

THE SCATTERING OF ALPHA PARTICLES

BY CARBON

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by

Laurence R Walker, B.Sc.

The Macdonald Physics Laboratory
McGill University
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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In view of a revival of interest in nuclear physics at McGill and in anticipation of the building of a cyclotron, a program of construction of auxiliary apparatus was started in 1936, in which the writer took part. Delays in the progress of the cyclotron scheme led to the suggestion that some project be undertaken using naturally radioactive sources. The appearance of the work of Bohr on the nature of nuclear reactions indicated that the scattering of alpha particles by the light nuclei might be expected to provide more immediate information concerning nuclear structure than had hitherto been supposed. These considerations led the writer to select the large angle scattering of alpha particles by light nuclei as a subject for experiment. The work was made possible and at the same time limited in duration by the rental of 250 milligrams of radium bromide by the department.

Using a scattering chamber filled with hydrogen at 10 cm. pressure, designed to permit the counting of alpha particles scattered through angles up to 158° , the number scattered into a given solid angle has been compared with the corresponding number from a gold target. Assuming that the latter obeyed Rutherford's law of scattering, the departures from this law in the case of the light elements could, thus, be found. The design of the box and the experimental arrangement was such that in many cases the number of particles to be counted was low; this fact, with the necessity of using targets of uniform flatness, rest-

restricted the elements for which it was possible to obtain really satisfactory results to two; carbon and oxygen. These fortunately belong to a class of elements to which the theory in its present form may fairly be applied. Moderately extensive results were obtained for boron which were felt to be doubtful for low energies. Beryllium, fluorine and aluminium were examined at a few points.

Clear evidence was found in carbon and oxygen for the existence of resonance levels in the compound nuclei formed and it was possible to draw from the data some conclusions regarding the angular momenta of these excited states.

Because of the extent to which apparatus had to be constructed, not only in connection with the scattering chamber and detecting equipment, but also for the housing of the radium supply and, since, in order to avoid trouble from contamination, it was necessary that the manufacture and the use of sources should be in the hands of different people, it was felt that two men ought to work together on the problem. Mr. A. J. Ferguson has, thus, been a collaborator throughout the course of the work. The preparation of the sources was carried out by him and the measurements at the scattering chamber were made by the writer. This arrangement was followed in the experiments on oxygen which Mr. Ferguson is reporting elsewhere, as well as in the work described here.

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integration processes. Having assumed such a mechanism for the nuclear reactions, it is possible, as has been done by Breit and Wigner (1937) and Bethe (1937), to calculate cross sections for the various nuclear possibilities. The detailed interpretation and evaluation of some of the quantities appearing in such a formula, such as the matrix elements for various transitions and the widths of levels in the compound nucleus, is not possible for theory in its present state, but the general form of the cross sections derived and their angle and energy dependence are doubtless independent of special assumptions. An examination of the formula shows that the magnitude of resonances and, indeed, their appearance or non-appearance will be sharply dependent on the angle of scattering. Except in purely accidental circumstances resonances must appear at 180° and have their maximum amplitude there. The latter will increase with decreasing atomic number, with increasing energy and with the angular momentum of the compound state. In an attempt, therefore, to find resonances in the scattering process it was felt best to work ^{at} as large an angle as possible.

FIG.1. General view of the apparatus.

