

Correspondence.

The Great Meteor of March 9, 1882.

To the Editor of the Scientific American:

At about eleven o'clock on the night of March 9, 1882, a meteor of great size and brilliancy exploded over Kosciusco County, Indiana, in latitude 41° 20' N., longitude 8° 50' W. from Washington. The following account of the phenomenon is derived from the Warsaw *Republican* of March 25, 1882 (edited by Quincy A. Hossler, Esq.), and from a letter written by Albert Parker, Esq., an intelligent and trustworthy observer.

Mr. Parker was one of a party of five young men who, at the time of the explosion, were riding in an open carriage or wagon about eight miles northeast of Warsaw, the county seat of Kosciusco County. The sky was entirely covered with clouds, and snow was rapidly falling. Consequently the meteor could not be seen till it had passed below the clouds; and as the explosion took place within less than a second after its appearance no trustworthy estimate could be formed of the time of flight. The motion of the meteor was from south to north, and was accompanied by a noise resembling that of a rapidly moving train of cars. Its color was a bright red, and its apparent size nearly equal to that of the full moon. According to Mr. Parker it was nearly overhead—probably a little north of the zenith—at the time of its explosion. The report was distinctly heard at Warsaw, and excited much attention from the fact of its occurring during a heavy snowstorm. The light of the meteor "was so brilliant as to blind any person looking directly at it, and notwithstanding the storm lightened the entire vicinity as clearly as the brightest day at noon." To Mr. Parker and his companions the explosion and report were very nearly simultaneous. No aerolites, however, if any fell in the vicinity, have yet been found.

DANIEL KIRKWOOD.

Bloomington, Ind., April 10.

A Phebee Bird's Victory.

To the Editor of the Scientific American:

I have noticed communications in late issues of your journal upon the subject of two and three story birds' nests. Permit me to relate the following, which I will personally vouch for. Some years ago a phebee bird had built her nest on a small projection under a piazza of my father's house, and occupied the place for several successive years unmolested. One spring a robin took possession of it before the arrival of the rightful owner, and would not give it up. The quarrel between the birds was noted by the members of the family, but nothing more was thought about it until fall, when the peculiar shape of the nest attracted attention. Upon examination it proved to be a double nest—one built upon the other—and in the lower one was found the vandal robin, dead. The phebee bird had built another nest, completely inclosing the robin, and reared her young upon the grave of her enemy.

E. H. DAVIS.

Avon, N. Y., April 8, 1882.

RECENT INVENTIONS.

Mr. George F. Oehrl, of Belle Vernon, Pa., has patented an improved cattle car, which can be converted from a single to a double deck car, and *vice versa*, rapidly and conveniently. The cattle car is constructed with a vertically adjustable platform provided with guide rollers running in grooved vertical tracks, which platform can be raised or lowered by means of chains attached to this platform and to shafts journaled in the top of the car. When in a lowered position the platform rests on suitable fixed supports projecting from the inner sides of the car and on removable cattle guards in the doorways, and when raised is supported by pivoted L-shaped latches. The car is provided on each side with two independent gates, one above the other.

Heretofore a sheet metal plate having ornamental figures painted on its outer face, forming a screen and fitting over the mouth of a fireplace, and adapted to slide in grooves in the jambs, and raised by weights attached to cords secured to the upper end of the metal plate and passing over pulleys, has been employed as a combined fire screen and fender. In this construction, when the sheet metal plate forming the combined fire screen and fender becomes hot, the paintings are liable to be destroyed and the fender only remains, and when the fender is hot and raised it is extremely liable to set on fire the wooden mantelpiece surrounding it, and the construction above described also requires an addition to the upper part of the mantelpiece. To remedy these defects, Mr. Thomas J. Suggs, of Fort Gaines, Ga., has invented a combined fire screen and fender, which consists of two sheet metal plates sliding in grooves in the jambs, the outer one provided with ornamental figures painted on its outer face and constituting the screen, and the inner sliding plate forming the fender, with a single balance weight for each sliding plate, the fender, when lowered, protecting the screen, when down, from rain and soot falling down the chimney, and preventing the screen from being overheated and the paintings on its outer face from being destroyed.

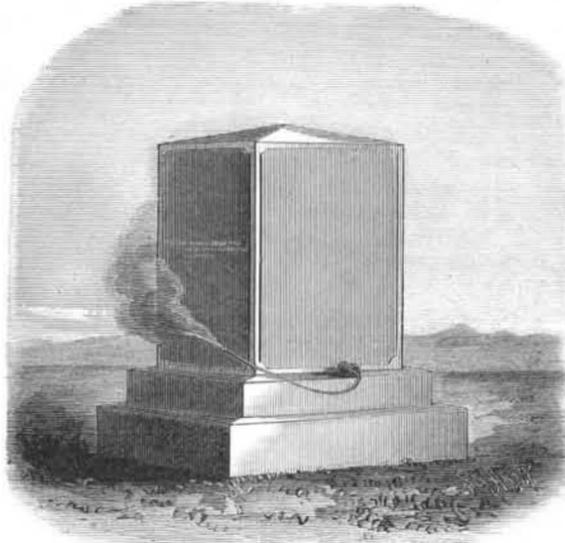
Mr. George Gough, of Brooklyn, N. Y., has patented an improved cover attachment for jewelry cases, butter dishes, sugar boxes, bonbonnières, and other like articles, whereby the cover can be raised by pushing backward the bail handle of the case or box.

Mr. Franklin P. Athey, of Middleway, W. Va., has pa-

tented a poke to prevent horses from jumping fences. It will choke the horse and force him away from the fence when he approaches the fence and attempts to rise into position to make the leap. The invention consists of a long slotted reach pivoted to the bow which goes around the neck of the horse, in combination with a cross frame which is also pivoted to the bow and connected to the reach by a cross-piece passing loosely through the slot, the reach being formed with a rearward extension, the end of which is provided with a cross-piece or head which comes against the throat of the horse, the rear part of the frame coming against the breast of the horse.

THE ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THE ANDRE MONUMENT.

A year or so ago a small monument of granite was set up at Tappan, Rockland county, N. Y., by Mr. Cyrus W. Field, to mark the spot where the British spy, Major

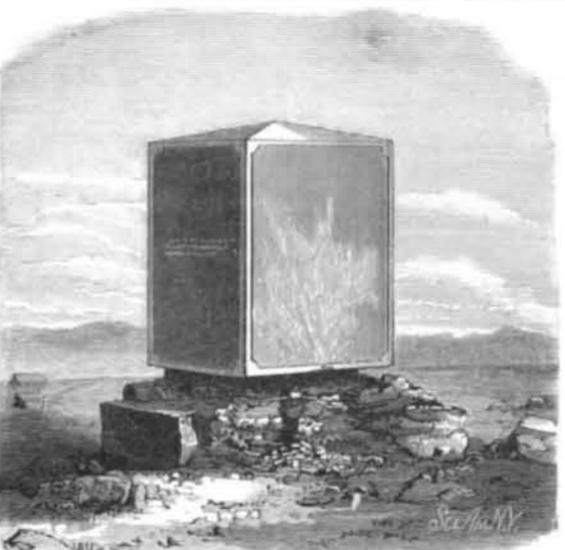


THE ANDRE MONUMENT BEFORE THE EXPLOSION.

André, was hanged in 1780. Major André, it will be remembered, was the agent of General Clinton, commanding the British forces in New York, in his negotiation with the traitor Arnold for the surrender of the important American position at West Point, on the Hudson. On his way back to New York, Major André was captured at Tarrytown; and, his errand being discovered, he was taken across the river to Washington's headquarters at Tappan, where he was tried and executed.

For some reason—probably a personal spite against Mr. Field—two attempts have lately been made to destroy the proper memorial which he had placed upon the historic spot of André's execution.

The first time the inscription was battered and partly obliterated. The next attempt would appear to have been made with a dynamite cartridge, placed upon the base, with the expectation, probably, that the explosion would overturn or shatter the main granite block. The vandal must have had but little knowledge of the action of high explosives under such conditions, or he would have placed the cartridge on the top of the monument, thus assuring its destruction. As it was placed, the base alone suffered seriously. The appear-



THE ANDRE MONUMENT AFTER THE EXPLOSION.

ance of the monument before and after the explosion may be seen in the accompanying cuts. The downward thrust of a dynamite explosion in air is strikingly shown in the smashing of the base, while the adjacent stone was but slightly injured.

Wood Carving in New York.

A marked and rapid increase has been made during the past ten years in the demand for fine wood carving, and with it a corresponding increase in the number of skilled workmen employed. Ten years ago the hundred skilled woodcarvers in the city were almost wholly engaged upon fine furniture. Now nearly six hundred carvers are at work for two firms, and as many as a thousand accomplished artists find employment in the city, the larger part of them upon the interior decoration of houses.

A writer for the *Evening Post*, who has lately investigated this (for us) new industry, says that the rapid immigration of skilled carvers from Europe has had the effect of reducing

wages considerably yet they are still good. The very finest workmen, especially those in the possession of some secret processes of doing difficult work, receive wages as high as eight dollars a day. The average pay of good wood carvers is from four to five dollars a day. The process of ebonizing cherry-wood, for instance, used by one of the firms visited, is a secret known only to the workman who does it. Even the members of the firm have no right to ask what his secret is. The fact that he can get a finer, more ebony-like surface than any other man gives him a high value at once. Although the use of mechanical devices for carving wood are so much disliked by the best workmen that sandpaper is forbidden, machinery is now used to cut away the rough parts of a bit of carving. A peculiar tool driven by steam power eats out the wood wherever it goes, and thus a skillful man blocks out in a rough way as much work in a day as twenty men could have done formerly.

The delicacy and lightness of wood-carving, and the good pay which fair workmen receive for it, have already attracted many American apprentices, who, untrammelled by union rules, are making rapid headway, and promise to surpass the foreigners.

Avalanches in Nevada.

Several mining towns in Nevada suffered severely by avalanches during the month of March. The snow falls were excessive—from five to seven feet in the valleys, and more on the mountains—and slides from the steep mountain-sides were frequent. A considerable portion of the village of Genoa, Nevada, was wrecked on the 16th, and many of the inhabitants were killed or injured.

The slide came down the gorge immediately south of Genoa cañon, and swept everything before it as far as Main street. No obstacle seemed to check this moving mountain of snow until it spread out and lost its force on the nearly level piece of land on which Genoa is built, fully a quarter of a mile from the base of the mountain.

During the same storm scores of avalanches fell in and near the town of Lundy, in the Homer mining district. Some fifty or more persons were buried, and several of them killed.

The first avalanche at Lundy, on the afternoon of Wednesday, March 15, was shot over a lofty precipice near the top of Mount Scowden, which rises to a height of 2,500 feet between and at the confluence of Lake and Mill Creek Cañons, overlooking the southern section of the town of Lundy. This body of loose, dry snow dropped about 800 feet, where it struck upon a bench of the mountain, bounded out upon the air compressed beneath it, sailed over the tops of the tallest pines, and came down, vertically, 1,500 feet from its last point of contact with the earth. Several residences were buried by the snow; but no lives were lost. A second avalanche at the same place was still more terrifying. It started from a cliff overhanging the business center of the town, where no snow-slide has ever been known to occur. Three-fourths of the population were in the streets in the course of the avalanche when it started, and they could not flee, as the snow was five feet deep and soft. Fortunately, the slide struck upon a broad and elongated rock mound or bench projecting from the mountain near its base and burst into a cloud of spray, or rather the compact snow was disintegrated and sent whirling with the velocity of fine shot from a gun, the rush of air created by the avalanche being sufficient to lift men from their feet and knock them several steps, and to drive the fine snow into planks of the building on the opposite side of the street.

An avalanche that shot down Mount Discovery, on the west side of Lake Cañon, at 11 o'clock Wednesday night, buried many persons, swept away cabins and mining works, and covered the bodies of some of its victims to a depth of 45 feet. This slide was one-fourth of a mile in width, had run entirely across the cañon, and 500 feet up the steep mountain on the other side.

Many other avalanches occurred on Wednesday night and Thursday, some of them huge ones, that did great damage. Friday morning opened with a clear sky and a stiff, cold wind from the west. Just as the sun was pouring its welcome light into the cañon, and the sleepless inhabitants had assembled on the sidewalk to bid it welcome, three huge avalanches, running parallel and simultaneously, went thundering down the northern slope of Mount Gilcrest, striking the ice of Lake Lundy, and shooting across half a mile to the other shore. The sun had not yet struck the surface of the lake, but as immense clouds of fine, dry snow from the avalanches filled the air the full width of the cañon, the sun poured through and turned the whole mass to eddy gold dust. Shortly afterward two other avalanches of huge proportions had a race into the cañon from the south side—one from Deer Cañon and the other from the side of the mountain just east of it. The first named had a run of two miles before reaching the open country. On reaching the open moraine, it spread out like a pigeon's tail, to a width of nearly half a mile, and rolled down in a huge wall of snow, 300 or 400 feet high. In a space of one hour and a half no less than nine ponderous avalanches were witnessed from the town, some of them running clear across Lake Lundy, and one crossing the creek below.

EXPLOSION OF CARBON BISULPHIDE.—A fatal explosion recently occurred at Bradford, Eng., due to the escape of carbon bisulphide into the public sewer. It appears to have come from a grease works where it had been used in the extraction of oil from seeds.