

THE CONQUEST OF NIGHT

What Mechanical Art Is Doing for the Comfort and Pleasure of Those Who Prowl and Work After Dark



By GILBERT KNOX

IT is a righteous custom, saying our prayers before we go to sleep, and a celebrated physician has lately declared it an aid to repose. The preachers approve of it, as is only natural. But preachers insist that we ought to do what we can to answer our own prayers; which, as it turns out, is just what we have been trying to accomplish in the case of darkness and its terrors. Indeed, the conquest of night—the turning of night into a period of safety, of comfort, of pleasure, even—remains one of the noblest struggles we ever engaged in, though, as far as the present writer is aware, he is the first to gather the facts. This seems the more strange when you reflect how impressive and downright romantic they are.

If Young—the Young who wrote the "Night Thoughts" a hundred years ago—should revisit this world, it is clear that he would find copy for a very lengthy appendix—good copy too. There is poetry in the new Day and Night Bank, which sets time and the hour at naught; poetry in the midnight mass for night workers, as of late introduced in Boston; and poetry—at least the poetry of humanity—in the plan of the German doctors to divide themselves into day shifts and night shifts, so that the physician who attends you in the small hours isn't the same who has toiled from dawn to sunset. And these recent triumphs of ingenuity become even finer and more significant when you think of them as brilliant incidents in the still unfinished struggle of mankind to get free of the bondage of night, and so to tame the ancient tyrant that whether we mortals would sleep or work or play we shall not be forbidden.

Hope in the Future

NOW, it happens that most of us sleep by night, or try to, and make the attempt in cities. This inclines us to ask whether our civilization will ever assist it. It certainly will. By and by we shall have done with the noisy granite block pavements, replacing them with brick, asphalt, or even wood, as is done in London. We shall send freight through subways. The heavy villain who carts sheet iron through the streets at two a. m. will go to his own place, a fervid one. Locomotives will be restrained by law from blowing hideous blasts and tolling ridiculous bells as they dash through a sleeping city. European locomotive whistles don't make a quarter the noise that ours do, and the European locomotives haven't any bells. Moreover, we shall rid our ports of the nuisance of a belated steamer bawling for somebody to take the line—the police will look out for that. Already the honk of the motor car has been modified, and perhaps it can be made even less disturbing, while the rattle and jingle of the milk cart may die away forever if the invention of powdered milk, just announced by an American chemist, turns out a success. If it doesn't, the tendency toward combination will at last give every city a milk trust, and reduce the number of carts in your street from seven or eight to one.

Meanwhile the doctors are busy teaching us to sleep in spite of noise. Insomnia and the nervous disorders that cause it were never so skilfully treated as today.

And never was sleep so refreshing when attained. Night air, once anathematized, is now canonized. In-

valids grow strong by sleeping out of doors, healthy folk conserve their strength by opening wide their windows, and in time the new craze for all night oxygen will inevitably invade the sleeping car. Now, the trouble with the sleeping car isn't chiefly the noise, it isn't chiefly the jar, it is chiefly the nine times breathed air—a wholly unnecessary infliction, which prevents sleep and sends you forth in the morning with an invisible iron band around your head.

Electric engines, sure to come, will do away with smoke and cinders, though even then there will remain drafts, until the railways are forced to equip their sleeping cars with ventilators, which are at present in market and would readily abate the horror. On the new boat built for the Boston floating hospital the air in every ward is changed once in four minutes, yet no draft is perceptible. The other day a party of New England men were invited to ride in an automatically ventilated trolley car. Though they all lit cigars, the air remained perfectly transparent. Again no draft. We may yet find it difficult to keep sleeping car passengers from following Mark Twain's example and smoking in bed.

The Astronomer's Advance

BUT many are they who must work at night, though their number may eventually dwindle notably. The astronomer, once the very king of the owls, now adjusts his telescope, winds up the clock-work mechanism that keeps it moving precisely in time with the stars, exposes a photographic plate so that it will register whatever the telescope sees, and goes home to his rejoicing family. Though it is rash to predict that such instances of emancipation will be greatly multiplied, it is probably rasher to predict that they won't.

Take a single case. It falls to the lot of man to be sometimes compelled to quit a comfortable couch, before what we call night is past, to light the kitchen fire. Why not an electric button next the bed, a gas jet under the kindlings in the range, and a flame of gas set going by touching the button? This would hardly be a more fantastic attempt to reduce night labor than is the contrivance that keeps the baby's milk warm by surrounding the bottle with hot water bags. A howl awakes you; you proffer the bottle, without getting up to raise its temperature, and immediately the howl ceases.

However, the fact remains that now and for decades to come a good share of us are doomed to toil by night, and society owes the night worker at least safety. Now that we can telephone for the constable or the fire engine from our homes, we can't endure fear in the streets. The electric lighting of



our towns, which has made crime both difficult and dangerous, is still not at all adequate perhaps never will be. It is therefore desirable that every citizen should carry a light of his own. The low power search light for indoor use awaits only the improvement of the storage battery to become a splendid protection out of doors. And in time the substitute for lead will be found, in which case we shall have long distance electric automobiles as well as high power pocket search lights.

Furthermore, the search light has some undeveloped possibilities as a police agent. Out in Buffalo, where the law requires that no one shall remain in the park overlooking the lake and river after a certain hour, the police boat runs by and lights up the whole park. Result? A general scramble. In the same way the wharves could be patrolled at night, to the great discomfiture of river thieves.

But by all odds the most urgent demand for after dark security is its demand in behalf of women. Hosts of wage earning women, many of them young, are compelled to go about the streets alone in the evening, and they do so with grim terror, as well they may. Saleswomen from shops that keep open till ten, waitresses from the restaurants, little typists from the hotels, and switchboard operators from the telephone exchanges have a right to travel the public highways without fear and trembling, though the hour is late. And cruel is the necessity that forbids girls who have worked since morning and who live in cramped lodgings to walk forth without escort for mere pleasure. Pinned up indoors all day, they are penned up indoors all the evening, unless they can find a male guardian, or unless they consent to brave the danger of affront.

Need for Night Stores

FOOD, of the best, you can get until midnight or a little later, but the all night restaurants and the all night "hot dog" wagon leave much to be desired, which is stating the case pretty mildly. And suppose you want to make a serious purchase—an umbrella or a pair of overshoes or a sweater or a hat—and suppose the desire seizes you at eleven in the evening, what then? Rain storms and cold waves don't wait on our convenience; the wicked wind doesn't always blow our headgear into the river during business hours; and we sometimes need the very thing whose acquisition least befits the time of night.

A small department store, containing everything a human being can't survive without, ought to be open from sunset to sunrise in every city. When that splendid institution is founded, a pharmacy will be one of its most essential features.

It is possible too that we shall make it easy for the night wanderer or errand runner to find his way—not merely by labeling our streets so that their names can be read after dark but doing as much for the numbers on houses. We have learned to paint the street's name on the glass of the gas lamp, and we have only to take a hint from Paris to print the number of the house in dark numerals (the Parisians prefer dark blue) on a white tablet six inches square. If you can't see that at night, consult an oculist.

