sparks to be first diverted outwardly, then deflected downwardly and centrally against the inner walls of the upper furnace, whence they fall into the lower closed funnel, and are drawn (by a current induced by the force of the next blast) up between the inner walls of the lower furnace and the outer walls of theupper funnel into the main current, in which they circulate.

An improvement in that class of Curtain Fixtures in which the rolling curtains are adapted for lowering from the top has been devised by Mr. William W. Pickford, of East Palestine, Ohio. In this improved curtain fixture the holders and clamps for the curtain cords are arranged in a novel and ingenious manner.

A Tail Piece for Guitars has been invented by Mr. Jacob Abraham, of Silver City, New Mexico, which is made of metal or other suitable material and is combined with a flanged foot rest, the object being to effect the vibration and at the same time prevent cutting or scratching the box of the guitar.

Communications.

Our Washington Correspondence.

To the Editor of the Scientific American:

As a result of a recent competitive examination the following promotions have been made in the corps of assistant examiners in the Patent Office: To be first assistant examiners—R. L. B. Packard, of Maine; L. B Wynne, of the District of Columbia; S. Brashears, of Maryland; and F. S. Williams, of New York. To be second assistant examiners—F. B. Pierce, of New York; H. S. Underwood, of Mississippi; George P. Fishee, of Delaware; and R. Mason, of Tennessee.

PATENT OFFICE MATTERS.

The Commissioner of Patents has recently sent a circular to the examining corps which is causing some little excitement among the attorneys practicing before the office.

The circular requires that the examiners shall exercise greater care in cases before them to see that the state of the art prior to the applicant's invention is stated specifically in the specification, and where it is an improvement on a previously patented article, it must be so stated, in order that any one reading the patent, even if unskilled in patent matters, would see not only what is claimed, but would see set forth clearly the exact state of the art upon which the invention was based. The fact that, owing to the great number of patents granted with claims of a trivial nature, our patent system has grown into considerable disrepute, the Commissioner thinks is sufficient reason for greater care in this respect.

Many of the attorneys are of the opinion that the ideas set forth in the Commissioner's circular cannot be carried out, as it would be impossible to set forth the state of the art in many cases without making the specification of an inordinate length. It is probable, however, that the office will not require such a full statement as to cumber up the specification in this manner, but only when it can be clearly seen that the alleged invention is only a slight improvement on a previous machine or device that it shall be so stated, instead of having the specification so worded as to convey the idea to unskilled readers that the patent covers the whole machine or device shown therein, when it really covers only some little point that is of very little value to any one and only useful as a means of obtaining a patent. There is no doubt that many worthy people have been badly swindled through purchasing "rights" in patents of this character, and if such swindles can be avoided it will certainly help to sustain our patent system against the outcry now being made against it.

In the application for the reissue of the patent No. 19,786, granted to John L. Mason March 30, 1858, and extended in 1872, an appeal having been taken from the Board of Appeals, who had rejected the first and fourth claims, the Commissioner affirmed the decision on the ground that the first claim, which was for "a screw chuck or former for caps of sheet metal provided with a rounded thread," was met by the reference cited, which showed a V-shaped thread only, as it required but the smallest amount of intelligence to enable one to take off the cutting edge formed by the apex of the thread so as to make it round, when it was found that it cut the metal of the cap during the process of spinning. With regard to the fourth claim, which was for a screw chuck or former made tapering toward its outer end, the Commissioner decided that as screw chucks were old and tapering formers were also old, there was nothing patentable in combining the two, as their functions were in no wise modified by the combination.

In the interference case of Adelbert Gates (deceased) *vs.* Hiram Rowe, motion having been made that the preliminary statement be amended, and it appearing that said statement was made by the brother of the inventor, acting as administrator, who, since filing the statement, had discovered that one E. P. Bennett, who had recently returned home after an absence of several months, had knowledge that the invention was of earlier date than that given in the statement, and that it was unknown by the administrator at the time of making the statement that said Bennett knew anything of the invention, the Commissioner decided that the statement ought to be amended, especially in view of the fact that no testimony had been taken in behalf of Gates.

In the interference case of Stearns *vs.* Wood, in which the parties occupied the relative positions of employer and workman, the Assistant Commissioner affirmed the decision of the Board of Appeals to the effect that, although the workman may have been the first to suggest and describe a certain portion of the device in controversy, yet, in view of the decision of the Supreme Court in the case of the Union Paper Collar Company *vs.* Van Deusen *et al.*, 7 O. G., p. 919, that a person having made a new invention and employingothers to carry it out, if the employed persons make discoveries auxilliary to the plan and preconceived design of the employer, the suggested improvements are in general to be regarded as the property of the latter, and may be embodied in his patent as part of his invention, the priority would have to be awarded to the employer.

An appeal having been taken in the case of Chas. McEvoy for the registration of the word "Hibernicon" as a trade mark, to be used in connection with an exhibition, against the decision of the examiner of trade marks, the Assistant Commissioner decided that the trade marks which the law contemplated referred solely to marks to be used on articles of trade, and that the purpose of a trade mark was to denote the origin or ownership of the articles of trade to which it was attached, and that therefore a trade mark connected with an amusement was something not contemplated by the law, and the examiner's decision was therefore affirmed.

The Commissioner in Kilmer's interference case has again decided, as on a former occasion, reported some weeks ago, that he would not allow a preliminary statement to be amended where the testimony of the opposite party had been taken.

In the case of the application of Getzendanner and Margreardt, which had been required to be divided by the examiner, because one of the devices related to a harness collar having a peculiar contrivance for automatically connecting the two parts of the collar at the lower ends, and the other device consisted of a suspending apparatus for holding the harness up until the horse should be placed thereunder, when the harness was released and dropped on the horse, the Commissioner decided that in view of the fact that each of the devices in question operated independently of the other, that the harness would act just as well without the suspending device, and that the latter could be used to hold up a collarhaving a totally different fastening, or any other article, the case ought to be divided, as a strict attention to the maintaining of the classification of the office was necessary both for the good of the public and for the convenience of the office in making searches.

The St. Louis Beef Canning Company having applied for a trade mark for canned meats in which the figure of an ox was the symbol desired to be registered, the examiner of trade marks refused it on the ground that it was descriptive; the Assistant Commissioner reversed the decision on the ground that as the trade mark was designed to be applied to all kinds of meat, it could hardly be considered as descriptive, certainly not to all other meats except beef, and as to the latter the name of the figure represented was different from the commercial name of the article contained within. In this respect the use of a tomato on canned tomatoes or an ear of corn on canned corn differed essentially, and as these considerations give rise at least to a doubt, it should be given in favor of the applicant.

A recent visit to the burned district shows that considerable progress is being made with the work of restoring the partially destroyed models. About 140 hands are employed at present, and the interior of the north hall has the appearance of a large machine shop. Long rows of benches furnished with lathes and vises extend from one end to the other, and on which a variety of work is carried on. Large numbers of models are being picked out which when cleaned and painted look as good as new, and many of them I have no doubt look better than before the fire.

The first number of the *Patent Office Gazette* for 1878 has just been issued, and is a great improvement on that of last year. The form of the page has been changed from three to two columns, which allows of a much better display of the engravings, as under the old style the engravings had to be so much cut down as to render them almost unintelligible in many cases.

It has been the practice with many persons desiring to begin the business of a patent agent to get a position in the Patent Office in some way, and then, as soon as they had a slight knowledge of the practice of the office, resigning on purpose to open a patent agency. In this manner they got Uncle Sam to pay them while they were educating themselves for their own private business. This, however, is not the worst of the matter, for some of them took lists of all partially rejected cases they could find and then wrote to the inventors, boasting of the facilities that their connection with the Patent Office had given them, and stating that unless they were employed, the cases referred to would finally be rejected, and in this manner took a large amount of business out of the hands of experienced practitioners. Worse than this, one or two have been credited, or rather discredited, with rejecting cases previous to their leaving the office, so that they might have a chance to get them passed afterward, when acting as agents. To prevent these practices a bill has been brought into the House by Mr. Douglass, which provides that it shall be unlawful for any officer, clerk or employé of the Patent Office to act as counsel, agent or attorney in the prosecution of applications for letters patent, or of any interest in letters patent, or be interested, directly or indirectly, in any firm established for prosecuting patent applications, or of any interest in letters patent, nor by any manner or means to aid in the prosecution of such patent applications within two years next after he shall have ceased to be such officer, clerk or employé; that any person in the service of the United States violating the provisions of this act by knowingly recognizing any such ex-officer, clerk or employé in any application for letters patent or any interest in letters patent as counsel, attorney or agent, shall be, *ipso facto*, discharged from the service of the United States; and the District Attorney shall proceed by writ of quo warranto, against any person in the United States service who shall violate the provisions of this act, and shall prosecute the same to the removal of such person from office. Bills similar to this have been introduced into Congress several times before, but have never passed, and it is doubted if Congress has power to pass such a law under the Constitution.

A CHANCE FOR INVENTORS.

I find the following in one of our dailies:

"The Post Office Department is considering a large number of petitions from persons in all sections of the country who desire to transmit samples of flour through the mails at third class rates. Heretofore the principal difficulty in the way of compliance with the petitions is the objectionable nature of the material sought to be transmitted. Under the postal regulations, as now existing, articles transmitted in the mails must be so put up as to enable postmasters to ascertain the contents without damaging the wrappers, and flour cannot be so inclosed without damaging the other contents of mail pouches. It is believed that, could this difficulty be overcome, a very considerable revenue might be derived to the department from the increased business that would be brought thereto by the large dealers in the commodity referred to. The matter is receiving careful consideration, and if any way can be devised to overcome the obstacle, a reasonable latitude of construction will be given to the law governing the transmission of third class matter through the mails."

This seems to be a good chance for inventors to get up some new style of envelope or bag for mailing purposes, to be used for samples of flour, sugar, tea, and many other articles in the grocery line, that will not spill the contents among the other mail matter and yet allow of a ready examination being made by the Post Office authorities without damaging the covering.

ANOTHER RAID ON "DESERT" LANDS.

The Commissioner of the General Land Office has under consideration a bill referred to him by the House Committee on Public Lands, to authorize O. W. Wozencraft and his associates to irrigate the "desert" west of Fort Yuma, in California, which is said to contain about 3,500,000 acres. The bill provides that the company shall be allowed ten years to supply this tract with water from the Colorado river by aqueducts, ditches, or canals sufficient for the purposes of travel and emigration over the said desert, and also for irrigation. The land so irrigated at the end of ten years is to be conveyed in fee simple to Wozencraft and his associates at such price as shall be fixed by a commission to be appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. This tract is supposed to have been at some remote period the bed of a sea or a part of the Gulf of California, and is represented as being about 200 feet below the Colorado, from which it is proposed to take the water for irrigation, etc. In order to avoid the surrounding high lands, the water will be taken round through the upper portion of the Mexican State of Sonora, but the distance the water supply has to be taken is not mentioned in the bill.

It would appear, however, from the official surveys in the Land Office that this said-to-be useless waste or "desert" of 3,500,000 acres is already capable of growing tolerably abundant vegetation. It is stated therein that when the Colorado overflows into the New river, that sinuates through the so-called desert, leaving a little water in the hollow places, "weeds" spring up which in thirty days grow to a height of 12 feet and a diameter of 14 inches. The mosquito bean also flourishes here. This bean grows on trees, not vines, and supplies the nomads of that region with abundant shade and cheap food, and it is stated that a single tree feasted twenty mules for three consecutive nights, without apparently making a diminution of the crop! If land that is so prolific in vegetation as this is called a "desert," what must fertile regions be?

THE NATIONAL OBSERVATORY.

A bill has been introduced into the Senate and debated to some extent, looking to the removal of the Observatory to some position which shall possess the advantages of healthfulness, clearness of atmosphere, and convenience of access, which the present location lacks, as the river fogs obscure the sky, rendering observations at many times impossible; the malaria sickens the officials; the hill on which it is built has been so cut into in laying out streets surrounding it that access is difficult, and the traffic in the neighborhood affects the instruments. In addition to this the buildings are so old as to be falling to pieces, and are not worth repairing. These old buildings, which the recent "Fire Commission" stated were regular tinder boxes, contain a valuable library, priceless records, and the finest telescope in the world; and the Senate committee therefore agreed to report a bill appropriating $300,000 for the purpose of erecting a new building, which it is believed will be put up on the hills north of the city. It is intended to purchase about thirty acres of ground, so that the Observatory will not be interfered with by the smoke of surrounding factories or dwellings.

Washington, D. C. OCCASIONAL.