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THOMAS ALVA EDISON.

MEN of genius are found in every age, but genius allied with fertility of resource, with breadth of view, with indomitable energy and persistency, is a gift too rare for Nature to bestow oftener than once in a century. When such a man appears he rises head and shoulders above his contemporaries, and that is where Thomas Alva Edison, by common consent, stands to-day.

His is the old, the oft-repeated, story of a poor boy, of humble parentage, of scarcely any education, and with little if any equipment, discipline or training, outstripping the profoundest thinkers of his time, and upon their own chosen ground. Edison owes nothing to the schools, to society, or to parentage. He is a natural force, and as such has at last made his own way to universal recognition.

Edison was born at Milan, Erie County, Ohio, in 1847. An obscure canal village of the smallest size, it was not a place where the advent of a genius would be looked for, if this elusive spark had the habit of appearing anywhere according to prescribed formulas. The village of Port Huron, Michigan, to which his family removed soon after, and where the greater part of his youth was passed, would not have afforded a better prospect.

His family was an average one of the humbler sort. There were no unusual talents in any of its members upon which a claim to heredity of ability could be based. Of a number of brothers and sisters, none have shown an inclination toward pursuits like the inventor's own. He may have taken from his father—who was in turn tailor, nurseryman, dealer in grain, in lumber, and in farm lands—some of the restlessness which has impelled him to activity in so many different directions. He took, also, a good constitution. His mother—of Scotch parentage, though born in Massachusetts—was of good education, and had formerly been a school-teacher in

Canada. She imparted to Thomas about all the instruction from outside sources he ever received. Of regular schooling he had no more than two months in his life.

When a child he amused himself much alone, and doubtless if his quiet plays had been noted there would have been detected indications of the faculty in which his extraordinary future career was involved. He was in particular an omnivorous reader. He had the intense curiosity about the world we inhabit, and its great names and great deeds, which will be found an early trait in common in almost all the lives that have histories of their own to leave behind them.

At ten he was reading Hume's "England," Gibbon's "Rome," the "Penny Encyclopædia," and even some books of chemistry, which came in his way with the rest, and gave, as it seems, the direction to his future action.

At twelve Edison began the world—as train-boy on the Grand Trunk Railroad of Canada and Central Michigan. To one who has noted the precocious self-possession, the flippant conversational powers, and the sharp financial dealings of the young persons who for the most part abound in it, it does not seem a profession for the cultivation of a spirit of quiet research, or the most thorough acquirement of the sciences and arts. But it is fair to presume that Master Edison at this time had no very comprehensive scheme of development prepared. It offered the most available means of a livelihood. He went into it with such a will that in course of time he became an employer of labor, having four assistants under him for the disposal of his wares.

"Were you one of the kind of train-boys," he has been asked, "who sell figs in boxes with bottoms half an inch thick?"

"If I recollect right," he replied, with a merry twinkle, "the bottoms of my boxes were a good inch."