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The New York Times and the Patent Laws.

In the New York Daily Times of the 26th ult. there is a long article on the Patent Laws, there is also one as long in the Times of the 29th ult., in answer to a correspondent. The Times asserts that patents have been and are an evil, and that it would be better to abolish the present system of Patent Laws. It does not propose the abolition of the present Patent Laws, however, without offering a substitute, like all great statesmen; and, alas, such a substitute! But we almost forgot, it offers two substitutes; let us consider them apart. Here is the first one:—

"If we are not prepared to abolish the patent system at once, there would be a slight, nay, more than a slight advantage in confining the business of the office to the granting of caveats. Let the inventor have no other bonus than what he may make in retaining his secret, and getting it fairly and fully in the market, a year before his competitors. If his improvement be valuable, and meet a mechanical want, the profit he may thus secure will, we fancy, equal the largest desert. And then, at least, the enormous taxation now levied upon the public will suffer a very considerable reduction. The working poor man will the sooner enter upon equal terms of competition with the speculating rich one. And there will be quite little, perhaps no litigation."

This extract, which we quote from the Times of the 26th, is one of the most sublimely ridiculous emanations that we ever saw in print. Until now, we could not have believed that there was a single American man, woman, or child, that could read, so profoundly ignorant of what a caveat is, and of our Patent Laws. But we live in strange times, Benthamite-doctrine times.

A caveat is simply the description of an invention not yet completed, which the inventor sends to the Patent Office with a fee of \$20, requesting it to be filed in the confidential archives of the Patent Office, and it contains this statement, "prior to making application for a patent for the same."

If another person makes application for a patent for a like invention during the term of one year from the filing of the caveat, the Patent Office, before acting on the said application, sends word to the person who files the caveat, to prepare his model and specifications, and make his application for a patent within three months. This is the *Caveat-beware*—of the Patent Office; it is no protection whatever, and there is no such a thing as a writ of *Caveat* granted; it is no bonus, and never can be. Perhaps the Times means a new kind of *Caveat*; if so, we would like to know what kind of bonus he could make out of it. What in the name of common sense is evolved by the expression, "let the inventor have no other bonus than what he may make in retaining his secret, and getting it fairly and fully in the market a year before his competitors,—the profit he may thus secure will, we fancy, equal the largest desert?"

There can be no doubt but there is a great quantity of *fancy* here. The Times surely means to have a new law enacted, by which an inventor will be compelled, whenever he makes an improvement, to describe the same to the Patent Office, which will grant a *Caveat* for one year—a beware to the public,—after which the Patent Office will reveal the same for the benefit of the public. This is the plain inference to be drawn from the language of the Times,—or it is nonsense. It is nonsense, for no law can be made that will compel an inventor to reveal his secret in one year; and no inventor would then be so contemptibly foolish as to reveal his secret at all in one year, or twenty years, while he can keep it to himself. The *caveat-bonus* of the Times, is therefore one of the modern Benthamite wonders of literature. The expression about the capitalist and working-man and enormous taxation, are quite unintelligible to us; we do not know what the Times means. But this is not the only remedy for the present patent system proposed by the Times;

here is another, and it is a perfection one:—

"These half-way measures, however, are seldom satisfactory. All the evils were better reached and cut away at once; and to effect this, nothing will answer but the abrogation of the entire code. As a substitute for it, we know of nothing better than a system of bounties. Replace the present troop of officers and examiners, with a commission composed of a due number of practical mechanics, and mechanical philosophers, before whom the inventor may lay his claims. Let them be prepared with an accurate knowledge of what has already been achieved, and with what improvements are required in mechanics, science, or art; and in passing upon the invention, let them determine not merely, as now, its title to originality, but to real and universal utility. If it be of intrinsic value, let them recommend its purchase by Government for the people; and let the Treasury pay for it. If it be of secondary importance, or of no importance whatever, let them so decide it, and leave it to make what way it can among purchasers without the official sanction."

The cloven foot peeps out here, whether intentionally or not. Yes, here it is. The present patent system does not allow political Galpinizing and Gardenerizing; it allows no spoils to the party victors: they do not get their hands into the Treasury to rob the people, in giving Uncle Sam's money out to favorite miserable inventors. The "practical mechanics and philosophers" of the Commission would be men as ignorant of their business as the Times is of a *Caveat*. This system of government rewards would answer well for political leaders, but the people of these United States are too enlightened to adopt such views. Patents do not tax anybody; but those who, like the Times, are ignorant of our Patent Laws, and who allow themselves to be cheated when they could easily prevent it by making themselves acquainted with the said laws. Here is another extract:—

"The inventor of real merit will invent, just as the author of real genius will write, even though there be positive laws against them. There is a necessity in these things. Accident is the parent of a vast number of discoveries; deliberate invention of the few; and no pecuniary reward will stimulate the latter into activity. The necessities of mankind, not the laws, prompt the loftiest reaches of inventive talents. And to the true man, who evolves a discovery calculated to benefit his race, the sense of such a benefit conferred, and the gratitude of his fellows, are amply sufficient compensation."

There is very little truth in the whole of this extract. The inventor will not invent, nor will the literary genius write with positive laws against them; it were just as true to say "the prisoner will exercise his natural instincts of liberty even if his limbs were manacled to the stone floor of a dungeon." Some discoveries have been made by accident, but all our great and useful mechanical inventions have been the result of much study, toil, expense, and research. Necessity is not at all times "the mother of invention." What use had Whitney for a Cotton Gin for himself, Watt for a Steam Engine, or the painter Fulton for a Steamboat? Rewards excite—not the necessities of mankind—inventive genius. It is related, in the life of Watt, that whenever he took up any invention, after he saw it would not pay, he threw it aside at once,—and wise and right was he. The Times speaks of inventors as if they were a lot of knaves and fools. But look at the compensation which the Times asserts is sufficient for a true inventor, "the sense of a benefit conferred, and the gratitude of his fellows are amply sufficient compensation," for his discovery. How would the Editor of the Times like to be remunerated by this kind of *sufficient* compensation, for the ideas he evolves. The mouse would often stagger from his flour barrel, with the tear in its eye, we guess, if he, the Editor, depended on the *gratitude* of his fellows for sufficient compensation.

As a matter of justice and right, we hold to the doctrine that inventors should be paid for their inventions by the community. Inventions do not tax, but relieve, the people. If a person does not wish to pay for a patented improvement, why, he need not use it: the pa-

tee cannot compel any one to use his invention; and those who use it and pay for it, do so because they consider the improvement relieves them of a tax,—it gives a good new improvement for a clumsy, inefficient machine. We have now cheap newspapers by inventions for making type, paper, and printing machines, while no improvement in composing has been made in two hundred years. Would those improvements have been made, and would we now have such cheap newspapers, if the improvers had depended for *compensation* on the gratitude of their fellows? We trow not. It may do very well to raise up an ideal *true man*, but human nature will be human nature, and the man who speaks of such compensation for useful discoveries, surely did not see the conclusion any person would draw from such a sentiment—"thou hast no gratitude."

Manilla Rope.

A correspondent inquires of us if we know of any compound or solution "that would prevent manilla rope becoming tender and weak by exposure to heat and smoke, especially to those engaged in the foundry business," and adds, "iron chain cannot be depended on." We are confident that good iron chain can be trusted. We have never tried any personal experiments with the ropes; it is our opinion, however, that if rope were steeped in alum, (say about 1 lb. of alum to 20 lbs. of rope), dissolved in as much water as would cover the rope, in a tub, and let it lie there a few hours, then take it out, wash it in cold water, and then dry it, that it would stand the heat and smoke a great deal better. The rope would have to be thus treated before it was put up on the crane. The alum is a good substance for imparting a partially tanned and non-combustible character to vegetable substances, such as rope. This mode of treating the rope may not be convenient, in that case weak alum water might be applied to the rope with a brush, and then let it dry on the crane. We know of no plaster composition (like tar) that would answer. But it must not be forgotten, that all rope will wear out by continual usage, hence a sharp eye must always be kept upon it—as sharp as that upon the *flattow* of a coal pit, where life is in continual danger.

The Streets of New York.

We have been in many cities at home, and in the Old World, but no one can at all come up to our great empire city for dirt and dust, it is the *Magnus Apollo* of all others. The great benefactor of our citizens is a heavy shower of rain; it appears to be the only generous and efficient scavenger we have got. In wet weather, our most noted street—Broadway, is generally six inches deep with mud, and when this dries up, and a good breeze comes sweeping along, it is quite as great a feat to travel up our grand promenading street as to journey across the Great Desert. American travellers are exceedingly foolish to journey to Egypt for a sight of the sandy plains. Only for the intervals of mud, the camel might be a more useful animal among us than the horse. We have repeatedly called attention to our dirty streets, but we suppose it will be all in vain to expect a reform, and yet the remedy could soon be applied. Whose fault is it? Not the city government's altogether. Let the merchants in Broadway do their duty; let them unite together and get rid of the evil in their street, which they can easily do, and this will do much for the credit of our city. It is our opinion they would save the amount in the better sale of their goods, if they themselves should pay to keep the street clean.

Russia Sheet-Iron.

MESSRS. EDITORS.—From your remarks on "Russia Iron and Patents," in the Scientific American of the 24th April, I infer you have no knowledge of the manufacture of "Imitation Russia" sheet-iron in this country, I therefore take the liberty of informing you that I have (with my brothers) been supplying that great desideratum since 1842, in which year we obtained United States Letters Patent for the successful discovery of a process of giving to sheet-iron (in its manufacture) that beautiful finish and durable gloss and lustre, heretofore only known in Russia; last

year we obtained another patent, from the U. S., for an improvement made in our *modus operandi*—and we now have in successful operation the "Delaware Iron Works," in Delaware; "Constitution Iron Works," near this city, and the "McKeesport Iron Works," near Pittsburg, Pa.—making an article equal to the Russian, of which we sold in New York alone, last year, 200 tons or more. Whether we have hit upon the secret mode of Russia or not, we do not pretend to know—nor do we believe that it is yet known out of Russia; there have been so many different candidates claiming that honor, with as many different modes that nothing less than the most substantial and conclusive proof of the discovery of the secret, should satisfy any one. And we not think Congress should pass a law granting the exclusive right to any one to manufacture this article by the Russian process, without such proof being furnished, and not then if such law should conflict with patents already granted. ALAN WOOD.

No. 3 North Fifth street, Phila.

[Mr. Wood is greatly mistaken if he supposes we ever discuss any question without being well acquainted with it. If he had been a careful reader of the Scientific American, he would have noticed that our subjects are carefully considered, and all our remarks well digested.

We perfectly agree with him, about Congress not granting the exclusive right to any one to make Russia Iron, without the requisite proof spoken of, and there is no fear that Congress will do so. We also assure him that the requisite proof has already been furnished. Before we penned the article referred to, we examined specimens of the iron made by the said process, also specimens of Wood's sheet-iron.

We also assure Mr. Wood that we know the whole process by which it is made, and if it be not better than that of Wood & Bros., then he need not be afraid of his craft, for assuredly it will do him more good than harm; the process must stand or fall upon its own merits. Is Mr. Wood afraid of it?

If Congress should grant a patent to-morrow which would conflict with any one in existence, then the one granted by the special act would be an infringement of the other, and the users of it liable for damages. The specimens of the sheet-iron referred to, which we saw, were very excellent, and stood burning in the fire better than a specimen from McKeesport Works; Wood's sheet-iron is a beautiful article, and does credit to the gentlemen who discovered the improvements.

Another Explosion.

On the 25th ult., as the Prairie State was passing out from Pekin, on the Illinois River, the flues of her larboard boiler collapsed, and sad to relate, some twenty persons were killed and wounded. The ends of the boiler flew out, and but for a quantity of hay stored in the boat, the loss would have been much greater.

A bill is now before the United States Senate, (which we hope will pass), for the prevention of accidents by explosions. We have received a copy of this bill, and will have more to say about it next week. We have also received the pamphlet of A. Guthrie, engineer of the Chicago Water Works, on the causes of explosions on the Mississippi, their prevention, &c. We will present the substance matter of this able pamphlet to our readers at an early date.

Sad Death of a Good Mechanic and Inventor.

Junius S. Alcott, of Oriskany Falls, who has left behind him a name on his father, during a fit of temporary insanity, committed suicide on the 26th ult., by throwing himself between the water-wheel and pinion of the woolen factory in that place. He was killed instantly. His loss will be much felt. We knew him well, and deeply regret his sudden and unhappy departure from among us. His partner, Mr. Couch, was in this city when the unfortunate event occurred.

We have received the thirty-first Annual Report of the Mercantile Association and supplement to the catalogue. This institution is one of the best in our city, and we are happy to know that it is in a highly prosperous condition; it numbers about 4,000 members, and has a library of over 30,000 volumes.