Scientific American

NEW-YORK, NOVEMBER 20, 1852.

Reform of the Patent Laws.

As Congress will soon assemble again, we conceive it to be our duty at this time, to direct the attention of our people to the reform of our patent laws. Our attention has also been specially called to this subject by the "Model Courier," Philadelphia, which speaks of the present laws as affording every means for the patent pirate to use a patented invention and contest the right of the patentee to the same, by money gained from the very machine of which he has robbed the inventor.

It is well known to our readers that a bill for reforming the Patent Laws passed the Senate during the past winter, and was sent down to the House of Representatives, and that it was afterwards recalled by nearly a unanimous vote, because a most glaring and iniquitous clause legalizing the actions of the Chief Clerk had been introduced into it, if not surreptitiously, at least it almost amounted to that.

Congress adjourned, although the session was a very long one, without passing the bill, and we are glad that it did so, for it will allow of a closer scrutiny being given to all the clauses of it, and the addition of new ones that may be required.

One great evil which should be remedied is the expensive and tedious mode of bringing cases to a conclusion in our United States Courts. No poor inventor can contest his patent with a wealthy infringer. We would recommend that a clause be introduced, making it the duty of government which grants a patent, to prosecute through the U. S. District Attorneys those who infringe patents; and that in every district where a jury trial is prayed for by the defendant, whoever he may be, that it at once be granted. This will bring the case to a focus very soon, and prevent such india rubber extension cases, as was exhibited in the famous dilatory, wandering, and singular india rubber case of Goodyear versus Day. We want to see the old tedious and expensive modes of obtaining justice in our courts of law simplified, and made common-sense-like and economical. We beat all creation in going ahead with machine inventions, but we certainly are in great want of an invention to render prompt justice in cases of patent infringement, for assuredly while we travel by steam and talk with lightning, our U. S. Courts, with whom the settlement of patent cases is left for adjudication, are content to move along slowly and grand in the old-fashioned mule-drawn carriages of *checks*, *delays*, *put-offs*, *embarrassments*, and *weighty purses*.

We also advocate prompt justice to a defendant; let all stand equal before the scales of justice. He should have the right to sue out a writ of *scire facias* to repeal a fraudulent patent, but then all patent cases should be acted upon promptly, so as to cause as little expense to both parties as possible.

There are two reforms which are imperatively demanded in our patent laws, that are not embraced in the bill left over by the last Congress. One is to return the model, as well as two-thirds of the fees of an applicant who withdraws his claims; the other is to afford an easy means to appeal from the decision of the Patent Office, and a return of the fees to the applicant if he is successful.

By the present law and regulations of the Patent Office, no rejected applicant gets back his model; it is retained in the Patent Office, and although it may have cost $200, the applicant loses it, or the whole of his fees. Ten dollars is enough to pay all the expenses of a rejected applicant, and if his model is similar to an older one in the Patent Office, what in the name of common sense is the use of retaining it? to the applicant it may be of practical use; to the aPtent Office none whatever.

When the application for a patent is rejected, the applicant can appeal from the decision of the Commissioner to the District Judge of the District of Columbia, or to his assistants, but he "must first deposit $25, and pay the whole of the expenses, whether the final decision shall be in his favor or not." In all common courts of law, the person who stands in the way of justice—the one who loses the case, pays the expenses, but it is altogether a different kind of justice which rules between inventors and the Patent Office. We want an alteration in the law which will throw the expense upon the Patent Office if it loses the case, and upon the applicant if he loses the case; this we consider even-handed justice. We hope that the committees of patents in the Senate and House of Representatives will give these suggestions their attention. Above all evils, however, connected with our patent laws, the expensive modes of obtaining decisions in our U. S. District Courts are the mill stones which hang around the necks of inventors.

Manufacture of Iron.

It has always appeared to us, that in many parts of our country the rich beds of iron, coal, and lime, lying so near to one another, afforded advantages for the manufacture of iron of as good a quality, and at as little cost, as it can be made in any country in the world. One of the most extensive iron makers of Great Britain, while on a visit to this country a few years ago, made it a special part of his business to travel extensively and examine the different iron works in several States. The conclusion at which he arrived was, that we were perfectly blind to our own interests in the mode of conducting the making of iron, and that it could be made as cheap, if not cheaper, in various places in America than in England, if the business was well managed.

It is not for us to point out where the defect lies, because it is so easy to lose money in the manufacture of iron, from bad management, that one maker in the same district in England will be making good dividends, while his nearest neighbor in the same field will be losing money. Our object is principally to bring to public notice a very great improvement which has been made in the manufacture of iron by Joseph Dixon, Esq., of Jersey City. A specimen of plate iron made by the new process has been left at our office for inspection by E. L. Norfolk. This plate is perfectly free from flaws, and all those imperfections of unequal texture, which belong to all the plate wrought iron we have examined. We understand that the process is but little more expensive (if any), than the present modes of making plate iron, and yet so beautiful and uniform in texture is the surface, that it will make a splended plate for the engraver's art.

For boiler iron especially, this improvement appears to be a grand remedy for defective plates, by which so many accidents have been caused, two of which with sad results, have taken place near this city during the present year. In the interior of boiler plates there are often times blisters, which sooner or later lead to an accident, if not noticed in season to prevent the same. We understand that no blister nor flaw can possibly exist in plates manufactured by the new process.—They are therefore much stronger than the common ones, for no boiler is stronger than the weakest part of it.

Iron is perhaps the most sensitive of all metals; it is affected for good or evil, in its manufacture, by very minute impurities and inattention. It is our opinion that the iron manufacture is far, very far, from having attained to anything like perfection. We hope that as many of our people who have time, opportunity and means, will devote part of their attention to experiments for improving its manufacture both as it respects quality and the reduction of cost.

Interesting Patent Case—Colt's Pistols.

Samuel Colt, against Young & Leavit.

This case has occupied much of the public attention, inasmuch as the speeches of counsel were published in some of our daily papers. The plaintiff was Samuel Colt, the well-know inventor of the fire-arms which bear his name, and the defendants were a well-known firm in this city. The plaintiff prayed for an injunction to restrain the defendants from infringing his patent. The case has been before the court in this city more than a single term. The presiding Judge Nelson reserved his decision until the 10th inst., when he gave it against the defendants and ordered an injunction.

The defence set up was, that the invention claimed in the patent was not new, the main point of which is that the breech is revolved by drawing the trigger. This combination of the revolving breech with the lock, Judge Nelson considered to have been fully substantiated as belonging to Colt—his invention.

Colt's patent was extended for 7 years in 1849, and has therefore four years to run before it expires. Col. Colt himself is now in England with a number of American mechanics, to establish the manufacture of his fire-arms there, at the solicitations of the British government.

Materials for Building Houses.

We have received communications relative to building houses—the most economical materials to employ, &c. There is a natural law which comes into operation in man at a certain age; that law is self-reliance. It is this law which prompts all men to love their own fire-sides best, and which causes grief and many unpleasant forebodings, when the heart is not satisfied because it hath no ingle side it can call its own, round which loved and happy faces sit and sing and call it "home."

A man is relieved of many cares when he has a free home and fire-side of his own. It would add greatly to the happiness of every honest and industrious man if he was lord of his own house—the baron of his own cottage. In and around our cities this is possible to a very limited number of our workers. The causes which operate against this are the high price of building lots and materials for building with. Timber is becoming dearer every year, and will continue to do so. Bricks are high in price, so is iron and stone. Is there no other building material which is cheaper and which will answer a good purpose? There is; Mr. Fowler, of the firm of Fowlers & Wells, of this city, with his real practical mind, has built a house near Fishkill, on the Hudson River, the walls of which are made of prepared gravel. The cheapness of the material, the unique character and comforts of the building have engaged much attention. Walls 256 feet in circumference, and 11 feet 4 inches high, cost seventy-nine dollars to put up, and this amounts to as many feet as are embraced in a house 45 feet long, 25 feet wide, and 21 feet high—two stories and a-half. The materials of which the walls are made are compounded of 8 bushels of slacked lime, sixteen bushels of sand, and about sixty bushels of fine and coarse gravel. This is thoroughly mixed up together in a bed to a proper consistency, and laid up in walls with standard guide boards, braces, &c., to lay the wall solid and straight. This wall has stood summer heats and winter frosts well. It is plastered inside and out, and is both comfortable and solid. The inside walls are made of studs lathed and plastered, but we only refer to the outside wall as being made of a cheap material, which is asserted to stand the weather perfectly, and is getting harder and better every day. Messrs. Fowlers & Wells have published a small book entitled "A Home for All," which contains diagrams and a full description of the whole method of building such a house. We have a strong predilection for brown freestone as a building material, but it is far too dear for common houses. Many improvements in brick machines have been made within a few years, but the price of bricks is still high. Some buildings are now being erected in this city of drab colored bricks, but we like the red kind better.—Every improvement which is made to cheapen the materials for building houses adds greatly to the comfort and happiness of the people, because many are thereby enabled to secure homes for themselves, which otherwise they would not be able to do.

New Invention for Steamships.

Wm. W. Hubbell attorney and counsellor at law, Philadelphia, informs us that he has perfected an invention for a new method of propelling steamships, which he states is more efficient and constant in its propulsive principle than side wheels or propeller screws. He has shown it and discussed its merits with some able marine engineers, who have agreed that for war steamers it will surpass anything now on the ocean for speed, constancy of action and invincibility. The rudder and every mast may be shot away, yet the ship will not be deprived of its speed or management. He intends to take out patents in foreign countries as well as for home. The improvements may be expected to be fully illustrated and described in our columns when the inventor returns from the south (where he has gone on business), during some part of next month.

To Competitors for the Prizes.

Our subscribers will bear in mind that the time is fast approaching when the valuable prizes offered by us, for the four largest lists of mail subscribers, will have to be awarded. They are as follows:—A Silver Pitcher, worth $60; a set of the Iconographic Encyclopedia, worth $35; Dempsey's Machinery of the Nineteenth Century, and C. B. Stuart's great work upon the Naval Dry Docks of the United States. The winner of the first prize can receive the Silver Pitcher or $60—we are not particular which is chosen. Several lists have been forwarded to us, and we therefore advise those of our friends who are really in earnest, to be expeditious. We should be sorry to find some hard-working zealous subscriber losing his chance merely from not sending us in his list of subscribers early enough; we therefore hope sincerely, that no such disagreeable inadvertency will occur—but occur it must if there be any procrastinating, for the prizes will be decidedly awarded at the fixed time. After this notice no blame can be attached to us. If any of our friends allows the occasion to pass by it will be his own fault—he will have no one to blame but himself. Never mind waiting to get a few more subscribers—send up your lists with what names you have already got, and do not lose your chance.

Our Canada and Nova Scotia friends are reminded that they are free to compete likewise for the valuable prizes above specified. In the case, however, of subscribers out of the States, fifty cents additional to the published rates of each yearly subscriber must be sent as we are obliged to pre-pay that amount of postage. We hope that they will not be behind-hand in competing.

Changes in the Patent Office.

During the present year many changes have taken place in the Patent Office. Never since it was instituted have so many rumors been circulated about doings in and connected with this department of the government. Three Chief-Examiners have resigned within four months, and the Commissioner of Patents—Mr. Ewbank—within two weeks. The Examiners who resigned were Dr. Page, Mr. Fitzgerald, and Mr. Cooper. The former two were the oldest Chief-Examiners in the office, and Mr. Cooper as Assistant and Chief-Examiner had been in the office ten years. The classes of inventions relating to electrical apparatus, weaving, spinning, hydraulics, and civil engineering, have now new Chief-Examiners.

It is the first instance, we believe, in the history of the Patent Office, that a Commissioner has resigned. Since the inauguration of General Taylor, the changes of government officers have been exceedingly numerous. With the causes of Mr. Ewbank's resignation we are not specifically informed; we could present some of the rumored causes which led to it, but this would not be right. S. H. Hodge, Esq, is now Commissioner of Patents, and all our readers who have personal business to transact with the Patent Office, should address their communications to him as Commissioner of Patents.

A Large and Small Wheel.

We expect that some of our Pennsylvania friends in Muncy, (and none others) will answer the article in last week's Scientific American, and tell how much the small wheel slides. Let the answer be short; a few lines will do it; and those who see through it will no doubt be able to point out an *error* of an important but single short word, in the article to which we refer.

Foreign Patents.

We would again remind our readers that we are transacting a very large Patent Agency business in all foreign countries. On the first of October, the day on which the Patent Law Amendment Act went into operation, provisional protection was extended to a number of cases in which we are acting agents."