Thomas A. Edison, 74 Today, As Robust As Man Of Forty

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that fly from the back of a cat are the mysterious element called electricity, which of late had been conjured to transfer taps over wire to great distances, he learned all he could about it then strung up a stove-pipe wire and tried it out—actually with vigorously-rubbed cats. The cats failed, but not without thorough testing.

His failures he counts as gains. Of easy success he is suspicious. He says that he never was so taken back in his life as when his first model of the phonograph, at the first trial, squeaked back at him, "Mary Had a Little Lamb." It is as vital a part of his progress to discard many accepted theories as to evolve new one. "I was always afraid of things that worked the first time," he says. When he had made more than 10,000 experiments on the storage battery without satisfactory success, he exclaimed to a condoling friend: "No results? Why, man, I've gotten a lot of results. I've found several thousand things that won't work."

As for the boy's regular schooling—well, the less said the better expressed. About five weeks was the limit. The teacher frankly said he was "addled." Anyway, as a boy he was "a bad egg," and he can't deny it, famous, successful and circumspect as he has become. Fortunately, his mother had been an excellent school teacher herself, and she took him in hand. The birch stick that hung behind her Seth Thomas clock was kept well polished by merited whippings. His father, on the other hand, worked a system of awards for good conduct which was no heavy tax upon himself until he began to pay the boy a small sum for every book he read; then it counted, for the boy promptly learned to sense a line at a glance and read three books a night without missing any meaning, and he so reads still.

Only five weeks of schooling and always at the foot of his class; but today the greatest experimenter—inventor the world has ever known! It rather upsets our fond notions of the high value of common education—what? When it comes to that, Mr. Edison would like to know what has become of the studious fellows who always stood at the heads of their classes and promised most masterful achievement when they should get a whack at life? As a rule their brilliancy seems all to go off like a skyrocket in the commencement thesis and only a stick lands somewhere silently.

The Edison rule is the exact reverse of that of common education. He accepts nothing as true until tested and proved to his own senses. The schools have to do with the wisdom of the past, which is not all wisdom; he delves into the undreamed mysteries of the future and the undiscovered forces. Learned lumber fixes limitations. In the biography of Edison, written by William H. Meadowcroft, his secretary, which is a work of genius commemorating genius, it is related that one of the most learned specalists Edison ever employed, when he had worked out three processes to attain a certain result in the concentration of magnetic ore, and all failed, said it could not be done. Edison took it up himself and in two days worked out 48 processes, and one of them worked.

Though the boy disgraced the foot of his class for his five weeks in school, his eagerness for knowledge was literally insatiable. Before he was 12 he had read all of Gibbon's "Decline of the Roman Empire," Hume's "History of England," Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy" and the "Dictionary of Sciences." Getting hold of Parker's "Physics," he tried every experiment in it that he had not tried already. At last, attaining access to a public library, he started in at one end of the shelves to read every book, one next another, and had read through several shelves when he balked at Newton's "Principia." Today, as then, he detests and avoids mathematics, except such as he can "do in his head."

"Many of your problems must call for most complex mathematics; how do you work them out?"

"Oh, I always know plenty of mathematicians I can hire," he said, "but I never knew a mathematician who could hire me."

Will the educators come forward and explain this reversal of their principles?

From earliest boyhood he instinctively gathered unto himself knowledge and materals for the experiments, as the unknown but unerrng magnet attracts to itself congenial metals. In a corner of the home cellar was his "laboratory." To this retreat he carried everything that promised possible use—iron and brass scraps, wires, tools, retorts, chemicals and books to the limit of the varied acquisitive powers which was far beyond the limit of others' patience.

He became newsboy on a train between his home town, Port Huron, and Detroit, in order to read the current books and magazines he peddled, to earn money to buy scientific works and mechanical and chemical materials, and to have seven hours a day in the Detroit pubic library. All his gains and energies went into his laboratory, where he studied and tinkered late into the nights.

Then, as now, he took no account of time. He never carried a watch; his task was his clock then as it is now. To the boy in his sunless cellar, day and night were as one, and, through his electric light he since has made them so to the world. He has worked intensively close to a hundred hours at a stretch, and still, at seventy-four years of age, it is no uncommon custom for him, when awaiting results of an experiment to snatch what few hours sleep he needs stretched out on a comfortable pile of iron pipes, a table or a luxurious canvas cot. "A soft bed spoils a man," he says.

The famous stock room at Menlo Park is as like that incipient laboratory as an enormous pea is like a little one. Edison does not know yet what he may want at any moment, and so he aims, as he says, "to have on hand some quantity of every known substance not easily perishable, with the most complete assortment of chemicals and drugs that experience and knowledge can suggest." Only today it is generally classified, and then it was not; today it has world reverence as the supply store of genius, but then it was detested as the idiosyncracy, of a brain-cracked pest and as a dangerous nuisance. A barn had been burned by one of his experiments and he had been publicly whipped for it in the town square. His cellar had been befouled beyond the endurance even of his adoring mother. With his ever accumulating heap of mechanical junk, stinking chemicals and deadly explosives, he was bundled out of one retreat after another until, finding himself so constantly on the move anyway, he put his precious laboratory aboard the baggage car in which he had his "butch" headquarters and there "moved to the music of the spheres" for some happy months, until on a luckless day a stick of his phosphorous set the car afire. The angry conductor kicked off the lad and his whole outfit and boxed his ears so soundly that he has ever since been deaf.

The cats had failed the young inventor, but not so his purpose. There were further studies and experiments until home-made crude batteries vitalized that old line of stove-pipe wire. This seems simple enough today, with all the vast and readily accessiblue knowledge of the subject and the infinite variety of apparatus to be bought ready-made; but when Edison was born, in 1847, telegraphy was only a dozen years old, its furthest reach west was to Pittsburgh, and technical understanding of it was meagre and hard to get. Generally considered, telegraphic communication across this continent was as deranged a dream as is today communication with Mars. Powerful generators reduced resistance and delicate instruments were unknown and undreamed-of. The sounder in use was complicated, clumsy and weighed 75 pounds at the day when the Edison lad took to the station where he was starting in to learn telegraphy, his own sounder made of wire, so small that he could cover it with his hand and so good that deaf as he was, he could hear it clearly.

From a slim, puny child, with big overbalancing head that was thought to be unsound, he grew by taking no care of himself at all into a robust figure of five feet, nine, of 175 pounds weight, which has not fluctuated two pounds either way in fifty years. "If I see I'm losing weight, I eat more," he says. "If I'm overweight, I eat less. I never eat much at most. People eat too much."

"What is your favorite food?"

"Pie—pie and coffee. Meat makes me dull. When I want imagination I eat pie."

His great-grandfather lived to one hundred and two, his grandfather to one hundred and three, and he promises to raise the record. In contemptuous defiance and constant violation of supposed immutable laws of nature regarding eating and sleeping, he has kept perfect health and worked eighteen to twenty hours a day at white heat for half a century, and is doing it still, with no indication of diminished powers.

Will the doctors step into line with the explaining educators?

If the boy ever saw the inside of a Sunday school, it made so little impression on him that he does not remember it. As a man he has not done his worshipping in church. Devotedly questing into the natural laws of the material world, he has pinned his faith to their proved responses and denies existence of soul or life apart from material element while religions based on belief in a disembodied hereafter he rejects as bosh. Yet, through his multiform devices for the dissemination of intelligence, man has learned more of his brother man in five decades than he had learned through theology in five ages, has put more light and warmth into the slums of the world's cities than had all the pietistic charities of the centuries, and to the query to Job. "Canst thou send forth lightnings that they may go and say unto thee, 'Here we are?' " flashes across the plains, over the mountains, under the seas and through the throbbing hearts of teeming cities, around the earth, as quick almost as thought, the triumphant answer, "Yes!"

Now will the preachers take their place beside the explaining educators and doctors and deal with this universal paradox?

The difficulties of his youth had of all the years since have been but inspiriting challenges to him. He has met them with defiance and swift, sure counter-stroke. Privation he has followed mockingly at her heels, mastering her tricks of thralldom that he might set millions free from them. Hard disappointments he has hammered into a shield against repeated errors. Discouragement he has always laughed out of countenance. Even the disaster of deafness he has turned into a blessing—to himself a help rather than a hindrance, he declares—and certainly devolving upon mankind a marvelous endowment. For, defying the fate that deafened him and determined to hear in spite of it, he has caused the once feeble telephone not only to articulate distinctly but, through his electromotograph attachment, to shout, to be audible at a thousand feet. As if humbled fate had not yet made enough amends, he has produced the microphone that makes the footsteps of a housefly stamp as loudly as a man's booted heel. And for such ears as may be held in bondage still, he has transformed the tap-tap of the telegraph into printed dots and dashes, then into printed words and then into photographs.

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TICK ERADICATION

(Continued from Page One.)

question, which carried. During the parliamentary wrangle which succeeded this, another motion to adjourn came and this was also voted down. The amendment raising the exemption from $25 proposed in the bill to $100 was offered and passed, and a roll call vote on the minority report showed 24 for the measure and 16 against it. Objection was immediately raised to third reading of the measure, and Sumner Burgwyn charged that parliamentary tactics were being used to defeat a measure that the majority of the senate favored. Senator Hartsell did not think it entirely in order for the gentleman from Northampton to make such a point. Burgwyn denied that he had ever tried to defeat a measure through indirect methods.

All of this time Minority Leader Bumgarner had been on his feet trying to get the "ear" of the chair for the purpose of asking that a certain bill be withdrawn from the committee, but so many motions and suggestions were before the senate, that he never did get the opportunity to offer his motion. Finally, during the wrangle, Carpenter moved to adjourn. Burgwyn asked for a roll call, but finally withdrew this. The president was unable to decide the proposition and called for the division himself. The standing vote showed 22 for and 17 against.

The senate will have to go through the whole agony again.

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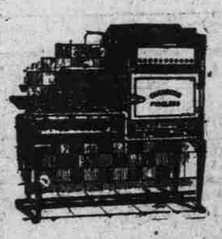

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