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All About Fireworks

By Ethel M. Foster

Although, of course, it was a shocking thing to do, most of us, I think, would be very sorry if Guy Fawkes had never tried to blow up King James I. and his parliament, because if there had been no gunpowder plot we should not celebrate the fifth of November; and, if we did not do that, one of the chief reasons for having the fireworks that we all so dearly love would be gone.

No one quite knows who first started having fireworks; but the Chinese, who seem to have invented so many things, had fireworks in very ancient times, and still use them to-day in their religious ceremonies-indeed, some of the most wonderful fireworks in the world are to be seen in China and Japan. The Greeks and the Romans, too, were fond of fireworks; but I do not think they were of the same kind as we have, although we hear of "whirling wheels and dropping fountains of fire" being displayed in the circus at Rome. After Rome was sacked by the barbarians, we do not hear anything more about fireworks until the Crusaders brought back with them from the East the art of making gunpowder. But from the Middle Ages onwards, great occasions of all sorts-from the birth of kings to the celebration of some great victory-have been marked by firework displays. At the marriage of Henry VIII. with Anne Boleyn the citizens of London were treated to a great display of fireworks, part of the show being a red dragon spouting fire, round which leapt and shouted a number of "terrible,

monstrous, wild men."

It was the people of Florence—those great traders who introduced so many of the marvels of the East into Europewho were responsible chiefly for the development of fireworks as we know them, and Italian people still are very fond of

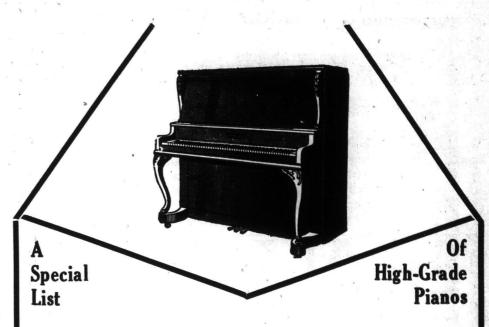
Now, how do they make those beautiful and wonderful things we call fireworks? As a child this was always a profound mystery to me, and now that I have been over a famous firework factory and seen rockets and crackers, and Roman candles and catherine wheels, and all the rest, being made, it is almost as much of a mystery as before. For who could guess that that hollow tube of paper or cardboard, or that round, whity-brown ball, looking like something between a gourd and a punching-ball, which is being filled with an uninteresting black powder and little lumps of what might be an ordinary brick, will, when set alight, fill the air with showers of golden sparks or silver rain, or stars of every color in the rainbow, or will light up the landscape with a red, blue or green light that "never was on land or sea"? And yet, whether you go in to watch a Roman candle being made, or a rocket, or one of those big "bombs," or "shells" as they are called, from which come showers of stars and golden rain, etc., you find that the two chief ingredients are a black powder and the little bricky-looking cubes.

The secret, of course, lies in what the powder and the cubes are composed of. If you look carefully at the black powder in the different sheds, you will see that some of it is very coarse, in great big grains, and some is as fine as dust; and, although the cubes, or "stars" as they are called, look very much alike, if you could see them being made, you would know that there is just as much difference in

All sorts of things are used in the composition of both the powder and the "stars," the ingredients required to cause the explosion being, of course, different from those that give the color to the fire-

The explosive part usually consists of gunpowder, or its constituents, charcoal, sulphur and saltpetre in various forms, though other things may be mixed with it, such as resin, lamp-black, starch or gum, in order to lessen or increase its explosive force. In order to obtain color, various chemicals are added; for instance, baryta gives a green flame, copper a blue flame, and soda an orange. The brilliant white light that accompanies silver rain is produced by adding powdered magnesium, while red fire is obtained from

strontia. The "stars" from which come the balls of fire, golden rain, etc., that light up when a rocket bursts into flame, consist of such things as gunpowder, charcoal, nitre, sulphur and some of the coloring materials I have just mentioned; these



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