Comments and Communications

A Museum of the Social Sciences

A new type of museum is proposed herewith—a museum of the social sciences. Such a museum is feasible and could be a dynamic and pervasive educational force. Its substance would be the accumulated knowledge concerning man: his cultures; his behavior, as an individual and in groups; the wherewithal of his survival; his migrations; etc. To depict the life story of each people or group separately would be impractical and unnecessary. Essentially the same end could be achieved by considering large subject themes. For example, a Hall of Food would show the various foods and food habits brought over by all the immigrant groups, the diverse methods of preparation of foods by each, the continuous borrowing and exchange of foods and customs in the course of time, etc. Halls of the Family, Education, Government, Art, Hygiene and Medicine, Marriage, and so on could be taken up in turn, providing a panorama of historical development and present usage, each theme taking full cognizance of the extensive exchange, adaptations, and fundamental similarities among all peoples.

The term "Hall" is used figuratively: one large room or auditorium could comprise all the "Halls." Visitors would be seated comfortably; the "exhibits" could be seen on a screen in motion pictures, in intelligent sequence and with interesting and meaningful explanations heard from transcribed records. Motion pictures are suggested, perhaps in serial form, because they are a most effective educational medium and would make possible distribution of the museum to every city and hamlet in the country.

It may be noted in this connection that the museums in America are primarily a big-city luxury. Only 4.7% of all cities in the United States have a museum, open to the public, which even to some small extent depicts the natural history of man; 1.8% of towns under 25,000, 14.7% of communities of 25,000–100,000, and 65.2% of cities of 100,000 population or over have one or more such museums. At least 5 states apparently do not have a single community with a museum of natural history. (The computations are based on data given in *The museums in America*, by L. V. Coleman, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., 1939; the population figures refer to the 1940 census.) Indeed, the few great museums in the country could get together, pool their resources—financial, exhibits, scholarship—and produce authoritative, interesting, and meaningful films, thereby making available to every community in the country one of the finest museums in the world.

But, most of all, there is needed a vital, factual, persuasive museum of the social sciences that would reach all sections and levels of the population. Making such a museum available to communities over the country through the medium of films, even at a nominal cost, might well make it a self-sustaining project financially. Most important, it would put the social sciences to effective use, and contribute enormously to intelligent and sympathetic understanding of and among our peoples.

Statements made in this item are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U. S. Public Health Service.

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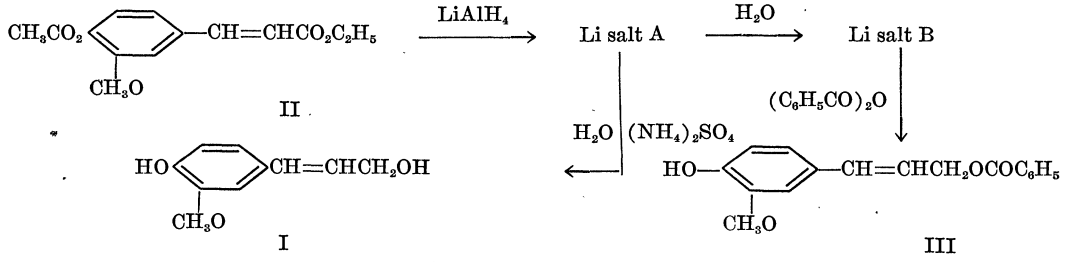
A Synthesis of Coniferyl Alcohol[1]

Coniferyl alcohol, I, which occurs in natural products as a glucoside (Tiemann and Haarmann. *Ber.*, 1871, **7**, 608; Kubel. *J. prakt. Chem.*, 1866, **97**, 243), and possibly as a benzoate (*Perf. Ess. Oil Rec.*, 1943, **34**, 341), is not a readily accessible substance. It is usually isolated from the glucoside by an emulsin fermentation (*Ber.*, 1871, **7**, 608)—a procedure that is inconvenient even when the natural isolate is available.

Its synthesis has now been achieved from relatively inexpensive starting materials. The action of lithium aluminum hydride on ethyl acetoferulate, II, with subsequent hydrolysis of the lithium-containing intermediate in the presence of ammonium sulfate gives a good yield of coniferyl alcohol. In the absence of ammonium salt, hydrolysis is incomplete, a second lithium salt being obtained; when this new substance is heated with benzoic anhydride, it gives coniferyl benzoate, III.



II I III

The synthetic coniferyl alcohol has all the properties recorded by Tiemann for his substance, isolated from natural sources.

The complete experimental details will be published shortly elsewhere.

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