

Miscellaneous.

Correspondence of the Scientific American.

WASHINGTON CITY, March 5, 1850.

During the past week, the Committee appointed by the Convention of Inventors, held at Baltimore, have had several meetings in this city for the purposes of drafting a bill which is to be submitted to Congress, amendatory of the Patent Laws. One of the Committee says it is clear to him, from an experience of 18 years, that there should be established at Washington, a Court to try all patent cases. This would effectually prevent the delay by repeated adjournments of courts for the purpose of procuring additional evidence; for with such a court on the spot, all the necessary documents could be procured instantly from the Patent Office. Such a court in a short time would become highly competent in their decisions.

It is also argued that any invention which it new in America should be entitled to a patent. England has ever done this, and why not we? Inventions may be kept in secret use in England many years, by which they may secure the whole trade; but when necessity causes the invention in our country, or a patent is obtained and the thing in use, the foreigner, as soon as he finds he is matched, comes out here. Under such circumstances then, it is asked, why should our patentee be put down because it was known before? Our government should at least be as liberal as a monarchy.

The Committee on Patents of the House are preparing a long report relative to the construction of U. S. patent machines in Canada, by which goods are manufactured and sent into the United States for sale.

From a statement made yesterday, it appears that 1½ inches rope of American water rotted hemp will sustain a greater weight than a similar rope of foreign hemp of 200 pounds.

The Regents of the Smithsonian Institute have decided upon Harmon's scheme for the proposed Architectural Gallery. It is to be supplied by competition designs from Architects; and is to answer the double purpose of a Gallery of Design, and a Professional Directory, where the most approved models can be contemplated, and the names of meritorious artists placed conspicuously before the public. The falling in of the principal floor of the Institute was a very curious affair, and although the contractor is blamed, he asks a suspension of opinion until the subject has been fully investigated. Had it happened after the completion of the building, there would in all probability have been a great loss of life. More than a year ago the mechanics of this District presented a memorial to Congress against the proposed mode of building.

The contractors are getting along rapidly with the wings of the Patent Office. They are now in the second story of the east wing. It is to be hoped that Congress will make an early appropriation, as a number of the workmen have been laboring without pay for four months. The due bills they receive are shaved enormously by the brokers.

The gas competition here is getting to a fever heat, and owing to there being so many Richmonds in the field, the Washington Company has been compelled to advertise a further reduction of price. The National Hotel is now nightly lighted with Brown's Patent Water Gas, which, in addition to its beauty and cheapness, is free from the unpleasant effluvia of the ordinary coal gas. It is made by causing the vapor of resin to combine with the hydrogen of water.

Owing to the recent accident on the Baltimore railroad by the springing of a rail, it is said a bill will be shortly introduced into Congress, requiring all Railroad Companies to adopt the English plan of having persons stationed at every three miles to examine the tracks daily.

Missouri is to be represented in the Washington Monument by a slab of solid iron one taken from one of her mountains. *

[To clear up one part of the above, and of which the Baltimore Convention Committee

are ignorant, if their opinions are stated correctly, we would state, that a patent will be granted for any invention that is new in America, if not described in a foreign publication. Suppose a machine is invented and used in secret here, for years, that will not prevent another from getting a patent for the same thing, nor invalidate the patent when granted. A foreigner cannot come out here and use his long kept secret machine, if a patent is secured by an American before he arrives.—[E.D.]

Carbon as food for Plants.

Mr. J. W. Rogers says he was refused the golden medal offered, a few years since by a public body in Ireland, because he had set forth that carbon, given to the roots of plants, would invigorate them. He observes, "This was then deemed a fallacy, but I am happy to say, any one may now alledge the same without being laughed at. At that period a popular chemist had set it down, that all plants depended upon the atmosphere for the carbon they contained, but the leading chemical writer of the present day says very indifferently. Brande states, in the 6th edition, published 1848, that although the accumulations of decaying matter which chemist call humus per, forms an important part in vegetable nutrition, it is not by its direct absorption and assimilation, but by its influence a source of carbonic acid, which is partly taken up by the juices of the roots, and partly envolved into the atmosphere, so that plants, independent of their leaves can thus receive carbonic acid."

Mr. Squarey, in his treatise on Agricultural Chemistry, says, "the use of charcoal along with manures consists in its quality for absorbing gases—fresh charcoal can absorb 90 times its volume of carbonic acid gas. Charcoal absorbs the ammonia that is in the manure, and gives it out to the plants aftershower of rain, and the removal of the gas by the rain from the charcoal, restores its original powers of absorbing gas; so that this substance, when applied to the soil, acts as a constant reservoir for this valuable gaseous substance, a property which neither time nor any circumstances can alter. Even when, in the course of cultivation, the charcoal originally applied on the surface of the land, is ploughed under the surface—even there it does not lose its power of absorbing the gases, but carries on its operations with undiminished energy."—Professor Johnston, in his valuable work on the Elements of Agriculture Chemistry, strongly recommends the mixing of manure and other rich applications to the soil, but apprehends that the cost and scarcity of this substance may preclude its being brought into general use.

The Force of Imagination.

A Lucchese peasant, shooting sparrows, saw his dog attacked by a strange and ferocious mastiff. He tried to separate the animals, and received a bite from his own dog, which instantly ran off through the fields. The wound was healed in a few days, and the dog was not found; and the peasant, after some time, began to feel symptoms of nervous agitation. He conceived that the dog, from disappearing, was mad; and, within a day or two after this idea had struck him, he began to feel symptoms of hydrophobia. They grew hourly more violent; he raved, and had all the evidences of this most violent distemper. As he laid, with the door open to let in the last air that he was to breathe, he heard his dog bark. The animal ran up to his bedside and frolicked about the room. It was clear that he, at least, was in perfect health. The peasant's mind was relieved instantly; he got up with renewed strength, dressed himself, plunged his head into a basin of water, and, thus refreshed, walked into the room to his astonished family. The statement is made in a memoir by Professor Barbantini; and it is not improbable that many attacks of a disease so strongly dependent on the imagination might be equally cured, by ascertaining the state of the animal by which the bite was given.

Good Investment.

Massachusetts has about three millions of dollars invested in school-houses. Mr. Everett it was who said so quaintly, "If you reduce the wages of the schoolmasters, you must raise those of the recruiting sergeant."

U. S. Astronomical Mission.

The National Intelligencer has received a copy of the Valparaiso Mercury of November 8th, from which it extracts the following:

"By the last steamer, Lieut. Gilliss, of the United States Navy, a distinguished astronomer, arrived in Chili, charged by the Government of the United States with a scientific mission of the highest importance—namely, to ascertain the true distance of the earth from the sun; the computation of which has, until now resulted only in serious mistakes. Various European savans, similarly commissioned with Lieut Gilliss, are about to occupy themselves with this work at different points of Europe and China. The Government of the United States has taken upon itself the part that belongs to America, and Chili has been selected in South America on account of its clear skies and natural topographical advantages.—Mr. Gilliss has received the instruments which he awaited; and, having joined the suite of gentlemen who are to accompany him, and who arrived at this port by another vessel, has gone to Santiago, where he has met, on the part of the authorities and private citizens, the most frank and cordial co-operation. The hill of Santa Lucia, encircled by the streets of the capital, is the site chosen for the observatory, the occupation of which will not be delayed.—We congratulate ourselves upon the preference shown to Chili by the United States Government and upon the occasion of having in our midst such illustrious guests. We trust that they may find in its pure sky the revelations of science, and the enchantments of life in the cordiality of its inhabitants."

Where is the Wilderness?

At the beginning of this century it was in Ohio and Indiana. Twenty-five years afterwards it was in Michigan, Wisconsin, and so forth. Last year it was in Minnesota Territory. Next year we will have to seek it in Nebraska and around the lake of the Woods.

Where the steamboat goes, there the wilderness disappears. And the steamboat is soon to startle the Indian and wake the echoes of the forest above the falls of the St. Anthony, for a boat is now building there which the St. Paul's "Chronicle and Register" of the 19th January says is "rapidly progressing." The time for launching her has even been fixed,—"as soon as the river is clear of ice." The builder hails from Bangor, Maine, the opposite extremity of the Union due east, and is said to be "a highly skilful workman." The dimensions of the craft are 108 feet keel, 120 feet deck, 25 feet beam, and will draw twelve inches light. The machinery is in course of construction at Bangor, and will be at the Falls by the opening of navigation.

Professional Beggars.

The Italian Benevolent Society in New Orleans caution the public against the hordes of professional beggars from Italy, now in the United States. They say these solicitors of eleemosynary aid are impostors, who make an annual visit from Italy as professed beggars and follow it as a regular trade. The number is annually increasing, for at the close of the season they return home with more money than they ever saw before, and their successes stimulate others to follow their example. The brig Louisiana, which recently arrived there from Genoa, brought as passengers seventy of these characters, covered with rags, vermin and filth, all of whom are now no doubt following their vocation. The police of the cities should pay their respects to these impostors and rid the streets of their presence.

[The above is true in every particular.—There are Italian beggars' rendezvous in this city, and the fields of operation for begging campaigns are laid out with great skill. The beggars carry printed certificates, which are nothing but forgeries.]

Lectures on the Mysterious Knockings at Rochester.

The Rev. Mr. Brittan delivered two mysterious lectures on this mysterious subject, before two mysterious audiences, in the Hall of the Society Library, last week. He compared the human mind to the Electric Telegraph, and in a remarkable happy manner, left the mysterious knockings as mysterious as ever.

Early Closing of Dry Good Stores.

A very large meeting was held in the Tabernacle, this city, on Wednesday evening, last week, for the purpose of drawing public attention to the evils under which the Retail Dry Goods Clerks labor. Their hours of toil average about fourteen the year round, and they desire to have them reduced—in other words, that the stores should not be kept open later than 7 o'clock, P. M., Saturday evenings excepted. A number of resolutions were passed, expressive of the evils of the long hours, with a request that our citizens would discountenance evening shopping as far as practicable. The Dry Goods Clerks have our sympathies and good wishes. No person should trade with the Dry Goods, or any other stores, after 7 P. M. It is a shame to our enlightened age that so many have to labor during 14 and 16 hours every day to obtain a livelihood. Ten hours of labor is plenty for any man, and as much can be performed during 10 as 12 hours, the year round.

Great Discovery.

That genius of a wag, Fitzgerald, of the "City Item," has made a most important discovery, whereby the nation will be enabled to save a great deal of money. The discovery is nothing less than a new plan for moderate and immoderate dram drinkers to get tipsy-turvy, without either smelling London Porter or Ferintosh. The plan is a very simple one, only to spin round rapidly on the heel of one foot as many times as may conduce to give the performer, according to his moderate or immoderate desires, that beautiful street attitude, denominated "walking the chalk with a brick in your hat."

Explosion of a Locomotive.

On Friday, the 1st inst., a locomotive boiler exploded at Whitehill, N. J., on the Camden and Amboy Railroad. Two engineers were killed and a number of others were wounded. When will there be an end of such accidents? Surely there is a strong necessity for the passage and execution of such laws as will tend to render explosions of boilers more like miracles than common occurrences.

A Righteous Verdict.

A young girl named Susan Davis, has recovered a verdict of \$5,400 against her former employer, a Mr. Smedley, a manufacturer of worsted shawls, &c., in Kensington, Philadelphia Co., Pa. It appeared that after she left his employ, he commenced a series of persecutions, and on three occasions had her arrested on the charge of stealing, she being in each instance honorably discharged by the magistrate.

A Great Railroad Project.

By the late news from Europe, a plan for a Railroad is proposed, to extend from Calais, in France, (connected with the English Packets,) to extend to Moulton, in India. It will cost as much to build it as the whole amount of England's debt. It never will be built, because it will not pay, and because the right of way cannot be purchased, from such nations, as Austria.

Behind the Age.

Among all her seaward-looking cliffs, Spain has not a single light-house, from the Pyrenees to Point Europe; she has no railroads, no canals, no telegraphs; and until lately there has been no safety for travelers on the highways.

Works on Science and Art.

ICONOGRAPHIC ENCYCLOPEDIA.—Part 6 of this splendid work, by Rudolph Garrigue, Barclay street, N. Y., has just been issued. The plates contain illustrations of human anatomy, geography of America, and natural history of its animals, ornithology, whale fishing, and general natural history. The letter press is excellent, and the matter very clear, condensed and interesting. We cannot speak too highly of this work—the plates alone are worth the price of it, viz., 20 steel plates in every number, which is \$1, or 5 cents singly for each plate, nearly every one of which has 20 figures in it.

A. McNair Cunningham, Esq., of Beaufort, S. C., is authorized to receive subscriptions for the Scientific American.