Death of Luther Stieringer.

LUTHER STIERINGER. IN 1902.

THE whole electrical fraternity in the United States is poorer by the death of Luther Stieringer, on Friday, July 17th, at Pasadena, Cal. Although Mr. Stieringer was only in his fifty-eighth year at the time of his death, his originally vigorous constitution had been showing signs of breakdown since the fall of 1900. Dyspepsia, accompanied by nervous hypochondria, then began to manifest itself, and many of Mr. Stieringer's old friends assumed somewhat hastily that the absence of his characteristic optimism was due to business worries, though it was in reality a well-recognized result of the malady from which he was suffering. In the summer of 1902, a heavy cold settled upon his chest, which failed to yield to the remedies prescribed by his New York physician. Acting under medical advice, he went South and West in November, 1902, resting for some weeks at El Paso, Tex., and going thence to Los Angeles, Cal. He then stayed for some months at Nordhoff, a quiet health resort in the foothills of Southern California. Some weeks ago his illness took a more serious turn and he went to Pasadena, where he was attended with unremitting care by a physician and a trained nurse. He was in touch with the outer world through Mr. A. W. Ballard, of Los Angeles, who kept Mr. Samuel Insull, of Chicago, Mr. Edward Clark, of Schenectady, and Mr. C. A. Coffin, and, through them his many other friends, fully informed by letters and telegrams of Mr. Stieringer's condition. The immediate cause of his death was consumption complicated with Bright's disease. His body has been cremated, in accordance with his dying wishes. The funeral was held at Los Angeles.

Luther Stieringer, though he achieved prominence in many different parts of the field of incandescent electric lighting, will be longest remembered for his marvellous power of mentally visualizing effects with artificial light before actual trial with the lights themselves. It was this quality that gave his services such an unique value to the projectors of expositions in this country. Next to Mr. Edison, to whose inspiration and fecundity of suggestiveness and analysis he was always proud to acknowledge his early successes were due, Mr. Stieringer was the first to grasp the enormous increase in striking effects in decorative or fête lighting made possible by the substitution of the electric incandescent lamp for gas, candles or oil. Exterior decorative lighting, with the elimination of wind and rain as limiting factors, assumed a new phase. Interior artificial lighting, both ordinary and decorative, was no longer trammeled by the need of a clear flame area with its attendant fire risk and blackened ceilings to be kept in mind.. From this point on, the differentiation of artificial illumination into decorative and non-decorative proceeded rapidly.

In decorative lighting the objects sought were the outlining of structures; the artistic massing of lights; form, variety, color, contrasts. In non-decorative lighting, a perfectly uniform distribution of light was aimed at, the actual source of light being either concealed or rendered as inconspicuous as possible. Mr. Stieringer's reasoning upon this latter point was that the effect of light upon the human eye was purely relative, so that very bright points in the field of vision by contracting the pupil of the eye made other objects seem badly lighted by contrast.

Of Mr. Stieringer's success in Exposition lighting, for decorative purposes, etc., it is almost needless to speak in the columns of the ELECTRICAL WORLD AND ENGINEER, which has enjoyed so many admirable articles from his pen, or has itself described his excellent work. Though already under the shadow of his last illness, he conceived and laid down the lines upon which the brilliant success of the night illumination of the Pan-American Exposition, at Buffalo, was achieved, and this was fated to be his last monument in the field of decorative lighting. Mr. Stieringer contributed several valuable papers, to the various societies of which he was a member, on the growth and development of decorative lighting by means of the electric incandescent lamp, as well as on other features of electrical construction.

Mr. Stieringer's boyhood was passed in New Jersey, where his father lived in a house between Jersey City and Bayonne. He attended the public schools in New Jersey, and then served a short apprenticeship as a gas-fitter in New York City. He had a keen, inquiring mind, and was always an omnivorous reader, so that he was soon recognized by his employers as a workman of superior calibre. While yet a very young man, he was placed in charge of the choice pieces of work in his line in all parts of the country. Thus he was responsible at various times for the installation of gas fixtures at the Capitol, the White House, the Treasury Building, the State, Army and Navy Building, and other public buildings in Washington. He also did work in the residences of many of the prominent families in New York City, such as the Astors, the Vanderbilts, Mr. J. P. Morgan, the late A. T. Stewart, and others. During this period, covering the later sixties and all the seventies, his mind was not idle. He analyzed lighting effects wherever he saw them, and his reputation was sufficiently well established in the middle seventies to have had him called in on many occasions to arrange the scheme of lighting for large oil paintings.

Mr. Stieringer joined Mr. Edison at a very early stage at Menlo Park. His first work there was the adaptation of incandescent lamps and their connections to existing gas fixtures, and while doing this Mr. Stieringer took out several patents. His subsequent work lay largely in the exploitation of the incandescent lamp. As a pioneer in this field he had hardly an equal, and his reports, at once graphic and succinct, left nothing to be desired.

Mr. Stieringer has left behind him hosts of warm friends scattered through the United States, Canada and Europe. His rich mental storehouse was always placed freely at their disposal, and his vivid recollections of the early difficulties and triumphs of electric lighting constituted an unfailing source of interest to younger men. Mrs. Stieringer's death in 1897 was a great blow to him, from the sorrow of which it is doubted if he fully recovered. He leaves no family. After this sad event, he gave up housekeeping, and stacked up the relics of the art and the valuable technical literature and memorabilia to the enthusiastic collection of which he devoted a great deal of his leisure through many years. It is indeed to be hoped that his collections may not be dispersed, but handed over to some such trustee as the Institute, and bearing his worthy name.

Returning to Mr. Stieringer's technical work, it is difficult, of course, to determine its lasting value, but no doubt can exist as to its importance. He was a pioneer in the electric illuminating art, and successfully introduced many fundamental inventions of his own, of which three systems of interior wiring are now in universal use, as disclosed in the patents, to wit: combination lighting fixtures, electroliers, and a system of distribution and control for interior conductors, commonly known as the "cabinet system." This system is now the standard wiring system in all countries. He also invented and introduced the hard-end fuse and incombustible base and other useful inventions now recognized as standard devices required in light installations. He was a pioneer in the application and distribution of electric light more especially in large areas, such as expositions. The illumination for the Louisville Exposition of 1883 was planned and installed by him, this being the first exposition entirely lighted by incandescent light. The 1893 Chicago Columbian World's Fair illumination and electric fountains, as well as other prominent expositions since, including the Omaha Exposition of 1898, and the recent Pan-American, were designed and installed by him, he also holding the position of consulting electrical engineer in most of them. Medals and diplomas were awarded to him for many of these illuminations. He first introduced the outlining and accentuation of the buildings on a large scale with incandescent lamps at the Chicago Fair of 1893. The further development reached its climax at the Omaha Grand Court and surrounding buildings, the lighting being effected by small incandescent lamps. A specially minted gold medal and a diploma were awarded to him, this being the highest award made. He may justly claim to have, by persistent effort, introduced and demonstrated the value of a small unit of light as exemplified on a large scale at the recent Pan-American. Just before his death he was awarded the John Scott medal by the Franklin Institute for this work, but unfortunately did not live long enough to be a recipient of the award in person.