

ON THE PROTECTION OF HOUSES FROM LIGHTNING.

(Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, vol. iv, pp. 179, 180.)

June, 20, 1845.

Professor Henry made a communication relative to a simple method of protecting from lightning buildings covered with metallic roofs.

On the principle of electric induction, houses thus covered are evidently more liable to be struck than those furnished either with shingle or tile. Fortunately however they admit of very simple means of perfect protection. It is evident, from well-established principles of electrical action, that if the outside of a house were encased entirely in a coating of metal, the most violent discharge which might fall upon it from the clouds would pass silently to the earth without damaging the house, or endangering the inmates. It is also evident, that if the house be merely covered with a roof of metal, without projecting chimneys, and this roof were put in metallic connection with the ground, the building would be perfectly protected. To make a protection therefore of this kind the Professor advises that the metallic roof be placed in connection with the ground by means of the tin or copper gutters which serve to lead the water from the roof to the earth. For this purpose it is sufficient to solder to the lower end of the gutter a ribbon of sheet copper, two or three inches wide, surrounding it with charcoal, and continuing it out from the house until it terminates in moist ground. The upper ends of these gutters are generally soldered to the roof; but if they are not in metallic contact, the two should be joined by a slip of sheet copper. The only part of the house unprotected by this arrangement will be the chimneys; and in order to secure these it will only be necessary to erect a short rod against the chimney, soldered at its lower end to the metal of the roof, and extending fifteen or twenty inches above the top of the flue.

Considerable discussion in late years has taken place in reference to the transmission of electricity along a conductor;—whether it passes through the whole capacity of the rod, or

is principally confined to the surface. From a series of experiments presented to the American Philosophical Society, by Professor Henry, on this subject, it appears that the electrical discharge passes, or tends to pass, principally at the surface; and as an ordinary sized house is commonly furnished with from two to four perpendicular gutters (generally two in front and two in the rear), the surface of these will be sufficient to conduct silently, the most violent discharge which may fall from the clouds.

Professor Henry also stated that he had lately examined a house struck by lightning, which exhibited some effects of an interesting kind. The lightning struck the top of the chimney, passed down the interior of the flue to a point opposite a mass of iron placed on the floor of the garret, where it pierced the chimney; thence it passed explosively, (breaking the plaster,) into a bedroom below, where it came in contact with a copper bell-wire, and passed along this horizontally and silently for about six feet; thence it leaped explosively through the air a distance of about ten feet, through a dormer window, breaking the sash, and scattering the fragments across the street. It was evidently attracted to this point by the upper end of a perpendicular gutter, which was near the window. It passed silently down the gutter, exhibiting scarcely any mark of its passage until it arrived at the termination, about a foot from the ground. Here again an explosion appeared to have taken place, since the windows of the cellar were broken. A bed in which a man was sleeping at the time, was situated against the wall, immediately under the bell-wire; and although his body was parallel to the wire, and not distant from it more than four feet, he was not only uninjured, but not sensibly affected. The size of the hole in the chimney, and the fact that the lightning passed along the copper wire without melting it, show that the discharge was a small one, and yet the mechanical effects, in breaking the plaster, and projecting the window frame across the street, were astonishingly great.

These effects the Professor attributes to a sudden repulsive energy, or expansive force developed in the air along the

path of the discharge. Indeed, he conceives that most of the mechanical effects often witnessed in cases of buildings struck by lightning, may be referred to the same cause. In the case of a house struck within a few miles of Princeton, the discharge entered the chimney, burst open the flue, and passed along the *cock-loft* to the other end of the house; and such was the explosive force in this confined space, that nearly the whole roof was blown off. This effect was in all probability due to the same cause which suddenly expands the air in the experiment with Kinnersly's electrical air thermometer.

ON COLOR-BLINDNESS.*

(From the Princeton Review, vol. xvii, pp. 488-489.)

July, 1845.

It is an interesting fact in reference to the dependence of at least one class of our knowledge—on sensation, that many persons are born with defective vision and yet remain for years of their lives without being conscious of the deficiency. We know a gentleman who had probably been always near sighted, but who did not discover the peculiarity of his vision until the age of twenty-five, when it was accidentally made known by looking at a distant object through a concave lens. Many persons whose eyes are sound and capable of exercising the most delicate functions, are permanently unable to distinguish certain colors. And the number of such persons is much more considerable than we would be led to imagine from the little attention this defect of vision has excited. It is often unknown to the individual himself, and indeed only becomes revealed by comparing his powers of discriminating different colors, with those of other persons.

*1. Observations on color-blindness, or insensibility to the impression of certain colors. By Sir David Brewster. Philosophical Magazine.

2. Memoir on Daltonism, (or color-blindness.) By M. Elie Wartmann, Professor of Natural Philosophy in the Academy of Lausanne, &c. Scientific Memoirs.