

Scientific American

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The Fire Annihilator, and Scientific American.

Two weeks ago, on page 261, we published a short notice of some experiments which had been made with the Fire Annihilator at Newark, N. J. On Thursday last week, Dr. Colton called upon us to remonstrate about the said notice, saying it conveyed an untruth, and requested us to make the correction, or he would take measures to publish something which would show to the world we circulated statements unworthy of credit. We told him we were always willing to correct errors, and asked him to point them out. In the article referred to, it is stated, "the building burned down, water was not handy." Water, it appears, was handy, for the building was erected on the banks of the canal, but it was not used.

This is the only error in the notice that the Doctor could point out,—and what does it amount to? Dr. Colton made two successful experiments, as we stated, but when the door was opened for him to apply the Annihilator during the third experiment, he was driven away, by a volume of flame, from his post and apparatus. There were a number of reserve annihilators—five we believe—but unfortunately their pins were mislaid; the crowd, however, threw them into the building, but they did not prevent it from being burned down. Dr. Colton called this an *accident*; very well, he has a perfect right to call it what he likes, and so has any other person or persons, but we call it a failure—the building burned down, which was the consummation of the experiments. We have been threatened many times with this and that kind of action, by various persons, because we have spoken plainly and unreservedly upon certain questions on which our opinion had been solicited as journalists. Those who know us, never would do so a foolish thing. From principle we conduct the Scientific American in the light of a conscientious public duty, and we contend we have the same right to criticise any new invention that comes before the public for patronage, as a literary critic has a new book, or an artist a painting; and what we say upon any question is entirely free from personal private feeling.

The experiments of Dr. Colton, as noticed by us, were made on the 17th ult., since that time he has made other experiments in the same place, which he stated to us were successful. He also informed us that the Newark papers had stated they were successful, and that a number of respectable citizens in that place had signed a certificate to that effect. Well, what is that to us; we claim to be as capable of judging of the merit of the Annihilator as any person whatever,—we care not who he is. We have stated before, and make the statement again, it is an *inefficient invention* for the prevention and extinguishment of fires. The gases which it generates, although asserted by some of the friends of the Annihilator to be innocuous, are not so, they are dangerous to inhale. They are steam combined with carbonic acid gas, and hyponitrous acid. When we published the patent of the Fire Annihilator on pages 1 and 2 this Vol., we stated, "we hoped it would prove to be all that was claimed for it, that we should watch its progress, and if convinced by ocular demonstration that it was a good invention we would say so, if not, we would make a note of the matter." We have watched its progress; we witnessed the failure of the experiment at 83rd street, this city; we attended Dr. Colton's lecture at Metropolitan Hall, which failed to satisfy us as to the efficacy of the Annihilator; and we also were witnesses of the experiments made at Melrose on the 9th of last Feb. The Melrose experiments were kept somewhat secret; free passes were given to some other papers none to us, but we were there and saw. The experiments were said to be successful, and a certificate to this effect was signed by probably as many and as respectable gentlemen as those who signed the Newark certificate; but we never accept the opinions

of any man or body of men for correctness against our own convictions. In noticing the experiments at Melrose, on page 179, we used this language,—“Ninety-nine fires out of every hundred originate from carelessness or incendiarism, and are too far advanced when discovered to be vanquished by any other force than our *fire brigades*.” Now for the proof of this statement, and for testimony to the inefficiency of the Annihilator as a fire extinguisher. Some time ago the Fire Annihilator Company furnished Fire Engine Co. No. 38, of this city, with a cart and number of Annihilators, to run to fires and give them (the Annihilators) a fair trial, before other engines arrived. On the 10th of last month the said company tried one of the Annihilators on the brig S. P. Lord, as noticed by us on page 253; the trial of it did no good. On the evening of the very day on which Dr. C. called upon us (Thursday week), a fire broke out in Fulton street, near Greenwich, this city, and Engine Co. No. 38 was there first with the Annihilators. One was taken off the cart, carried into the building, but the men could not get it to operate; this might be called an *accident*, but it will not do to depend for the extinguishment of fires upon such accidents. Water put out this fire. When the Annihilator was taken to the engine house, it was discovered that there was no vitriol in the vial which is lodged in the charge. On the next morning, (Friday week), a fire broke out in the upper story of the Tract House, Nassau street, and Engine Co. No. 38 was there first with the Annihilators again. Three of them were promptly taken up stairs and the men burst in the door, rushed into the room, and set off two annihilators; they operated well, but did no good whatever; the third one would not go off!—another *accident*. The fire engines soon arrived and put out the fire with water. Those who witnessed this fair trial at an accidental, (very different from a prepared) fire, said, there never could have been a better opportunity for testing the merits of the Annihilator, but it totally failed of success. Out of six Annihilators two could not be made to operate. The said company was almost determined not to try the Annihilator any more, for it afforded a subject of ridicule, and their confidence in them was nearly annihilated,—but the Annihilator Company replenished the Annihilators with new charges during the day, and the company was a second time armed and equipped, to fulfill the declaration of the secret circular of the Annihilator Co., namely, “an end must at once be put to every serious conflagration in our country.” On the next morning (Saturday), a fire broke out in Catharine street, and the Fire Annihilators were on hand again. Five of the largest size were discharged in the building, one would not operate:—another *accident*. They did no good; the building was burned down, and, sad to relate, five of our fellow creatures were consumed in the flames. Oh, what a glorious opportunity was presented here to test the good qualities of the Annihilator, if it had any.

In view of these facts—these fair experiments with the Annihilator at accidental fires, the public will judge between us and Dr. Colton, or any other person interested in the Annihilator.

A pint of water will put out a fire if applied in time,—and so may an Annihilator,—but the majority of our fires occur at night, in rooms and stores filled with curtains, cloths, goods, and combustible materials, and are generally far advanced before being discovered. Annihilators might be kept in a building, and the fire might take place in a quarter that would prevent approach to them, or they might, if found, not operate, like three of those furnished to Engine Company No. 38. We wish to inculcate the necessity of constant vigilance to prevent fires, without trusting such an apparatus as the “Fire Annihilator” for an extinguisher.

Telegraph Case.

The owners and assignees of Morse's Patent are now engaged in suing one another at law. F. O. J. Smith, of Boston, was assigned some part of the patent—the New England Districts, we believe—wherein he could sell rights, &c. Messrs. Morse & Vail, displeas-

ed with him for not being sharp enough with Henry O'Reilly, and some other cases, have applied for an injunction to restrain said Mr. Smith from selling and dealing in the patent rights of Morse's Telegraph. It is a queer case, take it all-in-all, and we regret it a great deal. We are always sorry to see parties interested in patents engaged in suing one another. That there is a necessity for so doing we do not doubt, but we regret the necessity.

Are Patents Monopolies?

The correspondent of the New York Tribune, signing himself “Anti-Monopoly,” had another article in that paper of May 1st, to back up his former one, which we noticed two weeks ago on page 253. The object of all discussion should be *truth*; therefore, when any person writes for the press, he should never suppress a fact, nor make a fact appear a falsehood—“nothing extenuate, nor ought set down in malice,” should be the guide of all men who come before the public professedly to impart information. He takes the ground more stubbornly than ever, that the principle of assigning patents, in our Patent Code, has been the cause of all patent evils—a tax upon the community—and he uses this language, “the question of allowing an assignment of a patent, from 1790 down to a later period, was regarded as impolitic.” We say, once and again, this is not true—but the very reverse of the fact. The question of assigning a patent was so far deemed impolitic, in 1790, and to a later period, that the very Act of 1790 recognizes assignees, and the Act of 1793 (that late period which he mentions) provides for the assigning of a patent to the fullest extent.—(See the laws as published on pages 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9, and 462-3 of the Appendix of Curtis on Patents.)

We state the plain fact, nothing more nor less. The said correspondent speaks about the people of the United States being taxed \$3,000,000 yearly for the Woodworth Planing Machine; also of their being taxed so much for Ross Winan's patent, and Goodyear's india rubber patent. He attributes all this to the patent law allowing an inventor to assign his patent. How he comes to this conclusion is no argument against the principle, for this alone is his reason, viz., “valuable inventions get into the hands of rich speculating men and men of influence, like the sons-in-law of Judges, and men who have influence with *Patent Judges*.” He evidently knows considerable about the working of patents, but surely he cannot be a lawyer and exhibit such a want of knowledge of our patent laws. It is true that the assignees of some patents have abused the privilege of our Patent Laws to the injury of many honest citizens, but then many assignees have done right in pursuing willing infringers. He speaks of the patents of Woodworth, and Ross Winans, and Goodyear, being in the hands of rich men, as a great evil; we do not look upon the question in this light, unless the assignees act wrong. Many honest poor inventors have taken out patents for good inventions which were infringed by rich manufacturers with impunity, because the poor patentee could not employ *great counsel*, and pursue for infringement. But it so happened that some of these poor inventors got some rich men to buy their patents, who could look after infringers, and no sooner did they lay the hand of the law upon these wealthy infringers, than up arose a hue and cry—monopoly, oh, monopoly! We know an inventor who had a patent for a good machine, which was infringed with impunity by a manufacturer for fourteen years, just because the poor inventor was not a very *cute* man of business, although an ingenious mechanic; and the infringer knew his failing. Had some rich man bought the patent, and pursued the infringer, it would have made our hearts glad. There are many rich manufacturers who would like nothing better than to infringe patents with impunity. A rich company in this State was called upon some time since, by an inventor and patentee, who exhibited to the active manager his invention—a very good one in their line. It was looked upon somewhat favorably, but when asked if it was patented, and was answered in the affirmative, the manager turned on his heel, and spoke somewhat sneeringly about it. Since that time the said company has been made to pay heavy damages for the infringe-

ment of an assigned patent. Who whines at it? None but those who feel the just lash of the law; and those who, like the correspondent referred to, view the question from only one point. If it were not for the principle of assigning patents, which is embraced in our Patent Code, patents would be very little worth to the majority of our inventors. We are opposed to the extension of patents beyond fourteen years, but we deem no patent to be a tax or a monopoly, if carried out in its true principle and spirit. The principle of our Patent Laws have been, and may be again, violated by unjust legal decisions, but that is no argument against the Patent Laws, it only shows a defect somewhere else.

Cooling Air in Hot Climates.

In the East Indies, and all tropical climates, Europeans suffer severely with the intense heat. To keep apartments bearable at all, fans are kept going continually, and wet mats are hung in the windows, from which the moisture evaporates and leaves the air somewhat cool. This plan, however, has been found very unhealthy, because rarified air containing moisture, has too little oxygen in it for the healthy action of the lungs. A Dr. Piazza Smith has recently published a pamphlet in England, upon a superior plan for supplying rooms in tropical countries with dry cold air, freed from moisture. His plan is to compress the air by mechanical means, then rob it, while so compressed, of its heat, and when cool, allow it to expand into the rooms, for which the apparatus is intended. If he can take air at 90° of temperature, compress it, and extract 30° of heat, he will have air at 60° to enter a room, which will thus be kept at a pleasant temperature. His cooler is to be formed of a pipe under water, and a pump is to force the air in at one end of it (the pipe) and out at the other, which is to have a weighted valve placed upon it. This plan appears to us simple and rational. If a copper pipe were laid in a stream of cool running water for some distance, and hot air forced through it into apartments, there can be no doubt but it (the air) would be rendered cool and healthy. A gentleman of wealth might employ such means to cool his house in a hot climate. A pipe, like the worm of a *still*, if placed in a deep well, would also answer the purpose of an air cooler, but in every case it would be well to have a valve on the exit end of the pipe. An iron pipe would answer as well as a copper one, only it is not such a good conductor of heat and cold as copper.

The People's College.

A few years ago, a number of active and sterling mechanics, in this State, became impressed with the conviction that if a “People's College,” free from sectarian influences and exclusiveness, were established somewhere in the State, it would be productive of great good. The idea soon assumed a practicable shape, as the originators of it were men well acquainted with constructing laws and designing institutions. A meeting has been called by those friendly to such an Institution. The Convention will meet in Rochester on the 20th of this month. The object of the College is a complete and thorough education for the sons and daughters of our working men—men of toil. It is designed to make the college, in part, self-supporting, and to teach science and art in a true and profitable manner. Engineering and machine making will be taught, as far as it is practicable; but it is intended that practical mechanics, in combination with science, shall be thoroughly drilled into the students. This will give it an advantage for real practical life over many colleges in our land. We heartily commend the enterprise to the people of this State; the object is a laudable one, and deserves the countenance and support of rich and poor. We hope the meeting will be well attended on the 20th.

The attention of our readers is called to the advertisement of a gentleman who is about to visit Europe, who will act as agent in selling or purchasing patents in foreign countries. The advertiser is well known to us, and is a gentleman competent for the business which he solicits, and those who have business which they wish transacted there, have a good opportunity offered by him.