MANUFACTURE OF GAS.

SKETCH OF ITS HISTORY WITH SOME INTERESTING FACTS.

First Experiments Were Made in 1690. Illuminating Gas Was First Invented in 1792—In 1813 an American Patented a Process—Big Companies.

Experiments at gas making were first made in England in 1690, and for nearly one hundred years various and unsuccessful attempts to obtain gas from bituminous coal and stone it for use in lighting were made.

The real invention of practical gas lighting was, however, made in 1792, and by William Murdock, who in that year lighted his house and office at Redruth in Cornwall, among the credit. Mr. Murdock removed to Scotland and devoted himself to the gas business. In 1798 he lighted his premises at Old Cumnock in Ayrshire with coal gas.

The following year he undertook the construction of gas works at the shops of Messrs. Boulton, Watt & Co., at Soho, and in 1803 first publicly exhibited the gas by showing two enormous flames from two copper vases at those works. Three years later the cotton mills of Messrs. Phillips & Lee, at Salford, were lighted under the direction of Murdock with gas brought from the works.

The French engineer Le Bon in 1799 took out a patent for gas making from wood, and proposed lighting Paris, but the scheme did not at that time meet with success. In 1809 the National Light and Heat company was organized in London, after it had been successfully demonstrated that street lamps could be lighted with gas, but a charter for the company being refused a great newspaper war was instituted in order to create popular interest in the new light.

SLOW PROGRESS.

In 1810 parliament authorized the grant of a charter, and in 1812 Westminster bridge was lighted, and very shortly afterward all the oil lights in the vicinity of Westminster were removed. Notwithstanding this great improvement over the old systems of oil lights, a great prejudice against gas existed, and even among men of science—so great, in fact, that it seemed at one time that no further progress would be made.

The ignorance prevalent at that time regarding gases in general was so great that when it was finally resolved to introduce gas lighting into the house of commons the architect directed that the pipes be placed four inches from the walls lest their heat should fire the building! Aside from the question of prejudice, there were many obstacles in the way of the successful development of a distributing gas system.

The proper machinery and apparatus for making gas had to be constructed, and for many years the required wrought iron pipes could not be secured. However, by the year 1823 four great gas companies had been established in London, using more than 1,000 retorts and nearly fifty gas holders, and making 400,000,000 cubic feet of gas annually.

In the United States gas for illuminating purposes was first made by David Melville, of Newport, R. I. In 1806 he lighted his residence and the street in front from gas made from coal. In 1813 he secured a patent, and shortly afterward applied the light to a number of small factories. Four years later his process was applied to the Pharos Tall lighthouse. That was the first use of gas in any lighthouse in the world. Some persons in Baltimore attempted gas making about 1816, but no success was met with until 1821.

MAKING COAL GAS.

In 1822 gas was introduced in Boston under the Melville system, and in the following year the New York Gas Light company was formed, but, owing to the limited demand for gas and not gas into actual operation until 1827. In 1829 the Manhattan Gas company, a rival concern, was started, and both for a time paid their companies more than three times the cost of oil and rosin. After that coal was employed. For many years coal gas improved in efficiency very slowly.

New methods have been introduced during the past fifteen or twenty years, and important progress has been made in that time. All the large gas companies have found it advisable to use higher temperatures and larger retorts, with the result that considerably more gas is now obtained from a ton of coal.

Coal gas is generally made from bituminous coal, although other varieties have been and are now employed. A ton of 2,240 pounds of good cannel coal carefully distilled will yield about 8,000 cubic feet of purified illuminating gas. Other bituminous coals yield from 6,000 cubic feet up to the above amount. The cannel coal yields by far the richest gas, and in England is sometimes used exclusively.

The manufacture of coal gas comprises three distinct operations: 1. Distillation of the coal. 2. The separation of the water and other condensable matters—condensation. 3. The removal of sulphur compounds and carbonic acid purification. Of late years the manufacture of what is known as water gas has become an important branch of the industry.

WATER GAS.

The first patent for water gas was granted in London in 1804. Improvements were made in 1809, 1823 and 1847, but attempts to use, in England some of the improved methods of making water gas has been able to compete with coal gas in cheapness. In this country, owing to the cheapness of petroleum and its products, quite the reverse has been the case.

During the past fifteen years the cost of gas to the consumer has been considerably reduced, in some cases by the voluntary action of the companies and in others by legislative action. At the present time there are in the United States 487 gas companies, whose combined capital is nearly $125,000,000.

The largest company in the United States is the Consolidated, of New York city, with a capital of $65,450,000, and a producing capacity of about 50,000,000 cubic feet in twenty-four hours. It has the largest gas holder in this country. Its capacity is 3,250,000 cubic feet. The number of the Consolidated employees varies from 1,000 to 2,500.

The Chicago Gas company, whose capital is $25,000,000, is the second largest company in the United States. It also has an enormous gas tank. The maximum quantity of gas produced in twenty-four hours in the city of New York is 50,000,000 cubic feet, or more in ten days than was required in twelve months in the whole of the city of London but than seventy years ago.—New York Sun.

The United States consul at Barcelona says that according to a calculation made by the administration of forests the extent of cork forests in Spain is about 250,000 hectares (a hectare is equivalent to 2.47 acres), distributed as follows: 80,000 in the province of Gerona, 48,000 in Huelva, 32,000 in Caceres, 20,000 in Seville, 20,000 in Cadiz, 15,000 in Ciudad Real and 9,000 in Cordoba.

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Doubtless but few people are aware of the fact that the so-called "blood oranges" are sometimes simply ordinary oranges treated with aniline dye. The originator of this trick was an Italian, who, on being discovered, was prosecuted, and he served two years in prison for his crime. Notwithstanding this salutary example the swindle is still occasionally perpetrated.—Boston Herald.

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