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(Illustrated articles are marked with an asterisk.)

Alum, Arizona	357
Aluminum, manufacture of	36
Boats, ships'	362
Brick, enameled, making	360
Business and personal	360
Color contrast*	361
Comet, Brooks, No. 3	353
Eggs by weight Exposition, Louisville, the next.	362
Exposition, Louisville, the next.	354
Fisheries, Gloucester	352
Fly, fluttering, the*	356
Furnace for burning fine coal*	30
Gas, coal, calorific power of	359
Hay loader, Spilman's*	300
Heliogravure, improvements in	99.0
High Bridge, New York city, stone	0.4
steps at* Horse detacher, Teeter's*	351
Horse detacher, Teeter's"	990
House bill 4,458	371
Ice in the sick room	304
Index for books, Trow's*	500
Inventions, engineering	900
Inventions, index of	300
Inventions, miscellaneous	000
Inventor gone, another	308
Lifeboats, steam-An opportun-	

Locks, freight car door, im-proved*.... proved*

Mount Etna, eruption of*

Notes and queries.....

Organs, pneumatic action for, Photographic notes..... Phylloxera, mercurial preventive Phylloxera, mercurial preventive of.
Of.
Planing machine, improved*.
Resting after meals.
Sawmill, circular*.
Scorpion, poisonous, of Mexico.
Shad, young, transportation of.
Sky, night—May and June.
"Slow burning" construction.
Sphinx, Egyptian, the*
Steamers to run 50 miles an hour Trade mark decision.
Trunnels. the, of the ancients.
Vegetation, chemics!*.
Weavers, handloom, the last of the old.

TABLE OF CONTENTS OF

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN SUPPLEMENT No. 544.

For the Week Ending June 5, 1886.

Price 10 cents. For sale by all newsdealers.

Ι	. ARCHÆOLO Study of Me	GY.—Pompeian thods	Painting.—Sir	м.	D.	WYATT'S	8686
I	memorial sci London, by l Size of Sto National A Mr. H. E. (Co	TURE.—GEORGE alpture to his number to his nu	nemory in Royal EAD, R.A.—2 illu Kensington.—F stration, showing	l Cou strat rom plan	rts or ions the d	f Justice, esigns of details of	8686 8686
Ι	II. ASTRONOL tion of nebu	MY.—A New Ind	uction in Speci	trosc	ору.:-	Constitu-	8694
Ι	ARMSTRONG measuring th nitric acid by The Eurho tion by the amine hydro	RY.—The Action of the electromotive is means of an election of ortho-action of Ortho-action of Zinc in Zinc A	f studying the national force between the strometer	em a ters.	of nd pla Thei	alloys by atinum in r produc- aphthyl-	8688 8694
7	Patent Office by C. J. King tricity in this	TY.—History of the control of the co	ered before the sting account of description of t	Fra the he m	nklin growt ore in	Institute h of elec- mportant	

VI. ENGINEERING AND MECHANICS.—On Board of a Torpedo Boat.—A graphic account of a trip on one of the French torpedo BOAL—A graphic account of a trip on one of the French torpedo boats off Toulon.—The detailed construction, operation, and performance of a Whitehead torpordo.—8 illustrations and 3 diagrams.

The Hydraulic Ram.—The principle of the ram applied to large machinery for raising or forcing water, compressing or exhausting air, or motive power.—By H. D. PEARSALL, C.E.—An improved form constructed by the author.—4 figures.

VII. GEOLOGY.—Artesian Well Sinking in the Sierra Nevada.—A correspondent's description of wells sunk in Sierra Valley, 50 miles north of Lake Tahoe, Cal.

Artesian Wells: their Requisite and Qualifying Conditions.—By THOMAS C. CHAMBERLIN.—Concluding paper.—Height of flow.—Detection of flow.—Effect of time on flow.—Character of the water.—Limits in depth.—The art of sinking wells.—Record of drillings.—Areas of favorable, doubtful, and adverse probabilities.—4 figures.

VIII. MEDICINE AND HYGIENE.—Pasteur's Treatment of Rabies.
—An historical and detailed account of Pasteur's system of pro-

IX. MISCELLANY.-Christopher Columbus' Egg.-An ingenious toy -3 ligures.
The Portuguese Royal Carriage.—I illustration.
The Anatomist's Ode to his Mistress.—Written by a medical teacher of New York when a student.

X. GENERAL PHYSICS.—On the Explosion of Homogeneous Gaseous Mixtures.—Determination of the pressures produced by the evils intentice. Determination of the pleasures produced by the explosion of mixtures of inflammable gas with atmospheric air.—
Tabulated results with coal gas and air, and with hydrogen and air.
By Mr. DUGALD CLERK.
Improvements in Air Pumps.—A new arrangement of Sprengel's

XI. TECHNOLOGY.—Facsimile Telegraphy.—The method by ruled squares devised by Lieut. Glen and Lieut.—Col. Melville, of the English Army.—if gures.—

ANOTHER PATENT NULLIFICATION BILL.

We give in this issue the text of a bill (H. R. 4,458) that threatens very gravely the interests of the inventors of this country. It was introduced in the House of Representatives by Mr. R. W. Townshend, of Illinois. During the last two years, it has often been our office to comment on proposed enactments that had the included. The clause is a blow at the equities of the same bad tendency—a tendency to the abridgment of the rights of patentees. We have reiterated the expression of the best jurists that this country has ever seen, that the inventor is a pre-eminently useful member of the community, and deserving of every protection and encouragement that the law can afford him. Judge Story, and other judges only less eminent than he, support this view of the case. Notwithstanding such support, the House of Representatives, for some reason, during the last two years, has had a paroxysm of activity in the production of bills impairing the standing of patentees in the courts.

But the present bill has gone further than most of its predecessors. It has, after consideration, been reported favorably by the Committee on Patents, and | the same erroneous line of action. presumably is in a fair way to pass the House. A glance at its provisions is enough to condemn it. It strikes at the root of our patent system, and threatens a gross injustice to the inventors of the country. A patent already granted is a pledge, and any curtailment of its rights is a violation of that pledge. The effect of the present patent system has been to place America in the van of nations, as regards her progress in the technical and industrial arts. Almost any change must be for the worse, when the original has proved so good. Yet such violation of contract and such change of a practically beneficial system, as proved by years of efficiency, is to-day proposed in Congress.

The first provision of the bill deprives the United States courts of jurisdiction in patent cases where the amount in controversy does not exceed two hundred dollars. By this provision, infringement is by law allowed on the majority of inventions. By one clause, the most meritorious inventions, and those that contribute the most to our comfort in every-day life, are declared unworthy of compensation. There is no need to refer to the records of patents to identify them. Sewing machines, churns, washing machines, straw cutters, plows, mowing machines, hardware, boots, shoes, clothing, furniture, stoves,—all these and innumerable others would fall within the two hundred dollar limit. Had this law been in force for the last fifty years, no small inventions would have been made. The inventor would have no incitement to use his talent, save in the larger class of subjects. None of the minor improvements in household conveniences, productive of health as well as comfort, would have been carried out. Our lamps might smoke, for who would invent anything to improve them under the two hundred dollar limit? Our coffee would be ground with mortar and pestle, or in inferior mills. Our culinary utensils would not be coated with enamel, but the poisonous copper vessels of old days would still be used. Our sewing machines, if manufacturers succeeded in maintaining the price above two hundred dollars, would not be provided with automatic tension devices, hemmers, and fellers, for the line of invention in the direction of such small objects would be closed. Many an inventor of small capital has fought his way to success by small but important improvement. This law would end the career of all such workers.

This first provision declares in effect that an inventor must submit to infringement by any individual to that extent before he can sue for relief.

If his patent is infringed, he cannot strike at the evil in the beginning, but must patiently wait until a wrong of a definite extent has been committed. Again, he may suffer great injustice by a multitude of infringers, none of whom may pass the two hundred dollar limit. In such a case, he can do nothing. Anyone can infringe licenses and encourages infringement. It would seem that such a clause would stand not the shadow of a ventors what is granted to foreign authors. chance of passing, were it not that the presumable temper of the House has been shown in the recommendation of the bill embodying it, by the Committee on

cent purchaser," of whom we have heard so much first and elude the second, he is pretty certain to find a fact is such, and should be so treated. He should for as to be almost given away, as was the case at Fulton the good of the community be subject to the same pen- Market, New York city, recently, during the early run alties as the willfully infringing purchaser. To make of young mackerel or "tinkers;" but a large supply of any law operative, the knowledge of its provisions on halibut, cod, hake, and haddock only tends to so far the part of the violator must be presumed. This is the reduce the price as to bring them within the means of invention becomes valueless if the ignorance of an in- may fairly be looked upon as two distinct orders of fringer is to protect him against the consequences of sishermen, for while the latter sometimes engage in infringement.

The bill provides that purchasers of a patent right risk the dangers of the stormy Banks in winter. for actual use shall not be liable for its value, or for infringing the same in any manner, if, at the time of its prised to find that the "bankers" are manned by young

claims of a third person. In other words, if a fraudulent patent is obtained, and sold to a manufacturer, he can work under it quite regardless of the rights of an original and anticipating inventor.

The proviso of ignorance, at the time of purchase only, of such claims on the part of the purchaser is case. The most admirable provisions of our patent laws are devoted to guarding the rights of original in-

Interference proceedings in the Patent Office and test cases in the courts continually arise for the purpose of determining priority of invention. By this act, all these safeguards are nullified, and such priority is made a secondary consideration, and subsidary to fraud. The purchase of fraudulent patents is legalized, and a reward is offered for perjury. The bill in the same clause excludes from liability the innocent purchaser of a patented article, until a written notice of the existence of the patent has been served upon him personally. This is a minor provision following

All these provisions are a direct temptation and incitement to fraud. They do no good to any class of the community, except as a law depriving laborers of their wages might be held to benefit capitalists. Inventors are the servants of the community. They have served it faithfully in the past century, as the splendid record of over three hundred thousand patents shows. It now remains to be seen whether their compensation is to be taken away from them.

The ingratitude of such an action counts for little, unfortunately; its injustice should count for more; but its shortsightedness and impolicy should be within the scope of every legislator. It is to be hoped that the House will not follow the action of its committee. If any influence has been brought to bear upon the latter, the whole body, it is probable, will be free therefrom. Though only one step on its road to enactment, we should be sorry to see the House of Representatives committed by the passage of this bill. Even where a bill ostensibly aimed at the further protection of inventors, we have counseled conservatism. The patent law is best let alone. It has done good work; it has been systematized codified in standard text books, and is understood by all. A radical change in it is always to be feared, but especially when it has a direct tendency toward injustice. We hope the bill will never reach the Senate; we hope that the full body of Representatives will effectually kill it, and relieve the air of so threatening a menace.

We hope that the House of Representatives will not pass this measure. If they do, the Senate will be under a great responsibility to the country for their action in the matter. If it should become law, then the majority of inventors will be deprived of their granted rights. Thousands of small industrial establishments, in all parts of the country, will be obliged to close and discharge their workers.

All who feel interested in preventing the consummation of this great error should lose no time in writing to their members of Congress, and protest against the passage of the bill, giving their reasons as fully and as forcibly as possible.

The members of the present Congress have taken a more favorable view of another class of intellectual works, the productions of authors. International copyright has been favorably considered, and the bill reported by the Senate Patent Committee, and the grant of patents to foreign authors, not members of the community, many of whom never have and never will see this country, is now in a fair way of being realized. In the same breath, the legislature that thinks so well of fostering foreign authors proposes to undo the laws protecting home inventors. If a book, as the product of the brain, is entitled in any sense to protection, a fortiori is a title to such protection due to an actual invention, which has assumed a tangible form under with impunity if he does not exceed this amount. In the clause of the patent laws requiring full and clear this provision, injustice and absurdity are rivals. It description and operativenessor utility. Inconsistency could go no further than this—to refuse to home in-

Contending with perils at sea and Canadian armed cruisers inshore, the life of the Gloucester fisherman is The next provision aims at the rights of the "inno-not a happy one. If, however, he can escape from the during the last two years. He stands in all justice in good profit awaiting him, for rarely is there a glut in the position of the innocent violator of a law, and in the deep sea fish market. Mackerel may be so plenty experience of all governments. The patent right in an the many. The "mackerelers" and the "bankers" mackereling in summer seas, the mackerel men rarely

purchase, they had no knowledge of the existence of men exclusively; perhaps it would be safe to say that