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SCIENCE AND EVERY-DAY PHILOSOPHY¹

By President WILLIAM E. WICKENDEN

CASE SCHOOL OF APPLIED SCIENCE

WE are gathered in this distinguished seat of learning to acclaim these new companions in research, who by their zeal, their intellectual integrity and their devotion to the ideals of science have shown themselves worthy to share in the pursuit of truth. Meanwhile John Does by the thousand stroll along, roll along on the streets of your fair city, scarcely aware of your existence and less aware of being in your debt. To them you are just a bunch of highbrows—a queer lot who get some freakish sort of kick out of peering down microscopes, messing around with ill-smelling chemicals, poring over statistics, peering at stars, carving up household pets and pests indiscriminately, rigging up mazes of wire and tubing, and juggling with the fourth dimension. The motives that stir your enthusiasms are mostly beyond their ken. Forty years and more ago a track laborer on the right-of-way of the Nickel Plate Railway in Cleveland saw a man

fussing with sets of mirrors in a way which struck his curiosity. The man didn't seem to be a surveyor or an inspector of permanent way. "What," he asked the trespasser, "are you up to here?" "Why, I am trying to measure the velocity of light." "Well, why should any one make such a fuss over a thing like that?" "Oh, because it is such corking good fun!" The trespasser was Michelson, and his fun lasted a lifetime. Corking good fun! How lightly the genius of optics summed up his ideals—the philosopher's thirst for truth, the artist's struggle for self-expression, the pioneer's wrestle with nature, the prospector's zest for discovery, the idealist's pursuit of supreme excellence—such corking good fun!

John Doe, as he rolls or strolls along the street, prides himself on being a great admirer of science. He is vaguely aware that science makes the water pure, keeps the sewers safe, keeps the current on tap in the wires, makes the telephone talk, tames the germs that pursue him, discovers medicines to kill

¹ Address at the Sigma Xi Initiation, Ohio State University, May 26, 1933.

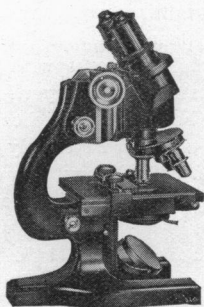
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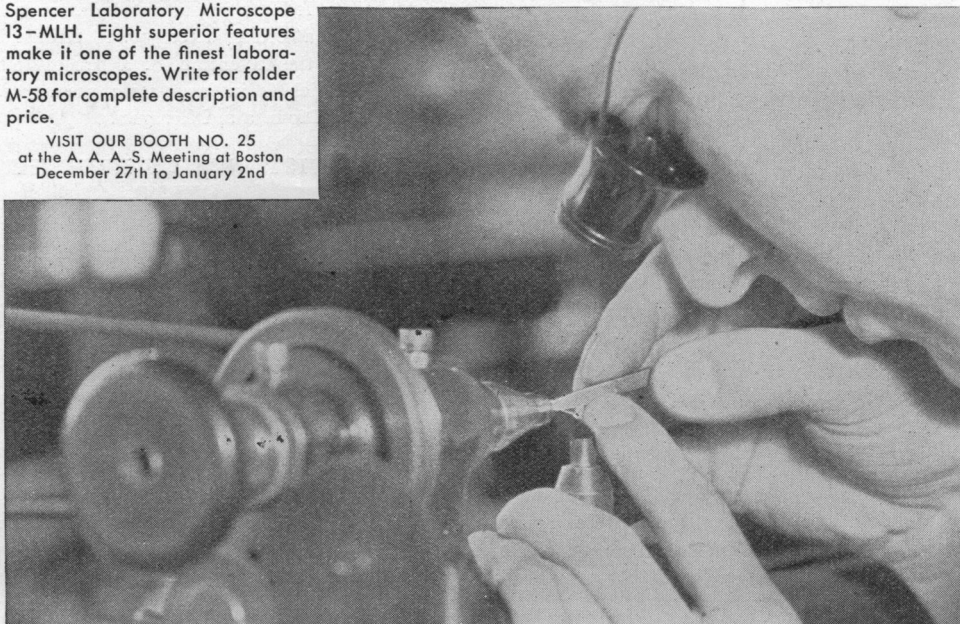
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