

Some Curious Inventions.



THE history and growth of inventions are subjects in which all are inter-

ested. The difficulties and rebuffs which inventors have had to undergo in the perfecting of their ideas, their perseverance and ultimate success, form most interesting reading.

Vast sums of money are brought in by apparently simple inventions requiring no great mechanical knowledge. The accounts of these read more like the wildest fiction than simple fact, and are sufficient to make the least covetous among us bright yellow with jealousy. The very simplicity of some of them creates a feeling of annoyance; we feel we could have invented them with the greatest ease. If we had only known better the wants and tastes of the public, we might ourselves have been the recipients of those compact round sums. The stylographic pen brought in £40,000 per annum, the india-rubber tips to pencils £20,000, metal plates for protecting the soles and heels of boots brought in £250,000 in all, the roller skate £200,000. A clergyman realised £400 a week by the invention of a toy; another toy, the return ball (a wooden ball with a piece of elastic attached), brought in an annual income of £10,000, the "Dancing Jim Crow" £15,000 per annum, whilst "Pharaoh's Serpents," a chemical toy, brought in £10,000 in all; the common needle-threader brought in £2,000 a year; the inventor of a copper cap for children's boots was able

to leave his heir £400,000; whilst Singer, of sewing-machine fame, left at his death nearly £3,000,000.

But there is another side to the question—the humorous side. It is to this that I propose to confine myself more particularly here, and to describe, with the help of drawings, some of the wonderful things which people have thought it worth their while to patent, strong in the hope of making a big fortune in the near future, only to find in so many cases that their inventions were impracticable and very often perfectly ridiculous.

The prevention of sea-sickness has long been a subject of interest to all travellers. Some of the cures and preventives have been curious. One suggestion I remember

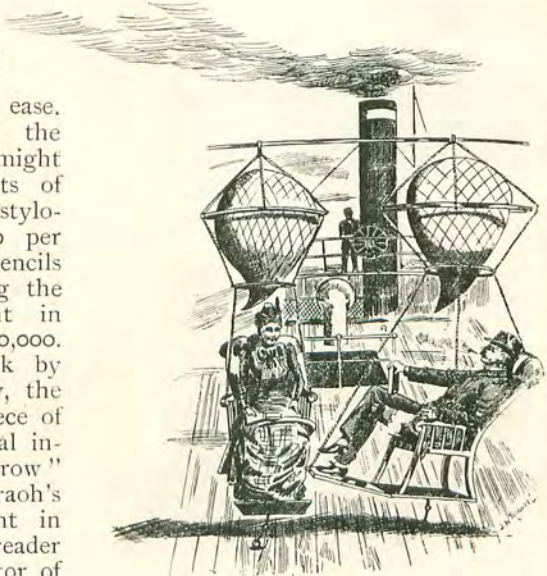


FIG. 1.

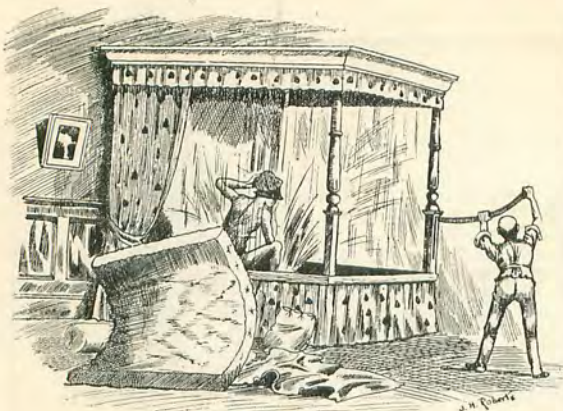


FIG. 2.

seeing recommended was the tying of a Bradshaw, or any other hard substance, tightly to the waist. But an invention depicted here (Fig. 1) beats this hollow in its originality of conception. The passenger's chair is attached to a balloon, the chair being connected to the deck by a ball and socket joint; to keep the balloon from swaying too much, it is attached to a rod above.

The next piece of furniture we will take is the bed. A man invents a four-poster, which can be converted into a bath. The

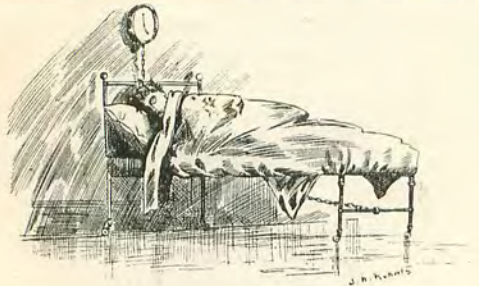


FIG. 3.

canopy above forms the vessel for the shower-bath, the water being pumped up through a pipe in one of the four uprights (Fig. 2). Another bed is called the alarum bed; at the appointed hour the two lower legs bend backwards and awake the occupant (Fig. 3).

The next thing is a vapour bath, constructed as depicted here, with a hole for the head and hands (Fig. 4). Of all the inventions mentioned in this paper, this is the only one I have ever seen in use.

The hat or cap has received a great deal of attention from the inventors. We find methods patented for making it water-proof, blow-proof, for ventilating it, and for keeping it warm, some of these methods being as complicated and cumbrous as those applied to buildings.

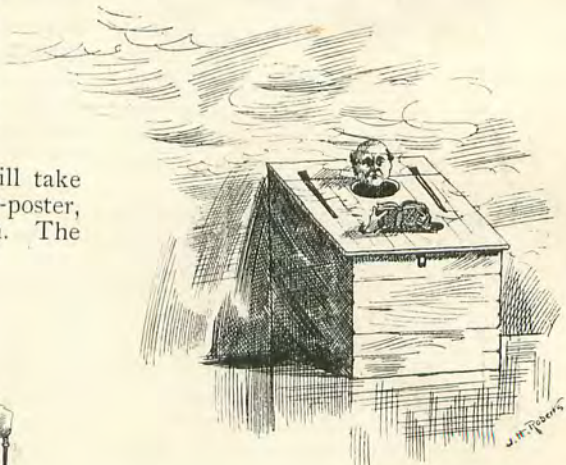


FIG. 4.

One of the methods for ventilating a hat is indeed startling. The crown is made separate from the sides. They are united by means of springs, slides, or staples, so that the crown may be partially or wholly raised, or shut down entirely, at the pleasure of the wearer!

I wonder how many of these hats were sold. I think the "every-day" man would prefer holding his hat in his hand if very hot. Perhaps this hat was intended for those whose hands are already occupied—porters carrying burdens, bakers pushing carts, or cricketers when fielding or batting (Fig. 5).

The next hat on my list goes in for being

strong, if nothing else ; it is made of tin, copper, or other metal. One can imagine the unearthly din and clatter there would be about one's head during a sharp hail or rain storm.

The next hat is patented by a scientific gentleman. His hat may be described as a medicinal or surgical hat. But let him describe it in his own words :—

“My invention consists in the introduction into coverings for heads of such combinations of metals or materials as shall form with the moist skin during the wearing of such coverings a voltaic or galvanic combination, and develop a current of electricity, the electrical current so developed curing or relieving headaches or other nervous or painful affections in the head of the wearer.”

What a delightful hat to wear at the Royal Academy or other picture gallery, for these are the places which one never leaves without a headache. The doctors, I am told, have discovered the headache caused by looking at pictures to be quite unique, and I hear it has been given a name all to itself to distinguish it from others. Why should not the Royal Academy have a counter where these medicinal hats could be had on loan, after the manner of opera glasses at the theatres? or, failing this, might not private enterprise satisfy the wants of the public? I give this suggestion away to the street newspaper boy or to the street toy-seller, or any other person who cares to have it. Of course, if these hats were found satisfactory, they would be worn at all times, and in all places, whenever one had a headache ; indeed, a neuralgic person would have a hat-peg fixed over his bed with the hat hung on, ready for instant use.

The next hat is not of such an ambitious nature as the last ; it is to be used more as a preventive than a corrective. In the words

of the inventor, “It is a cap which ensures safety, ease, and comfort to the wearer when travelling ; it consists of one, two, or three air-tight circular tubes to be inflated when required for use.” In this we have something very novel if nothing else, and suited to those people who tell you all they want is comfort, and that the look of the thing is nothing to them. What a curious aspect our railway stations would assume if these hats were generally worn ! Old gentlemen short of wind would tip a porter and get their hats blown

out for them ; porters would carry a pair of bellows hung from their belt expressly for this purpose. On cold days, when it would be dangerous to remove the cap from the head, passengers would blow each other out. What an animated scene ! (Fig. 6.)

The next hat on my list is one intended to protect the eyes from the sun and dust. Just over the brim we have two apertures for the eyes, filled with glass, gauze, or other suitable material. When the wearer is annoyed with the dust or sun, or in the distance views an enemy or dun (I see I have lapsed into poetry), he simply pulls his hat down to his ears and goes on



FIG. 5.



FIG. 6.

his way rejoicing (Fig. 7). Another inventor, apparently much struck with this invention, improves upon it. He makes the body of the hat in two parts, the upper part resting on the head, the lower part, which carries the brim, sliding over the other; it is



FIG. 7.

provided with apertures and screens as before described.

The next novelty is a reversible hat having a cloth surface for fine weather, a waterproof surface for wet weather. The next has an attachment for striking matches; the next contains a mirror. Then we have a hat constructed in such a manner that it will fit any sized head—a useful piece of clothing for large and graduating families.

The inventor we now come to has apparently been in a wholesale business, where he has got into the habit of doing things on a large and exhaustive scale, for he takes out protection for a hat with a brim or peak adapted to receive certain useful articles, namely, a looking-glass, comb, pencil, &c. But this is nothing compared to the invention of another gentleman who patents a walking-stick which contains a pistol, powder, ball, screw, telescope, pen, ink, paper, pencil, knife, and drawing materials! We can imagine this latter gentleman arriving at a sea-side lodgings without any luggage; we can see the landlady courteously, but firmly, refusing to take him in; we can see our inventor unscrewing his walking-stick, and exhibiting his belongings to the astonished landlady.

"Here, my good woman, is my luggage;" a smile from the landlady, and admission graciously granted (Fig. 8). Certainly these articles would be useless as toilet and

sleeping requisites, but why not have a Saturday to Monday walking-stick, to contain night-shirt, razor, sponge, tooth-brush and shaving-brush?

There is one more hat to be mentioned, and we must then get on to other garments.

This hat has a removable brim which can be folded up and put in the pocket; we are not told what advantage the wearer gains by getting rid of his brim in this curious and eccentric manner, but perhaps the hat is one meant more particularly for members of the conjuring profession; though it would certainly be useful to a person paying an afternoon call necessitating a hot and sunny walk. He would travel with the brim on; on approaching the house the brim would be taken off and concealed, and he would ring

the bell clothed in an ordinary hat.

In looking through these specifications, we find collars, gloves, stays, and crinolines have received the most attention. The latter seem to have exercised the brain of the inventor to a dangerous extent; the great problem was to construct a crinoline which would permit the wearer to sit down in comfort, to enter a vehicle, and to pass through narrow places. Some of the contrivances and dodges to attain these ends to the uninitiated sound most complicated. Strings and pulleys are freely used; I have only space to describe one of these inventions, I give it in the inventor's own words:—"The crinoline is made of light air-tight



FIG. 8.

material, capable of collapsing, and having a small aperture in the upper part, in order that thereto may be adapted a minute pair of bellows of a very slender form; a second

aperture allows for the emission of air when ladies shall desire to sit down."

The next invention will be of interest to military men, to those fond of camping out, and travellers generally. Listen to the words of the inventor:—"My invention is an improved military cloak; the body of the cloak is nearly circular, a hood is fixed to the neck portion, sleeves are sewn to the body." Such a cloak, we are informed, forms an excellent close tent. The cloak can be suspended by the hood, holes can be made in the lower edge of the cloak for the passage of pegs, and the cold

front part of the skirt can be unbuttoned and buttoned back behind, forming swallow tails. Thus dressed the wearer can accept an invitation to dinner at a moment's notice. A white tie he could always carry with him, so as to be ready for any emergency.

Another frock coat is described which can be turned inside out and worn either way.

Here is another coat, which ensures you



FIG. 9.

may be kept out by means of the customary buttons and buttonholes.

On the first blush this sounds rather a good idea, and almost practicable, till the thing is looked into more closely. We then find that the cloak must either be very, very large for the wearer, or, on the other hand, the tent must be very, very small for the occupant. To put it graphically, we have the choice of two sorts as depicted here (Fig. 9). We are not told what happens to the sleeves when used as a tent; perhaps one is stuffed with straw to keep out the cold, the other being used as a chimney or ventilator!

Another tent coat is formed by buttoning three coats together, each one being one-third of a circle in shape. Such a tent would be all very well for two of the men, but the third, I am afraid, would have to sit outside, to say nothing of the dog, supposing there was one.

Almost as marvellous as the above is the description of a coat, the skirts of which are attached to the body in such a manner that whilst it is being worn it may be readily converted into a frock coat, a dress coat, a hunting coat. Apparently the

a soft and dry seat wherever you may sit down (Fig. 10)—a peculiarly appropriate coat for a third-class smoking carriage: "In the back part of the coat there is placed, between the lining and the cloth, a bag or cushion, which, when inflated, forms a seat. A small tube of indiarubber extends from the bag to the side pocket." Fancy travelling by train, not knowing such a thing as this coat existed, and seeing your fellow passengers gradually rising higher and higher in the world on the seat opposite to you—how uncanny it would be!



FIG. 10.

Here are a few more curiosities:—A child's bib with a trough attached, the whole made of some waterproof material; a pocket which cannot be picked; a muff and boa filled with air, to save you from a watery grave; cuffs and collars made of steel, painted or enamelled white; trousers with double legs — on the outer legs getting soiled or bespattered you tuck them up, and behold a clean pair. This arrangement would be only suitable, I should say, when worn with an overcoat. Last, but not least, we read of sham calves in stockings.

Under the head of umbrellas and walking sticks we get some very laughable inventions.

One is an umbrella, which, in some wonderful way, is converted into a walking-stick, and so formed that a spear can be attached, when it is useful as a weapon of offence and defence. I recommend it to elderly ladies in the dog-days, as a protection from sun and mad dogs.

The next invention is a rain absorber, to prevent rain from running down from hats and umbrellas. The absorber is formed either of uncovered sponges or of sponges covered by a fabric. We are naively told that the absorber can be readily removed from the article, squeezed, and replaced.

We next come to an article which the inventor has named (take a long breath and shut

your eyes) the "Rhabdoskidophorus." This is an umbrella which takes to pieces; the silk and ribs being hidden within the stick, it is thus transformed into a stout walking-stick.

Let me now bring to the notice of frequenters of the Row and riders generally an umbrella with telescopic handle, which is attached to the saddle behind in such a manner that it can be adjusted to any angle. When not in use, the silk portion can be removed.

The next umbrella, to use a vulgarity, "takes the cake." It is one provided with windows, so that the occupant or user thereof can see where he is going. Thanks to this umbrella, a collision is avoided (Fig. 11).

Walking-sticks have been patented with all manner of attachments on them and within them. Among other things mentioned we find almanacks, thermometers, pistols, pipes, perfumes, inkpots, and crutches.

The feet come last, and form a fitting end to this article. There is only one invention worth mentioning, which consists of metal plates which are attached to the heels of boots, thus protecting the trousers from splashes of mud (Fig. 12).

The moral of all this is, that every man can be an inventor, but not necessarily a successful one.



FIG. 11.



FIG. 12.