

The First Town to see Night turned into Day

I am sure that among those who listen to me tonight there is more than one who remembers the day when the town in which he lived was dark as pitch on nights when the moon did not shine. No doubt you remember as I do when the exciting news spread over the country back in 1880 that a town had actually been made as light as day in the dark of the moon. The town was Wabash, Illinois. It was a queer contrivance that worked the miracle - four great globes, blue moons they were called, mounted on cross bars atop the dome of the Court House, twenty feet above the ground - four lamps, each of them three thousand candle power. The experiment was marked with as much excitement as the Lindberg's flight across the Atlantic. Thousands of people went to Wabash and tens of thousands read the papers the next morning to know what had happened. What they read was that every house and yard was lighted, the river flowed like a band of molten silver, ^{indeed} farmers said they could see to do their chores about the barn, could count the posts in their fences, could even read the newspaper. Others who had not know of what was to happen were frightened by this sudden illumination. They fell on their knees

believing that some new wonder was coming down from heaven. Prophecies came from scientists the world over as to what the demonstration might mean, ^{among other things} that all around which the corn would grow twice its usual size and one that he believed the corn would be so big they would have to harvest it with saws.

It is only fifty seven years ago since this country and Europe were thrilled to their marrow by an electric lighted town. We have now two generations who have never heard of any other kind of a town and who if the lights fall even for five minutes write to the newspapers complaining of the inefficiency of the utility company.

What does this all mean? It means that each common convenience of our life has had a beginning, this beginning a result of years upon years of experiment. Each is a conquest of courage and faith and persistency.

An electric lighted town is a tremendous lesson in the way ^{are done} ~~one does~~ things. It teaches the eternal truth that if you are to have results you must begin small, work steadily and persistently, that there are no miracles. In that method lies the true secret, not only of all scientific progress but of all social progress.

Suggestion ,

No end of excited attention was aroused the moment that the plans of the Wabash Common Council became known. For several months before the eventful night when Wabash would first see electric lights, scientific and popular interest was at the highest pitch.

News of the project traveled far and wide, and aroused the comments of many technical men. From faraway Germany came a startling speculation by an electrical inventor who is said to have predicted that such a powerful illumination would quite likely make the crops grow faster throughout the surrounding country-side. The corn around Wabash, he is recorded as having declared, "would grow twice its size" under the electric lamps.

As may well be imagined, this profoundly excited the agriculturists. A reminiscient writer of Wabash history asserts that "farmers within a radius of five miles.... were led to believe that they would have corn large enough to harvest with saws." (1)