

## SMITHSONIAN MISCELLANEOUS COLLECTIONS.

237

### DIRECTIONS FOR CONSTRUCTING LIGHTNING-RODS.

FROM ESSAYS ON METEOROLOGY, BY PROF. JOSEPH HENRY.

1st. The rod should consist of round iron, of not less than three-fourths of an inch in diameter. A larger size is preferable to a smaller one. (Ordinary gas-pipe may be employed.) Iron is preferred, because it can be readily procured, is cheap, a sufficiently good conductor, and, when of the size mentioned, cannot be melted by a discharge from the clouds. Other forms of rod, such as flat or twisted, will conduct the lightning, and in most cases answer sufficiently well. They tend, however, to give off lateral sparks from the sharp edges at the moment of the passage of the electricity through them, which might, in some cases, set fire to very combustible materials.

2d. It should be, through its whole length, in perfect metallic continuity; as many pieces should be joined together by welding as practicable, and, when other joinings are unavoidable, they should be made by screwing the parts firmly together by a coupling ferule, care being taken to make the upper connection of the latter with the rod water-tight by cement, solder, or paint.

3d. To secure it from rust, the rod should be covered with a coating of black paint.

4th. It should be terminated above with a single point, the cone of which should not be too acute, and to preserve it from the weather, as well as to prevent its being melted, should be encased with platinum, formed by soldering a plate of this metal, not less than a twentieth of an inch in thickness, into the form of a hollow cone. Points of this kind can be purchased of almost any mathematical instrument maker. Usually the cone of platinum, for convenience, is first attached to a brass socket, which is secured on the top of the rod, and to this plan there is no objection. The platinum

casing, however, is frequently made so thin, and the cone so slender, in order to save metal, that the point is melted by a powerful discharge.

5th. The shorter and more direct the rod is in its course to the earth the better. Acute angles, made by bending the rod, and projecting points along its course, should be avoided.

6th. It should be fastened to the house by iron eyes, and may be insulated by cylinders of glass. We do not think the latter, however, of much importance, since they soon become wet by water, and, in case of a heavy discharge, are burst asunder.

7th. The rod should be connected with the earth in the most perfect manner possible; and in cities nothing is better for this purpose than to unite it in good metallic contact with the gas-mains or large water-pipes in the streets; and, indeed, such a connection is absolutely necessary, if gas or water-pipes are within the house. Electricity, by what is called induction, acts at a distance on the perpendicular gas-pipes within a house, rendering them so highly negative, the cloud being positive, as to attract the electricity from a lightning-rod imperfectly connected with the earth, or even from the air through the roof. Damage to buildings on this account is of constant occurrence. The above connection can be made by soldering to the end of the rod a strip of copper, which, after being wrapped several times around the pipe, is permanently attached to it. When a connection with the ground cannot be formed in the way mentioned, the rod should terminate, if possible, in a well, always containing water; and, where this arrangement is not practicable, it should terminate in a plate of iron or some other metal buried in the moist ground. It should, before it descends to the earth, be bent, so as to pass off nearly at right angles to the side of the house, and be buried in a trench, surrounded with powdered charcoal.

8th. The rod should be placed, in preference, on the west side of the house, in this latitude, and especially on the chimney from which a current of heated air ascends during the summer season.

9th. In case of a small house, a single rod may suffice, provided its point be sufficiently high above the roof; the rule being observed, that its elevation should be at least half of the distance to which its protection is expected to extend. It is safer, however, particularly in modern houses, in which a large amount of iron enters into the construction, to make the distance between two rods.

less than this rule would indicate, rather than more. Indeed, we see no objection to an indefinite multiplication of rods to a house, provided they are all properly connected with the ground and with each other. A building entirely inclosed, as it were, in a case of iron rods so connected with the earth, would be safe from the direct action of the lightning.

10th. When a house is covered by a metallic roof, the latter should be united, in good metallic connection, with the lightning rods; and in this case the perpendicular pipes conveying the water from the gutters at the eaves may be made to act the part of rods, by soldering strips of copper to the metal roof and pipes above, and connecting them with the earth by plates of metal united by similar strips of copper to their lower ends; or, better, with the gas or water-pipes of the city. In this case, however, the chimneys would be unprotected, and copper lightning-rods soldered to the roof and rising a few feet above the chimneys, would suffice to receive the discharge. We say soldered to the roof, because, if the contact was not very perfect, a greater intensity of action would take place at this point, and the metal might be burnt through by the discharge, particularly if it were thin.

11th. As a general rule, large masses of metal within the building, particularly those which have perpendicular elevation, ought to be connected with the rod. The main portion of the great building erected for the World's Exhibition at Paris was entirely surrounded by a rod of iron, from which rose at intervals a series of lightning-conductors, the whole system being connected with the earth by means of four wells, one at each corner of the edifice.

The foregoing rules may serve as general guides for the erection of lightning-rods on ordinary buildings, but for the protection of a large complex structure, consisting of several parts, a special survey should be made, and the best form of protection devised which the peculiar circumstances of the case will admit.