A Brilliant Class

PROF. FREEMAN (addressing class in Electrical Lecture).—I think, gentlemen, that perhaps you have not clear ideas in regard to some of the units commonly used, and—but by the way, what is a unit, Mr. Hayden?

HAYDEN.—Why, a—ah—a unit is—

PROF. F.—Mr. Martin.

MARTIN.—Why, a unit is a conceivable part of anything which we consider as related to the real thing in such a way that—

PROF. F.—I see you have the idea, Mr. Martin, but it is rather hazy. I will explain, to save time. A unit represents a certain condition. For example, we can take as a unit of hilarity, say H: "H=3 beers." This represents a condition—

HAUSSMAN (interrupting).—But that is variable, is it not? Now, three beers might produce hilarity with some people, but for me—

PROF. F.—Well, then, let us take something else—say a color, yellow, for instance. Now, the yellowness of that wall may be measured in these units. Of course, if the wall had been red or blue, we might have measured it in those units instead. Do you understand, Mr. Graff?

GRAFF (waking from deep reveries).—Yes, sir; one blue equals five reds. Yes, sir, I see.

PROF. F.—Undoubtedly, Mr. Graff, undoubtedly. But perhaps we had better take something more practical. The pound will do. What is a pound, Mr. Higginson?

HIGGINSON.—A pint's a pound the world around.

PROF. F.—I think you must have been studying your mother's cook book instead of your lecture notes, Mr. Higginson.

HIGGINSON.—Yes, sir; I wanted to find out how to make dough.

PROF. F.—We are wandering from the subject. What is a pound, Mr. Parker?

PARKER.—A pound is a unit mass of one pound.

PROF. F.—No, not quite that. The pound is a name chosen arbitrarily to represent a certain unit. We might just as well have called it one Parker.

FISHER.—But, professor, wouldn't that have been too large a practical unit?

CLASS.—Ha, ha, ha!

PROF. F.—Mr. Walther, what is a pound?

WALTHER.—A pound is—(fifteen seconds)—a—(ten sconds)—unit of mass.