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SEPARATION OF METALS BY DISTILLATION

William H. Osborn, New York, Sidney B. Tuwiner, Kew Gardens, and Ernest O. Sperr, deceased, late of Brooklyn, N. Y., by Evelyn Sperr, administratrix, Brooklyn, N. Y., assignors to Phelps Dodge Corporation, New York, N. Y., a corporation of New York

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This invention relates to a method and apparatus for the separation of metals by distillation and condensation. It is particularly useful in the separation by vaporization and condensation, under controlled conditions of temperature and pressure, of lead, arsenic, antimony, bismuth and other metals from tin or from each other, but it may also be used in the separation of other metals and also of other substances requiring high temperatures for distillation.

It is an object of this invention to provide an improved method and apparatus for the vacuum distillation of metals and other materials requiring high temperatures for distillation. It is also an object to provide a method and apparatus in which the heat necessary to achieve the distillation is applied externally to that portion of the apparatus within which the vacuum is maintained. Another object is to provide an improved method and apparatus in which the fractionation of the metals, etc. may be carried out continuously. A further object is to provide an improved means for supplying to the vacuum still the molten material to be distilled. Other objects will become apparent.

In utilizing the invention, mixtures of two or more metals, or other materials, in the molten state may be introduced into a chamber maintained under vacuum and flowed over a heated surface of the chamber to vaporize one or more of the metals. A condensing surface also may be provided within the chamber and the condensate and unvaporized residue may be separately collected in the chamber or continuously withdrawn therefrom. The condensing surface is preferably located near the heating surface and uniformly spaced therefrom. In this manner, various metals may be separated continuously from other metals by distillation at relatively low temperatures and without substantial oxidation.

The apparatus should be one that provides a path for the molten metal, etc. of refractory material that will not be adversely affected by or affect the metals, etc. of the molten mixture, within an enclosure of sufficient structural strength and impermeability to withstand the temperatures and high vacuums applied to it during the distillation.

In describing the method and apparatus, reference will be made to the drawings in which several modifications are illustrated, but it is not intended to thereby limit the invention to the particular embodiments shown and described.

The apparatus as illustrated consists essentially of two cylinders having their major axes in a vertical plane and so arranged as to leave an annular space between them within which a vacuum may be maintained. This annular space may be formed by using cylinders of equal length and closing the annular space between them at both

ends or the inner cylinder may be made shorter than the outer and the lower end of each cylinder may be closed separately.

The molten mixture of metals to be subjected to the distillation is caused to pass along the heated surface of one of these cylinders and the products of distillation are caused to condense along the cooled surface of the other cylinder, which latter surface is maintained at a temperature sufficiently low to insure the desired condensation. The metal to be distilled is passed into the apparatus in a molten condition through a regulator valve or other suitable feed means. The condensate and the residue from distillation may be withdrawn from the apparatus by means of barometric tubes which discharge into cups, or wells, of molten metal, or by other suitable means, such as pumps.

The material to be distilled is preferably fed to the vacuum still through a barometric tube and the heat is preferably applied to the outer wall of the annular distilling chamber, while the inner wall of that chamber is cooled to provide a condensing surface. However, these features may be used to advantage separately or in other combinations.

Referring to the drawings, Figure 1 is a diagrammatic view of a general assembly embodying the invention.

Figure 2 is a vertical cross section along a diameter of an apparatus embodying the invention, the apparatus being broken away to indicate greater length.

Figure 3 is a sectional view of the apparatus, taken on the line 3-3 of Figure 2.

Figure 4 is an enlarged fractional, cross sectional view of one of the rings, taken approximately on the line 4-4 of Figure 3.

Figure 5 is a vertical cross sectional view, similar to Figure 2, of a modified form of the apparatus.

Figure 6 is a sectional view, taken on the line 6-6 of Figure 5.

Figure 7 is a vertical sectional view on a diameter of a modified form of condenser unit.

The distilling apparatus illustrated includes the still 1, which may be located within a furnace 2 heated by any suitable means, such as the two burners 3 and 3a or by electrical resistance wires, etc.

The materials to be separated may be fed to the apparatus through a barometric tube 4, which is connected in a U-bend to an open ended enlarged tube 5. This barometric tube and the tube 5 may be surrounded by a heating medium, such as the electric heating element 6 in an insulating material 6a, or by other suitable means, to maintain the material being fed in a molten condition. The tube 4 should be long enough to form a barometric column of feed material when the