

THINGS ARE WHAT THEY SEEM

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In New York you can wander down into Greenwich Village and, if you know the ropes, descend into subterranean passages and sit in dark corners and eat a meal, surrounded by gloom and cigarette fog and lack of ventilation, and you can feel that you are in Bohemia. You are away from all the sordid, gilded strife of modern civilization. This is the real thing. It is dark, and unkempt, and dreadful, but the soul of man needs a cozy, convention-defying seclusion of this sort for its proper expansion and development. At least, this is the manner in which the bohemians deceive themselves. When a girl smokes cigarettes *here*, she thinks she is defying the whole orthodox, custom-ridden world. She is doing as she damn pleases and getting away with it. But the point is, this dinginess, this lack of cleanliness and neatness, this atmosphere of unaccustomedness, has an appeal to a certain proportion of the human race. It is supposed to suggest the occult, the mysterious intellectual world in which the mind of genius best thrives.

One would have supposed, or at least hoped, that the chemist and his laboratory were in these days above all this nonsense. Unfortunately, such is very frequently not the case. In a somewhat perverted way many laboratories are quite bohemian, if you will understand the word in our special sense as above indicated. We have seen many commercial laboratories which were apparently designed along the same lines as the Greenwich Village eating dungeon. The idea is, possibly, to impress the clients with the mysterious powers of darkness. The darker, the smellier, the more littered the benches, the more wonderful and mysterious and suggestive of the hidden powers of a bottle of acid. The more disordered the laboratory, the more disordered becomes the mind of the client, and the client likes to be bewildered and overwhelmed, particularly when he is paying for it. Put the laboratory away up in the attic of an old building, and it is safe from intrusion, and all the dreadful secrets it contains will be safe; it is an ideal place for ferreting out the hidden secrets of things. The whole business is romantic; it appeals to the imaginative nature of the lay mind, and it depends for its livelihood on those lay minds whose imaginative nature can be aroused by such devices. No doubt it has other clients who (fortunately) never see the laboratory.

Now, if this sort of thing works, and apparently it does work in commercial laboratories to some extent, whatever explanation or justification may exist for it is not applicable to industrial laboratories. The industrial chemist is not a tinkering amateur or dilettante, playing on the imaginations of the credulous and stupid. (We have no more faith in this explanation of the dirty commercial laboratory than you have, but it looks better in print than the naked truth.) He is a professional man with a record and reputation to establish or maintain, and this must be accomplished on a sound basis. His laboratory reflects the condition of his mind. If it is a disordered, higgledy-piggledy junk shop, this effect is the product of nothing but his own imagination, and classifies him infallibly. It is the expression of his individuality.

These details are, of course, commonplace; if they are not realized in so many words, they are at least felt instinctively. One would therefore expect to find industrial laboratories kept everlastingly in ship-shape order and the chemists striving and competing with each other to contrive ways and means to improve the entire machine and all its details. We would expect to find

none of the dirty collar, long black nailed and unbrushed hair bohemia in industrial laboratories. But we do find it.

The single argument we hear to excuse the disheveled laboratory is poverty. Would a neat and tidy place really cost more money? Would a man with a genius for cluttering up the place be prevented from expressing his individuality by a slate-top bench instead of a wood one? I doubt it. You doubt it. We both know better. The untidy, careless chemist, with no pride in the appearance of the place in which he works, with no regard for the convenience and comfort either of himself or his co-workers, is not delivering the goods. The head chemist who tolerates this is lapsing in his duty.

We hear a vast buzz of complaint about chemists being underpaid. Consider this a moment. The majority of chemists do nothing but use standard apparatus in the standard prescribed way the standard number of hours a day, getting analytical results by following directions contained in standard methods or in standard textbooks, and an ordinary letter carrier does essentially the same thing. How can the enterprising chemist distinguish himself from his co-workers better than expressing himself in systematic tidiness and orderly neatness in his daily routine? If you are so pessimistic as to hold that every tidy chemist cannot hope to gain promotion by that means, at least you must concede that every untidy, thoughtlessly bohemian rebel against the conventional rules of laboratory cleanliness will inevitably lose out in the long run.

DEATH OF DR. CHARLES BASKERVILLE

In the untimely passing away of Dr. Baskerville, January 28th, the Chemical profession lost one of its most brilliant members, and his associates, one of their dearest friends. Born in Deer Brook, Mississippi, 1870, he was but 52 years of age at the time of his death.

The members of the Interstate Association and the Oil Chemists' Society who were fortunate enough to be present at the Birmingham meeting, will remember the very lucid demonstration he gave them of his then recently inventive process for refining oil.

At the time of his death, he was Professor in charge of the Chemical Department of the College of the City of New York. The youthful enthusiasm which he carried into his work as a teacher made his work with the students highly successful, while his charm of manner and good fellowship will make his many friends always remember him as one of the most lovable of men they have ever known.

DAVID WESSON.

CORROSION RESEARCH

The National Research Committee has recently appointed a special committee for the study of corrosion, the purpose being that it shall act as a general steering committee for the collection of fundamental data on the principles of corrosion. In view of the fact that there is a great amount of scattered information on this whole subject whether direct from the standpoint of corrosion as such or indirectly through the effect of metals upon vegetable oils, we are requesting that all such information, scattered facts as they may be, be sent to the undersigned who will forward it to the National Research Council direct, in bulk. In the interests of co-operative research, please give this your immediate and careful attention.

J. H. SHRADER, Chairman,
Committee on Cooperation in Research.