



Edison in his chemical laboratory, n.d.

# Thomas Alva EDISON

## An Observation

13 February 1921

I'm free to confess that I read two morning papers and three evening papers, all the principal magazines, except the fiction part, and most of the scientific publications. Sometimes when loafing I take a dip into a detective story. You know, Macaulay did that, too.

I do think that a young man should always read a daily newspaper. If he is going into business in New York he should read in addition the New

York *Journal of Commerce*. If he is an electrical engineer he should read a journal on engineering, and so on throughout the field. We live and grow by new knowledge.

I generally recommend only those books that are written by men who actually try to describe things plainly, simply and by analogy with things everybody knows. I am sorry to say that ordinary scientific books are in nearly every case written by men who have no capacity to explain anything. But, after all, the masterpieces in any field are mighty few.

Progress is the thing that puts most books in the discard. Nearly all my books are transactions of scientific societies, which will never be republished. They gain in value constantly on account of the scarcity of the earlier volumes. I have made a rough estimate, based on actual purchases, that they gain, say, about two per cent per annum in value. It is sometimes said that the societies publish too much, but I don't think so — provided it is real information.

I use these books to prevent waste of time, and money, by not doing again the things that have already been done or tried out by others — unless you want to make the experiment again, just as you like to hear a piece of music again. See how Faraday's works are crammed with the simple report of test and discoveries, his record being like that in the very rocks. Look at the recent reprint in five or six languages, including the original Latin, of Oersted's great determinations in electro-magnetism.\* It's awfully short, but there is literally an experiment and a fact in every line. Such is truth forever.

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\* Hans Christian Oersted (1777-1851), Danish physicist, whose work "Electromagnetism" was published in 1821 in the *Annals of Philosophy*. The 46-page text was republished in 1920, the centennial year of Oersted's initial discovery. [NHC note]



**Thomas Edison and Charles P. Steinmetz, n.d.**

Steinmetz, a Prussian immigrant and fellow inventor who developed the alternating current motor, worked with Edison's General Electric Company for several decades.

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National Humanities Center, Research Triangle Park, NC. 2005.