

W. J. Hammer

980

“Electrical Diablerie”



Being a veracious account of an Electrical Dinner tendered in 1884 by William J. Hammer, Consulting Electrical Engineer, to the “Society of Seventy-Seven” of the N. P. H. S. of Newark, N. J., in the First Electrical House ever established.

“ELECTRICAL DIABLERIE.”

The following is reprinted from a metropolitan* paper, as illustrating some of the novel applications of electricity, in the FIRST electrical house ever equipped, and is published upon the supposition that “a little nonsense now and then, is relished by the wisest men.”

“Some years ago, (1884) on New Year’s eve, an entertainment was given at the home of Mr. William J. Hammer, in Newark, N. J., which, for the display of the powers of electricity has seldom, if ever, been equalled. Mr. Hammer, who has for years been associated with Mr. Edison, both in this country and in Europe, desiring to give his old classmates, the “Society of Seventy-Seven,” a lively and interesting time, invited them to an “electrical dinner” at his home. The invitations which were sent out were written upon Western Union telegraph blanks

* See N. Y. *World*, Jan. 3, 1885, and Newark, N. J. *Daily Advertiser and Journal*, Jan. 3, 1885.

with an Edison electric pen. When the guests arrived and entered the gate, the house appeared dark, but as they placed foot upon the lower step of the veranda a row of tiny electric lights over the door blazed out, and the number of the house appeared in bright relief. The next step taken rang the front door bell automatically, the third threw open the door, and at the same time made a connection which lit the gas in the hall by electricity. Upon entering the house the visitor was invited to divest himself of his coat and hat, and by placing his foot upon an odd little foot-rest near the door, and pressing a pear-shaped pendant hanging from the wall by a silken cord, revolving brushes attached to an electric motor brushed the mud and snow from his shoes and polished them by electricity. As he was about to let go of the switch or button, a contact in it connected with a shocking coil, caused him to drop it like a hot potato. Up-stairs was a bedroom which would be a fortune to a lazy man; he had only to step on the door sill and the gas was instantly lighted. The ceiling was found to be covered with luminous stars, arranged to represent the principal constellations in the heavens—while comets, moons, etc., shone beautifully in the dark. By placing one's head on the pillow, the gas, fifteen feet away, would be extinguished and the phosphorescent stars on the ceiling would

shine forth weirdly, and a phosphorescent moon rose from behind a cloud over the mantel and slowly describing a hugh arch disappeared behind a bank of phosphorescent clouds on the other side of the room; by pressing the toe to the foot-board of the bed the gas could again be relit.

Pouring a teacup of water into the water-clock on the mantel and setting the indicator would assure the awakening of the sleeper at whatever hour he might desire. There was also in the hall outside the room a large drum, which could be set to beat by electricity at the hour when the family wished to arise. The whole house was fitted throughout with electric bells, burglar alarms, fire alarms, telephones, electric cigar lighters, medical coils, phonographs, electric fans, thermostats, heat regulating devices, some seven musical instruments, operated by electricity, etc. Upon the evening referred to nearly every piece of furniture in the parlor was arranged to play its part. Sit on one chair and out went the gas, take another seat and it would light again; sitting on an ottoman produced a mysterious rapping under the floor; pressure on some chairs started off drums, triangles, tambourines, cymbals, chimes and other musical instruments; in fact, it seemed unsafe to sit down anywhere. The guests stood about in groups and whispered, each hoping to see his neighbor or a new comer

caught napping. One visitor (Brown) secured an apparently safe seat, and was telling a funny story—he had left electricity far behind—but just as he reached the climax, a pretty funnel-shaped Japanese affair like a big dunce cap, that seemed but a ceiling ornament which was held in place by an electro-magnet, dropped from overhead and quietly covered him up, thus silently extinguishing the story and the story-teller. A big easy chair placed invitingly between the folding doors joining the double parlors sent the unwary sitter flying out of its recesses by the sudden and deafening clamor of twenty-one electric bells hidden in the folds of the draperies hanging in the doorway. In a convenient position stood the silver lemonade pitcher and cup, the former was filled with the tempting beverage, but no matter how much a guest might desire to imbibe one touch convinced him that the pitcher and cup were so heavily charged with electricity as to render it impossible for him to pour out a drink or even to let go until the electricity was switched off from the hidden induction coil.

Some one proposed music, and half a selection had been enjoyed, when something seemed to give way inside the piano, and suddenly there emanated from that bewitched instrument a conglomeration of sounds that drowned the voices of the singers, and the keys seemed to beat upon a horrible jangle

of drums, gongs and various noise-producing implements which were fastened inside of and underneath the piano.

After the guests were treated to a beautiful display of electrical experiments, under the direction of Mr. Hammer, and Professor George C. Sonn, they were escorted to the dining-room, where an electrical dinner had been prepared and was presided over by "Jupiter," who was in full dress, and sat at the head of the table, where by means of a small phonograph inside of his anatomy he shouted: "Welcome, Society of Seventy-Seven and their friends to Jove's festive board." The menu was as follows: "Electric Toast," "Wizard Pie," "Sheol Pudding," "Magnetic Cake," "Telegraph Cake," "Telephone Pie," "Ohm-made Electric Current Pie," "Menlo Park Fruit," "Incandescent Lemonade," "Electric Coffee" and "Cigars," etc., and music by Prof. Mephistopheles' Electric Orchestra. About the table were pretty bouquets, and among the flowers shone tiny incandescent lamps, while near the centre of the table was placed an electric fan which kept the air cool and pure, and at each end was a tiny Christmas tree lighted with small incandescent lamps, planted in a hugh dish of assorted nuts and raisins. Each lamp had a dainty piece of ribbon attached to it upon which the initials of the Society and the date were painted, and each

guest received a lamp to take away with him as a souvenir of the occasion. Plates of iced cakes made in the form of telephones, switches, bells, electric lamps, batteries, etc., stood on each side of the centre piece. Promptly at 12 o'clock, as the chimes of the distant churches came softly to the ears of the assembled guests, pandemonium seemed to change places with the modest dining-room. A cannon on the porch, just outside the door, and another inside the chimney, were unexpectedly discharged; and at this sudden roar, every man sprang back from the table; the lights disappeared; huge fire-gongs, under each chair beat a tattoo. The concussion produced by the cannon in the fireplace caused several bricks to come crashing down the chimney, and as the year of 1884 faded away, the table seemed bewitched. The "Sheol Pudding" blazed forth green and red flames illuminating the room, tiny tin boxes containing "Greek" fire which had been placed over each window and door were electrically ignited by spirals of platinum iridium wire heated by a storage battery and blazed up suddenly; the "Telegraph Cake" clicked forth messages said to be press reports of the proceedings, (it was also utilized to count the guests and click off the answers to various questions put to it) bells rang inside the pastry; incandescent lamps burned underneath the colored lemonade;

the thunderbolt pudding discharged its long black bolts all over the room (long steel spiral springs covered with black cloth) and loud spirit rapping occurred under the table. The silver knives, forks and spoons were charged with electricity from a shocking coil and could not be touched, while the coffee and toast (made by electricity) were rapidly absorbed; the "Magnetic Cake" disappeared; the "Wizard" and "Current Pies" vanished, and "Jupiter" raising a glass to his lips began to imbibe. The effect was astonishing! The gas instantly went out, a gigantic skeleton painted with luminous paint appeared and paraded about the room, while Jupiter's nose assumed the color of a genuine toper! His green eyes twinkled, the electric diamonds in his shirt front (tiny lamps) blazed forth and twinkled like stars, as he phonographically shouted "Happy New Year! Happy New Year!" This "Master of Ceremonies," now becoming more gentle, the guests turned their attention to the beautiful fruit piece, over four feet high, that stood in the center of the table. From the fruit hung tiny electric lamps, and the whole was surmounted by a bronze figure of Bartholdi's "Statue of Liberty;" uplifted in "Miss Liberty's" right hand burned an Edison lamp no larger than a bean. The dinner finished, and there was much that was good to eat, notwithstanding the "magical"

dishes which they were first invited to partake of, speeches were delivered by Messrs. Hammer, Rutan, McDougall, Brown, Duneka, and Dawson, and an original poem was read by Mr. Van Wyck. Upon repairing to the parlors the guests saw Mr. Hammer's little sister, May, dressed in white and mounted upon a pedestal, representing the "Goddess of Electricity;" tiny electric lamps hung in her hair, and were also suspended as earrings, while she held a wand surmounted by a star, and containing a very small electric lamp. Not the least interesting display of electricity took place in front of the house, where a fine display of bombs, rockets, Roman candles, Greek fire and other fireworks were set off by electricity, which was, by the way, the first time this had been accomplished. The guests were requested to press button switches ranged along the front veranda railing thus causing electricity from a storage battery to heat to a red heat tiny platinum iridium spirals attached to each fuse of the various pieces of fireworks thus sending up rocket after rocket, as well as igniting the other pieces which had been placed in the roadway in front of the house. An attempt was made to send up a large hot air balloon to which was attached a tiny storage battery and an incandescent signal lamp but a sudden gust of wind caused the balloon to take fire as it rose from the ground. This constituted the only experiment made

during the evening which was not an unqualified success. The innumerable electrical devices shown during the progress of the dinner were all operated by Mr. Hammer, who controlled various switches fastened to the under side of the table and attached to a switchboard, which rested on his lap, while the two cannons were fired by lever switches on the floor, which he operated by the pressure of the foot. Electricity was supplied by primary and storage batteries placed under the table. After an exhibition of electrical apparatus and experiments with a large phonograph, the guests departed with a bewildered feeling that somehow they had been living half a century ahead of the new year.



WHAT THEY SAY.

(EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS IN MY PROFESSIONAL PAMPHLET.-W. J. H.)

"He had entire charge of my exhibit at the Paris Exposition, which was very successful.

"He has carried out successfully some of the largest electric lighting installations in this country and in Europe. He is competent, reliable and industrious. I heartily commend him."

THOMAS A. EDISON.

"It gives me pleasure to testify to the ability of Mr. William J. Hammer in electrical enterprises over which he has had supervision. I consider that he possesses exceptional qualities fitting him for the field of work which he has taken up. I feel confident that work entrusted to his care would receive the conscientious, painstaking attention which its importance demands."

ELIHU THOMSON.

"I take pleasure in recommending Mr. William J. Hammer to any one who contemplates doing anything in the way of electricity, as from my long acquaintance with him I know him to be thoroughly competent to advise in all matters connected with the same, and I know of no one more thoroughly competent than he."

WILLIAM WALLACE.

"I wish to say for him, that no man in the electric business, is as able, conscientious, energetic and fertile in resources in the matter of *detail* as he. He is the man we have all been looking for, and you can turn over to his care the largest equipment with absolute certainty that his work, whether supervisory, planning or constructing, will be of the very highest order."

EDWARD H. JOHNSON.

"I believe your very wide and diversified experience, both in this country and abroad, in connection with electric lighting and power matters, should fit you in a very high degree for the position of a consulting and constructing engineer."

H. M. BYLLESBY.

"It gives me great pleasure to state that I most strongly recommend Mr. W. J. Hammer as a consulting and constructing engineer.

"He has been for ten years actively working in many positions and in many countries, always connected with the planning, construction and inspection of large electric plants.

"Personally I know Mr. Hammer to be a man of the highest character and reliability."

FRANCIS R. UPTON.

"From my knowledge of and close acquaintance with Mr. Hammer, I believe him to be one of the most thoroughly conscientious and competent electrical engineers with whom I have had occasion to deal. His personal associations with Mr. Thomas A. Edison in Paris and other parts of Europe, as well as in the Edison Laboratory in this country, have peculiarly fitted him for the career upon which he has entered, and I most heartily commend him to all who may have occasion to avail themselves of his advice or services."

FRANK S. HASTINGS.

"He is entirely capable, both in a supervisory capacity or as a practical constructor and operator. His capacity for hard work and knowledge of and attention to detail, and his thorough probity and earnestness are too well known to need any special word. It will give me pleasure to be of any possible assistance to him."

FRANK J. SPRAGUE.

"In the extraordinary development of the science of electricity and its marvelous application in our time to all forms of public utility, Mr. William J. Hammer has been no inconsiderable factor. It was his great privilege to be associated with the great inventor Edison in the early development of the incandescent electric light and other inventions at the Edison Laboratory, and in representing Mr. Edison and his interests in this country and in France, England and Germany, he justly acquired an international reputation as a consulting electrical engineer. His versatility in many fields of science and engineering has given him a conspicuously honorable position in his profession.

"To his professional attainments Mr. Hammer adds a sterling character and untiring industry."

JAMES M. BECK.

(From New York Supreme Court Case, 1916).

Q. "How long have you been acquainted with Mr. William J. Hammer?"

A. "I think since 1879 or 1880."

Q. "Do you know what his reputation is among Electrical Engineers and in the Electric Lamp Industry?"

A. "He is at the head in the incandescent lamp industry. I think he is the best expert in this country."

FRANCIS R. UPTON.

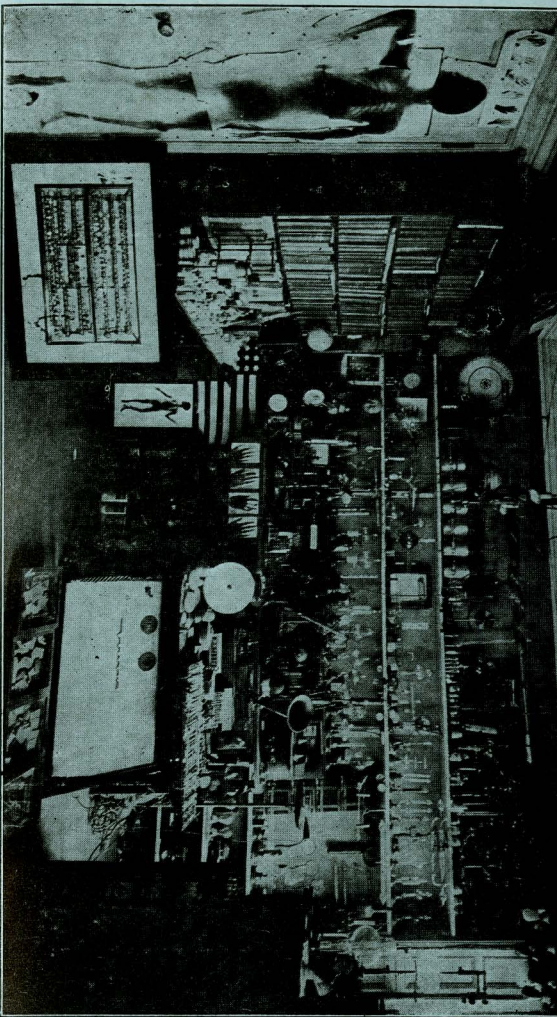
Q. "How long have you known him?"

A. "By reputation as an engineer for 25 years; personally for more than 15 years."

Q. "What is Mr. Hammer's reputation and standing in the electrical industry?"

A. "Mr. Hammer was one of the pioneers in the profession of Electrical Engineering. He was one of the men who created that profession at a time when special electrical men were almost unknown. . . . I should say that in any controversy relating to the Electric Lamp Art one side or the other would employ Mr. Hammer."

THOMAS J. JOHNSTON.



Scientific Den in the Home of William J. Hammer

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