

"Thomas Edison Prophecies," July 10, 1907

Thomas Edison Prophecies

He Says the day is Coming When the air Will Fertilize the Depleted Earth.

Thomas A. Edison gave the American yesterday the first interview since his announcement on his 60th birthday last February that he had quit the career of a money-making inventor for that of a scientist.

For the rest of his life, he says he intends to devote all his attention to scientific problems without a thought of whether or not their solution would bring financial gain.

Though the Wizard guarded as a secret this particular task on which he is at present expending his thought and energy, he otherwise spoke freely of his work. He discussed many of the mysteries into which he was delving, and prophesied that even though he might fail of solution, he firmly believed others would triumph where he had failed.

Mr. Edison, for example, made the prediction that before long science would enable the farmer to enrich his lands by means of nitrogen from the air.

"The elements necessary for making land fertile," he said, "is nitrogen, which exists in almost inexhaustible quantities in the atmosphere. Until recently, however, the utilization of atmospheric nitrogen was regarded as merely a laboratory demonstration. Business men said it could never be obtained cheap enough to sell to the farmer for fertilizer.

"But the day is just about to dawn when the air will be made to give its nitrogen to the earth, and to make it yield more abundant harvests and fatter herds of cattle. In Norway a plant has been established which has been conducted with such good results that I expect to see atmospheric fertilizer on the market in this country within the next ten years.

"That such a product will soon be imperatively necessary there is not doubt. Every ship load of wheat and corn which goes abroad leaves the United States so much poorer, not in gold but in nitrogen.

"Sir William Cookes, when he was president of the British [sic] Association for the Advancement of Science, prophesied that in another quarter of a century the earth would be drained of nitrogen to such a degree that there would be famine in many regions of the world. He may

have taken too discouraging a view of the subject, but nevertheless his statement had a true basis of fact.

“At the present time the bulk of the world’s supply of nitrogen comes from the saltpetre beds of South America, but these are being dug up so fast it will not be very long before they will be exhausted.

“Another scientific discovery which I expect to see before I die,” continued the man whose own inventions have done so much to revolutionize modern life, “is the direct generation of electricity from coal. This has already been achieved in an experimental way. I have heard of several men who have done it. I myself have generated an electrical current by burning carbon and Chilean saltpetre together in an electrolyte [sic], although at an expense which made the process a commercial impossibility.

“Imagine what will be the consequences. Then locomotives will be thrown into the scrap heap. All trains will be run by electricity. No longer will coal be laboriously transported to the cities, but there will be great power plants established at the mouths of the mines, from which the electricity will be sent out over the country by wire.

“There will be no horses in the streets, not stables, no flies. Wagons will be propelled by electricity. Houses will be lighted entirely by electricity, for it will be so cheap it can be used by the humblest tenement dweller.

“Ships will no longer be driven by steam. Electricity will be their motive power. And then it will be possible to cross the Atlantic in three days.”

“At present time nine-tenths of the power obtained from coal is lost by the use of boilers, wheels, and dynamos. With the direct generation of the electrical current, therefore, the world will have ten times more energy than now.”--New York American