

Let There Be Light

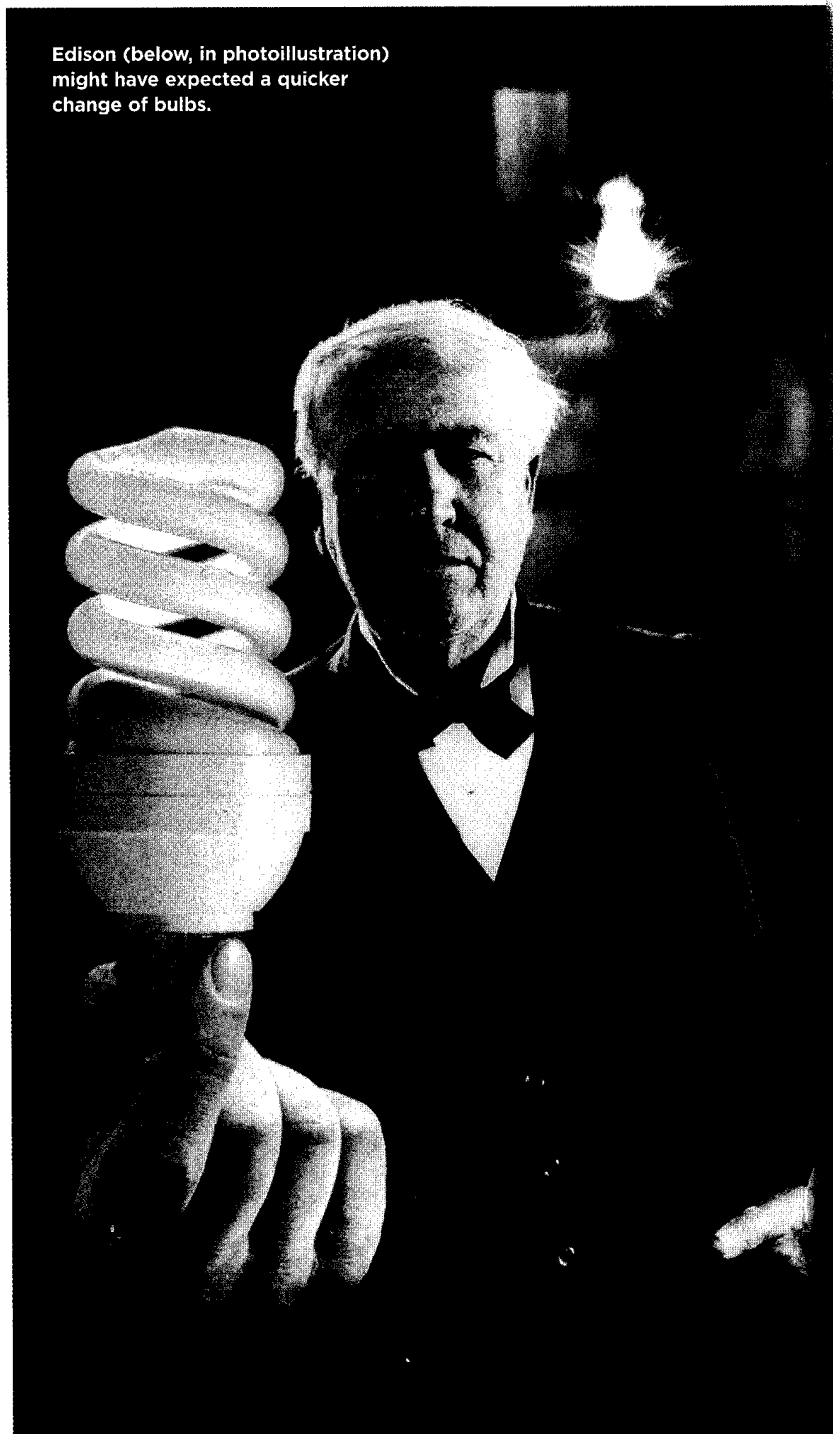
Incandescent or fluorescent?

What would Edison do? **BY RICHARD CONNIFF**

LIVE LONG ENOUGH, and technologies that once seemed immortal fade into oblivion, often taking a piece of your heart with them: the 45 rpm record, the transistor radio, photographic film, a typewriter left at the curb to be anointed by passing dogs. The case that brings this gloomy thought to mind probably isn't going to hurt as bad as finding your old copy of Led Zeppelin's *Houses of the Holy* LP growing mold in your parents' basement. Still, there's always something poignant when a pear-bodied vestige of our past gives way to a younger rival once dismissed as clunky and cold, and now revealed in a slimmer, smarter, sexier new form.

I am talking about the impending demise of the incandescent light bulb, at the hands of the compact fluorescent lamp (or CFL). After roughly 125 years as one of the most familiar objects in our lives, providing a simple, dependable, relatively cheap source of light (and fodder for an entire genre of jokes), the incandescent bulb has lately become the bane of everyone who worries about global warming. Even its admirers concede that it's an energy hog, converting less than 10 percent of the electricity it uses into light. (The other 90-odd percent goes to waste as heat.) And since much of that wasted electricity comes from dirty, coal-fired power plants, this adds up to a lot of needless greenhouse gas emissions.

The CFL's admirers say it is not only far more efficient and cooler, both literally and figuratively, but also lasts about ten times longer (although it doesn't last as long if you



Edison (below, in photoillustration) might have expected a quicker change of bulbs.