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Contents.

(Illustrated articles are marked with an asterisk.) African Island, a neglected, 207 Alloys, new method for, 202 Aluminum analysis, 206 American Export Edition, 188 Ancient Greek statue, and, 207 Animals and zoology, 199 Aurora, the, and cathode rays*, 203 Boston street car subway, 197 Botanical gardens, 199 Brooklyn's trial, the, news from, 199 Cathode rays and the polar corona*, 203 Chemical Society, the American, 206 Comets and cathode rays*, 203 Delphi, bronze statue discovered at*, 207 Eclipse of the sun, August 8, 201 Electric lamp holder, an extension*, 200 Electric street car subway, Boston*, 197 Electrolysis and molecular dynamics, 199 Explorers lost in South America, 203 Guns, big, firing, 205 Highways, power locomotion on, 207 Horticulture and health, 199 Li Hune Chang*, 202 Lithography, centennial of, 202 Mars, polar snow of, 201 Moon, eclipse of the, 205 Nansen's experiences, 203 Newspaper censorship in Europe, 206 Patent decisions, recent, 203 Patent medicines, 188 Peary, news from, 203 Photographs, kite, of Boston, Princeton University, new library, 207 Quips and jests, 209 Rivers, the Savage magazine*, 206 Science, advancement of, 198 Science notes, 202 Smokeless powder, development of, 207 Stars, six new variable, 207 Steamboat record, North River, Steamship, old, end of an, 207 St. Helena as it is now, 207 Street car subway, Boston*, 197 Telemeter, Codeira's*, 200 Trees, raising large*, 204 Warship Brooklyn, trial of, 199

TABLE OF CONTENTS OF SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN SUPPLEMENT No. 1079.

For the Week Ending September 5, 1896.

Price 10 cents. For sale by all newsdealers

I. ANTHROPOLOGY.—The Emblematic Use of the Tree in the Dakotan Group.—By ALICE C. FLETCHER.—A valuable paper by a recognized authority, as read at the A. A. S. meeting, Buffalo, 1896.—First installment. 17241 II. ASTRONOMY.—The Eclipse of the Sun.—Popular account of the recent total eclipse of the sun as seen in Norway. 17241 III. CHEMISTRY.—The Quantitative Analysis of Metals by Electrolysis.—Simple apparatus for carrying out the above named process.—2 illustrations. 17248 Uranium and its Properties.—Recent investigations by Becquerel.—A metal sensitive to X rays. 17246 IV. CYCLING.—Akroyd's Cells for Pneumatic Tires.—A tire which can stand many punctures before deflation.—3 illustrations. 17246 V. ELECTRIC ENGINEERING.—Double Crossley Gas Engine and Direct Driven Dynamo.—A direct connected gas engine and dynamo.—1 illustration. 17247 Electric Lighting of Railway Trains Abroad.—The field of electric car lighting abroad.—A very full review of this subject. 17248 VI. ENTOMOLOGY.—The Young Entomologist and What He Wants.—By SAMUEL H. SCUMMER.—An excellent practical article on the beginner's work in entomology.—The collection and preservation of insects. 17240 VII. HISTORY OF SCIENCE.—Machine for Raising Water from a River to the Height of a Half Diameter of a Large Wheel, with but Slight Pressure.—A curiosity in the history of mechanics.—1 illustration. 17246 VIII. HYGIENE.—Sunstrokes.—A theory of sunstroke and experiments to test its truth. 17250 IX. METALLURGY.—Modern Methods of Iron Mining and Smelting.—By WILLIAM P. KIBBEE.—Notes on iron, iron ore and methods of working the same. 17252 Note on Brass Casting.—By GEORGE SIMONS.—The Art of Bronze Casting in Europe.—By GEORGE SIMONS.—A very practical description of the methods of testing bronze status.—First installment. 17245 X. MISCELLANEOUS.—The Trouble in Crete.—An interesting article on Crete, its products and history; and story of the present crisis.—4 illustrations. 17239 The Brussels International Exhibition of 1897.—Prospects of the exposition, with plans of the buildings and grounds.—1 illustration. Visiting the Sewers of Paris.—A vivid description of the sewers of Paris, with illustrations and map.—7 illustrations. 17251 Selected Formulae. 17252 Engineering Notes. 17253 Electrical Notes. 17253 Miscellaneous Notes. 17253 XI. NUMISMATICS.—English Coins.—By G. F. HILL.—Early English, Scottish and Irish coins, with numerous representations.—1 illustration. 17243 Note on a Recent Sale of Greek Coins in London. 17254 XII. PHYSICS.—New Form of Apparatus for the Production of Röntgen Rays.—A new X ray tube giving powerful radiations.—9 illustrations. 17254 XIII. RAILROAD ENGINEERING.—The Snaefell Mountain Railway.—An electric railroad operated on the Isle of Man.—Description of equipment and roadbed traversed.—2 illustrations. 17247 XIV. SOCIAL SCIENCE.—An Industrial Democracy.—An interesting experiment by an American manufacturing company, establishing popular relations between labor and capital in their factory. 17244 XV. TECHNOLOGY.—Milk and Some of its Products.—By JOHN CROWELL.—The quality of milk and the preparation from it of different products. 17249 Open Hearth Furnaces in Glassworks.—The new type of furnace now used for the manufacture of glass, displacing the old pot furnace.—1 illustration. 17251

PATENT MEDICINES.

The experience of every patent solicitor includes the preparation of applications for letters patent on mixtures designed to be used in medicine. The pharmacist, in his mercantile relations with the community, finds that a very large portion of his business consists in selling a quantity of well known ready-made mixtures, all of which by him are grouped under the term "patent medicines." These include the vast number of proprietary remedies for the cure of the ills which flesh is heir to, which remedies are of secret composition generally, and are frowned upon by the regular medical practitioners. Any one who for a moment considers the meaning of the term patent will see at once that it is grossly misapplied in the case of anything secret. A thing patented is a thing divulged. The medical profession very properly may raise objections to sundry secret medicines, as opposed to the ethics of their calling, but a medicine patented has its composition disclosed. Any one, for a nominal sum, can procure from Washington a specification describing its composition.

It would seem that it is not a departure from ethics for a physician to patent any medicine whose composition may involve the exercise on his part of invention.

Every physician has his own favorite prescriptions, and it would seem that the ground thus taken would expose the community to the abuse of being flooded with innumerable patents for medicines, and that prescription after prescription would become the property of some specific doctor.

But it so happens that the patent law, which may be treated from some aspects of the case as an embodiment of ethics, with numerous decisions of the highest courts of the land to elucidate its doctrines, steps in here and makes the patenting of a medicine exceedingly difficult. The history of these applications in the Patent Office is in most cases a rejection on formulated grounds. The application generally describes a mixture of well known medicines. In official letters from the Patent Office examiner in these cases apt descriptions and characterizations of these mixtures are to be found. The examiner will term the subject of the application perhaps "an inventory of items assembled regardless of synergistic effects or chemical union." The mixture may be stated to be "merely numerically novel," and as involving only the skill and ingenuity of a pharmacist or physician. The medicine, it will be stated, can be made by any one possessing the skill of the calling of a pharmacist or physician, and, therefore, is not the creative work of the inventor. The examiner will require the application to show, in brief, some new and distinctive product having new properties resulting from the compounding. This is rarely shown, and the application is rejected.

So much in line with each other do the numerous applications for patent medicines fall, that the Patent Office has adopted a fixed practice, that of rejecting all applications for medical compounds which can be regarded as in the nature of physicians' prescriptions, and as descriptive of mere assemblages of well known ingredients which have well known effects on the human system. The Patent Office has even gone so far as to use a practically stereotyped form of rejection of those compounds, emphasizing the fact that the proper subject matter of a patent, whatever it is for, must be able to endure the relative tests of the presence of invention as well as of novelty and utility. The majority of these cases are disposed of unfavorably for want of invention and for being mere aggregations of known things, not showing the required statutory elements. There is therefore no mystery attending the treatment of these cases. It will be seen that they fall exactly into line with applications for mechanical devices. In them, as in mechanical devices, one great proof of invention is the presence of a true combination of parts as distinguished from an aggregation. A distinctly new result must be shown. In a case of mechanics it is obvious that the showing a new result is far simpler than in the case of a medicine. The results of a medicine have to be demonstrated on so complicated an organism as the human frame, and the subjective element preponderates in the trial. In other words, the result produced depends largely upon the subject upon whom it is tried. It is therefore very difficult to prove the presence of invention by results. Even in mechanical cases this is often not the easiest thing to do, but when the human system becomes the subject, it is a hundredfold more so.

There is, however, an indirect species of protection open to the inventor of a prescription or a formula which is unpatentable. This protection is afforded by the trade mark laws. Under the provisions of this law he may register a trade mark in connection with his compound and thereby obtain standing in the United States courts for protection for the use of such title, prima facie evidence of which will be afforded by his letters of registration. Some trade marks are enormously valuable, the business energy of their proprietors having made a simple name worth many thousands of dollars. The right of protection in the use of a trade mark rests in the common law, but the registration of

it by a competent patent solicitor of course immensely increases its value.

It is here that another frequent error is made. Many applicants imagine that a trade mark in some mysterious manner protects them in the use of a compound or preparation. This it does not do. It protects them in the use of the name or trade mark designation, and it is only indirectly that it can protect them in the thing bearing its trade mark, imitation of which might be shown to indicate a desire on the part of the competitor to copy the appearance of the article and hence to trench upon the trade mark.

The United States Patent Office is ready to grant letters patent for medicines which fulfill the statutory requirements. But in foreign countries this protection is often refused, the statutes forbidding the granting of patents for such compounds.

It seems clear that it may be considered an open question in professional ethics whether a physician should patent a remedy, assuming that he has one which is patentable. Synthetic medicines, prepared by chemical processes, often coal tar products, are now invading the field of Nature's simples, and it is possible that there may yet be a number of patentable medical compounds invented, to replace quinine and other vegetable alkaloids and extracts. But now, of all the so-called patent medicines, very few are really patented at all, and they are supposed to be, and often are, of unknown and secret composition. Protection by patenting, which involves disclosure of their composition, is the last thing their proprietors would think of. It is such secrecy that is opposed to every fundamental principle of medical ethics.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION AT BUFFALO, N. Y.

For the fourth time the city of Buffalo has opened her hospitable doors to receive the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and has given a hearty welcome to the hundreds of men and women who assemble to enjoy an interchange of the varied fruits of scientific research. The general session of the American Association for the Advancement of Science was opened on Monday, August 24, with prayer by Bishop Fowler of the Methodist Episcopal Church, followed by an address of welcome from General Jewett, the Mayor of Buffalo, and from Dr. Roswell Park, the president of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences. Attention was called to the fact that Buffalo was a great commercial center, more tonnage entering and leaving its harbor than any other in the world, with the exception of Liverpool. The institutions of this metropolis by the lakes were described, particularly the society represented by Dr. Park, and which is really doing an important work that reaches many thousands of people. This has been a famous year for conventions, especially of a political sort, a fact that caused the city aid to be denied that might otherwise have been expected. But public-spirited citizens amply atoned for this by their liberality. Prof. E. D. Cope, the renowned paleontologist and comparative anatomist, and who has the honor this year of being the President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, responded to the addresses of welcome and gave an outline of the objects of the Association. He said that while many of the scientists assembled were teachers, the prime object of the organization was not teaching, but the advancement of science by the increase of knowledge; to penetrate the unknown; to understand with certainty the mutual relations of the various parts of the universe; and to ascertain the highest principles of nature. Some of us are attracted by a certain love of the beautiful, whether it be the beauty of perfect mechanism, of form, or of law in operation; others have an interest in the origin and destiny of the human race; others are adventurous explorers, while many others simply desire to know. Science has a high utilitarian value, and it also promotes human happiness. The man of science pursues the truth wherever it may lead, and often gains unexpected benefits. Scientific methods require a reasonable use of the results of observation and experiment. Thus correct habits of thought are formed; we study facts first, and then draw our inferences. Theories should not be valued for any more than they are worth. Labor brings its substantial reward, but there is a pleasure in activity itself. Scientific men teach that the mental life is worth living and gives as much pleasure as the physical life. They demand free thought, as well as thought that is careful and judicious and beneficial. The future of science will be greater than its past; and its honest, diligent cultivation will more largely affect the national life than it has ever done heretofore.

The address of Miss Alice C. Fletcher, before the Section of Anthropology, will be found in part in the SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN SUPPLEMENT.

Before the Section of Physics an address was given by Vice-President Mees on "Electrolysis and Some Outstanding Problems in Molecular Dynamics." He reviewed the history of the century that has elapsed since the first note was made of chemical action having been