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IMPORTANT DECISION IN THE EDISON ELECTRIC LIGHT SUITS.

In May, 1885, the Edison Electric Light Co. brought a number of suits for infringement of its patents against various electric light companies and others using incandescent plants.

Last April the latter cases were argued before Judge Wallace of the United States Circuit Court, and he has just rendered a decision against the Edison company.

From a broader point of view than that of the magnitude of the interests directly involved, the decision is of importance. It is based on the interpretation of Section 4,887 of the United States patent laws. This is the well known clause limiting the duration of an American patent to the term of the shortest foreign patent which may have been granted before it was granted in this country.

The decision covered the following points. The suit was brought subsequent to July 21, 1883. The court held that it could have no jurisdiction if the American patent expired on that day along with the Austro-Hungarian patent because suit was brought nearly two years later.

The injustice done by this much debated clause of our patent law is very evident in the present instance. Mr. Edison appears as the uncontested inventor of an immensely valuable system. Possibly by neglect a comparatively unimportant foreign patent is allowed to lapse. At once his invention is declared public property and at the mercy of any one who save for a technicality would be an infringer.

Much might be done by appropriate legislation in placing the relations of American and foreign patents on a better basis. The Industrial Union has had little effect. It is not in international action that the remedy is to be found. As the law now stands, the United States gives far greater privileges to foreigners than she receives from other nations.

The equitable view of patents regards them as a franchise granted for a valuable consideration. The consideration is the publishing of the invention, and the price paid for such publication is the seventeen years' monopoly. In every sense of the term, our citizens are entitled to this privilege.

In the particular case under consideration, a great hardship appears to have been done. A purely technical defense to allegations of infringement has carried the day against an undisputed inventor. It is evident that there is room here for special legislation.

tional tribunal or regulation, the obvious defects in that portion of our patent law relating to foreign patents and patentees might be brought into a better condition. International agreements inevitably lead to complications.

THE UNDERGROUND PIPES OF LARGE CITIES.

The increasing requirements of modern civilization are well illustrated by the extent and variety of underground pipe systems now employed in large cities. Thus there are in actual operation:

- 1. Pipes for conveying and delivering illuminating gas.
2. Pipes for conveying and delivering fuel gas.
3. Pipes for conveying and delivering drinking water, and for fire purposes.
4. Pipes for conveying salt water for street sprinkling and for fire purposes.
5. Pipes for draining, and carrying off sewage and surface water.
6. Pipes for delivering hot water under high pressure, for heating purposes and power.
7. Pipes for delivering cold water under high pressure, for power.
8. Pipes for delivering live steam under pressure, for heating purposes and power.
9. Pipes for delivering compressed air, for purposes of power and ventilation.
10. Pipes for producing power where required, by vacuum or suction, and for ventilation.
11. Pipes for conveying letters and packages, by compressed air and by vacuum.
12. Pipes for regulating clocks, by compressed air.
13. Pipes for conveying mineral oils.
14. Pipes for electrical wires for electric lighting, electric railways, telephones, and telegraphy.
15. Pipes for power ropes for driving machinery, moving street railway cars, etc.

THE CARNEGIE SAVINGS BANK.

The firm of Carnegie, Phipps & Co., of Pittsburg, issued during the present month a circular to their employes, offering to take deposits from them not to exceed \$2,000 for each individual, and to allow six per cent interest on the money. This offer was coupled with a statement that the firm, as hitherto, would continue to lend money at bond and mortgage to intending builders of homes.

ELECTRIC LIGHT FIRES.

The frequency of conflagration caused by electric light wires induced the Electric Club of Philadelphia to inquire into the means of preventing them. At a recent meeting, the report of a committee of four months' standing, under the chairmanship of Mr. H. B. Cutter, was presented. The various automatic cut-outs proposed by different inventors were considered, some utilizing the heating of a wire, some the action of a spring pulling against an armature of a magnet.

PROGRESS OF THE PHONOGRAPH.

We give elsewhere an account of the trial of the new Edison phonograph at the rooms of the Electrical Club in this city. The results are substantially the same as those described by us in connection with our illustrations of the new instrument, given in the SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN of December 31, 1887.

Still another form has been perfected by Mr. Emile Berliner, of Washington, D. C., who recently read a paper on the subject before the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, and also exhibited his new instrument, which he styles the "gramophone." One of the distinguishing features of this invention is that the indentations of the transmitting diaphragm are made

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