

Scientific American.

NEW YORK, JULY 3, 1858.

The Fate of the Patent Bill.

Congress has adjourned. Many days of the session have been spent in unprofitable discussion, sometimes involving bitter, disgraceful, personal reflection and aspersion. Many speeches have been made for the ear of the constituent, of no practical moment to the national weal; and we fear that many bills have passed that may be denominated "useless legislation," while many really important measures have utterly failed, because compelled to stand on their own merits, with no aid from the lobby to lubricate their passage.

In reference to the all-important subject that most concerns the interests of inventors, viz., amendments to the patent law, we are compelled to reiterate the same old story—nothing done. European inventors, who seem so unsophisticated in reference to the doings of an American Congress, and apparently think that the mere reporting of a bill is a certain sign of its passage, will regret to hear that the much-desired result, so long hoped-for, so confidently anticipated, and so urgently pressed during the session, has been blown to the winds.

An English inventor, because he happens to have been born within the domains of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, must, upon presenting his application for a patent in this country, still continue to pay the outrageous sum of \$500. The Frenchman, born just across the English Channel, with no more legal merit, but only because he happens to be a Frenchman, has only to pay \$300 for the same privilege. In fact, the children of our venerable friend "Bull" are the only ones who are thus singled out and made to pay the enormous patent fee of \$500. Year after year we have uttered our protest against this unjust discrimination, and session after session the Patent Committees have made a most feeble and ineffectual attempt to secure a just and honorable reduction. There has been no opposition to this change—not a single American journal—not a single American inventor—not a single interest of any kind, so far as we can learn, has interposed the slightest barrier to its success; and yet it has failed again, while the public have been made to pay for a mass of legislation scarcely fit to be recorded on the pure parchment upon which it is engrossed.

We speak now in no partisan spirit. We have heard members of all political parties assert that our legislation, as a general thing, whether State or national, has of late years been characterized by wrangling disputes, or been wasted in scheming through measures of a selfish and corrupt nature. Among those useful departments of the government which have been almost wholly neglected by Congress, for many years past, is the Patent Office; and our legislation seems to have become so corrupt that all honest attempts, however few and far between, seem instantly to arouse a great deal of suspicion. An honorable citizen who appears at Washington to enlighten our public functionaries upon defects noticeable in some one of our departments, is instantly set upon as a "free wool" customer, and is branded accordingly. Attempts were made, near to the close of the session, by Senators Simmons and Yulee, both members of the Committee on Patents, to engraft on the general appropriation bills certain salutary resolutions in regard to the fees of the Patent Office, and for paying the salaries of the Examiners, none of which propositions prevailed. One day Senator Yulee tries to get an amendment passed, and Senator Simmons opposes. In a day or two afterwards, Simmons tries to get his amendment passed, and fails. We cannot learn from the *Congressional Globe* whether Yulee opposed Simmons or not; but the whole matter, in-

cluding the discussion which it elicited, seems to have been about as irregular as the racing of a yoke of steers. Senator Hale, of New Hampshire, representing more immediately than many other Senators an ingenious constituency, came forward in the discussion as an antagonist of the general bill reported by the Committee on Patents, and remarked that "from the imperfect knowledge I had of the matter, I thought I saw in that bill some things that were crude and imperfect, and I notified the Committee on Patents that, when it was called up, I should be prepared to say something in opposition to the measure." Now with all proper deference to the wit and wisdom of the Senator, we are curious to know what he thought he saw in his imperfect examination of the bill, to warrant him in announcing his settled hostility to its passage. What "spectre in white" could have flitted across his vision, and so disturbed his judgment in respect to a measure that had met not only the sanction of the Commissioner of Patents, but also the unanimous approval of the Committees in both houses of Congress?

Senator Hale, in some remarks made a few days later, takes us somewhat behind the scenes, and intimates his opinions that "political considerations have influenced the appointment and turning out of Commissioners, and the appointment of Examiners, confessedly without the qualifications necessary to the office." Now from an extensive experience of twelve years' practice in the business of the Patent Office, we are prepared to say that Mr. Hale is mistaken. We are of the opinion, and we reach it independent of the clamor of politicians, or the lachrymose cry of some dissatisfied ex-official, that the qualifications of the present examining corps, as a body, are quite equal to those possessed by any previous members of that body, and furthermore, that the present corps of Examiners are much superior in the exercise of proper discrimination and liberal judgment towards the claims of inventors. It is our deliberate conviction, without intending to impute moral delinquency to any one, that the removals which have occurred in the Patent Office during the past two or three years have been useful; and that if those old Examiners had been retained, the revenue of the Office would have been much less than it now is. Inventors had become discouraged, and felt that their claims were most unjustly disposed of. Senator Hale, before he fully launches out in his meditated assault upon the Patent Office, will have to take soundings with great care, or else he may be like one "running a muck with a windmill." The patent bill reported at the last session is not a perfect one, but it is the nearest approach to perfection that we have ever met with in the history of Congressional tinkering on the patent laws, for about twenty years past. We venture to assert that the inventors of New Hampshire, and indeed, all those of the whole country, will heartily approve of the action of Congress whenever it shall pass this plausible bill.

The Patent Office Structure.

"One of the most beautiful, substantial and appropriate structures in the world is the Patent Office, as it is called, in this city. We do not like its designation, which belittles the building and deceives every man who reads of it. The Patent Office! of course it is some public building, suitable for the deposit of models and the record of great and little inventions. Suppose we call it the Department of the Interior—that greatest of all departments in this great country, which is to be enlarged until its records shall embrace a history of the products, the genius, the skill, the science, the learning, the overshadowing magnitude of the nation.

The Department of the Interior, then, is enclosed in one of the most unique and substantial public edifices in this or any other country. We do not care to speak of its cost; it doubtless cost enough, and too much, unless at some future day it shall be made to cost more by the extension of the space around it. No private individual would ever risk his name

and fame upon the construction and grounds of the Department of the Interior. It is constructed like a store on Broadway or Chestnut street, on just ground enough for its foundations. You come upon it suddenly, and look almost heavenward to see the finest building in America. It is cramped in between dwelling houses, stores, stables, groceries, and liquor shops, encouraged a little at a single point, just across the street, by the magnificent Post-office Department.

Is it not possible even to rescue that noble structure from the Vandalism of its surroundings? Is it beyond the line of our economy to clear away the rubbish of two or three of its fronts, and to exhibit the Interior Department as it is to the admiring beholder?"

The above article appears as an editorial in the *Washington Union* of the 23d ult.—the recognized organ of the government. It is got up in a bungling manner, yet its origin sheds upon it a peculiar significance. Had it come from any other source, we should have simply regretted it; but when we discover what seems to be a grave and serious attempt on the part of some one connected with the government, speaking through its organ, to divert one of the noblest institutions of the nation from its original purposes and legitimate design, we feel compelled to utter our protest against it. It is known to our readers that since the organization of the Department of the Interior, under the administration of General Taylor, the Patent Office has been subordinated to it; and true to the spirit "give me an inch and I'll take an ell," a systematic scheme of encroachment has gone on ever since, seemingly intended to rob inventors of that noble building, to the erection of which they have contributed between three and four hundred thousand dollars, and to appropriate it to such uses as were never contemplated by its founders. The Patent Office, the pride of every intelligent citizen, the storehouse and monument of the ingenuity and skill of our countrymen, is threatened with a species of annihilation, which, if suffered to be carried into execution, will wipe out its very existence in name, swallow up its independence, and convert it into an appendage of the Department of the Interior, as a mere tenant-at-will, liable, upon the sudden fancy of some Secretary, to be hustled out of the building, and thus the vast collection of models now generally so well preserved, may be stored away, perchance, in some shed or building wholly unfit for their preservation. Such a state of things is possible, it is even probable; for when we see it seriously announced that "the very designation of Patent Office belittles the building, and deceives every man who reads it," we are prepared to hear the assertion, as applied to the archives and models of the Patent Office, "your room is better than your company;" and upon the *ipse dixit* of some capricious Secretary, whose pride of office and power may be jostled by the too close proximity of a collection of models of "great and little inventions"—to quote from the article in the *Union*—they may be ordered to be turned out to find shelter elsewhere, and thus preserve to himself an agreeable aristocracy of position.

After all that has been thought of the magnificence of the Patent Office, and of its importance to the country, and in the midst of all the great achievements of Art, Science and Industry, the *Union* has come to this lame and impotent conclusion, that it "belittles" a stone building in Washington to call it a "Patent Office," even though its associations are connected with the Cotton Gin, the Steam Engine, the Electric Telegraph, the Reaper, the Planing Machine, and a thousand other useful improvements, without which we could not have made the signal progress which marks our history.

Well, we do not know that we ought to be amazed at this extraordinary proposition. The treatment of men of genius since the world began, has been and still is in accordance with these belittling practices. They have been set upon at every turn of their his-

tory by a set of men sharper than themselves; they have been laughed at by those who were scarcely fit to brush the dust from their models; and, under what may prove to be a deceptive guise, they have been inveigled by the government out of contributions amounting to between three and four hundred thousand dollars for the purpose of building an edifice as a depository for the sacred preservation of their models and documents, and now it is discovered that it will no longer do to call the building a "Patent Office"—that its distinctive character must be absorbed, because forsooth the title "belittles" it and "deceives every man who reads it."

We are curious to know by what system of reasoning the designation of a building as the "Patent Office" can be termed a deception. Why does not the same charge of deception equally apply to the War, the Navy, or the Treasury Department? Simply, in our judgment, because the universal popularity of the Patent Office and the noble proportions of the structure (designed by the late Wm. P. Elliot, of Washington) diminish that magnitude which might otherwise attach to the Department of the Interior. The United States Government is the trustee of the patent fund; a large part of that fund has been expended on the Patent Office, and the government is sacredly bound to preserve the building from perversion or improper encroachment.

Let the Department of the Interior remain where it is, until a suitable building can be erected for its accommodation; then remove it, and let the Patent Office go on in undisputed possession; for, at the present rate of progress, the whole building will eventually be needed for the transaction of its business.

We believe that the article copied from the *Union* will shock the generous sentiments of the American people. It is wrong in principle and degrading in its tendency. It will meet with no sympathy from the majority of our citizens; while, so far as the great body of inventors is concerned, it will be frowned upon with indignation, as it should be,

The Susquehanna and our Health Officers.

The dangerous plan which we announced in our last number as having been proposed by Health Officer Thompson, for disinfecting this ship, and sanctioned by the Board of Health, has been carried into effect, and is now being proceeded with at official speed.

In fairness we are also bound to say that we have not, as yet, seen that any disastrous consequences have followed this rash step, but the infection is not compelled to develop itself immediately, and most likely in packing away infected stores our wooden-headed Board is hatching a little nest-egg of epidemic for some future time. The sapiently which dictated a sanction of the removal of infected stores when the thermometer is dancing between 75 and 90°, is, we are happy to say, in some measure accounted for by the fact that the Board of Health of this city is composed of gentlemen who have not the slightest pretensions to medical or scientific knowledge but are placed in that responsible situation without any regard as to qualification, but as a reward for political services. Indeed we should not be surprised if the persons who have this city's physical welfare in their custody, knew just about as much of science as the student who defined Oxygen as *pure gin*, and Hydrogen as *gin and water*. Surely this state of things must be remedied, and we think little of that politician who would allow any motives save a desire to secure efficiency, to guide him in the appointment of a Board of Health.

Life Boats.

Congress appropriated, during the session which has just closed, \$6,440 for the purchase of the best self-righting life boat, for each of the stations on the coast of New Jersey; and \$10,000 for the purchase of the life boats (to be approved by the Treasury Department) for the coast of Long Island.