

Misapplied Chemistry

ARTHUR D. LITTLE, in *The Handwriting on the Wall* (Little, Brown):

It would be a pleasure to rehearse the triumphs of applied chemistry and to demonstrate its intimate relation to agriculture and to industry of every sort. I should like to make you realize how deeply you are indebted to Faraday and Pasteur, to Burton, Nobel, and Solvay, and to those many other men of genius who, in cooperation with the rank and file of laboratory workers, have conferred upon you countless benefits. For the moment, however, I have assumed the functions of the Devil's Advocate and in that capacity must direct your attention to chemistry when misapplied.

Misapplied chemistry is the chemistry of the ignorant, the charlatan, and the swindler. It flourished long before the practices of Egyptian priests led the Arabs to adopt for it the name Al Chemy, the Egyptian, or Black Art, and it remains to-day an active and sinister offshoot of the science.

There are, of course, instances without number where chemistry has been misapplied without intention, and these we may view with charity. We may even be grateful to that chemical student who reported that hydrofluoric acid "itches" glass, though it is obviously a pity that glass should itch when it is so hard to scratch. We may sympathize

Good as Neon—*Cont'd*

Briggs. "In beacons of moderate candlepower any advantages due to the distinctive color of a neon lamp may be obtained more conveniently and simply and more reliably by means of an incandescent filament lamp equipped with a suitable color screen."

As a matter of fact, putting a red filter in front of a light does not increase its fog-penetrating power, he said. Tests were also made with incandescent lamps, one of which was covered with a red screen. The lamps were both of the same power. In every case it was found that the uncovered light could be seen through a greater thickness of fog.

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with that other student who defined caustic soda as "a cooling summer drink," and we need not condemn too harshly the druggist who gave the very little girl aspirin when what she asked for was ice cream. The little girl probably said quite enough herself. We need not be so tolerant with the manufacturer who misbrands his goods or who sells water at high prices. Some years ago we analyzed a leather stain for which a Jewish client was paying eighty-five cents a gallon. It proved to be water containing a little gum tragacanth colored with aniline dye. When our client read the certificate he remarked, "Now I see where the Gentiles get the money that we get from the Gentiles."

The late Professor Brush, the distinguished mineralogist of Yale, delighted in the story of the young farmer, who knocked timidly at his office door one day. In response to the professor's invitation to enter, the farmer's head appeared at the partly opened door, and an anxious voice inquired, "Are you alone?" "Yes, yes," said the professor, "come in." The farmer entered, closed the door carefully behind him, seated himself, and from the depths of a carpetbag drew forth a large lump of yellow mineral, which he passed to the professor. "What do you think of that?" he said. Professor Brush examined it for a moment

"Our Father"—*Cont'd*

others. Only 44 per cent. could explain "Our Father," while Thy kingdom come" proved to be the most difficult of all, and was answered by only 43 per cent. The easiest passages were "and forgive us our debts" and "lead us not into temptation."

The investigation indicates "that the school and church are failing in teaching the student the wider and more subtle meaning of this well-known passage," Mr. Wheeler reports. "If college students understand only about two-thirds of the prayer the ignorance of the average child will probably be more appalling than this study indicates."

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and replied, "I never saw a finer specimen of pyrite." "Pyrite!" said the young man, "What do you mean? Ain't that gold?" "No," said Professor Brush. "It is only a compound of iron and sulphur." The farmer sank into his chair, then pulled himself together, and said weekly, "My God! Professor, I've just married twenty acres of it."

Our own experience with the prize hens concerned a local example of misapplied chemistry. The award of the blue ribbon to a fine coop of Rhode Island reds had been contested by a defeated exhibitor on the ground that the hens were dyed. We were waited upon by a committee, who requested that we determine whether the hens were in fact better than they should be, since it appeared that hens are not permitted the cosmetic aids so freely utilized in other feminine circles. Never having analyzed a hen, we stipulated that the committee should supply one which, like Cæsar's wife, was above suspicion. This they did, and from her feathers we were unable to extract a trace of dye. From those of the beribboned birds, however, sufficient color was readily removed to dye deeply large skeins of worsted.

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Palestine's Jewish population is growing rapidly.

Noiseless Airplanes—*Cont.*

With the more vital problems of aviation well on the road to solution, it is quite possible that inventive genius will solve the problem of propeller noise, or possibly change the whole principle of airplane propulsion. It is not beyond the realm of imagination that the present generation may live to see the day when airplanes will slip noiselessly through the air on missions of pleasure and commerce, or in time of war on trips of deadly destruction.

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