Small Inventions that Brought Fortunes.

No better example of the importance of small things can be found than among the records of the United States Patent Office, in Washington. There are to be seen certain small objects, which, by a lucky turn of affairs or, perhaps by the ingenuity of the inventors, have become known throughout the United States, and even throughout the world, and have been the means of filling the pockets of both the inventor and their representatives. In fact, it would seem as if inventors of small objects have been far better paid than skilled mechanics and engineers who have spent months and years in perfecting elaborate mechanisms. Certainly, in proportion to the amount of work done, the lot of the inventor of small objects is more to be desired than that of the man who spends the best part of his life over an elaborate machine, the merits of which are tardily recognized, not, perhaps, until the inventor, through worry and sickness, is in no condition to enjoy the fruits of his toil. It would seem also as if the inventors of small objects which have paid have not, as a rule, been inventors by profession. They have been for the most part persons who by sheer luck have stumbled upon an idea which somebody else has recognized as a good one. Without the suggestion of this "somebody else," who is usually the one who profits, the great idea, though born, would rarely grow to maturity.

A story current at the Patent Office is told of an old farmer up in Maine. The children of the old fellow, like many other children before and since, had a way of kicking the toes out of their shoes. The farmer was an ingenious turn of mind, and he cut out a couple of copper strips for each pair of shoes, which were fastened over the toes and between the sole and the upper. The plan proved so successful that the farmer found that, where he had been buying three pairs of shoes, one pair would suffice. There happened along about this time a man from the city with an eye to business. He prevailed on the old man to have the idea patented. This was done, and between $50,000 and $100,000 was made out of it. How much of this the old man got is not known, but it is presumed that the promoter got the larger part. The record at the Patent Office shows only the drawing of the invention as patented on January 5, 1858, by George A. Mitchell, of Turner, Me.

Another similar invention which made a great deal of money was the metal button fastener for shoes, invented and introduced by Heaton, of Providence, R. I. At the time it was considered a fine invention, for the old sewed button was continually coming off. It has gradually grown in popularity since its introduction in 1860, until now very few shoes with buttons are manufactured without the Heaton appliance.

By a comparatively simple arrangement the shipping tags in use all over the country today were made a possibility. The chief trouble with a paper tag was the almost unavoidable tearing out of the tying hole before the package arrived at its destination. A cardboard reinforcement, round in shape, on each side of the tying hole was all that was necessary to make the shipping tags a success. This was the invention of Mr. Dennison, of Philadelphia, who has made a fortune out of a lucky five minutes of thought.

The chief examiner of the division of toys cites many instances where fortunes have been made and similar objects. The pigs in clover puzzle had a curious history. The inventor, Crandall, put it on the market before the patent had been, or, in fact, even applied for. Other people, recognizing the value of the invention from a financial point of view, formed companies and began manufacturing the puzzles in even larger quantities than the Crandall's company could turn them out. Crandall, of course, contested for his rights and prayed for an injunction. The claim was put into interference, which is a long process and one which tires both the patience of the department and that of the attorneys. The unfortunate part of it for Crandall was that the craze for the puzzle was over before the interference was settled. This is the same Crandall who invented the famous children's building blocks, with dovetailed edges, which had such a run and are popular even today.

The return ball, fastened to a strip of thin rubber, with a wooden ring at the other end, which was patented somewhere in the sixties, had a rush of popularity which netted its inventor $60,000, and is widely sold today. The patent has now expired. The flying top, a round tin affair with wings, wound with a string and shot up in the air, made a fortune for its inventor. Several years ago a puzzle appeared which attracted considerable attention. It consisted of two double painter's hooks, which, when fastened together a certain way, could not be taken apart, except by one who had seen it done. It is said that this invention came about by the merest chance. A painter was standing on his ladder scaffold across the front of a house. He had occasion to use a pair of the hooks, and picking them up hurriedly, entangled them in such a manner that it was several hours before he could get them apart. He forthwith had drawings made and filed an application for a patent, which was granted. No figures are known at the Patent Office, but it is supposed that he made a large sum of money, for the puzzle was sold for twenty-five cents in all parts of the East, and it cost much less than a cent to manufacture.

A discovery which has been the means of bringing forth a number of inventions, both great and small, was that of Goodyear, the rubber vulcanizer. It was not until the Goodyear discovery of the vulcanization of rubber, in 1844, that rubber could be used, except in a very primitive fashion. Then it was found that, by the use of sulphur at a certain temperature, rubber could be moulded, shaped and worked into any form. Immediately after this discovery, the application clerk at the Patent Office having charge of such matters was besieged by hundreds and hundreds of applications with the Goodyear discovery as a basis. They related chiefly to matters of form in which it was desired to work rubber. After that time the rubber blanket, the rubber overshoe, the rubber band followed, one after the other in rapid succession, and since that time there has not been a month that some patents have not been granted for different forms of rubber.

Now applications are coming at the rate of four or five a month, involving many applications of the pneumatic tubing or cushioning principle. There are now pneumatic blankets, pneumatic pillars of all descriptions, pneumatic-soled shoes for running and jumping and pneumatic car fender guards.

A recent invention which has come into prominence within the last two or three years is the tin cup on the top of beer bottles. This appliance is steadily taking the place of the rubber cork with the iron thumb lever. It is found that sulphur in the rubber cork is acted upon by the beer, with the result of causing rubber to deteriorate and spoil the beer. An offer from some whisky makers is attracting the attention of inventors. It is a reward of from $25,000 to $50,000 for an appliance on bottles which will prevent their being refilled. As it is now, all the great whisky and beer manufacturers of the country, and, indeed, of the world are constantly getting letters from people who complain that they have received inferior qualities of liquids under well-known labels. Of course, it is impossible without some such appliance for manufacturers to guarantee the contents of bottles. All appliances so far with this end in view have been unsatisfactory. The chief difficulty seems to be to make the invention practical and cheap enough for commercial use. The problem has been solved by a number inventors, but at too great an expense, for it has seemed up to the present impossible to get the cost below $2 a bottle. Completed the cost must not cost more than two or three cents a bottle.

Several years ago a patent was granted for an addition to the cans which made the opening of them a very easy matter, and did away with the old fashioned iron can opener. The can had a small rim just below the top, bent by machinery at an angle just below the breaking point. By a blow on the top of the can around the rim the top would be broken off with a smooth edge. This did not cost the inventor one cent a thousand above the regular price of the cans. Armour, the Chicago meat man, as soon as he heard of the invention, ordered 10,000,000 cans to pack meat in, to fill an order for the German army. The inventor of this can made a fortune in the first six months. His cans are now used all over the United States for oysters and fruits.

The ordinary wood screw, patented August 20, 1846, by T. J. Sloan, is recorded among the simplest inventions that have made the most money. Then screws were cut by machinery, some of which is still used by the American Screw Company, of Providence, R. I.

The man who invented the brass spring fingers one sees on a lamp for holding the chimney in place got for a long period a royalty of $50,000 a year. William A. Thrall, a former official of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway, patented, June 1, 1886, a thousand mile ticket which possessed so many advantages that it has been adopted by many Western roads. Several years ago Mr. Thrall resigned his place and is now living on a royalty of $20,000 a year. Within the last two weeks a patent has been granted on a new whistle used principally by bicyclers, and made on the principal of the siren or fog whistle. It is manufactured by a firm in the East, and they have only been able to supply the Eastern trade. The inventor has received for some time past $5,000 a month. Among musical instruments for general use, the autoharp has perhaps made the most money. The first one was patented in 1882. Now they are solvd very reasonably, and manufacturers report immense sales every month. The organette, with perforated paper sheets, is another of the money-making musical instruments.—*Washington Correspondent N. Y. Sun.*

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