

Most people the composition, the making, the selling and the proper use of gas are more or less a mystery. There is no necessity for this. There is nothing mysterious or abstruse about any of these subjects. Anyone can understand them, and it would be to the mutual advantage of the gas company and its consumers if the latter would take the slight trouble necessary to inform themselves on these subjects.

It is quite frequently claimed that a gas company is an organized means of extortion. This, of course, is not true. Most consumers think they are completely at the mercy of the meter, or of the meters' owners, in the matter of making bills, and that they are charged whatever the company sees fit or whatever is needed by the state of its treasury. There was never a greater mistake.

To give information on these points to show that there is no mystery about the making and selling of gas, and that the making and selling of gas may be almost classed with the exact sciences; to show that it is an honorable and profitable business, and that its whole business is so open and aboveboard that the customer cannot possibly be cheated if he only uses his own native intelligence; to show that the interest of company and customer is mutual, and to cultivate friendly relations between them is the object of the following story. Please read it carefully.

Do Gas Companies Cheat?

It is sometimes suspected that gas companies pump or force air into their gas to swell its volume and cheat their customers. This is preposterous. Even a small admixture as 1 part out of 100 would diminish the illuminating power of the gas 6 per cent; and as gas companies are obliged to maintain a good grade of gas, they would have to enrich it to make good the loss caused by the introduction of air, the cost of which enriching would much more than offset the amount of gas which might be otherwise effected by the use of air. The gas companies would lose much more than they would gain.

Consumers who think themselves in the power of the company that makes out their bills, and to believe that these bills are made out to suit its whims, and that the amount of gas consumed. This is a great mistake. It comes entirely from ignorance of the way the gas is consumed is arrived at, aided by a want of thought as to the actual situation.

The gas company has nothing whatever to do with the economy of the consumer. That matter rests entirely with the consumer. The size of the bills depends altogether upon the quantity of gas consumed. The meter is the exacting of which it may readily verify at any time, and the trustworthiness of which is fully shown elsewhere. Every foot of gas that passes through the meter, and the only way in which the company can get at the amount consumed is by reading the meter. That is the only way in which men employed especially for the purpose.

Now, as a matter of course, these men may and sometimes do make a mistake taking the index of the meters. But as is elsewhere explained, that mistake is so small, there is no constant trouble. Either there will be a waste of gas and consequently higher bills than there should be, or there will be an undue saving, and the gas company will be blamed for a poor quality of gas when really only the quantity is at fault.

One of the troubles constantly confronting gas companies is the smallness of the piping in houses, and they are blamed for what is due to the ignorance of the clerk who keeps the books and make out the bills from the meter returns. Would these men do such things of their own accord? Certainly not. They must be induced to do so by a motive. Either they must get a personal benefit from it or else they do it by specific orders from their superiors. If they get a personal benefit, they are them most perpetually be liable to blackmail to keep their nefarious practice hid. Besides, it would be impossible for such practices to long remain concealed. The same reasoning will apply in case such practices were by order of the officers or directors of the company. Now, gas stockholders and officers are certainly as reputable citizens as other business men. They are not likely to be induced to do anything so persistent iniquity than their neighbors, to say nothing of the peculiarly risky nature of the fraud which has been pointed out. The moral turpitude of such a course of deliberate fraud as must exist if it is the habit of the clerk who keeps the books, does any reader suppose the directors are stupid enough to pursue it under the conditions which must surround them? Would they not be sooner or later, be sure to be exposed, answer to this will in the minds of nine hundred and ninety-nine men in a thousand, and the public, who are so fastidious and too prevalent belief that deliberate fraud is a part of the stock in trade in selling gas.

Gas-Meter Stories

Despise the common prejudice against what is often referred to as "the lying gas meter," gas companies have almost unlimited faith in it. The following incident may help you to understand how it is that meters so often record gas passing where no gas is supposed to be closed and unused.

A large house had for more than a year been unoccupied and shut up, so that the meter could not be seen for reading. At last the house was rented. The new tenants moved in. The state of the meter was taken the next day. It was found to be 229. The last reading, it called for a bill of meter 229. This was duly presented to the owner. As the last bill had been paid up to the out, it showed something wrong. Investigation showed no leak. The owner happened to be a large owner of gas stock, so he called, quietly to the office and read somebody a lecture, none the less emphatically indignant when being, so to speak, sub rosa. The matter was placed in the hands of an inspector, who gave it extended and exceedingly puzzled attention. Suffice it to say that he at length found out that for months he had been paying "cramp" players, who had obtained entrance through a rear door, a panel of which they had broken out, and in which was paid without further protest against meter or gas company. Suppose the "cramp" players had not been discovered? The meter would have been charged with inaccuracy, or the company with dishonesty.

Another instance was that of a double house, one-half of which had been piped for gas when the house was built, while the other half was piped some years afterwards, by simply extending into it the pipes from the half piped. This made the gas for both houses pass through one meter, and the man who had the right as long as the original owner retained the property and attended to the paying of the gas bills. But after a time the property changed hands, and the new owner, the tenants in both houses began to use gas, but one found that his bills were out of all proportion to the quantity of gas he consumed. He even found that his bills would come in just the same, whether he used any gas or not. He thought had a clear case of robbery against the gas company; but an investigation was instituted which resulted in the discovery that his "extra door" had been open the time been enjoying gas lighting at his expense.

Large Gas Bills. It can be set down as an invariable truth that when a gas bill is abnormally large there is some satisfactory and complete explanation for it, if all the facts are accurately connected with the case can only be ascertained. Rest assured that the gas company is not trying to cheat you. When you find a sudden or unusual increase in your bill, ask yourself:

- (1) Whether the weather has not been unusually dark or cold or both;
(2) Whether you have not had sickness in the house;
(3) Whether you have not had company during the month;
(4) Whether you have not had a party during the month;
(5) Whether you cannot recall some other circumstance or occurrence which might account for the increased bill. If you cannot, then go, in a proper spirit (not in anger or suspicion), to the gas company, and explain the facts to help you hunt for the cause; and if they find it to be an error on their own part, they will cheerfully correct the bill accordingly.
(6) Be sure to read your meter and compare the index with the reading which shows on the bill.

Piping the House.

Upon the size, the manner of placing them and the quality of pipes for the distribution of gas to the burners, much depends in the way of economy and satisfaction to the consumer.

First, the fitting of a house should be given to a thoroughly competent firm. It is no economy to give the job to a man who will slight his work or use poor material, the presence of which will be the first manifested by leaks and annoying odor through the house. The company trading with the pairing leaking pipes will be much greater than the difference between a poor and a good gas fitter's prices. The pipes should be laid in as short and direct lines from meter to burners as possible, with the size graduated in such a way that the quantity of burners, and their distance from the meter. A house with 200 feet of pipe and twenty burners should have a supply pipe of one inch in diameter, which may be lessened to three-fourths, one-half, three-eighths and one-quarter at the best burners, though it would be better to exclude the quarter-inch pipe altogether. If these precautions are neglected and the size of the supply pipe is small, there will be constant trouble. Either there will be a waste of gas and consequently higher bills than there should be, or there will be an undue saving, and the gas company will be blamed for a poor quality of gas when really only the quantity is at fault.

How to Find if There is a Leak.

Watch the small upper dial of your meter, which registers only two feet. If no gas is being burned and the hand moves, however slowly, there is a leak somewhere. This makes it a valuable and convenient device.

How to Read a Meter.

When the meter is new all the hands stand at 0. When "set" in the house and connected, the moment a burner is lighted they begin to move, the one on the right, on which is recorded the hundreds of feet, moving ten times as fast as the one in the middle, which records the thousands, and that moving ten times as fast as the one on the left, which records the ten thousands of cubic feet passing the meter. By the time the first one has made one complete circuit it shows ten hundred feet, and the middle hand one thousand feet, or one-tenth the way round the meter.

Artificial Gas as Fuel.

The fuel of the future will undoubtedly be gas; in fact, artificial gas is already being largely used for heating and cooking. Heating stoves for artificial gas are cheap and very efficient, and the cost of operating them is so

reasonable that they are coming into general use. They are portable and convenient, and are especially adapted to heating bedrooms, parlors, offices, etc., or for an small room, or for cool mornings and evenings.

Artificial gas for cooking purposes is far excellent. Thousands of gas cooking stoves are in daily use in this city, and the users of them testify that the cost of cooking with artificial gas is no greater than with coal, while in the matter of convenience and comfort it is far superior. It is clean, it is desired, and with the intensity of the flame at its highest point in an instant. With gas you can do better cooking, and with less labor and less fatigue than with any other fuel. It is the safest fuel, for its feed is regular and an instant's attention is usually sufficient to keep it in the exact point needed; after which it will remain exactly there. There are no sparks, no roll down on the floor, in the absence of a wind to set the house on fire.

General Remarks.

There is no other legitimate business, perhaps, that receives more abuse than that of making and selling gas. There are probably two principal reasons for this. First, the gas company is a monopoly, and, knowing how prone the nature is to take advantage of the absence of competition, the public assumes that the gas companies are less liberal than other manufacturing or mercantile concerns. Again, the apparent (not real) mystery surrounding the business, and the lack of knowledge on the part of the company's customers as to whether they ever receive what they pay for, breeds suspicion. It is unfortunate for gas companies that people will not post themselves more in matters pertaining to lighting their premises, learn to read their meters, and know how to properly use the gas being used, and the pressure at which the gas should be consumed. We have never yet seen a gas company officer who was not glad of an opportunity to explain these points to a customer.

How to Treat the Company.

The gas company has thousands of customers, and each customer's bill is made out from the reading of a meter twelve times a year. Besides, the officers and employes are ordinary men, very like their neighbors, who are as much—and no more—liable to make mistakes. In all the thousands of calculations necessary in making out fifty million bills a year, somebody will, now and then, have his meter misread or get a wrong bill. In such a case, give the much-abused gas man a chance. He is a poor fellow, and his prosperity so much depends upon the good will of his customers that he is even more anxious to be fair than not to offend. The cases in which he is so absolutely master of the situation that he cannot be supplanted at an hour's notice by the kerosene lamp and stove are so few and far between as not to be worth counting.

The air is sometimes thick with complaints, and it would be a long time to find a case wherein a complaint, honestly and dispassionately presented, was not patiently listened to and promptly, fully and fairly investigated. The result has been, in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases, the vindication of the company. This is not to say that the gas company is perfect, but it is to say that its aid, he would have received a shortcoming of the gas company. But if from any cause you have occasion to complain, go to the headquarters where you will be met with courtesy and your complaint will be sifted to the bottom.

Read your meter. Keep a monthly record of the readings. When the company's man comes around, verify his readings. You know the price of gas; a few minutes' work with a pencil will give your bill as accurately as the gas clerk can make it out. If your bill varies from your correct figuring, you will know there is a mistake somewhere. Be sure to make your reading on the same day the gas company reads. If you are right, and the gas company wrong, the error will be rectified at once. If you find your bills increasing too rapidly, see if you can

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