LOCAL MISCELLANY.

ANOTHER EXPLOSION IN BROADWAY.

THE ACCIDENT DUE TO THE OPERATIONS OF THE AMERICAN STEAM HEATING COMPANY.

A violent explosion of gas occurred at the manhole of the American Steam Heating and Power Company at Maiden-Lane and Broadway shortly before 11 o'clock yesterday morning, causing much alarm among the occupants of the surrounding buildings and wild excitement among passing teams. Besides the destruction of windows, two persons passing by were severely injured. The sound of the explosion was louder than the report of a cannon, and the two man-hole covers, the upper and lower, were shot into the air in fragments. The pipes of the American Steam Heating and Power Company are adjacent to the pipes of the Mutual Gas Light Company at that point. The steam pipes are surrounded by creosoted plank boxes, the interstices being filled in with lampblack. The Steam Heating Company stopped supplying steam a week ago and that fact caused the pipes to contract and the breakage or leakage of the Mutual Gas Company's pipes caused a mixture of air and gas, explosive at the slightest spark. The present accident is said to have been caused in this way. The American Steam Heating Company had men employed in digging up a connection box in front of No. 5 Maiden-lane. The ground being frozen a fire was lighted to lessen the labor. The flame set on fire the escaping gas from the trenches, and running along the pipes caused an explosion at the man-hole where the gas had accumulated. The covers flew up in the air, and the sky seemed to rain lamp black for a short time. A mass of flame shot up and pedestrians and occupants of neighboring buildings hastily sought refuge.

Foreman T. J. Madden of the Mutual Gaslight Company descended the man-hole and extinguished the fire, thereby preventing further disaster. When the smoke and excitement had subsided it was found that two persons had been injured. They were W. M. Hunt, age fifty-three, a general business agent living at No. 351 East Eighty-fifth-st., and Nathan Simon, age thirty-three, a tailor of No. 85 Essex-st. Jeremiah Counselor of Newark, N. J., who was passing at the time, was knocked down by the concussion, but was able to go home unassisted. Mr. Hunt and Mr. Simon were taken to the offices of the Exchange Fire Insurance Company on the southeast corner of Maiden-lane and Broadway, wherethey were temporarily attended by Dr. Swanman, of One-hundred-and-fifth st. They were both taken to the Chambers-Street Hospital. Mr Hunt was subject to fits and at the hospital suffered from an attack brought on by the shock. He was shortly afterward taken home by friends. Mr. Simon's face was badly burned. It was dressed in the hospital and he went home. The damage done to the neighboring buildings was not great, but they were covered with lampblack. The plate glass windows in the office of J. C. Wilber & Co. and Messrs. Fox & Co., on the third floor of No. 1 Maiden-lane, were shattered to pieces. The force of the explosion was sufficient to overturn the covering of a man-hole at Broadway and John-st., a block away.

ANXIOUS FOR CUSTOM HOUSE POSITIONS.

General Williams and Messrs. Comstock and Livingston, the Civil Service Commissioners, continued every day last week the examination of applicants for positions in the Custom House. The rooms provided for the use of the Commissioners in the fourth story of the Federal Building, have been fitted up with desks and tables, so that over forty applicants can be examined at once. About 250 applicants have been questioned on arithmetic, geography and other subjects. The persons were examined last week for positions as clerks at $1,200 a year, inspectors, night inspectors, weighers and assistant weighers. Many of those who applied for appointment as weighers have had experience in the duties of the position, having served as "extra" weighers at the pay of laborers. The examinations have, therefore, embraced questions in reference to the particular duties of the position. About one in three of those who apply for work in the weighing department has a chance of appointment. The proportion of probable appointments in the other departments is less.

ARRIVAL OF OCEAN STEAMSHIPS.

Six large steamers arrived yesterday, the State of Nebraska, the Devon, the Frisia of the Hamburg-American Line, the Stella, the France and the Bethania. They carried 138 cabin and 916 steerage passengers. Most of them reported a tempestuous voyage, with heavy gales and seas. The Devon, of the Great Western Line, was eighteen days from Bristol. On January 13, in latitude 51° north, longitude 34° west, she encountered a terrific hurricane from the northwest and had tremendous seas for forty-eight hours, and then heavy gales for eight days. Her only injury was a slight damage to her boat covers.

The State of Nebraska met with strong gales. The Frisia, with 35 cabin and 376 steerage passengers, left Hamburg on January 10. Have three days later, and arrived off Sandy Hook at 9:30 a. m. The Stella, of the Royal Netherland Line, was twenty-four days in passage. She encountered calms and squalls up to January 11, and then heavy gales with a fearful sea from the northwest. She was not damaged.

The ship Annie M. Small reported having had heavy gales in the China seas. She sprung three of her topsail yards.

THE YONKERS SAVINGS BANK SOUND.

The flurry which occurred among a part of the depositors in the Yonkers Savings Bank on Thursday and Friday had almost disappeared yesterday. There were only a few more withdrawals of money than is usual on Saturday. Among businessmen of all classes no one could be found who doubted the bank's soundness. Ethan Flagg, president of the bank, said to a TRIBUNE reporter who asked him what started the "run": "I cannot explain the affair. The panic was confined to the working classes entirely. While the 'run' was the greatest there were many good-sized deposits made. The bank has been in successful operation since 1854, and it was never in a better condition than it is to-day. We have securities amounting to $750,000, par value, that we could turn into cash at almost an hour's notice. The par value of the bank's assets is $1,165,000; the liabilities amount to a little more than that, but the premiums on our securities make the actual surplus owned by the bank more than $100,000. We are rather glad the affair has occurred, as it takes money off our hands that we can't invest to the best advantage just now."

QUARRELLING ABOUT A LIQUOR STORE.

John Carey was arraigned before Justice Patterson in the Jefferson Market Police Court yesterday on charge of retaining money belonging to his sister-in-law. About two weeks ago Lawrence Carey died at his home, No. 121 McDougal-st. On the first floor of the house he had kept a liquor store. His brother, John, was his bartender, and it is asserted that he tried to retain possession of the premises to the exclusion of Mrs. Carey. She visited the store yesterday, and seeing John Carey take possession of all the money in the drawers, caused his arrest. He said that Mrs. Carey was separated from her husband at the time of his death, and although she now occupied the rooms over the store, she had no business there. The Justice decided that it was a case for the civil courts and dismissed the complaint.

NO RESPECT FOR PRIVATE RIGHTS.

Washington A. Hall, president of the Oriental Bank, at Grand-st. and the Bowery, went before Justice Power yesterday, at the Tombs Police Court, to prefer a charge of trespass against John S. Cunningham, foreman of a gang of laborers in the employment of the Brush Electric Light Company, for a wilful and malicious trespass in cutting and digging up the sidewalk and flags in front of that bank, and thereby injuring the property. Cunningham on being arraigned said that he had acted under instructions from the Electric Light Company and by virtue of a permit issued by the Board of Aldermen. Justice Power reminded him of the rights of private property, but he shifted the responsibility to his employers. He was paroled on his own recognizance.

CUTTING STEERAGE RATES.

The Liverpool and Glasgow lines of steamships will reduce the steerage fare from $30 to $21 tomorrow, and the continental lines will make a proportionate diminution of rates. This action was decided upon by the North Atlantic Conference, to which nearly all the ocean lines belong. Two lines which run to Boston and one to this port will not do this. It is understood that this action of the conference was taken because these three lines were cutting rates, or would not enter the combination. "The real purpose appears to be," said a well-informed man yesterday, "to run out these three companies."

It is thought that this action will bring to this country a "cheaper and lower" class of emigrants than heretofore, should the reduction last for any length of time.

A FIELD OF ICE AT STATEN ISLAND.

The Staten Island ferryboats were running uninterruptedly yesterday, and they found little trouble from the ice. A policeman stationed at the entrance all day said that the boats had run without any trouble. "But," he added, "you can never tell how soon it will be before the ice will come crowding in and blockade the boats."

One could see off the Battery an apparently solid field of ice, lying around the northern end of Staten Island, but the boats pushed through it easily. The North River boats had no difficulty from ice.

CANDIDATES FOR WEST POINT.

Twenty young men, candidates for the West Point cadetship in the Xth Congressional District, met at the hall of the Board of Education yesterday morning for examination. The committee appointed by Congressman R. P. Flower to examine the candidates consisted of Superintendent Jasper, Professor Drisler, of Columbia College, and Paul Dana. Each candidate received a number which he placed at the top of every paper he completed. This was the only mark by which the candidates were to be distinguished from each other. The young men were examined in spelling, geography, history, arithmetic, composition and grammar. The examination lasted three hours. At its close Superintendent Jasper announced that the name of the successful candidate would be made known as soon as the papers had been examined, which, he thought, would be in about one week.

REAL ESTATE DULL AND STRONG.

TRANSACTIONS NOT LARGE, BUT INQUIRIES PLENTIFUL.

There is only a moderate activity in the real estate market. The latter part of the month has not yet yielded the results promised by the spurt in business soon after the opening of the New Year. Yet conservative dealers express themselves as satisfied with the general condition of affairs. Those who have looked for a "boom" in prices and those who have expected a rapid and steady increase of activity have been disappointed. But the market remains in a healthy condition, with full prices commanded by sellers, who are less numerous than the buyers. There is little friction in making any transaction, except where unreasonably high values are demanded by owners. Downtown business property continues in excellent request, and prices verge a shade upon the extravagant. One of the big purchases of the week in this line was that of Nos. 59 and 61 Liberty-st. by the United States Electric Light Company, for $285,000. A good opportunity to test the market will be offered next week, when the property in Broadway now occupied by Tefft, Weller & Co., will be sold at auction to close an estate. This plot has a frontage in Broadway, Worth and Pearl-sts., and embraces about seven city lots. Real estatemen think that the property ought to bring about three-quarters of a million dollars. It is to be noted that newer properties are now being put upon the market through auction sales than at the same time last year. Such improved and unimproved lots as were sold in this way last week brought fair prices—in some cases high ones.

There were no notably heavy dealings in dwelling houses last week. The inquiry for this class of property, however, is better than it has been for months past. Unless there should be an unnatural stiffening of rates on the part of owners, there should be a fair business done in this direction within the next thirty days. Preference continues to be shown for east side realty and the dealings in the west side are quiet. Among the sales worth noting were those of No. 28 East Fifty-eighth-st. for $47,000 to Walter C. Stokes, of No. 693 Madison-ave.; for $30,000 cash to Peter T. O'Brien, and No. 44 East Thirty-st. for $22,080 to Joseph A. Moalheimer. The second floor of the Lisbon Apartment House has been sold for $31,000. Two of the Seward Apartment Houses, in Ninety-third-st., between Third and Lexington-aves., have been sold for about $75,000. The sellers, Messrs. Smith & Ellis, accepted in part payment property in the annexed district.

The plans are prepared for J. Rothschild's new residence in Fifty-seventh-st., between Fifth and Sixth-aves., the estimated cost of which is $250,000. J. R. Maxwell will erect twelve frame dwellings in Babylon, L. I., to cost about $40,000. Numbers of small dwelling-houses are soon to be built in Harlem, on the West Side.

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS EXCITED.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW WHETHER THEIR SALARIES ARE TO BE CUT DOWN.

The public school teachers, especially the women, are disturbed over the possible cutting down of their salaries. The Board of Apportionment this year granted for the schools $120,000 less than the estimate made by the Board of Education. The latter body is engaged in determining how the different sums shall be made up; the Executive Committee have handed the subject over to the Finance Committee for consideration. The Executive committee will probably make a report at the meeting of the board on Wednesday next. The plans already discussed for making good the deficiency of $120,000 include a general reduction of teachers' salaries or a reduction of the salaries of female teachers, the closing of the colored schools, the discharge of special teachers, etc. The result has been a state of alarm among all the teachers. The rumor went out that the salaries of female teachers were to be cut down, while those of the male teachers would remain unaffected. This was received with indignation by the women. Many teachers have called at the office of the Board of Education, in Grand-st., within the last few days, and discussed the situation. One woman teacher exclaimed: "The Board of Apportionment ought to have its ears pulled!" All were of the opinion that the fault lay with that body. The Board of Education, they said, was anxious to do the best possible for the teachers, but that body had been placed in a predicament by not having sufficiently large appropriation. "You may say, if you," one woman remarked to a TRIBUNE reporter, "that the salaries of lady teachers will not be cut down," and she looked as if she meant it. There was much comment on the action of the Board in increasing the salary of the president of the Normal School $1,500, so that his salary was made $7,500, while now there was talk of reducing other salaries. "And Normal School training is not as essential, either, as our common schools," one teacher said.

Superintendent Jasper said that no action had yet been taken. "There have been various plans under discussion," he stated; "among them the proposal to reduce the maximum salaries of the lady teachers. Those are maximum teachers who have taught for fourteen years. They receive the maximum salary allowed in their grade. A report on the matter will be made next Wednesday, probably."

The maximum salaries are from $2,250 to $3,000 for male teachers in the grammar schools, and from $1,200 to $1,900 for female teachers; in primary schools, from $1,000 to $1,750.

Complaint has been made that teachers who are absent from any cause, sickness included, receive no salary, and that those who fill their places temporarily receive only one-third of their regular salary. Superintendent Jasper said of this: "It is not so. Two rules hold good in case of sickness. First, any teacher who has served five years, and has a clear record, will be excused, sick, for three months by the Board, with full pay, on the recommendation of the trustees of the ward. Secondly, the substitute's pay is deducted from the teacher's salary, at the rate of $1 11 a day, up to a certain time. I have here on my roll the name of a young lady who was absent forty days in 1880, sixty days in 1881, and 125½ days in 1882, for illness. She was excused at first for three months, then for five months, on full pay, the substitute's wages being deducted at the rate of $1 11 a day."

THE MAYOR AND HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS.

Mayor Edson is of the opinion that there should be closer relations between the head of the city government and the heads of the various departments. Yesterday he sent a copy of the following circular to all the departments:

It is a well-known fact that for many years past legislation by the state affecting the government of this city has, in many respects, been crude, unsatisfactory and leading to complications and unnecessary expenditures. I am convinced that this may be avoided in the future to a great extent by more frequent consultations between the heads of the various departments of the city government, so that all proposed legislation affecting our municipal affairs may be first carefully considered at home, and then, if believed to be necessary or for the best interests of the city, be sent to the Legislature with the approval of the Mayor. In order that such a system may be inaugurated without delay, I respectfully recommend that the Commissioners of the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Department of Public Parks, the Department of Docks, the Department of Charities and Correction, the Health Department and the Department of Taxes and Assessments shall designate one of their number to represent them in such consultations with the Mayor and the heads of the other departments of the city government designated as such in the charter. I trust this recommendation may receive your careful consideration, and that I may be favored with your early reply, upon receiving which I shall immediately call a meeting of the persons so designated, together with the heads of the other departments of the city government, and I shall continue to do so as frequently as it may seem to be desirable, in accordance with the authority vested in the Mayor by section 23 of the charter.

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE TRANSATLANTIC MAIL SERVICE

From The North British Mail.

Among commercial circles in Liverpool the opinion is prevalent that Mr. Fawcett, acting upon some suggestions made during a debate on the ocean mail subsidies last year, will during the forthcoming session propose several very important alterations in the Government mail contracts for the colonies and elsewhere, and it is not improbable that some, is not all, of the foreign mail subsidies will be abolished on the termination of the existing contracts. The present arrangements for the carriage of the outgoing American mails from Liverpool and Queenstown will probably receive the attention Mr. Fawcett promised last year, and steamers noted for successively rapid passages will no doubt be called into requisition. At present the mails from the United States are delivered with admirable punctuality, but among those engaged in the American trade it is felt that the same punctuality does not mark the delivery of the English mails in America—particularly some of the Saturday's mails, always the largest and most important mail of the week, which ought to be given to vessels known for their fast transit across the Atlantic. It has been suggested to Mr. Fawcett that the Arizona and Alaska, undoubtedly the two fastest steamers afloat, should on their respective days of sailing, take out the Saturday's mail, as it would in their case insure one or two days at the least earlier delivery in America. In connection with the Government mail contracts there is very little doubt that the services to the East and West Indies, Australia, Queensland, New-Zealand, China and the Straits Settlements will undergo a thorough revision. There is no doubt that many of the new steamers engaged in the merchant service between Great Britain and the countries above-mentioned are, as far as speed is concerned, much better entitled to carry the mails than the ships belonging to the contract companies. Some of the vessels of the Orient Line have frequently beaten the regular mail steamers of the Peninsular and Oriental Company, while the Stirling Castle last year arrived in the Thames several days ahead of the China mail, though the latter came part of the way overland. The same may be said of many of the steamers leaving Liverpool for the West Indies. They invariably arrive days in advance of the mail steamers from Southampton.

The climate of Austin has a wonderfully invigorating effect on the intellects of young children. "How many ends has a stick of candy got?" asked Billy Smartboy of his father. "Two, of course." "That's where you are mistaken. I have bitten three or four ends off this stick of candy and there are two left yet."—[Texas Siftings.

IMPROVED BUILDINGS.

NEW APARTMENT AND TENEMENT HOUSES

WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED BY THE HEALTH BOARD OF THE CITY UNDER RECENT LAWS.

The apartment and tenement houses erected in this city recently have been so many in number and of such an improved character as to cause much comment. The law passed by the Legislature in 1879 gave the Board of Health control of this class of buildings, and all plans and specifications for these must be approved by them. The clerk in charge of the applications for building permits, and who also has control of the specifications for all the plumbing now done in this city, under a recent act of the Legislature, said to a reporter of THE TRIBUNE recently: "Since January 4, 1879 every room in every house built in the city has been thoroughly lighted and properly ventilated. Before the enforcement of the tenement-house law, buildings were erected so as to cover an entire lot. There were no special regulations, and the builders made as many dark rooms as they pleased. Architects were regarded as efficient according to the ingenuity they displayed in getting the greatest number of rooms into the least possible space. The buildings were not all erected facing on the street. Reached by a covered alley and separated by a narrow space, termed by courtesy a court, from the building in front, large rear tenements were built. The front structure served as a screen to prevent the filth and garbage thrown from the windows from being seen by passers-by. Rear houses now have been substantially crowded out. Only four of them have been built since the new law went into effect. In the few cases where permits have been given for them, the lots were exceptionally deep, running back 150 feet, and there were open spaces between the front and rear houses fully twenty-five feet in width.

"It was formerly customary to erect stables on the rear of an ordinary lot, but this also has been done away with. If a man had a grocery on the corner, he used to keep his horse and wagon in his back yard. The waste sinks and closets were constructed in the cellar, because this was a damp, dark hole in which nobody could be induced to live. Sometimes these closets were built next to the bedrooms, and the tenants while sleeping were exposed to the foulest odors and most noxious emanations. Now all these conveniences have to be placed in an extension especially constructed for the purpose. They are ventilated by a special shaft, and have no connection whatever with any room in the building.

"The work of improving tenement and apartment houses has been going on quietly," continued the clerk, "without any display, and with increased exactions, as experience and investigation developed their necessity. At first there was a constant wrangle, and nobody was willing to allow an inch more air-space than he actually was compelled to by the Board of Health. Now the builders have begun to realize that good light and ventilation are improvements that are made in their own interest. They have found by actual experience that those who have built with the greatest care in regard to sanitary improvements have done the best as regards renting their buildings. Their rents are higher, but are more cheerfully paid, and they secure a better class of tenants. Because they live in better ventilated rooms, the tenants enjoy better health. They consequently work with greater regularity, and pay their rent more promptly and with less hardship."

"The largest number of apartment-houses have been erected in Harlem. West of Third-ave. are to be found the better class of these. About 3,000 houses of all kinds is a fair estimate of the number built in this city in the last year. Of these upward of 50 per cent are apartment or tenement houses. So great is the demand for tenement and medium-priced apartment houses that builders are hardly able to finish their work before they are occupied. The records of the Bureau of Vital Statistics show that the number of deaths in the tenement-houses of improved construction have been materially less than in the older and badly built houses.

"The waterfulness and care exercised make the plumbing and other conveniences in the recently built tenements about as good from a sanitary point of view as they well can be, with the present arrangement of city lots. The plumber before beginning any work is required to file with the Board of Health a plan describing every detail of the proposed job. Whatever seems defective is pointed out and remedied before the Board will approve the plan. The sanitary engineer of the district keeps watch of the work, makes reports as it advances, and if any detail of the specifications is not fully complied with, notice of the violation is served upon the owner of the building personally. The owner must remedy the defect at once, or an injunction will be served upon him, by which he will be restrained from proceeding with any of the work about the house and from letting or selling the property until the fault is remedied. When the law was first enforced, "skin plumbers," as they were termed, adopted many subterfuges to cheat the engineers and inspectors. When ordered to extend a waste pipe to and through the roof or the sake of ventilation and to carry off the sewer gas, it was a favorite dodge to run it into the neighboring partition or some handy chimney and allow it to end there, thus endangering the health of the inmates of the house merely to save a few feet of pipe. Both owners and tenants are protected and benefited by the plumbing law. One of its requirements is that every house drain must be protected by a trap from the main sewer, and that the pipe inside the house must be of iron, with the joints caulked with molten lead. The soil and waste pipes must be of suitable diameter, extended at full caliber above the roof, and the trap of every fixture must be properly ventilated by a special vent-pipe. This not only insures protection against the siphoning of the trap and the entrance of sewer gas into the rooms, but also secures a thorough circulation of air throughout the entire system of pipes in the house. One of the inspectors who recently tested a system of plumbing arranged in accordance with the requirements of the Board, ascertained, by using the anemometer, that in some conditions of the atmosphere the air in the ventilating pipes was renewed four times in a minute. Under these regulations and requirements a man can now move into a new house, whether erected for only one family or more, with perfect confidence that everything is in first-rate sanitary condition, at least as far as light, ventilation and plumbing are concerned.

"The apartment and tenement houses," continued the clerk, "are usually divided into three classes by the Board of Health. The building at Madison-ave. and forty-second-st. is an excellent example of the first class, the most costly apartment-houses. The parlors in these houses are about 25 by 20 feet, and the kitchens are 15 by 15 feet. There are two elevators, one for carrying the people who occupy apartments in the house, the other for the grocers, butchers and other tradesmen. There are openings into the kitchens from the latter elevator, and the milkman or grocer rings the bell and hands the answering servant whatever there may be to deliver. The dining-rooms are 16 by 20 feet, and the five sleeping-rooms in each suite are nearly square, 15 by 15 feet on the average. There is a special ventilating shaft for the bath-room, the windows of which open upon a large court, insuring the best of ventilation. The trimmings are all of hard woods, of a rare quality and polished in an elegant manner. The mantels are of inlaid hard woods of the latest patterns, and the frescoing is artistic. The dining-room, library and parlors can be thrown together into one room whenever desired. The elevators are built in solid brick shafts. The whole building is heated by steam, and there are large revolving fans to assist in driving the air through the ventilating shafts, as may be desired. Each suite of apartments has a private hall, and is separated from the other suites as completely as if the rooms were in different houses. The servants' rooms adjoin the kitchen, and all their conveniences are separated from those of the other occupants of the house. Suites in houses of this class are rented for from $5,000 to $6,000 a year, and the demand for them is active.

"The second class of the Board of Health includes the apartment-houses where the suites rent for moderate prices. A good example of this class is building in Forty-eighth-st., between Third and Fourth-aves. This has only one elevator, but is provided with a servants' staircase. The windows in every room open into the outer air, and there is an ample brick central court to carry light and air into the halls. The windows in each bath-room also open into the outer air. There are parlors, libraries, sleeping rooms and kitchens of ample dimensions, having all the modern improvements. The trimming, mantels and the frescoing are very handsome, but not so expensive as in the houses of the first class. These houses usually have a frontage of about fifty feet, and the suites rent at from $75 to $100 a month each.

"The third class of the Board of Health are the most important of all, for they are the tenements of the laboring people. The suites of rooms in the best of these rent at from $13 to $15 a month. Most of the best houses of this class built now are of the kind known as 'dou-de-deckers.' In all double-deckers there are four families on each floor. In the old houses all except the front and the extreme back rooms are dark, and there are no bath-rooms or closets, except those used by all the tenants in common. In the double deckers each suite of rooms consists of three large rooms and a fully appointed bath-room opening into the hall, having a window into the open air, and built into a brick shaft so as to be utterly disconnected from the other rooms. The health of the occupants of these improved tenements has been found to be many per cent better than that of persons engaged in the same trade or calling living in one of the old dark-roomed buildings. The front rooms of the double-deckers have alcoves. These usually contain beds. In the daytime curtains are drawn in front of this recess, and the room becomes a nice parlor. At night the curtains are drawn back, and the occupants have a large airy bed-room. By a system of indentation, side courts are formed, and every room in the house looks out into the open air. The greatest feature of the improved double-decker is the cutting of the house into a system of half floors. That is, there are two suites of rooms at the head of each half flight of stairs, front and back. By putting two families on each half floor, as much privacy is secured as if there were only two suites of rooms on a floor, instead of four. Families with large families of more room than one suite will give, have found it both pleasant and convenient to take a half floor, or two suites. This practically gives a family a whole floor. There is a handy dumb-waiter, large enough to bring up coal, which is kept in bins in the cellar, groceries, etc., and to carry the washing in baskets up to the roof, where there are ample facilities for drying clothes. Everything about these houses is very plain but substantial, and very little repairing is necessary. The plumbing is first-class, and all the pipes are in sight, so that anything wrong about any part is seen and corrected before it can become a nuisance."

A gentleman who built two of these improved tenements over a year ago, when labor and material were cheaper than now, gave a TRIBUNE reporter the following interesting figures: The cost of the land and the two houses was $40,000. He had $2,000 cash, and he raised $38,000 by mortgaging the property. The annual cost to him now is: Interest on mortgage, $1,980; on his own money, $120; taxes, $625; repairs about $75—total, $2,800. The houses contain forty-eight suites, which rent for $3,640. His profits are thus about $5,840 a year. The buildings are so near fireproof that the owner prefers to take the risks on them himself. They are so well built that the repairs will be very small, and on account of their style and location every room is light, well ventilated and desirable. The applications that this gentleman has for tenements are sufficient to fill another house of the same kind.

FIRES DURING THE YEAR.

Fire Marshal Sheldon yesterday sent a report to the Commissioners stating that there were 2,001 fires in the city in 1882. The fires caused a total loss of $4,194,960—$978,132 on buildings and $3,216,828 on their contents. The property destroyed or damaged by these fires was insured for $21,352,401. There were 777 fires which caused losses of less than $10 each. Of the eight largest fires, one caused a loss of from $400,000 to $450,000, one of $350,000, two of over $150,000, and four of from $100,000 to $125,000.

UNSEASONABLE SPRING IN ENGLAND.

From The Pall Mall Gazette, Jan. 9.

The mild weather which prevailed last week produced a quickening effect upon vegetation such as I never before remember to have noticed in England so early in the year. Annuals and perennials alike seem to have been thoroughly deceived by the sudden change in temperature after the December frosts, and to have made up their minds two months too soon that spring is already upon us. I do not mean merely that the primroses are out in full bloom in many places, or that the buds on the rhododendrons are swelling with a futile promise of abundant blossom. Primroses are perennials of the most perennial sort; their leaves persist practically through the coldest winters, and their buds open sporadically at any time from October to June; while as to rhododendrons, they are an Alpine and Himalayan tribe, which laugh at English frosts and snows with their broad, glossy evergreen foliage, and can snow their massive color on a southerly shrubbery even on mornings when no well-regulated lowland flower ought to stir a petal from its warm bud. Nor do I mean only that many a gorse bush on the common is now one blaze of golden blossom; for furze, again, is a peculiarly hardy and thick-skinned evergreen, whose flowers will expand under the influence of a little generous sunshine even on days when the thermometer in the shade falls a degree or two below freezing. Primroses, gorse and rhododendron buds I have often seen before under similar circumstances, on far less provocation than during the present strange spell of spring-like weather; but I have never before seen such a universal quickening of seeds, tubers and leaf-buds in the month of January during several years' observation of our English seasons as that which is now taking place in all the meadows and gardens around us.

In the ditches by the roadside the seedling cleavers of the new year stand six inches above the ground. The little bitter cress has reached an inch or more, with its finely cut rosette of pinnate leaves. Both these are annuals and both started their crop of 1883 long before 1882 had been reckoned with its fathers. The common arum is a perennial, with a buried rootstock, but its foliage dies down entirely every autumn, and the reappearance of the twisted awl shaped leaf-bundle above the ground next season is one of the earliest and surest harbingers of coming spring. This year I have seen several of them peeping up already; and what is more, on unrolling the close spire of leaves, I have found the undeveloped flower wrapped up tightly in their centre. Of course the groundsel, the daisies, the dandelions, the creeping veronica and the small spurge are all in flower—they hardly ever desert us, even when the snow is on the ground; and the little annual field grass is alike flaunting its pensile head of yellow anthers and feathery pistils to the westerly breezes but to these indefatigable and undaunted winter creatures I attach small importance from a climatic point of view. It is far more noteworthy that so many seeds have already begun to sprout by the waysides and in the copses; that so many buds have begun to burst upon the shrubs and trees; that so many bulbous or tuber-bearing perennials have begun to send up fresh yearly shoots. Even the animal world is unusually active and lively; several snails have come out from their hibernating crannies a fortnight ago, and have ventured to quit their winter quarters, and some small flies have apparently must ken the mouth for May instead of January.

In the garden the signs of the times are no less remarkable. Crocus bulbs have everywhere sent up their long, fine, blade-like leaves inclosed in their little papery sheaths. Daffodils are showing their broader and flatter lances above ground, and the crimson shoots of the peony are peeping cautiously out between last year's withered stems. On the trellis against the south side of the cottage the yellow jasmine covers the side of the wall with its pale blossoms. Beneath on the flower-bed five or six golden anemones, with their broad leaf-like involucre, are fully out, while the Siberian saxifrage is coming on rapidly in the sunny corner by the box hedge. The flower-buds on the mahonia are big with blossom. Moreover, when I cut one of the terminal knobs on the rhododendron bush lengthwise with my knife, I can see within it, not only the tiny pink petals, but even the fully formed stamens and the little undeveloped ovary; while sweet blue violets are growing in abundance on the plot beneath. But perhaps the most ominous sign of all is the universality with which almost every shrub and tree is swelling its buds and bursting its dusky outer scales. To-day, however, the scarcening wind has come, and the inevitable frost will follow; and all this fair promise will be cut off by an untimely end, to the great detriment of our April gardens.

THE FLOODS AT MANNHEIM AND WORMS.

From The London Standard.

Mannheim is but a small island in the midst of a raging sea. Raging, one may fairly say, for, though the rain had almost ceased, the wind was very strong, and the waves could be seen, even from the height where I stood, beating on the dams. The great Rhine dam, which protects the further bank of the river, was broken, and Ludwigshafen, the "Sonnenwark" of Mannheim, was an island connected with Mannheim only by the great suspension bridge which carries road and railway. Dotted over this huge sheet of water were the villages whose names have occupied my telegrams—on the right, near, Friesenheim, further off, Oppau, on the left Edigheim, and in the far distance Frankenthal—or rather the remains of villages, little clusters of roofs, with a church tower dominating each. Looking through a telescope, one made out that everything was tottering and ready to fall; not a roof straight, not a wall unbroken. Hundreds of houses have disappeared beneath the flood now; it is no shallow lake, but a really deep sea. Few houses stand more than roof upward out of it. Few tree trunks are to be seen. Only consider what this scene means to those who a few days ago called these sheds their homes—the population of poor laboring folk, living on black bread, potatoes and milk. Their cattle lie under those ruins, dead; their stores of potatoes, heaped together against winter time, are rotting beneath the water; and their homes are washed away and destroyed by the waves. Truly it is a picture which would sadden the most careless of onlookers. The point of vantage which I had ascended was crowded with no more careless spectators. Many of them were once the occupiers of those ruined homes, and it was a sad, and often, I fear heart-broken, gaze that was bent upon them.

Descending the tower, I crossed to Ludwigshafen, and walked along the great dam nearly as far as the breach which was made where the Neckar and Rhine join. The chemical and soda works which are built along it were quite still and smokeless. They stand deep in water themselves. On leaving their shelter, the strength of the waves which are raised under the action of the fierce wind blowing to-day was evident. They beat almost over the embankment, and if I ventured further on did not seem the secure. I doubt if any part of it would stand long. I next went to one of the school houses, where the sufferers are now sheltered, to see something of their state. Pitiable, indeed, it was, even if they had not the consciousness of their loss of everything. Children, old men and women, sick, all crowded together, making the tables and desks into beds, scarcely realizing their position, except that they are without everything that makes life enjoyable. Instead of every comfort, they eyed me eagerly as I entered, as if they thought the stranger might perchance have some help to bring them. Without, the same saddening sight—a young girl carrying in a basket all she had saved from the wreck; a young man making his way to some depot with the best piece of family furniture, no doubt; or, still sadder, a mother leading her little children with some coarse black bread, all she had to give them.

On arriving at Worms I found the weather much improved, and made an excursion to some of the "near" lying villages by carriage and boat, in order to see more closely the harm done. The first, Bohenheim, appeared not much damaged, as it stood on the edge of the great mere, over which already many water birds were wheeling around. On approaching, one saw, however, how great the force of the water had been—in the lower part of the village scarcely a house still straight, and many houses were absolute heaps of ruins. Further on one comes to Rorheim, one of the places which has suffered most. Passing along the middle street, which was dry, I came to the church, and entering, found it had been used as a depot for every conceivable kind of saved property. On the font stood a great basket of potatoes; across the seats were thrown beds and bedding; while I noticed a number of unbaked rolls lying together in a bag just as they had been made for baking on New Year's night. Confessionals, side altars, organ loft—every conceivable nook and corner was employed by some one to store something especially valued; and over all streamed the sun through the painted windows and lit up the heterogeneous accumulation with many colored rays. In the street opposite people were still saving things by ladders through the windows and pioneers and firemen passed to and fro with boats. Being desirous of going through the worst parts myself, I addressed a band of men, smoking pipes stolidly, and inquired if I could get a boat. "What do you want it for?" asked one. "To go round the village a little." "And steal something I expect," added another. On my explaining, however, that my object was merely to obtain a view of the place for purposes of description, he assisted me in finding the village ferryman, who rowed slowly round, entertaining me the while with varied converse. One hundred and eleven houses had fallen, not counting barns and sheds, and the dam broke on New Year's night. One could hardly realize the disaster. Houses were to be seen twisted about in every conceivable way. Here was one with its end torn out, so that one could see the wall-papers in the rooms within; in another case the roof had opened out like a great umbrella, and lay on the water, with one chimney projecting slantingly from its middle point.

I questioned the old ferryman how it had come about: "In New Year's night the village was aroused about 9 in the evening by a fearful roaring, and then the water began to rise on the floor. At once there began a general flight to the church; sick people, bed-ridden children, all carried off in the dark, there to wait till dawn. And what a situation when dawn came! Some fifty houses already fallen, water cutting off the way on every side and no one knowing whether the building in which they had taken refuge might not soon become a victim, too, to the devouring waves." "Didn't you expect it; all the neighboring places were inundated?" "No; it was a complete surprise. No preparations made, no means of salvage ready. We thought the dam would hold."

And so I believe it is, when the dam is not actually breaking before his eyes; the peasant sits in the "wirthshaus," drinks his glass of beer, and discusses the misfortunes of his neighbors until the night-cry comes, and then—confusion and hasty flight. The state of unpreparation may be imagined from a story a young officer, who has been on duty at Frankenthal, told me. Thither in one of the boats came a bride, her bridal dress still gay; all she had saved were two large bouquets, which she held, in dazed fashion, one in either hand.

When Mr. Henry James called his amusing little story "An International Episode," he founded a capital title for a number of incidents constantly occurring here, typical both of the proverbial patience of our people and the unpardonable rudeness of foreigners, titled and otherwise. As an instance of this a little thing occurred a few days ago, so sublime in its "cheek" that it deserves to be recorded. A well-known lady and her son gave a brilliant ball, which was, as everybody expected, the great event of the season. A certain young Englishman, called by courtesy the Honorable Mr. So-and-so, wished to go, and applied through friends for an invitation. The card was sent, and the founder of the feast, not knowing the foreigner in question, inclosed his own card. The honorable gentleman duly went to the ball, but neither called on his host nor even took the pains to be presented either to him or his mother. "Manners maketh man."—[The Hour.

THE MONEY MARKET.

SALES AT THE STOCK EXCHANGE.

JANUARY 27, 1883.

THE GENERAL LIST.

Name.	Actual Sales. O'pg.	H'g'st.	Low'st	Final.	Closing Bids. Bid.	Ask'd	Shares Sold.
Alton & T. H.	60½	62	60¼	62	63	63½	825
A. & P. H. arf.	99½	99½	99½	99½	99¼	99½	100
B. Air L. pref.	80	80	80	80	80	81	310
B. C. R. & N.	83	83	83	83	83	84	100
Canada Pacific	..	..	..	..	92	..	..
Cedar Falls	..	..	..	..	12½	17	..
Cent. Pac.	83⅝	83½	83¼	83½	83½	83⅝	2,600
Can. South.	69½	70	69¾	69½	69½	69¾	1,900
C. C. C. & I.	77¾	77¾	77¼	77¾	77	79	100
C. C. & I. C.	..	..	..	..	3½	4½	..
Ches. & Ohio	23	23	23	23	22½	23½	100
Do 2d pref.	..	..	..	..	25	26½	..
Do. 1st pref.	32½	32½	32½	32½	33	33½	10
C. B. & Q.	122¾	122¾	122½	122½	122⅝	123	81
C. R. I. & P.	124	124	123¾	123¾	123¾	124	200
Chic. & Alton.	136	136	136	136	136	137	200
C. St. P., M. & O