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Contents.

(Illustrated articles are marked with an asterisk.)

Animals as barometers... 357
Ballast, scientific... 358
Bessemer steel works in the United States... 354
Blast, carbon, for extinguishing fires*... 359
Business and personal... 362
Cana, St. Petersburg... 352
Claw bar, Warwick*... 354
Cupo a. Dr. Otto Gmelin*... 360
Dispatch in the machine shop... 356
Distances, estimat., methods of... 357
Dye, yellow... 357
Electricity from machine belts... 357
Expansion, value of the coefficient of... 354
Feed mechanism for roller mills, Busch's*... 354
Fire escape, Windmeyer's*... 356
Fluid in vapor engines, efficiency of... 352
Forces, natural utilization of in electric lighting... 353
Fountain, Collado's*... 355
Furniture, old and new... 360
Gas, natural, vs. coal... 361
Gumbo... 356
Iridium... 353
Inventions, agricultural... 362
Inventions, engineering... 362
Inventions, index of... 357
Inventions, miscellaneous... 362
Inventors, American, chance for... 360
Iron and steel, burning of... 356
Japan, trade with our... 353
Journey of a million, the... 361
Light, briefly... 357
Locomotive, smoke burning... 357
Mine, iron, a Mexican... 360
New books and publications... 362
Notes and queries... 357
Oysters... 357
Ozone, liquefaction and color of... 358
Pan, vacuum, for sugar making, an immense*... 351
Paper, letter, a sheet of may move a ton a mile... 360
Patent Office business, fiscal year 1883-84... 361
Piano, Mason & Hamlin's*... 355
Pianos, upright, imp. in*... 355
Plow, improved, Stevenson's*... 354
Principles, first, for young mechanics... 357
Relic, an interesting... 354
Rope serving machine*... 354
Sabine, Robert Henry... 356
Slide, beautiful, a... 360
Specially for our readers... 352
Steel uniformity... 352
To news agents... 353
Tramway, elevated, without rails a new*... 358
Women, centenarian... 359
Wood, petrified... 354
Wood, preservation... 361
Working to advantage... 353

TABLE OF CONTENTS OF

THE SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN SUPPLEMENT

No. 466,

For the Week ending December 6, 1884.

Price 10 cents. For sale by all newsdealers.

I. ENGINEERING AND MECHANICS.—A New Method of Constructing Horizontal Tubular Boilers... 7438
Portable Bridges.—With an engraving of the whole structure, and 15 figures of details of Cottrau's portable bridge over the River Sarno, at Castellamare... 7439
Combined Locomotive and Car.—Lehigh Valley Railroad... 7440
The Creators of the Age of Steel.—Bessemer, Siemens, Whitworth, and Gilchrist... 7445
II. TECHNOLOGY.—Test for the Viscosity of Oils.—By W. P. MASON... 7440
The Stanhope Water Softener and Purifier.—With 3 figures... 7443
III. ELECTRICITY, ETC.—Telephoning without Wires.—A abstract of an address by Professor E. J. HOUSTON before the Franklin Institute... 7443
Devices for Making Electric Connections.—16 figures... 7444
IV. ARCHITECTURE.—The Wall.—A lecture delivered by Prof. T. ROGER SMITH to the architectural students at University College.—Foundations.—Materials, ancient and modern.—Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman walls.—Arcades.—Ornamentation of walls... 7442
V. NATURAL HISTORY.—The Luminosity of Luciola Italica... 7446
VI. BOTANY.—Livistona Australis.—With engraving... 7446
VII. MISCELLANEOUS.—The English Nile Expedition.—The Nassef-Kheir passing up the Bab-e-Kebir.—Full page of engravings... 7432
Cairo to Khartoum.—A long and interesting article, with a general view of Cairo, a map of the Nile, and over fifty small engravings of remarkable places, with interesting descriptions; including the Temple of Luxor, Philæ, Denderah, Esneh, Karnak, Thebes, the Great Sphinx, the Great Pyramids, etc... 7432
The Navigation of the Nile... 7437
English Boats for the Nile Expedition.—With engraving... 7438

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THE EFFICIENCY OF FLUID IN VAPOR ENGINES.

Last year, when the so-called thermic motor, or bisulphide carbon engine, was on exhibition here, an effort was made by several engineers to subject the motor to critical tests, to determine how nearly correct were the pretended claims of great economy set up by the motor people. But no disinterested tests were allowed, and purchasers of stock are said to have been badly stuck. Among those who desired to test the "thermic" were the mechanical engineers, Mesers. H. L. Gantt and D. H. Maury. Failing to obtain permission to test the engine in question, they were compelled to confine themselves to a purely theoretical discussion of the subject, and the results they have now given in a very able paper, under the above title, published in Van Nostrand's Magazine.

The authors say: "Rankine, Clausius, and others have proved that the amount of heat transformed into work does not depend upon the fluid which is the conveyer of that heat, but simply upon the limits of temperature between which the fluid is worked. It follows that, theoretically, all fluids are equally efficient in transforming heat into work; it does not follow, however, that all fluids are equally valuable as the working fluid of an engine, for there are other considerations besides efficiency to be taken into account in making choice of a working fluid. We have set ourselves the task of choosing the best working fluid from the following liquids: water, alcohol, ether, bisulphide of carbon, and chloroform."

The final conclusions reached are substantially as follows: "If we limit maximum pressure to that employed in the steam engine, steam is the most efficient fluid we can use. The relative size of cylinder necessary to produce the same power is smaller for steam than it is for the non-aqueous vapors when all have the same initial pressures.

The higher initial pressure, involving higher initial temperature, and consequently greater range of temperature, causes such an increase of efficiency of the non-aqueous vapors as to put them all above that of water, and to cause some doubt as to which would be the best working fluid, judged thermodynamically only.

As the most convenient method of deciding the question just raised, we may compare each of the vapors with that of water, showing their advantages and disadvantages.

The vapor of alcohol gives us 1.4 per cent more efficiency than steam, and requires a cylinder whose volume is only 0.533 of that of the steam cylinder to produce the same power. The disadvantages of alcohol are the high tension of the vapor, the great danger which arises from the ready inflammability of the hot liquid, and its cost.

The use of ether would give us a greater gain in efficiency (2.11 per cent), and would require a still smaller cylinder

(0.535 of that of steam), but it is open to the same objections as alcohol, and in a more marked degree.

The vapor of bisulphide of carbon gives a gain in efficiency of 3.71 per cent, and demands a cylinder 0.550 of that of steam. It, however, is not only open to all the objections that have been stated against alcohol and ether, but it has two which are peculiar to itself, viz., its intensely disagreeable odor and its power of rapidly corroding iron which comes alternately into contact with it and with the air.

The vapor of chloroform, which gives a gain of 3 per cent efficiency, and requires a cylinder 0.761, the volume of that of steam, is not open to the objection of inflammability, but it has so high a cost that it is probably impossible that it can ever be used economically in competition with steam.

All the apparent advantages of the non-aqueous vapors may be gained in the steam engine by an increase of initial pressure; and, as the tendency of modern practice is in that direction, it seems certain that none of the non-aqueous vapors will ever successfully compete with steam."

STEEL UNIFORMITY.

The users of steel for manufacturing purposes, and probably the producers of steel, would welcome any information that would insure uniformity in the product. It appears to be almost a waste of investigating endeavor to argue on the relative merits of steel produced from the iron and that cemented from the bar. The true test of their relative merits is that of use in practice. Yet there seems to be an almost insane desire to turn all our iron into steel, and to produce steel as directly from the ore as pig iron is produced. An enthusiast recently called attention to some lathe and planing tools, cast from iron melted in the cupola in the regular way, and then submitted to a cementing process of brief duration, claiming them to be true cast steel, or its equivalent. And there are others who assume that all the work of cementation and the after processes may be dispensed with, and good tool steel result.

This nonsense will be taken up and repeated by mechanics who may be like the Athenians described in Acts xvii., 21; but there are workers who know steel from carbonized cast iron, and who require for their work all the proper qualities of cast steel.

What is needed in regard to steel information is how to make cast steel to-day, to-morrow, and so on indefinitely, the same. We know that iron can be refined, and that its components can be changed, so as to improve its quality, and so that it can assume some of the qualities of cast steel, and be called steel commercially. But what is required is an equable quality of the steel used for tools.

This equable quality does not exist among the steels made by the best known manufacturers; they may claim it, but the facts of practice do not sustain the claim. All the differences in working different lots from the same makers, in working different bars from the same lot, in working from the same bar, do not come from the difference in treatment and manipulation. A chart of tests comprehending the steels of five of the best known manufacturers of steels show not only a difference between the products of the different establishments, but a great lack of uniformity in the specimens tested from the same maker. An establishment that makes the production of small steel tools a specialty, and is probably as successful as any other in this country, or other countries, has its tools returned for failure in exactly opposite directions—too soft, too brittle. What is to be done? There is the same treatment of, commercially, the same material. The fact is that uniformity in the character of crucible steel is an attainment yet to be reached and it is time that scientific and practical men devoted their attention to this attainment, instead of arguing on the identity of purified iron, called "Bessemer steel," and cast steel per se.

St. Petersburg Canal.

This canal, which has just been completed, is intended to enable ships of large tonnage coming from abroad to reach the port of St. Petersburg direct, and to take in cargoes there, without having recourse to the hitherto inevitable transshipment at Cronstadt. The canal extends from Goutouiew on the Neva as far as the small roadstead of Cronstadt. A branch has been excavated along the Pontilow Railway in the direction of the Catherinhof, an arm of the Neva. The Neva has also been dredged to meet the requirements of the Russian navy, between the canal and the source of the Catherinhof. The length of the canal is 17 3/4 miles, and the length of its branches is 2 1/2 miles.

The bed of the Neva has been dredged for a distance of 5,333 1/2 feet. The canal and the dredged portion of the Neva have a depth of 24 1/4 feet. The depth of the branch varies between 17 1/2 feet and 23 1/2 feet. On the portion of the canal which is protected by embankments, the width of the base is 213 feet for the first four versts from the Neva. This width is carried to 275 1/2 feet for the next 3 1/4 miles, and to 355 1/2 feet for the remainder of the canal, which is the portion of it which is not protected by embankments. The work of excavating the canal was almost entirely carried on by means of nine dredgers. The imperial order prescribing the construction of the canal was signed June 1, 1874, but the works were not actually commenced until September, 1878. Water was admitted into the canal in the presence of the Emperor Alexander III., November 12, 1883; but it is only recently that the canal has been finally made available for the passage of vessels. The work of the canal cost altogether 1,642,464.