These Labs Are Just Like Home

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BEARDED scientists are coming out from behind their microscopes to wash overalls, make doughnuts and shampoo hair just as does the American homemaker. By peering over the homemaker’s shoulder, they can learn more about her daily life than they could ever guess with their beakers and Bunsen burners.

Large companies like Proctor & Gamble, soap and shortening manufacturers, are conducting home laboratories so that they can eliminate flaws in their products before they reach the retailers’ shelves. These labs duplicate exact conditions found in American home laundries and kitchens as well as in commercial laundries, bakeries and beauty shops.

The Beginning

Of course Proctor & Gamble have always had laboratories, at least since 1887 when their first chemist arrived. But previous P & G labs had worked as “bureaus of standards,” scientifically checking raw materials and finished products. The object of these earlier labs was and still is to keep products up to factory standards. But in 1923, P & G awoke to a new standard, the customers’ standard. Here’s how it happened.

One day a laundry owner in a small town complained to P & G that their soap and his local water simply were not “simpatico.” Immediately a P & G research man rushed out to the laundry and solved the problem. This started the idea of duplicating commercial laundry conditions right in the lab. It’s one thing to suds tiny swatches of material in miniature washers, but it’s something else to tackle a regular family wash and then check the results scientifically.

P & G employees save on laundry bills when they leave their dirty clothes at the labs to be washed. Testers use both hard and soft water to duplicate conditions from all over the country and try other brands of soap as well as their own to compare results.

Testing Soap

Just to show how scientific they are, they may soil four different towels to exactly the same degree—a lot dirtier than little brother could make them—and then wash them with four different soap preparations, or in four different ways. Then the towels are checked by the photoelectric eye which can record the slightest difference in cleanliness.

What happens when sheer hose are washed twenty times with a certain kind of soap? The “sock buster” has the answer. It gives stockings imitation “knee action” and measures the wearing quality of hose after they have been washed.

Drifting in from the laundry’s open door comes the tempting odor of cake, just out of the oven. Are you surprised? Remember that P & G makes shortening too, and the family dinner table receives just as much attention as the laundry.

Scientific Baking

In a typical homemaker’s kitchen, efficient home economists make cooking a delicious science. Their job is to find easier ways to bake which they may pass on to the homemaker, and to develop more appetizing and easier recipes. These testers improve cooking methods to insure richer, lighter, better textured cakes, and pies that are a sure success every time. Ivorydale experts have made your mother’s methods of baking cake and pie as out-of-date as the
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hoop skirt. Even the most undomestic male can turn out perfect pie crust now.

Not only are baking methods improved, but printed instructions on P & G packages and wrappers are being simplified constantly. What a boon this is to inexperienced and flustered brides preparing three daily meals for their new lord and master!

P & G experts also carry cooking education to high schools and colleges. Over a hundred colleges and universities are on their calling list. And the experts are working in other ways with the homemakers of tomorrow. Over a million pamphlets are mailed from these headquarters every year to high school home economics classes, telling girls how to wash all sorts of fabrics, giving them hints on good grooming, as well as providing the newest baking tips.

Beauty Shop, Too

Something that may surprise you even more is that P & G has its own beauty shop. Their office women gladly contribute themselves as guinea pigs for science and free beauty care.

Some women may get a "split shampoo," one kind of shampoo on one side of their head and another on the other side. Then the trusty Lustremeter, which registers the amount of reflected light to the thousandth of "lustre power," is used and the results studied.

Soap is most often used to wash people, so P & G has a "people laboratory," too, where various soaps are tested by employees. It's better to find out in the lab if certain ingredients irritate the skin before those all-important consumers use them and switch to another brand.

Here a three-way comparison is being run to test the dishwashing efficiency of Dreft and two experimental products. This is part of the work carried on by the Home Economics Department in their checking of established products such as Dreft and testing of experimental products. The dishes are wheeled in from the P & G Restaurant each noon and washed, and the results on the dishes and suds studied. It's the most practical kind of test.

Other Jobs

Imagine soap experts in laboratories going to work to make coal less dusty, or helping to make metal foil flexible enough to wrap around a stick of gum or a candy bar. Or imagine them going out into textile mills to give today's colorful fabrics all of the intricate soap baths they need before you buy them in the stores.

They're called upon to look over the shoulders of the papermakers and show how soap can help produce that smooth coating on magazine paper. They're asked to show farmers the quickest, smartest way of cleaning cream separators. The wire in your telephone and the wire in your kitchen strainer were pulled through soap when drawn to size. Soap had to scour your saucepan or automobile bumpers before they could be plated with shining metal. And speaking about that automobile, soap is employed in the processing of the natural and synthetic rubber used in the tires.

These labs which scientifically test their products under actual home conditions are another step in lightening and brightening the career of homemaking.