

## ATMOSPHERIC RAILWAYS.

It is long since the system of atmospheric propulsion for railways was tried, and given up after much futile effort and vain expense. It is possible, however, with this, as with many other projects which have failed at first, that new improvements may, at some future time, give the method greater practicability than it has hitherto possessed. In a recently suggested plan, looking to this end, the inventor employs a slot along the top of the tube, as has before been done, and forms the tube with a vertical flange on each side of the slot. In order to close over the slot air-tight he employs a continuous length of vulcanized india-rubber, strengthened, if desired, with canvas or other material, and on the upper surface of the strip of india-rubber he fixes plates of metal in short lengths. A recess or groove is also made along the top of the inner side of each of the vertical flanges at the sides of the slot, which recess is deep enough for the india-rubber band and the metal plate fixed above it to lie in, so that the top of the metal plates may be level with or below the top of the flange, whilst the band of india-rubber rests at its sides on the bottom of the recess. A thin band of iron or other metal not quite the width of the open part of the slot may run along under or over the india-rubber to take the strain or drag off it. To raise the band to allow air to pass into the tube immediately behind the piston, the inventor passes the band over a pulley, and to again close down the valve in rear of the piston he employs another pulley connected to or carried by the carriage. By this means a free supply of air is admitted directly on to the back of the piston, and the tube in rear of the piston is filled with air. Afterwards the valve is pressed down on to its seat, and so a perfectly air-tight joint is secured.—*American Artisan.*

## JANUARY.

The first month in the Calendar—When and How it Became the First of the Year.

It is very appropriate that this should be the first month of the year, as far as the Northern hemisphere is concerned, since, its beginning being near the winter solstice, the year is thus made to present a complete series of the seasonal changes and operations, including equally the first movements of Spring, and the death of all annual vegetation in the frozen arms of Winter. Yet the earliest calendars, as the Jewish, the Egyptian, and Greek, did not place the commencement of the year at this point. It was not done till the formation of the Roman calendar, usually attributed to the second king, Numa Pompilius, whose reign is set down as terminating in 672 B. C. Numa, it is said, having decreed that the year should commence now, added two new months to the ten into which the year had previously been divided, calling the first January, in honor of Janus, the deity said to preside over doors (Latin *Janua*, a door), who might very naturally be presumed, also, to have something to do with the opening of the year.

Although, however, there was a general popular regard to the 1st of January as the beginning of the year, the ancient Jewish year, which opened with the 25th of March, continued long to have a legal position in Christian countries. In England it was not till 1752 that the 1st of January became the initial day of the legal, as it had long been of the popular, year. Before that time it was customary to set down dates between the 1st of January and the 24th of March, inclusive—thus January, 30, 1648-9, meaning that, popularly, the year was 1648, but legally 1649. In Scotland this desirable change was made by a decree of James VI, in privy council, in the year 1600. It was effected in France in 1564; in Holland, Protestant Germany, and Russia in 1700; and in Sweden in 1753.—*St. Joe, (Mo.) Herald.*

DANCED TO DEATH.—A Pittsburg (Pa.) paper gives these particulars of a waltzing contest for a gold ring in that city, recently:

At midnight the band struck up "It Bache," and a full dozen competitors took their places on the floor, entering for the contest. At the expiration of twenty minutes four of the couples gave way and took their seats, leaving the rest twirling and whirling in the giddy and intoxicating dance. One hour more there were but three couples on the floor, and the dance went on till another hour had passed, when, from sheer exhaustion, another couple gave way, leaving the floor to the remaining two pairs of enthusiastic terpsichorean devotees. The band of music played and played, and the four fast falling dancers danced and danced, till even those who looked upon them grew sick and dizzy. At the end of the fourth hour the musicians grew feeble, and from the finger ends of the violinists the blood trickled to the floor; but still they supplied the moving power to keep the dancers going. The excitement grew intense, as the fifth hour of the dance came on, and there were those present who insisted on putting an end to the merry, though reckless, quartette suicide. However, no interference was permitted, and the prize dance over the jaws of death went on. After five hours and three minutes had elapsed, one of the ladies fainted, and her partner quickly followed her example, and amidst cheers the prize was awarded to the other couple who kept the floor. Then came a summing up of damages. The two contesting girls were higher death than life, and had to be conveyed to their homes— together with their partners, who were as badly used up—in carriages, and all have since been in a precarious condition and under medical treatment. The girls had to have their shoes cut from their feet, and their limbs were swollen next day to an enormous size. The young men will hardly recover, and the musicians suffered terribly, and will never again play at a terpsichorean contest.

A flowery exchange says: "The oyster is what is known to science as a marine accephalous mollusk of the lamellibranchiate order of the genus *Ostrea*."

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