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AMENDMENT OF THE PATENT LAWS.

Nearly a dozen bills having in view a change in the patent laws have been introduced at the present session of Congress, most of which, if passed, would have the effect to destroy the present value of patent property and crush many of the industries that now flourish under the protection of the patent laws.

For example, bill H. R. 1,171 provides for vacating patents; 1,344, for securing public use of patents; 1,286, 1,569, 1,637, 4,368, "to protect innocent purchasers" by allowing everybody freely to infringe; 1,327, to limit the damages to be recovered by patentees; 1,431, to reduce the term of patents; 3,326, to regulate the use of patent rights.

It is to be hoped none of these bills will pass. The Electrical Association lately discussed patent laws and the necessity of their revision, several of the members having become satisfied that changes were demanded. One of the new features proposed was the establishment of a patent court as a branch of the Patent Office.

Of other suggested changes, among the most sensible are those presented by Senator Chandler, and contained in a memorial by Mr. J. McC. Perkins, of Massachusetts:

"He asks that the patent laws of the United States may be so amended that patents shall be granted substantially as they were before the law of July 4, 1836; the first patent law, of 1790, authorizing the grant of letters patent to any person who applied in proper form and paid the required government fees. In 1835 the Secretary of State informed the public that patents were issued in the order of time that proper documents were received at the Patent Office. In 1836 Congress radically changed the law regulating the grant of patents by providing that they should not be issued until the Commissioner of Patents should be satisfied that the subject matter was really patentable. The object in thus changing the law was to obviate inconveniences resulting from the fact that, because drawings and specifications in those early days were not published, some patents came to be many times duplicated. Under the present practice, however, with the publication and sale at a merely nominal price of drawings and specifications immediately upon the issue of every patent, inventors can easily ascertain whether or not it will be profitable for them to obtain patents and to undertake to enforce such patents by suits in the court, and the reason of the change made in 1836 no longer applies. Under the present system the memorialist states that the features of a judicial tribunal have been engrafted upon the Patent Office until now its machinery rivals in elaborateness that of the Federal courts, and yet after all the proceedings have been had in the Patent Office and a patent is issued, nothing has been settled. The whole question must be fought over again in the courts, the same as before the law of 1836.

"The memorialist claims that the practice prevailing before 1836 of granting patents to all applicants is substantially the English system and that of all other patent-granting countries. The memorialist proposes as his remedy for existing evils to abolish the requirement of a Patent Office examination before the grant of a patent, and to give to every inventor his patent on his filing a correct application therefor; and, if disputes arise between different inventors as to their rights, to let the controversies be settled by the courts alone, exactly as they, in fact, must be and are now settled. He states that the annual report of Judge Mason, Commissioner of Patents in 1855, presents very clearly the reasons why this change should be made; that Commissioner Foote, in his report for 1868, re-enforces Judge Mason's recommendation, and that the ablest Commissioners of Patents have repeatedly pointed out the great injustice of the present system."

If these changes were enacted, inventors would become their own examiners in respect to novelty; all delays would be done away with, an increase in the number of patents granted would take place, and the present force of examiners would be able to maintain and carry on the business of the office in the most efficient manner.

AMERICAN AND BRITISH "PIRATES."

In a pamphlet sermon entitled, "The National Sin of Literary Piracy," for which a forty-two year patent has been secured, the Rev. Mr. Van Dyke draws a rather grim picture of the American publisher who reprints foreign works; and the reader, who may be unfamiliar with the other side of the question, will scarce refrain from sympathy with the British publisher, who, by the author's inference, has so nice a moral perception that it will not permit him to indulge in the same reprehensible practices. One cannot help the regret that the author is not informed of this other side, because of his evident sincerity, for then we should have had the two pictures side by side, the American and the British publisher, and thus been able to judge of their relative merits and defects. On page 15, he says: "This nation [the American] says to the German, the

Frenchman, the Englishman, 'You have written a book. We want it, and we propose to take it. You have no rights that we are bound to respect. We shall reprint your work, and mutilate it and sell it, and do as we like with it, and you shall never receive a penny for it.'"

Now, however wicked it may be to "steal" a book, how much worse it is after stealing it to mutilate it; to remove the real author's name and put another in its place, thus robbing him of all credit; to cut out chapters and replace them with others written by strange hands; to change the scene of a story, and leaving the author's name on the title page, put sentiments in his mouth which he has not expressed and does not hold! We ask, is not this even worse than what our author calls stealing? Yet the British publisher of American books does all this—has been doing it for years, and is still at it.

An American author, Mr. Brander Matthews, who, be it said, strongly favors international copyright, says: "The American pirate only steals your purse, but the British pirate also robs you of your good name." In his recent article in the Princeton Review, he says: "In 1876, Longfellow wrote to a lady in England whose works had been republished in America without permission: 'It may comfort you to know that I have had twenty-two publishers in England and Scotland, and only four of them ever took the slightest notice of my existence, even to send me a copy of the books. Shall we call this "chivalry" or the other word?' When General Lew Wallace, the author of 'Ben Hur,' was last in London, he went to the store of Messrs. Frederick Warne & Co., and bought a copy of his book. He examined it a moment, and then asked to see the head of the firm, whose attention he called to certain alterations made in England without any authority from him. 'I see you have changed my title,' said Gen. Wallace, 'and you have written an entirely new preface and signed my name to it.' The publisher hesitated, and at last stammered forth that they had thought they could improve upon it. 'And have you taken any other liberties with my books?' pursued Gen. Wallace, and Mr. Warne answered that they had left out the story of Ben Hur, and made a few minor changes. And the British publisher has never offered to make any payment to the American author whom he had despoiled and whose work he had disfigured."

Dr. Holland, on a similar visit, found that Messrs. Ward, Lock & Tyler had printed one of his books with chapters condensed, rewritten, and otherwise mutilated. In another of his works he discovered a long preface by one S. O. Beeton, in which is "a note of tearful regret for John Camden Hotten, who was a very Blackbeard among British pirates, as ingenious as he was unscrupulous."

Still another book had its title altered, parts left out, and the story anglicized so as to turn a Fourth of July celebration into a loyal merry-making over the Queen's birthday. The annual list of British publishing houses abounds with American reprints, hundreds upon hundreds of them, it is said, and many, if not most of them, more or less mutilated. Nor is it an unusual thing in England to discover an American work appropriated by a foreign author. The cases are well known of the taking of Miss Wistar's adaptations from the German by the Rev. S. Baring Gould for use in what he claimed to be his own work, and again of the appropriation by the Rev. Sir George W. Cox, Bart., of the "Young Folks' Cyclopaedia of Common Things," the work of Mr. John D. Champlin, Jr., an American. Hawthorne's works, some of them changed in title, as, for instance, the "Transformation" for the "Marble Faun," are found in pirated shape in all the principal English libraries, so are Dr. Holmes' works and a host of others. All British publishers do not do these things. By no means. But if there is a single American publisher who engages in such practices, we have yet to hear of him.

Normal Lectures in Science Teaching.

On February 15, at 4 P. M., the first of a series of three lectures on the above subject was delivered by Dr. T. O'Connor Sloane, in the hall of the Industrial Educational Association, in this city. The general plan of the course is to show how completely a course of instruction in physics can be illustrated with experiments performed with the most simple apparatus. The ground covered in the first lecture included properties of matter, cohesion, porosity, elasticity, impenetrability, etc., the general laws of motion and force, action and reaction, impact, centrifugal and rotary force, and the mechanical powers. A large number of experiments were given in the above subjects, very little except common, everyday objects being employed. In the succeeding lectures the remaining ground, exclusive of electricity, will be covered. The audience comprised the leading educators of the city, the public schools being largely represented by their principals and vice-principals. The dates for the next lectures are February 29 and March 14.