

Miscellaneous.

Correspondence of the Scientific American.

WASHINGTON CITY, Feb. 1, 1850.

Aside from the public buildings, and the usual interest existing here during the Session of Congress, Washington possesses very little attraction to the stranger, and it is a matter of surprise to many that so little attention was paid to the arrangement and location of the various buildings devoted to the transaction of the governmental business. In one place we find the General Post Office—a fine marble structure,—in another, the Patent Office, the monument and store-house for the genius of the country, and at some distance from these are located, in beautiful irregularity, the State, Treasury, War and Navy Buildings. It may justly be called the City of "Magnificent Distances." No person should visit this city without paying a lengthy visit to the Patent Office, for it is here that we find collected, in countless forms the result of American ingenuity and skill.

We are forcibly reminded here of the causes which spread civilization and comfort around us, rendering the name of our country the theme of admiration to the world. I am informed that the Patent Office contains nearly 15,000 models of various inventions, many of which are highly wrought specimens of mechanical skill.

I would here suggest, as a matter worthy of reflection, that the mass of our people are apparently insensible of the long, wearied and deep research which has attended the results here developed, while at the same time they are in full participation of their blessings. Very few of the worthy inventors who have contributed to this vast collection, have been rewarded proportionate to the value conferred by them upon the community.

It would require thousands of pages to furnish even a condensed description of all the different inventions found in this office. I have heard something said in relation to the publication of all the patents that have been granted, but such an undertaking would be attended with an enormous expense, and amount to the work of years. An incomplete history would be of very little importance to the great mass of inventors, and it may now be regretted that Congress did not, at the foundation of the Patent Office, appropriate a sufficient sum for the yearly publication of each invention complete, abstracted from the drawings and specifications furnished by the applicant.

I coincide with many of the views entertained by Commissioner Ewbank, and would rejoice to see meritorious inventors rewarded by an appropriation of a stipendium from the revenue of the office, for their valuable inventions. This, I believe however, would be attended with many disadvantages, and it would be difficult to select out of such a noble host a few names without inflicting a sting upon the balance, for it is a well-known fact that all inventors regard their inventions as superior to any other.

I should say more upon this point, but I observe that you have treated the subject properly, and with a due regard to the best interests of inventors.

I am opposed to the appropriation of twenty or thirty thousand dollars for experiments out of which no scientific mechanic can ever expect a beneficial result. The finale of all such schemes are so understood, that I need not refer to an ~~obscure~~ case as an example.

The upper story of the Patent Office is occupied by the National Institute, for the depositing of geological and other curiosities, I noticed in one case the original Declaration of Independence, the coat, vest and breeches worn by Gen. Washington when he resigned his Commission at Annapolis, in 1783; also his camp chest and fixtures. It also contains the minerals of Smithson, collected from various portions of the world—curiosities from Egypt, deposited by Geo. R. Gliddon, Esq.; Japanese frock and knit gaiters of cotton, of various colors—beautifully made baskets from the Tonga Islands—specimens of bitumen; sulphur, indigo, and the other fruit from the Dead

Sea, deposited by Mr. Lynch,—bones of the enormous Mastodon found in Missouri in 1843. Another object of rare interest is the old printing press of Dr. Franklin, made more than 100 years ago. The objects of interest here found are too numerous for description in one letter.

I think Mr. Porter made a mistake when he wrote to the "Union," stating that he was authorized to announce the discovery of Mr. Paine. I have been informed from a reliable source, that no such authority was extended, and I regret exceedingly that Mr. Paine, whom I well knew to be a superior mechanic, should find his invention incorporated into a scheme for navigating the air—an old worn-out hobby. Mr. Porter might fly about here a little for the amusement of our people, but I hardly think he will ever reach California mounted on the back of Mr. Paine's discovery.

The Report of Mr. Ewbank is spoken of very highly here, he pays a just and merited tribute to the inventor, and I regret that speculations have been made by some of your papers in regard to his confirmation: I believe he is one of the most useful officers ever placed at the head of this department, and so will prove himself. W—s.

WASHINGTON, February 5, 1850.

I understand that the Committee of the House have already drafted some important amendments to the Patent Law, but owing to the slavery question, which bids fair to absorb everything else, there appears to be no probability of any attention being paid to scientific matters. Those who are depending for aid from Congress to complete their inventions may as well go home.

Prof. Johnson concluded his course of lectures on Agriculture, at the Smithsonian Institute, on Saturday. His instructions relative to the recovery of worn out soils, were highly interesting, inasmuch as they are especially adapted to the exhausted tobacco lands of Virginia. I see the Legislature of Massachusetts have appropriated \$1200 for a course of lectures by him, in Boston.

The Patent Office has, at the present time, an unusual number of application for patents. Among them is one by Dr. J. H. Little, who claims to have invented an Electrical Engine on an entirely new plan. The Dr. hails from the Western Prairies.

Some of our money dealers have been sadly taken in by the Mormon gold coins, as there appeared no doubt of their being worth the sum stamped upon their face; but it now appears that the aggregate value of the \$20 pieces is not over \$17.22. The fineness is found to be 887 thousandths—silver parting 98 thousandths.

From the Annual Report of the Director of the Mint, it appears that the deposits of gold and silver at the Mint and its branches, during the past year, was \$14,609,463. The deposit of gold from mines in the U. S. was \$5,767,092.

A strong appeal will shortly be made to Congress on the subject of the improvement of Western Navigation, and for the amendment of the law regulating steamboats carrying passengers. During the past year, in the West, 112 steamboats were blown up, 200 persons killed, as many wounded, and a loss of two millions of dollars.

The plank road project continues to interest the people on both sides the Potomac, and by summer it is presumed we shall have at least a dozen radiating from this district.

A scientific wag of this city says he will purchase a pair of Galt's double sighted spectacles for the purpose of watching for Mr. Paine and his gas machine.

It is the intention of the Naval Committee to report a bill relative to the propriety of providing all our vessels with the necessary apparatus for producing carbonic acid gas for extinguishing fires. The materials required are a cask of common chalk at the bottom of the hold, connected with the deck by a small pipe, and a two gallon bottle of sulphuric acid, which, being poured down the pipe, will generate a sufficient quantity of the gas to extinguish the largest fire.

It is said that Government will shortly receive a rifle from an American at Berlin, made

upon the plan of the new Prussian rifle, the secret of which he has discovered.

Col. Benton appears determined that the scientific world shall not be imposed upon in the matter of the "non-descript" horse alleged to have been captured by Col. Freemont,—for on his affidavit the owner has been held to bail on a charge of receiving money under false pretences.

Meredith Myers, of N. H., has applied for an extension of his patent for an improvement in Turnabouts for Railroads.

The cotton factories of Georgetown and Alexandria, filled with industrious young women and men, now work like a chariot. *

[The Prussian Rifle, about which so much is said, is already patented in the United States, and is both illustrated and described on page 124 of our present volume. The owner of the patent is Mr. John B. Klein, No. 51 Lighthouse street, this city. Our Government cannot use it without purchasing the right. We have seen this rifle with our eyes, and we must say that the American gentleman in Berlin, who has troubled himself so much as to send the said rifle here, is only sending his coals to Newcastle.—[E.D.]

Terrific Explosion of a Boiler.—Great Loss of Life.

On last Monday morning, at half-past seven o'clock, a steam boiler of 200 horse power, capacity in the establishment of A. B. Taylor and Co., No. 3 Hague St., this city, blew up, tearing the building to pieces and destroying the lives of no less it is supposed, than 70 persons, and wounding so far as is yet known, 30. The cause of the explosion, is most reasonably supposed to be, owing to a want of water in the boiler, and a tremendous pressure of steam at that. The engineer is among the killed. The boiler was a modification of Montgomery's Patent. It was in the cellar and passed upward, carrying all before it to the top of the high six story building. The supports being thus cut away and a vacuum formed, the walls fell in with a terrific crash, burying nearly all who were in the establishment among the ruins, which at once burst into flames. It is supposed that more than 100 persons were in the building at the time, as it was a hat-body manufactory—a machine shop, and a machinery for carving wood, by Singers' Patent, as employed on the fifth story. One person who saw the building in the interval between the falling in of the walls says, that it was the most appalling sight he ever witnessed. This is one of the most heart-rending accidents that has ever taken place in this city. No steam boiler should be allowed in the cellar of a building, but in a place apart by itself. It is but a few weeks since, we were in the establishment, and then we witnessed many healthy and happy-like faces, which now could scarcely be recognised as forming part of bodies wherein once dwelt a human soul. Truly there is but a step between us and the grave. Those who have been extricated alive from the ruins, have a debt of gratitude to pay to our heroic firemen, who performed acts, which in Greece and Rome, would have covered them with chaplets. The police force and magistrates of our city, also deserve great praise, for whatever could be done by men in their capacity, was done, and done promptly and well.

Long Pent-up Fire.

The last St. Louis Republican says:—While workmen were yesterday engaged in removing the rubbish from the cellar of the building occupied by Messrs. Meech & Loring previous to the fire in May last, they discovered a mass of paper some feet under the surface, which was on fire. As soon as the air penetrated the mass it blazed up freely, having retained fire since the 17th of May last, a period of nearly eight months.

The Iron Business.

The forge-branches of ten of the great iron mills at Pittsburg are idle; and taking into consideration all who are directly and indirectly connected with them, at last 1800 operatives are thrown out of employment. An outlay of more than \$18,000 a week is suspended, and both employers and employed are suffering.

Regatta in Cuba—An American Boat.

The New Orleans Picayune translates from El Redactor, of Santiago de Cuba of December 30th, an account of a splendid regatta or series of boat races which took place at that port on the preceding Sunday. There were 8 boats started for the first match; one Spanish, one American one French, manned by British seamen, one German, and the other four English. The distance rowed was two miles from the mole, and the match resulted in the American boat coming in the winner of the first prize; the French boat won the second, and the German the third. As the opinion prevailed that the advantages of position were not equal, a second match took place in the evening between the American boat and the French boat, manned by Englishmen, both rowing six oars instead of four, as at the first time. The American again proved the victor, leaving her rival a long way astern. She was a boat belonging to the brig Adele, of Philadelphia.—The same boat subsequently beat an English boat manned by Spanish sailors, making a third triumph. She was afterwards to be rowed against the French boat which on the occasion was to be manned by some of the crew of the vessel to which she belonged and to be steered by her captain.

The Royal Society of London Prize.

This Society, which has been in existence during nearly two centuries, held its annual meeting in London on St. Andrew's Day last, according to custom, and on that occasion the President, Lord Rosse, announced that Lord J. Russell had offered to place the yearly sum of £1,000 at the disposal of the Council of the Society, as a fund from which scientific men might be assisted to pursue their scientific investigations. The offer was accepted. Lord Rosse also announced that the Copley Medal,—which is held in such honorable estimation that Sir Humphrey Davy called it "the Olive Crown"—had been awarded to Sir Roderick Murchison, for his "Silurian System;" "Geology of Russia and the Ural Mountains;" and other valuable scientific productions.

Ship Building in England.

The Manchester Guardian says there never were so many English ships actually building or contracted for as at the present time, when the navigation laws have only ten days' existence before them. The unprecedented number of vessels building at Sunderland has been repeatedly mentioned in the newspapers; and we have recently heard of a gentleman who had gone to Liverpool with the intention of contracting for the building of three or four large ships; but he found all the ship-builders full of orders, and not one of them would contract, even at a high price, for a vessel to be immediately commenced.

Sub Marine Armor in the Gold Region.

Gen. S. Kimberly, now in California, writes home recounting the success he has met with in procuring gold from the beds of the rivers by means of J. E. Gowen & Co.'s sub-marine armor. On one occasion he bagged \$800 in five hours, at the depth of 25 feet. In six weeks he had realized the handsome sum of \$18,500.

Mechanics Wanted West.

The Batesville (Ark) Eagle says that place stands in need of a tin and coppersmith, saddle and harness maker, house, sign and ornamental painter, silversmith and chair-maker. There is also a demand for more bricklayers, stone masons, carpenters, shoe-makers, blacksmiths, house gardeners, and a barber.

Building in New York.

In the last year 1495 new buildings have been erected, making an increase of upwards of 300 over the preceding year, and nearly double the number erected in 1838. Within the last fifteen years 20,000 structures have been built in this city.

Messrs. Thurston & Green, of Fox Point, R. I., have constructed two very large and fine boilers for the Bay State steamer. They measure 39 feet four inches in length, and 10 feet six inches in diameter, presenting a circumference of 32 feet. From the bottom of the boiler to the top of the steam chimney 20 feet. Each contains 26 flues, and weighs 40 tons.