

The Pleasures of Foreign Travel

IN DECEMBER of 1958 I boarded a ship at New Orleans which was bound for Greece. This voyage was to be the first leg of a leisurely journey which eventually would take me around the world. While I did not set out with a fixed itinerary, I planned, after visiting Greece, to go on to Egypt, Pakistan, India, Singapore, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Japan. During my reading and preparing for these travels I realized one day that in each of these lands there were members of the American Oil Chemists' Society; it occurred to me that if I could meet some of them, I would add much to the pleasure and interest of my travels.

I wrote to President J. C. Konen of my plan to see as many of our foreign members as I could and asked him for a letter of greeting to them. He responded enthusiastically with the following:

By means of this letter I wish to extend the official greetings of the American Oil Chemists' Society to all of its foreign members whom you might visit. I hope that you will tell them how much we value their membership in our Society. I also would ask you to encourage them to submit technical papers for publication in the Journal so that it may be truly world-wide in scope. Perhaps you could also officially extend an urgent invitation to them to attend our 50th Anniversary meeting in New Orleans. We will have an outstanding technical program with many foreign speakers participating. The social program will also be outstanding and will give an opportunity for all who attend to become better acquainted with their fellow Society members. Even where our politics may be different, our scientific interests are the same; and on this I hope we can begin to found a lasting friendship with all our fellow chemists throughout the world.

I had first thought that I would call at the office of each fellow member when I arrived in his country. But I soon learned that when a traveler who does not know a foreign country's language sets out to find an address in the industrial section of a big strange city, he is likely to run up a staggering taxi bill and probably will fail to arrive at the place he seeks

as well. It became my practice to write a note to all the members in the city I was visiting with an invitation to meet me for a late afternoon drink at my hotel or a club. The response which I received to my gesture of friendliness is one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.



T. L. Rettger

Unfortunately circumstances did not permit me to meet a number of A.O.C.S. members in several ports which I visited. This was my loss. I was in Alexandria for only 12 hours although I expected to be there long enough to meet the two members in that city. Karachi was a one-day port of call for the freighter which I took from Port Said to Bombay. That day was Sunday, and I could only send notes of greeting to our three members there. The same circumstances prevailed in Manila, and I did not have an opportunity to write to our two Philippine members in that port. When I was in the fascinating city of Hong Kong, the urgency of other matters (getting some money after all my travelers' checks were stolen) deprived me of the pleasure of meeting our one member there. But in Athens, Cairo, Bombay, Singapore, and Tokyo I was able to meet our

members and was given a most cordial welcome.

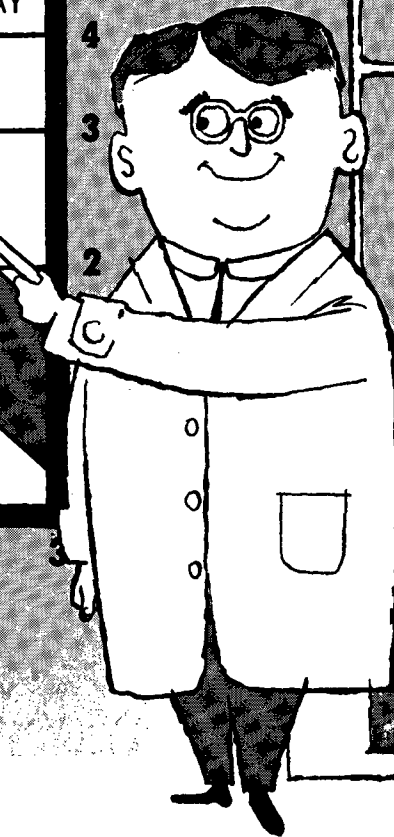
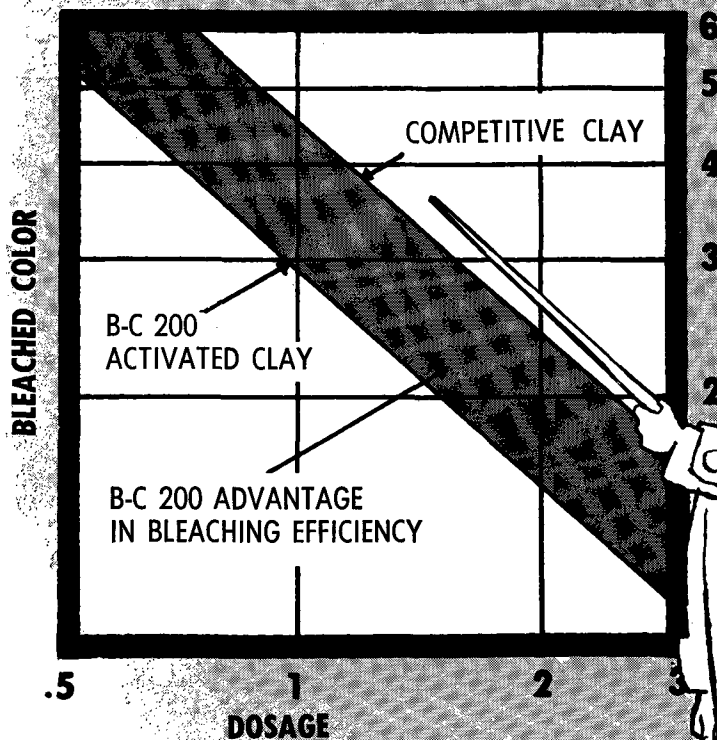
ICANNOT, in this space, name the many persons in those cities who were so friendly and showed me such warm hospitality. I will mention my long-time friend, J. G. Kane, head of the University of Bombay's Department of Chemical Technology who, though not now a member of the A.O.C.S., held a luncheon in Bombay so that I could meet the members and several other eminent chemists there. I only hope that each one will read this expression of my deep and sincere appreciation of the courtesy and consideration shown me.

It seems to me particularly significant that when I was in those foreign cities and was able to let Society members know of my presence in their country, each one without exception accepted my invitation and came to meet me. I know that in some cases this was done at considerable inconvenience; one man cancelled plans for a trip out of the city. But the acceptance of my invitation was only the beginning. They then took over and made me their guest with a display of friendliness and generous hospitality that was memorable and heart-warming.

How shall we interpret this enthusiastic reception which was accorded me, an old but undistinguished member of the Society, by our foreign members? First of all, it was their innate courtesy and the custom of showing hospitality to a visiting stranger. But I think it was also a very real appreciation of my gesture of friendliness and of President Konen's message. I am most grateful for the kindness shown me; it greatly exceeds that which I have usually extended to the foreigners I have met in my country. In these days when so many Americans are travelling everywhere I suggest: call on your foreign A.O.C.S. members. They'll give you a warm welcome.

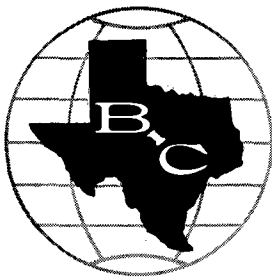
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