organ of the Vatican. The protest regarding Cardinal Mercier was published in the same way.

'These are matters which are not understood here,' Archbishop Cerretti went on, 'and I have looked in vain for some reference to them in the Australian press. I want it particularly understood that the Pope did not favor Germany at any stage of the present war. The Church is universal. She has her subjects in Germany and Austria, as well as among the Allies, and due care must be observed not to hurt the feelings of any section of Catholics. This is why the Church, as a body, must be neutral as far as possible in such a dreadful calamity as Europe is at present experiencing.'

'The Pope and Cardinals have their private sympathies and opinions, but they may not officially express them. If they did so it might be the cause of a schism.'

Asked if Italy's intervention would cause any serious inconvenience to the conduct of the Church's affairs at the Vatican, the Archbishop expressed the fear that it would. The Italian Government had, he believed, already refused to recognise the neutrality of the Vatican.

'However,' he concluded, 'out of evil cometh good. The war may lead to a settlement, once and for all, of the neutrality of the Vatican in times of European war, and the end of hostilities, let us hope, will see the world generally prepared to enter on a newer and better life.'