

is a diminishing ratio of progression that he proposes for these tests. I think there is much force in his view as to practical experience with reference to that degree of safety or danger in the burning of the oil, in this question of capillary attraction; but I deny that it would be reasonable or right, with the enormous additional cost which a very high gravity test would impose, to apply such a test as he proposes. He says we know that oil is often very carelessly used—that in the country, sometimes, it is put in very close proximity to a warm stove—and we want to provide that the oil should be safe when men use it in a dangerous manner.

Mr. COLBY. That was not my argument. We must take, I said, the average experience. I say the oil is exposed to such conditions. I do not believe that oil should be made so absolutely safe that under no possible amount of carelessness or mismanagement there would be an explosion. I instanced an extreme case. I do not say that we ought to keep a test that would meet that extreme case; but we have to meet all conditions of practical use. My argument simply is, that the whole thing is an experiment; it cannot be determined in the laboratory, in the office, or in any other way than by the average of common experience under the conditions that exist. I mentioned the difference in lamps, mentioning old worn-out lamps as one of those conditions. Another is a very serious condition in the climate: it is found that a certain degree of cold will separate the constituents of the oil, leaving the lighter particles to rise and the heavier to fall. The oil may be drawn off in such a way after this partial separation, that the heavier particles forming the lower strata, and the lighter particles the upper, will only at a certain temperature be wholly mixed; at another temperature those particles will be separate, and you may get the heavier particles where you got the lighter. These conditions will enter into the general public experiment; and upon the results as they are found to exist, I am prepared to base my judgment, and not upon any scientific test. We are within the line of safety now. I am prepared to relax it step by step until we come to the verge of safety, which ought to be the getting of the cheapest oil compatible with safety.

Mr. BLAKE. The hon. gentleman says he is disposed to take an average, and he has given us a new instance of the risks experienced in this connection, which suggests the old direction that druggists attached to their mixed prescriptions—to be well shaken before taken. I do not know to what extent this argument may go. If there is a possibility that the oil, unless well shaken up, may in certain states of temperature separate itself, one part becoming very dangerous and one part quite safe, we may have—to accomplish absolute safety under all conditions, if one portion will not rise in summer as well as in winter—to raise the price of one of the first necessities, perhaps I should call it the first necessary of life to the people. I say there is a reasonable mode of dealing with this question, not dependent upon the conditions which the hon. gentleman suggested. While those conditions, from their importance must always be taken into account—I mean those connected with the practical working of any test through the whole country for a considerable period of time—I am quite sure it is possible to accumulate evidence very rapidly and easily, from the consumption of oil with lamps in various states of use and deterioration, with various kinds of wicks, to make such experiments with much greater rapidity than the hon. gentleman suggests, and yet to gain quite a sufficient margin of experience to enable us to act otherwise than the hon. member supposes. And mark this: it is a serious question for the people of this country. The tax which they are paying upon their light in order that some careless people might be protected from reaping the consequences of their own carelessness—

Mr. BLAKE.

the general tax which the whole community is paying is something enormous. What with the combined operations of the law I find that the price which Canadians pay for their oil is now about twice the price which is paid in New York, and a little while ago it was three times as much.

Mr. COLBY. But that is not the fault of the law.

Mr. BLAKE. I said that I was not speaking of this provision of the law alone. It is partly, and I believe largely, the fault of the provision we are discussing, and I agree it is not entirely the fault of this particular impediment. But all your laws in reference to petroleum at this moment, as I understand from practical men, have this result: that the people of New York can buy their oil at one-half the price which we have to pay for ours. How long, I ask those who are interested in the protective aspect of this question, will the people of Canada submit to pay twice as much for their oil as they need to pay? I say that those who are interested in the production and manufacture of oil in this country, are playing a most suicidal part in endeavoring to keep up the gravity test to any point which is not demonstratively demanded by the public safety. Inasmuch as it is clear that the gravity test does enhance the price of the article, the result of their keeping up a difference between the price of the article here, and the price at which, but for this test could be procured, will be that the whole fabric will fall; and, therefore, in their interest—though I do not profess to speak in their interest—it is important that an obstacle which will have the effect of still further increasing the price of oil should be removed. There is indeed a reason why a very high specific gravity test is favored by some who are engaged in refining. It is favored by those who at once produce crude oil and refined—those who are owners of oil wells and refiners. And why is it favored by that class? It is because the higher you keep the prohibitory gravity test, the more gallons of crude oil you require to make a barrel of refined oil; because there is a greater consumption of the raw material, to give the people the same number of gallons of refined illuminating oil. That is the purpose, and that is the line which now divides the refiners of this country on this subject. Those who are not engaged in producing crude oil, so far as I am aware, are almost unanimously in favor of the reduction of the specific gravity test. Those who are not engaged in producing crude oil—some of them at all events—are taking a somewhat different position.

Mr. COLBY. Will the hon. gentleman permit me to state that every refiner who has communicated with me on the subject—and for some reason or other a great many do communicate with me—has been in favor of the relaxation of the gravity test.

Mr. BLAKE. To what degree?

Mr. COLBY. To different degrees, but they are all in favor of relaxation.

Mr. BLAKE. I do not say that they are not in favor of some relaxation, but I say that, so far as I have had communications, I find the line to be that those who are not engaged in the production of crude oil are more liberal with reference to the degree to which they are willing and anxious that a specific gravity test should go than those who appear to combine the operations of producing and refining the crude oil. For this I can find but one reason, namely, the reason which animates the producer of crude oil—and it is not a reason which should commend itself to this House—that there should be a real waste of the natural production, only that there might be a greater quantity consumed at the expense of the people of this country. It is true I have received letters from some engaged in both trades, and none of them have favored keeping the test up to 802, and that is the strongest proof