

The Watchman and Southron

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 14, 1894.

STREET CAR CABLES.

SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES THEY HAVE TO CONTEND WITH.

How "Kinks" Are Located by the "Splicer"—Horny Handed Sons of Toil Mend Breaks With Neatness and Dispatch—The Big Broadway (New York) Cables.

If one stands astride the narrow slot which is, as it were, an artery through an artery of our great city on Broadway and watches the snaky cable as it glides along, he must pause a moment to consider before he can realize what an enormous amount of power it carries and what experiences it has to go through.

Before we tell the history of the cable let us see of what it is composed. A strong hempen strand five-eighths of an inch in diameter forms the inner core. Around this are wrapped six steel cables, which are in turn composed of seven strands wrapped around with other strands of steel wire, the whole making a total diameter of 1 1/4 inches.

A steel rod three-eighths of an inch in diameter and a foot in length weighs approximately one pound. The difference in weight between this cable and a steel rod of the same size may be realized when it is known that this cable weighs but three pounds to the running foot. The use of the central hemp rope is for the purpose of giving a certain pliability.

In order that rust and decay should be avoided, the rope is kept smeared with tar and oil. This is what causes the black shiny appearance. As one of the cables which obtains its power from the Broadway cable house is 20,000 feet in length, it is not difficult to determine the entire weight, which in this case would be 60,000 pounds.

The market price of cables being about 40 cents per foot, the cost of this would be in the neighborhood of \$8,000 for one coil of wire. The Broadway company maintains six cables, and as the approximate life of a cable in our busy thoroughfare is little more than eight months it would appear that the expense caused by the renewal of cables is not a small item.

In Denver longer cables than these exist, the one on the main street being 86,906 feet in length, having a diameter of but 1 1/4 inches. Owing to the fact that there is less traffic in the latter city, the work required from the cable is not so great. Its life is slightly lengthened, and 10 months may be put to its credit.

It is quite interesting to watch the peculiarities of the cable, and when we stop a moment to think how the grip-men, when they reach the termini of a line, have the destruction of \$8,000 worth of property in their power we can see that some means is yet to be devised which will perform automatically the action of throwing off the grip, for, unless the grip is loosened as the car approaches the power house, when it reaches the place where the cable descends the driving wheels something must give way, and while the cable generally has the best of the encounter every often a couple of strands are ripped, which entails considerable work upon the repairers.

At the Broadway power house Mr. M. Moore is the person who is technically known as the "splicer." He was brought from Denver, where he had been in charge of the cable in that city. He has about eight or ten men under him, who, with dexterity, make necessary repairs.

Cables are in a measure human. They have their diseases, and they need their doctors. Mr. Moore is the medical examiner, and from him we received several points concerning the troubles to which the cable is subjected.

In case a cable has become bent in any way, it is difficult, in fact almost impossible, to straighten it absolutely. The bend remains, and if we stoop down to watch its onward approach it looks like a huge sea serpent wriggling toward us, performing wonderful gyrations as it approaches. Several of these "kinks," as they are termed, have been made in the up town cable, which travels at the rate of \$10 feet per minute. As the rate of the cable is invariable, by simply looking at the clock the man, whose sole duty it is to watch the cable, can tell at exactly what place the "kink" is situated. As a matter of curiosity we inquired of the watcher at the Fiftieth street power house when the next "kink" would arrive. Looking at his watch and hastily making a mental calculation, he answered, "Between 4:11 and 4:12." In fact the "kink" came in sight immediately as the hands of the watch pointed to 11 minutes after 4.

While it is easy to localize accidents, it is difficult to assign causes. However, recently, for some reason or other, the Bowling Green cable had about 1,000 feet of strands ripped off, and the writhing, curling mass of wire, as it lay upon the floor of the power house, presented a most confused appearance, and one would be led to wonder how puny man could have the power to cope with such an apparently unwieldy mass. With huge shears, however, those pieces of metal are snipped off, and a new cable must be put in place of the damaged portion.

The splicing is an interesting operation. Unlike rope, the strands are extremely difficult to manipulate. Yet, with skill acquired from the continual work, each strand is woven into place among other strands, heavy pliers and marine spikes being used to separate the layers. When all is done, about four inches of the ends of each strand are left outside the cable, and by continued wear they finally break off, and the splice becomes practically as a virgin cable. Even the trained eye of Mr. Moore is unable to detect the splice after the wires have been thoroughly covered with tar. The joint is as firm and as strong as the original cable.

Delicate hands are out of place in this work, and cable splicers are veritably "horny handed sons of toil." Their work is done mainly in the wee hours of the night, when traffic is at its minimum. Mr. Moore assures me that with his eight or ten helpers he can splice in a thousand feet of cable in 1 1/2 hours.—Electrical Review.

Negroes Who Pass For Whites. At the census of 1880 nearly 34 per cent of the colored population was under 10 years of age, while at the census of 1890 only 28 per cent was under 10 years of age. Samuel E. Tatum, a Washington negro, in explaining this, says: "It may be a fact that the colored population is constantly falling off in its increase, for which there may be a great many reasons. We should first take into consideration the vast number of people of color leaving the race yearly. There are thousands who emigrate from the south so light in complexion that in the north they are supposed to be white, and in this way a vast number of families in the course of a decade lose their identity as people of color."—Washington Correspondent.

A Fasting Hog. Dr. Free Harris owns a hog that is fasting. She has not eaten or drunk anything for two months. She seems happy and contented, and no amount of tempting food will she take. She runs around the street and seems determined to outdo Dr. Tanner in the act. Much interest is felt in the outcome, and some betting. She is gradually losing flesh.—Dalton (Ga.) Dispatch.

A process has been devised by a Frenchman whereby glass may be securely soldered to metals. The portion of the glass tube or other article that is to be soldered is first covered with a thin layer of platinum. This deposit is obtained by brushing over the slightly heated glass a very natural chloride of platinum mixed with essential oil of camomile. The latter is slowly evaporated and when the white and odoriferous vapors cease to be given off the temperature is raised to a red heat; the platinum is then reduced and covers the tube with a layer of bright metal. Placing the metalized tube in a bath of sulphate of copper and connecting the tube to the negative pole of a battery of suitable energy there is deposited on the platinum a ring of copper, which will be malleable and very adhesive if the operation has been properly performed. In this state the glass tube topped with copper can be treated like a genuine metallic tube and soldered to iron, copper, bronze, platinum or any other metal that can be united with the solder.

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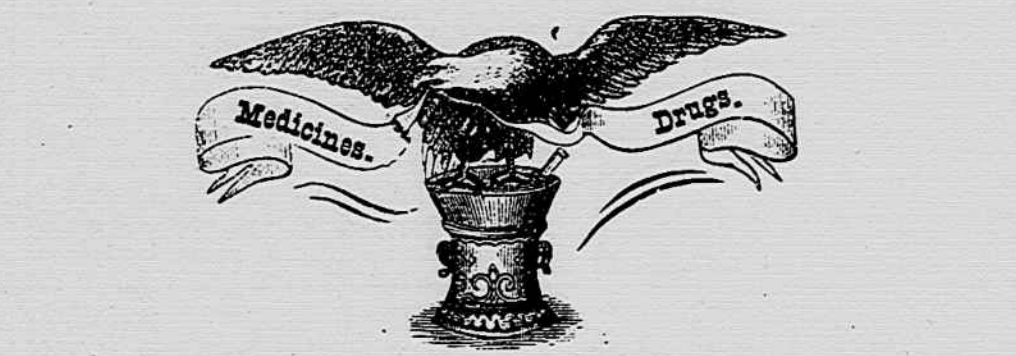


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