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A Little Lesson from Dr. Einstein.

by Professor A.D. Conrow

Quite by chance, I found myself with a little time to kill on a bright but cool day in early November 1933. Being somewhat familiar with Princeton, New Jersey, I decided to look up my old friend Abe Flexner at his newly founded Institute for Advance Study.

I took a chance by calling on him without contacting him on the phone, and his secretary escorted me directly into his spacious office.

"Professor Conrow," Abe exclaimed, as I was introduced, and took a seat in front of his impressive desk, "What has it been... a year or more?"

After bringing him up-to-speed, so to speak, he became excited and wanted me to meet his latest staff member. "Albert Einstein," I exclaimed, "are you joking? Of course I want to meet him"! Abe called his secretary on the six-button intercom and asked where we might find Dr. Einstein that morning, and we soon found ourselves outside conversing with one of the most interesting men I have ever met.

"Dr. Einstein, this is Professor A.D. Conrow from Kansas, and he has come all the way from there to meet you" said Abe, with a little wink in my direction. I was to later learn that Dr. Einstein was more than a little depressed after having all of his possessions (including his prized sailboat) seized by Hitler back in Germany.

"Professor Conrow, what am I to say... I have lost everything but my head and my hands," replied a solemn Einstein in his thick accent, "but with those two things, I think I shall be all right here in America." I was moved by what he said, and the way he said it, but understood what it meant to lose everything.

We strolled along the grounds looking at the fabulous facilities, and talked about a lot of different things that we shared as common interests. One discussion point, that I found particularly interesting, was Einstein's mention of his method of moving liquid metals (like sodium) using a magnetic field. Although I was not that familiar with the Einstein-Szilard pump, I soon realized what an excellent idea it was because it had no mechanical parts that could fail.

Einstein said, "It is so simple and yet scales nicely up and down in size," That is the point that struck me. I was looking for a simple method of removing unwanted heat from my Wood Pyrolyzer invention that turned ordinary wood scraps into charcoal and natural gas, that could be used to run engines and cook food, etc.. I had found a way to further convert the "wood-gas" into a liquid fuel using a secret catalyst, but the process released tremendous quantities of heat, and the heat needed to be released carefully, or the whole apparatus would explode, as had my first two machines.

I mentioned this problem to Einstein as we shared some sardines and crackers (that he produced from his coat pocket rather spontaneously) and he said, "You know, it would be a simple matter to use liquid sodium to move the heat outside the reaction vessel, and over to a cooling tower. Poor old Franz Fischer & Hans Tropsch have been struggling with a similar problem back in Germany, but then we wouldn't want to help them now would we Professor Conrow?" I laughed nervously, in that, I had not the slightest idea what he was talking about, but didn't want to admit it.

We went on to speak about Einstein's refrigerator, and whatever had happened to it, which turned out to be a bad subject, I realized from the slight elbow that Abe gave me as we quietly walked along. After about an hour, I said goodbye to my new friend, and was soon back on the train to Chicago. The trip back gave me time to reflect, and I came up with the idea for a small gift for Einstein that might lift his spirits and welcome him to America. You know, from a crack-pot inventor like me to a real genius!

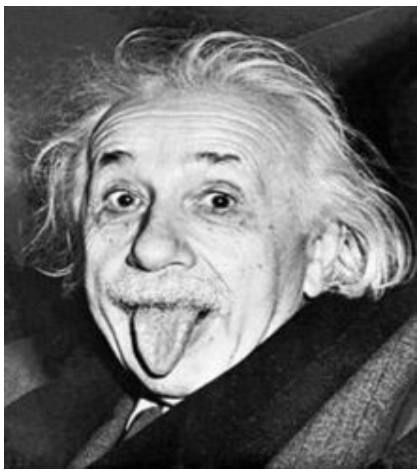
Upon arriving back at my shop, I quickly found some scrap glass tubing in the glass-shop, and lit my favorite torch. In less than an hour, I had fashioned the first of many glass tubes which I filled with a special liquid (as well as a drop of colorant) and sealed them off at the ends.

Using Einstein's own principle, when heat was applied to one end, bubbles would quickly form, and carry the heat up the column, where it was dissipated in the top chamber. From there, it was a simple matter to place a small lamp underneath (in a Bakelite base) and watch as the energy was converted to heat, and then released at the top of the column... what a delight to watch.

The very next morning, I ventured back into town, in my converted Model T pickup truck (woodgas) and stopped by the post office to mail the Einstein Desk Lamp off to Einstein himself, c/o Abe Flexner at the Institute for Advanced Study.

Soon, I had forgotten all about the small gift I had sent, and was startled to discover a small package in my rural mailbox one afternoon, Inside was a tin of sardines, and a small note, written in Einstein's own hand that simply said, "Sometimes one pays most for the things one gets for nothing," and was signed, "Faithfully Yours, A. Einstein."

TO THIS DAY, I have no idea what, exactly, he meant, and I have never forgiven him for putting the thought in my head... I suspect, he did it to make me question my own motives...



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