

Scientific American.

ESTABLISHED 1845.

MUNN & CO., Editors and Proprietors.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY AT NO. 37 PARK ROW, NEW YORK.

O. D. MUNN. A. E. BEACH.

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VOL. XXXIX., No. 8. [NEW SERIES.] Thirty-third Year.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 1878.

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EDISON AND THE UNSEEN UNIVERSE.

Hitherto man's knowledge of the extent of the universe has been bounded by the limits of vision. During the day, when the range of sight is narrowed by the sun's excessive brightness, we see but a minute fraction even of the little world we inhabit. At night a wider reach of vision is possible, and some thousands of stellar and planetary bodies are added to the domain of positive knowledge, thus enlarging enormously man's idea of the magnitude of the universe.

That the most powerful of telescopes enables us to reach the limit of the universe no one imagines. See as much as we may, more—perhaps infinitely more—lies beyond. So, at least, all experience leads us to infer; but our positive knowledge ends with the limit of vision.

Must this always be so? Hitherto science has given no hint of the possibility of exploring the vast and mysterious beyond, from which no visible ray of light has ever been detected, or is ever likely to be detected, by the most far-reaching and sensitive of optic aids. But now there comes a promise of an extension of positive knowledge to fields of space so remote that light is tired out and lost before it can traverse the intervening distance. A new agent or organ of scientific sense for space exploration has been given to the world in the tasimeter, by which it is possible not only to measure the heat of the remotest of visible stars, out, Mr. Edison believes, to detect by their invisible radiations stars that are unseen and unseeable! Mr. Edison's plan is to adjust the tasimeter to its utmost degree of sensitiveness, then attach it to a large telescope, and so explore those parts of the heavens which appear blank when examined by telescopes of the highest penetrative power.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN SALT MAKING.

Judging from articles in some of our recent exchanges the salt manufacturers of Syracuse, who have so long enjoyed a monopoly, are beginning to recognize the fact that the methods which have so long prevailed for the manufacture of this commodity require considerable modification in order to encourage continued or further investment of capital; that the conservatism which has for so many years held fast to the old system, is beginning to find that it is too crude and expensive for these times of sharp competition in the business, and is at last not indisposed to admit that some change might be advantageous.

The salt block of to-day consists of a horizontal brick flue 90 to 110 feet long, or thereabouts, having at one end from 50 to 75 square feet of grate surface, and at the other an upright smoke stack, while arranged all along on the top of this flue are open circular iron pans for the evaporation of the salt water.

When in operation a large amount of soft coal (two or three tons) is kept burning on the grate in order to produce sufficient burning gas to fill the flue throughout its length; but of course the pans at the grate end evaporate the water four or five times more rapidly than those at the other end. The water in the pans is constantly replenished until several inches of salt are deposited, which is then removed with shovels, and the evaporation renewed.

The excessive consumption of fuel and the unequal temperature in the flue are the most immediately apparent objections to this method, but one of no less importance lies in the fact that the deposit in the pans of several inches of salt constitutes such a non-conductor of heat that a large portion of the thermal value of the fuel used is lost.

The two first objections may be overcome by improved methods of firing; one of which would be to build a cylindrical fireplace (which should be fed from the top), lined with a coil of pipe for superheating steam, then to make within it a fire of anthracite culm, and force up through the burning coals a jet of the hot steam, which, first passing through the coil, should carry with it into the mass of fuel sufficient air to maintain active combustion. The steam, taking air with it, becomes decomposed by passing through the hot coals, and creates a very high temperature and a long and full hydrogen gas flame, which, extending throughout the length of a "block," would secure a far more equitable heat than is now done.

This method of firing was in successful practice and brought to our notice eighteen years ago at certain experimental works in Philadelphia, but since then we had heard nothing of it until, quite recently, we find it is strongly advocated by scientists in England.

Another method of very economical firing for salt works would, in our opinion, be found in the use of pulverized bituminous coal, by which a great saving in cost and amount of fuel, and a long, hot flame throughout the flue, could be secured; and this plan, we understand, is about to be tried by parties in Pomeroy, Ohio.

The objection to the use of pans for evaporation has been removed by substituting for them revolving cylinders, whose continual movement prevents the local deposit of the salt and thereby greatly economizes or makes of use the volume of heat now lost. The expense of the plant for this system seems to be the only bar to its general adoption.

THE NEW PATENT LAW OF SPAIN.

The splendid exhibit which Spain and the Spanish colonies displayed at Philadelphia was a surprise to many. For a century or more the curse of bad government had weighed so heavily upon the industries of that once powerful country that the recovery of its former standing among nations was regarded by most people as practically hopeless. The numerous prizes won by Spain at the Vienna Exhibition, however, had clearly indicated that the period of Spanish decadence had come to an end, and that the spirit of the nineteenth century had at last, though tardily, gained a lodgment there. The energy and industrial earnestness manifested in connection with the Centennial Exhibition proved that Spain was becoming once more a power in the world—industrially if not politically. A further and if anything more striking evidence that the country is in earnest in regard to industrial progress is seen in the patent law which has just gone into operation.

Hitherto patents have been granted in Spain only under such onerous conditions as to practically exclude the majority of inventors, foreign inventors especially, from any share in the very limited benefits offered. The new law is comparatively liberal, placing foreigners on the same footing as natives, and the interests of the inventor are well protected. The duration of patent rights has been largely extended, the fees have been greatly reduced, and a single patent now covers not only Spain, but all the Spanish colonies—the Balearic Islands, the Canaries, Cuba, Porto Rico, the Philippines, and Fernando Po.

Heretofore separate patents had to be taken out for each of these possessions, each costing several times more than is now charged for all. Certificates of additions, covering any improvement or modification of patents, are granted any time within the first year; and subsequently the inventor is given the preference for new patents on improvements. Patents may be inherited, sold, or donated, the same as other property. The time allowed for the official working of patents is extended from one year to two. Infringements are punishable by fines, confiscation of machinery and products for the benefit of the patentee, and, if repeated, by imprisonment. The life of a patent has been extended to twenty years.

Inventors and manufacturers will readily appreciate the value and importance of the field laid open to them by this law—certainly that part of it embraced in the Spanish West Indies. The commercial relations of our country with Cuba and Porto Rico are steadily increasing in scope and value, and the nearness of those islands to us must ultimately give us the command of their markets.

The protection which patented inventions now enjoy there cannot but prove of signal advantage to our manufacturers in many ways, not the least of which may be the shutting out from Spanish-American markets of British and German counterfeits of American products, by which Americans have so long suffered, in pocket as well as in credit.

As our readers are doubtless all aware, the publishers of this paper are also solicitors of American and foreign patents. Their advertisement, with special reference to Spanish patents, in another column, will be of interest to inventors and manufacturers.

LOCAL ENCOURAGEMENT OF MANUFACTURES.

A member of the Baltimore City Council proposes to that body the appointment of a permanent commission of prominent citizens, whose special duty shall be to promote the establishment of manufactures in that city. Among the means proposed for securing that end is the proffer of sites for manufacturing establishments at low rates, the exemption from municipal taxation of the buildings and machinery used, and the granting of special water rates. Speaking of this proposition the Baltimore Sun pertinently remarks that except in rare instances and under peculiar circumstances it is always by a combination of manufactures and commerce that cities grow populous and wealthy. Every new manufacturing establishment brings an accession of citizens—who require additional houses, and whose wants must be supplied by additional artisans and shopkeepers. The wealthiest States are the manufacturing States, and they are the ones which sustain a numerous population. Rhode Island, for example, depending almost entirely upon manufactures, has a larger population for its area than any other in the Union. So with cities. Philadelphia, which until recently has had no foreign commerce worth speaking of, has grown populous and wealthy within a little more than thirty years through the numerous manufactures that have been established within her limits.

The gathering of eight or ten thousand inhabitants about the mills and manufactories in the suburb of Baltimore known