

GAS TESTS IN THE CAPITOL

Effect of Congressional "Hot Air" as Shown by Official Experiments.

ELLIOTT WOODS, Superintendent of the United States Capitol buildings at Washington, has visited New York to see what progress is being made by the architects who are planning to rebuild the interior of the chamber of the House of Representatives.

It is becoming a pressing question in Washington how to turn more good, pure air upon the inner workings of Congress. Magazines and newspapers variously classed as muck-raking and up-lift periodicals have been industriously turning light upon the doings of that body, but a report shortly to be made public by Supt. Woods indicates that it is air and not light that is needed in the House chamber at present.

Under the direction of Surgeon Gen. Walter Wyman of the Public Health and Marine Hospital Service a thorough test of the air in the House and Senate chambers was made during the busy days of the last session, and the results are something to give pause to the student of National legislative affairs. Passed Assistant Surgeon Roberts, who made the examination of the air, gave up any attempt to explain the remarkable conditions which he found to exist on the floor of the House, and especially about the desk of Speaker Cannon.

"It appears that air of good quality and in sufficient quantity is supplied to the floors of both chambers," says Surgeon Roberts in his report, "but that sometimes the air actually breathed by the occupants of the floors is not up to the accepted standard of freedom from contamination. It would seem that this localized contamination of the air must be due to faulty circulation."

This explanation of the army surgeon is not accepted by those who have studied the detailed figures of his report, and who are at the same time somewhat familiar with the quality of hot air that is manufactured in certain portions of the House chamber in moments of great stress over the tariff, the rules, or the Speakership.

Surgeon Roberts proves conclusively that the air entering the House chamber and that leaving through the overhead attic is fairly free from carbon monoxide, otherwise known as gas. It is the more remarkable, therefore, he indicates, that in certain parts of the chamber the gas should be found in such unusual quantities.

Small glass jars filled with chemicals for registering the quantity of gas in the air were placed at various points in the House and Senate chambers on many different days. A normal percentage of gas in the air is given at about 48 parts

in 100,000. Tests were first taken at the air inlets and at points in the basement from which the air comes up to the legislative halls.

Here it was entirely pure and free from gas. At a point at the extreme eastern end of the Democratic side of the House floor the first test showed 89.5 parts of gas, a normal quantity. A test taken ten minutes later on the Republican side in the corresponding portion of the House showed 45 parts of gas in the air.

This was enough to set the physicians to speculating. Two days later they stationed one of the jars near the centre aisle on the Democratic side by the desk of Congressman Wickliffe of Louisiana. Evidently Mr. Wickliffe or some one near him had been manufacturing Democratic campaign thunder that day, for the jar registered 57 parts of gas, a quantity well above the normal amount carried by the air.

Next day the army surgeon returned to the attack. Again he stationed the jar near Mr. Wickliffe's desk, but the register was only 31. This was at 4:50 o'clock in the afternoon. Ten minutes later he crossed the aisle to the Republican side and set up a detector by the desk of a member from New York, whose name he thought was Kean.

The gas registered in this jar when the analysis was made was 46 parts, 15 more than on the Democratic side ten minutes previously. Unacquainted with all the intricacies of the House, the army surgeon was unable to explain this wide difference, but friends have confided to him since that it was Congressman Sereno E. Payne, father and defender of the tariff, and not Kean, who was responsible for the higher average of gas on the Republican side.

Several tests were made in the Senate. The record was established at the spot just in front of Vice President Sherman's chair, where the percentage of gas was 61.5, an abnormal quantity. On the Republican side of the chamber it was 60, and on another day it was 57 in front of the Vice President, and 39 "back of the Democratic corner." Searching for gassy places, a test was made "on the Republican side, between Senators Smith and Stephenson," and the Michigan and Wisconsin statesmen were found to have developed 54 parts of gas in the air, or at least the air registered that much in their vicinity.

The greatest shock to the surgeons came when they returned to the House and began to prowling about the desk of Speaker Cannon. Up to that time the quantity of gas had increased pretty regularly as the jars were placed close to

the important gassers of the two houses, and the climax came when one of the little detectors was set up in front of the Speaker's chair, almost under the lips of Uncle Joe.

It must have been one of the days when Speaker Cannon was daring the insurgents to battle, for the contents of the glass jar, when later analyzed, showed it to contain 103 parts of gas, a phenomenal quantity, and indicating a poisoned condition of the atmosphere making it dangerous to the lives of all insurgents and most regulars.

The surgeons moved the glass jar down the middle row, toward the Republican side and again tested the air, but this time got returns of only 41. The analysis of the contents of the jars that night caused consternation. Next day the investigators returned to the scene with three of the retainers, and began operations again in front of Uncle Joe's desk.

This time the Chair was in a state of coma, apparently, for the yield was only 50. A test on the Republican side, somewhat removed from Congressman Payne, gave the same results. Another test was made in what the surgeon describes as the "Democratic side, front row, near the wall," and yielded 66.5 parts of gas. Investigation shows, however, that this is the "Cherokee strip" of the House, the small portion of the Democratic side reserved for renegade Republicans, mostly insurgents.

One more effort to absolve Uncle Joe was made a week after these tests. A glass jar was again set up in front of his chair just at adjournment. It yielded 72 parts of gas in the air, when analysis was made, indicating a very foul condition of the atmosphere.

So Supt. Woods has gone to New York to see how nearly the architects have approached the completion of the plans for remodeling the House Chamber, and improving the ventilation and circulation within it. There has been some suggestion that seats be provided outside the main chamber for Uncle Joe, Sereno E. Payne, James A. Tawney, and some of the insurgents, on the theory that this would greatly lower the quantity of gas in the air within.

This plan is not given much support. The interior of the House will undoubtedly be changed so that the room will extend to some of the outside windows of the Capitol Building, on the south or east sides. This will permit the entrance of pure air in greater quantities. At present neither the House nor Senate Chamber has direct communication with the outside air, and it is found extremely difficult to maintain a circulation of pure air.