

英语简易读物

爱迪生传



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(美) Margaret Cousins (原著)

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THOMAS ALVA EDISON—The Man Who
Lighted the World
by MARGARET COUSINS
Adapted by Michael Selkin
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前 言

本书系世界闻名的发明家爱迪生的传记，共分九章，前八章生动地描述了爱迪生的童年生活、成长过程以及他在发明创造方面的故事，最后一章是作者对爱迪生一生的评价。

爱迪生 1847 年生于美国俄亥俄州迈兰镇。他家境贫寒，八岁才上学，但由于他好动喜问、善于思考，与当时呆板枯燥的学校教育格格不入，进校三个月就退了学。他的知识是由他母亲启蒙，加上刻苦自学和勤奋实验而获得的。他当过报童、报务员，后来专门从事与电学有关的发明创造工作。他先后改进了电报、电话，发明了油印机、蜡纸、自动收报机、留声机、电灯、电影等等，为人类作出了巨大的贡献。

爱迪生之所以成功，不仅在于他的天赋，更重要的是由于他的勤奋，由于他锲而不舍的精神，他常常为了解决一个问题做几千次乃至上万次试验。这一点对我们今天仍有启迪。

本书是迈克尔·塞尔金 (Michael Selkin) 根据玛格丽特·卡曾斯 (Margaret Cousins) 的原著改写，1969 年由美国福西特出版公司列入阶梯丛书出版的。简写本保留了原著的风格，故事生动，语言浅显，行文流畅，词汇、句型和语法现象重复率高，适合高中和大学低年级或具有同等水平的读者阅读。

本书的难词难句均有注释，常用的词组、句型和语法现象还有举例说明，书末并附有人名表、地名表和词汇表，以资参考。

谭志明

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Chapter 1

YOUNGEST CHILD

THOMAS ALVA EDISON was born in the early morning hours¹ of the 11th of February, in 1847, in the busy little town of Milan, Ohio, in the Middle West of the United States. His father's small red house stood on a little hill near the Huron River. Lake Erie was not far away. The ground was covered deeply by snow. The darkness of winter was weakly lighted by candles and oil lamps, but the child who was born on that day was going to be the one to light the lamp that shines everywhere in the world.²

Samuel Edison walked nervously outside the closed door of his wife's room. His wife, Nancy, had asked God to allow her to have this child. The three youngest of her six children had died in the long, hard winters there. Her oldest daughter, Marion, was to be married soon.³ Pitt Edison was almost 15 years old, and Harriet Ann, whom they called Tannie, was 13. A baby would make them all very happy.

Nancy Elliott Edison loved children—all children. She was a strong little woman.⁴ Her family had come to America from Scotland. She had been a teacher before she married Samuel Edison of Ontario, Canada. She was 18 when she married him.

Nancy's life was not easy. Her tall young husband could jump, run, and fight better than anyone in his town.⁵ He was always doing those three things. It was difficult for him to remain interested in any one business, and therefore he changed from one trade to another many times. Also, he was a person who became angry very quickly and very often.

Sam Edison came to the United States of America to escape the government of Canada⁶. He had joined a group trying to change that government by force⁷ in 1837. When it won the fight against Sam Edison's group⁸, the Canadian government said he had tried to destroy his country's government, and sent soldiers to catch him.

This made Edison decide to leave Canada. He ran as fast as he could towards the United States. Soldiers and their hunting dogs followed quickly behind him. He ran for two days without stopping to sleep⁹, crossed the ice of the St. Clair River, and arrived in Port Huron,

Michigan, U. S. A.

When Sam Edison stopped running and saw where he was, he decided to go further south¹⁰. He reached Milan, Ohio, and decided it would be a good town in which to sell materials for building houses. Milan was a new town where many people were then settling. He stayed there and started a business selling wood. He built a pretty red house with a white fence and brought his wife and children there to live in it.

Years later, Sam Edison was walking nervously outside his wife's room. Finally, the woman neighbor who was helping his wife opened the door and came out.

"You have a fine boy," she said. "He has light hair and blue eyes—very much like his mother."

"I am glad he has a face like his mother's," Sam Edison said. "If he also has a character like hers when he is older, that will be better yet!"

The neighbor smiled. Nancy Edison was known as¹¹ a good person. "I don't know if he will," the neighbor said, "but I think he is an unusual child. He has a very big head."

The first time Sam Edison saw his seventh and last child¹², he thought the child's head was too large. He

was afraid the baby was ill.

"Do you think the child's body will grow big enough for such a large head?"¹³ Sam asked his wife.

"He is perfect!" Nancy said. She loved the boy from the moment she first saw him. All her life, she believed in everything he did and told doubting people¹⁴ that he was right.

They named the boy Thomas Alva Edison. He was usually called Alva when he was young, and his mother always called him Al.

Little Al began very soon to prove that he was unusual. First, he almost never cried. He laughed all the time. He seemed to try to make other people laugh, too.

As a baby, too, he often became very interested in¹⁵ some object. He would then appear to be trying to think of how he could get it into his hands. He moved his mouth and eyes as people do when they are thinking.¹⁶ He never stopped trying to do a thing that he had decided to do. As soon as¹⁷ he learned to walk, he would walk, without any help, towards whatever he wanted.

Little Al's appearance was very pleasant. His head was large but well-formed. But his thick, light-colored hair was a problem. It pointed up from his head, and

would not remain in place.¹⁸ Nancy Edison had to cut his hair short, although she did not like to do that. At the age of three years, Alva was moving his fingers through his hair when he was thinging, as a man does.

As early as anyone can remember¹⁹, Thomas Alva Edison asked many questions about everything. He seemed to want to learn to talk, only to ask questions.²⁰ As soon as he learned, he began to ask them, and he asked them during his whole life. Some of his questions had no easy answers, some of them were unimportant. But he never stopped asking them. He asked so many that most of his family²¹ did not want to answer any more. But his mother always tried to help.

"Why does the wind blow?" he asked his father.

"I don't know, Al," Sam Edison said.

"Why don't you know?" Alva asked.

Alva was interested in everything. He seemed to think that all nature was full of unknown things, and that it was his job to discover them. He was helping his mother gather eggs one day, when they found a goose, sitting on its eggs.²² (A goose is a large bird which people cook and eat.)

"Why is the goose not eating with the other birds?" Al wanted to know.

"It is sitting on its eggs," said his mother.

"Why?" asked Al.

"To keep them warm," his mother said.

"Why does it want to keep them warm?"

"So they will hatch."

"What does 'hatch' mean?"

"A baby goose hatches when it breaks the egg it is born in, and comes out of it."²³

"If an egg is kept warm, will a goose come out?"

"If it is the right time, and if the egg is a goose egg."

"Oh."

That afternoon, Al caused no trouble for his family.²⁴ They did not see him anywhere. At the end of the day, Al's father tried to find the boy. Sam found Al on a neighbor's farm, sitting on some goose eggs. He was sad that no little goose had decided to come out!

Al's brothers and sisters were so much older than he was, that he usually played alone or stayed with his mother. Al tried to do everything his brother Pitt did. When Pitt made pictures, Al made pictures. When Pitt read a book, Al tried to read, too.

Most of the time Al played near the house, where his mother could see him. When she looked away, he

would walk away.²⁵ And because Al was so interested in so many things, he was often in danger. One time he went inside a building where wheat is stored. He fell into the wheat, coming to rest with his head entirely covered by the wheat.²⁶ He almost died, because he had no air there. But someone pulled Al out by his feet.²⁷ Another time, he fell into some water and had to be pulled out, wet and afraid.²⁸

He often visited the grain mill of Sam Winchester, who liked to experiment with new things. At this time Winchester was trying to make a device that would fly. He did this by filling a large bag with something like air, but of less weight. This made Al interested in flying. He put several chemicals together and believed that anyone who ate the chemicals would weigh less than air. Al asked Michael Oates, a man who worked for Al's father, to eat it and fly. After Oates ate what Al had made, he became so ill that²⁹ he needed a doctor's help. Al seemed to think it was a failure of Michael Oates—not of Al's own—that Oates did not fly.³⁰

For doing these things, Al was whipped. His father thought that only whipping Al would stop him from making trouble.³¹ His mother believed that if you don't whip a boy when he does something wrong, he won't

become a good man. And she decided not to allow this to happen to Al. He was whipped, but he did not stop being interested in everything.

When he was six years old, Al was whipped harder than ever before. He had been playing in one of his father's farm buildings. Then, he decided to make a small fire. "I wanted to see what it would do," he said. The fire spread quickly. Al escaped, but the building was completely burned. The fire spread almost far enough to burn the whole town. What Al had done was too bad and too dangerous for nothing to be done about it.³² But you cannot do to a six-year-old boy what you would do to a man who did bad things.

Samuel Edison said that he would whip his son in the middle of³³ the town to teach him not to do dangerous things. He asked the townspeople to come and watch. Children were often whipped at that time, but never in public.³⁴ The townspeople came and brought their children, to teach them not to do such things. Sam Edison whipped his young son while they all watched. Alva did not become angry with his father. But, after that, he never seemed to think of pain as an important thing³⁵—his own pain, or other people's.

Al was soon in trouble³⁶ again. One day he went to

play with another boy in a little river. After some time, Al discovered that he was alone. He waited for the boy to come back. But when it became late and the boy did not come back, Al went home. He said nothing about what had happened but, in the middle of the night, he was awakened and asked about his friend.³⁷

"I waited and waited," Al said. "He never came."

The boy had fallen into the water and died. Al did not understand that he should have told people what had happened.³⁸ However, his father began to think there was something wrong with Al. Samuel was afraid his son did not care what happened to other people.

When Al was seven years old, his father's business became poorer. Samuel Edison decided to go to another town. He remembered the pretty little town of Port Huron, in Michigan, where he had entered the United States.

Port Huron was built where the St. Clair River enters Lake Huron. Sam Edison found a house at the northern edge of the town at Fort Gratiot, an old French settlement. It was a big, strong house with trees around it. From it, one could see the lake and the river. The rooms of the house were big, and there were four big fireplaces. There were apple trees and a garden and farm

buildings. The Edisons³⁹ took everything they owned with them, and rode on a train, and then on a wagon, to Detroit, Michigan. Then they went on a boat up the St. Clair River to their new home.⁴⁰

Before Al had time to know Port Huron well, he became ill with a sickness called scarlet fever.⁴¹ He was ill for a long time. Therefore, his mother did not send him to school that year. He played alone and stayed with his mother, who loved him to be near. Later in Al's life, when he became deaf, people decided that this illness was a cause of his deafness.

A short time after this, Samuel Edison decided to make a tall building, more than 30 yards high,⁴² on a hill, so that⁴³ people could look at the land around Port Huron. For 25 cents, visitors could go to the top of the building and look through a telescope there. Al stayed at the building and took the money people paid. After some time, people stopped coming to see the view. Al and his mother often went to the top alone and sat looking at the lake and the river. There they talked as if they were of the same age.

Because his family had gone from one town to another, and because of his illness, Al did not start going

to school until he was eight years old. He went to a small school, with all the classes in one room.⁴⁴ The teachers were a churchman and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. G. B. Engle. Most of the teaching was done by giving the students things to remember. Al liked to ask "why" and get answers, not just to learn and remember anything the teacher told him. Therefore, he did not do well in this school.⁴⁵

After three months in the school, Al heard Engle say: "That Edison boy does not have a good mind."⁴⁶ He cannot learn."

Al was a quiet boy, but the unfairness of this made him very angry. He took his hat and coat and went home. "I will never go back to that school," he said.

When his mother learned from him what had happened, she was angrier than he was. The next morning, she went to see Mr. Engle. "I understand that you think my son does not have a good mind," Nancy Edison said.

"He does not work carefully enough on his studies," the teacher said.

"I have been a teacher," Al's mother told Engle, "and I think I can say that Al has a better mind than most boys his age⁴⁷ do." Nancy Edison also said that

the Engles' ways of teaching⁴⁸ must be wrong.

Engle then said that a mother's love might make her unable to believe what was true about her son.⁴⁹ Nancy Edison became angry. "I myself will teach Al," she said. "He won't come here again!"

Al went to school only three months of his life.⁵⁰ After that time, his mother was his teacher. He studied every day, according to⁵¹ his mother's firm plan, not only in the winter but also⁵² in the summer, when the other boys were playing. He did not object to this, because his mother gave him not only learning, but the love of learning. She thought it was more important to think than simply to remember facts.

Nancy Edison's way of teaching was to read to Al the best books she could find—books by the great English writers Shakespeare⁵³ and Dickens⁵⁴, and many important books of history. When he was eight years old, Al became interested in reading good books. By the time he was nine, he could read difficult books very quickly. He had to learn to do everything for himself.⁵⁵ Certain things, which require remembering facts and rules, he never really learned.⁵⁶ He learned to do number problems,⁵⁷ but he did not like to do them.

He did not think about numbers the way most people