Fortunate = = = • • • Inventions.

Many Little Things Which Have Made Patentees Rich.

It is noticeable, remarks a Washington correspondent, that most of the big fortunes earned through patents have been gained through small things, such as would not be considered important by the casual observer. A country lass was made independent for life by the simple idea which is represented by the pasteboard compartment tray for packing eggs. She had to put up a great many eggs for market, and the loss by breakage was a serious matter. So she hit upon the notion of providing a separate compartment for each egg, and, inasmuch as pasteboard was cheap and the trays could be easily returned with the boxes that contained them, the problem was solved. It is a fact that people in rural parts invent few things. It was a Maine farmer, however, who patented copper tips for shoes, and it is reckoned that they were worth about half a million to him. He had several boys who kicked out the toes of their shoes, and he found that copper tips made them last three times as long. Hence the idea.

One of the most successful inventors of small things was Crandall. He patented several puzzles that made money, but "Pigs in Clover" was his great hit in this line. At one time he was engaged in the business of making croquet sets, the lawn game then being at the height of its popularity. He devised a method of constructing the boxes, so that the parts were held together by groove and tongue fastenings instead of nails. One night he took home some of the waste pieces to his little girl, who was sick. She found such delight in playing with them and putting them together that her father conceived the idea of making similar blocks for the amusement of children. Such was the evolution of the well known Crandall building blocks.

Another very profitable toy was the invention of a bedridden boy. This was "Dancing Jim Crow," which for a long time was the rage. It is said to have yielded $75,000 the first year it came out.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been made by Dennison out of his shipping tags. The idea consists simply in a little ring of cardboard that re-inforces the tying hole and prevents the string from tearing out. A lot of money has been earned by the little brass clip fastening, patented a few years ago, by which sheets of paper are held together. Yet it is an exact copy of a contrivance in bronze that was used by the Romans more than two centuries ago. In fact, there are not a few modern inventions which are in reality merely reproductions of antique contrivances. One of these is the safety pin, which was commonly employed by the women of ancient Rome to fasten their dresses.

Among the most profitable patents have been various little devices having relation to women's costume, such as the perspiration proof shield of rubber, the idea of substituting the quills of chicken and turkey feathers for whalebone in corsets, and the suspender garter. The last was sold outright for $50,000. Tin cans are now made so that they can be opened by simply striking the top with a smart blow. As soon as he learned of the invention, Armour, the Chicago packer, ordered 500,000 of the cans, and the inventor is already wealthy. The automatic inkstand, which keeps an equal supply of ink ready for the pen, is said to have earned $200,000. The "shading pen" has earned a sum even larger. Shoe buttons are no longer sewed on, but are applied with a metal fastener. This idea has been worth a big fortune. A new contrivance that promises to be very profitable is a bicyle whistle, made on the principle of the siren fog whistle. There was $500,000 in the wooden shoe peg, but the inventor went insane just as wealth was pouring in upon him. Another gold producing patent was the inverted glass bell placed over gas gets to protect ceilings. Great sums have been earned by the rubber pencil tip, barbed wire for fences, and a contrivance for shaving ice. A "hump" on a hook to keep it from slipping out of the eye has made the proprietors millionaires.

One of the most valuable patents was the result of a dream. An engineer named Springer, had been trying to devise an automatic lock which would break a carriage going down hill, so that the driver would not have to get out, but might lock the brake by pulling his horse in. He dreamed that he was driving down a steep hill and had just such a lock on his wagon. He noticed exactly how it was constructed, and on waking he got up and sketched the details of the mechanism. He then went to bed again. Three days later he applied for a patent, which was granted. It yielded $75,000 the first year. Of the heaps of pattents issued every week by the United States Patent Office only a very small percentage of them have any practical usefulness. But it is not always possible to judge before a thing has been tried. A few years ago a man thought of inclosing trees in canvas and filling the canvas with deadly gasses for the purpose of destroying insects. He was considered a lunatic, but this method is now practiced on a great scale and with much success in California.

One man has patented a scheme for utilizing sea-weeds for food, shredding them very fine, drying them, mixing them with sugar and cornstarch, and putting them up in tins. They are guaranteed to last indefinitely. Another inventor proposes to distill whiskey from seaweeds.

Another a process for making flour from bananas, which are to be sliced, dried in hot air, and pulverized. This flour is nutritious and very cheap. Banana flour, by the way, is already manufactured on quite a large scale in Central America. A process has been patented for making a kind of wine out of over-ripe bananas, pressed and fermented. Sweet potato flour and desiccated mince pie are numbered among the original ideas on the files. An automatic tack driver is a hammer that contains a reservoir of tacks, so that there is no danger of banging one's thumb. Devices for cosmetic purposes are a finger taperer, a contrivance to hold back the ears, a spring to alter the lines of the mouth, a tongue cleaner and an anti-snorer. A special novelty in false noses is attached to a spectacle frame, and imitation gold fillings are added to false teeth by burnishing gold foil upon them in spots, so as to make them look more natural.

Artificial hen's eggs are to be made in the laboratory, the whites being a mixture of sulphur, carbon and beef fat, and yolks of beef blood, magnesia, etc., colored with chrome yellow. The shells are to be shaped with a blowpipe from moist composition of lime and gympsum. Lockets of asbestos intended to contain the addresses of people who travel on railways, for identification in case of collision or fire. One inventor proposes to stretch a cable the entire length of the Atlantic coast, some distance from the shore and anchored at intervals. Vessels dragging their anchors in danger of being wrecked are expected to catch this cable and save themselves. Another genius proposes that the government shall locate large rifled guns on dangerous parts of the coast, to be loaded with anchors and chains. On being discharged, the anchor unfolds and drops in the sea beyond the vessel, with the chain across her bows, so that the crew will only have to make the chain fast and ride out the storm in safety.

There is a process for preserving oysters in a batter of plaster of Paris. A special sort of cannon is designed to shoot water. A talking watch contains a miniature phonograph and cries out the hour when the stem is pressed. The idea of punching pinholes in eggs to keep them fresh, supplying the contents with fresh air, has actually been patented. When the hens go to roost their weight on the perch may be utilized for actuating a mechanism which shuts the door of the beehives on the farm, thus keeping out the night flying moths whose larvæ attack honey and young bees. A washable paper, from which writing ink may be removed after the lapse of any time, is made of rag pulp, glue and asbestos. The manufacture of it has been forbidden in Germany, because it might help frand. Not least interesting is a process for extracting spider silk by machinery from living spiders. The common field spiders of Sea Islands of South Carolina are preferred, a single one yielding 150 yards of the finest silk. Spider silk is superior in quality to that spun by the silkworm, but the difficulty hither has been to obtain it in sufficient quantities for commercial use. — *Boston Journal of Commerce.*

New Uses for Cornstalks.

According to Edwin H. Cramp, of the great Philadelphia ship building firm, several new uses have been discovered for cornstalks. One day, recently, Mr. Cramp explained that he had discovered wonderful uses for the stalks. He has had a chemist making experiments for nearly two years.

Some time ago he discovered that the stalks could be made into cellulose, which, when used to line ships of war, would make them practically waterproof. This discovery was made public at the time, but since then Mr. Cramp has found many other still more wonderful uses to which cornstalks can be put. Through his chemist he has developed an absolutely smokeless powder, which is far superior to the European product.

Pursuing his investigations further he has discovered that the elements entering into the composition of the stalk of the corn can be utilided for the production of a food for cattle, better than anything on the market. Other uses to which the hitherto despised stalks can be put are the production of alcohol, mattings, paper and carpets. The experiments are still being conducted, and Mr. Cramp expects to find still other uses for the stalks. Plants for the production of all these various articles, said Mr. Cramp, could be erected for $150,000, and they would consume all the cornstalks within a radius of twenty-five miles in any of the corn regions of the country.

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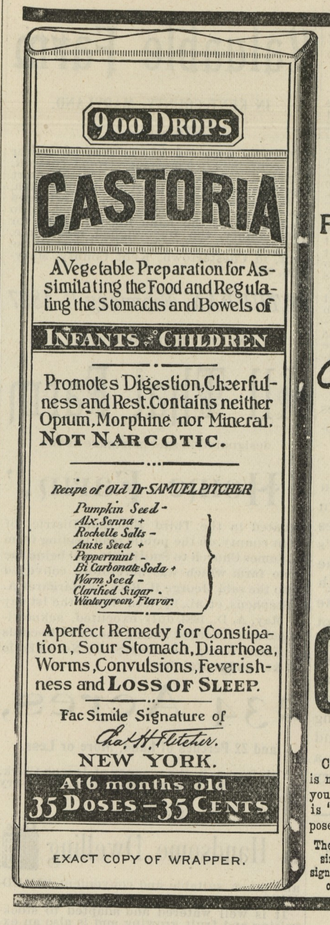

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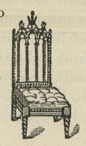

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December 19, 1896—4t.

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