

**SF Bk 1 English letter 352 transcribed (typed)**

London May 5<sup>th</sup> 1896  
The Editor of The Pall Mall Gazette

Sir:-

The article in Friday evening's issue of your valuable paper upon the enquiry of a select Committee of the House of Commons on the uses and abuses of Petroleum has given a very one sided view of the matter, and cannot be passed over without comment by one as equally interested as "A Trade Authority" would appear to be. Your correspondent's chief complaint is, that were the flash point raised to 100 degrees Fahrenheit (Abel's test) the British Public might have to pay one penny per gallon more for the oil consumed.

Respecting flash point, "A Trade Authority" doubts if petroleum can be obtained in sufficient quantities over 100 degrees.

For general use in lamps I would recommend a standard of 90 to 100 degrees as fully meeting all requirements, but perhaps the same "Authority" can inform us why, in the United States, the law does not permit oil at a flash point of 73 degrees, and why in some of the States the standard is as high even as 100 degrees Abel's test.

Surely if the Americans protect themselves with a higher flash point, they cannot complain if a similar quality should be demanded in this country.

Russian oil has a flash point of about 85 degrees, whilst American oil at about equal price will flash at 73 to 75 degrees.

Now to raise the flash point of American oil to 85 degrees, I believe would not cost the consumers of this country one farthing, because no doubt American oil would have to compete with Russian oil at the same price and at the same standard. To raise the flash point to 95 degrees might possibly increase the price of oil one halfpenny to one penny per gallon, but no doubt the £500,000 which your correspondent is fearful will be taken from the British Public's pocket, would affect the American oil monopoly far more, hence the present vigorous protest.

The philanthropic idea of "Trade Authority" saving the Consumers of this country one penny per gallon, has not always marked the acts of the American oil Interest - these charitable feelings were not characteristic of their action some twelve months ago, - at a time Stocks were low, - when the price was run up to such an extent that the consumer was mulct to the tune of about a million pounds sterling into the pocket of the American oil monopoly.

The notion that the question of safety is entirely of a lamp one (which your article insinuates) the evidence of Experts now before the Parliamentary Committee will disabuse. Any legislation which prescribes alterations in existing lamps or burners will only tend to make the commodity dearer, - a fact which will deter more people from buying lamps than the slightly raised price of oil.

This should be borne in mind by the Petroleum trade, as it will be hardly necessary to point out that the fewer lamps in use, the less oil will be required.

Lamps always have been and ever will be of a decorative as well as of a useful nature, and there are millions of pretty china, fancy glass & metal lamps nightly in use which are perfectly safe in the hands of any one, except a drunken maniac.

That real lamp accidents are a frequent occurrence is wholly imaginary, and in all justice I appeal to your paper, which has always been credited for all its fairness and accuracy, to refrain from the oft recurring headlines "Another Lamp Accident" or "The Dangers of The Lamp" etc - whether it be an accident (?) or refers to a Benzoline spirit lamp or "costers flarer". As an instance I quote your issue of April 29<sup>th</sup>. where a case is reported of an old lady having overturned a lamp in her sleep. Would not the result have been equally disastrous had it been caused by a candle, and would it then have been called "The Dangers of Candles"?

The lamp trade, which is one of considerable importance, has of late suffered almost irretrievable injury from these glaring headings --- penned no doubt in ignorance, but nevertheless damning in their effect.

I do not wish to encroach too much upon your valuable space, or I could give you dozens of instances, which have come under my notice, where accidents have invariably been described in the press as the out-come of dangerous lamps, when they were simply the consequence of carelessness, drunkenness or negligence, causes which no legislation in the world can possibly remedy.

In fairness to both users & manufacturers, when a lamp accident does occur let it be called such, but until a genuine case has happened which proves the lamp to be at fault, let it be called the act of careless or drunken people, and not confounded with the vagaries of a well constructed lamp.

Trusting to your well known courtesy to give equal prominence to this as to the article referred to.

I remain, Your obedient Servant, Fair Play

P.S. I enclose my card but not for publication.