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Junior Chemists

By Jerry Klein

Youngsters Learn Chemistry

If Santa Claus brought your little boy a chemistry set—as he did to many thousands of others this Christmas—stand by! Within the next few days, anything is liable to happen around your house—and probably will.

For America's little chemists show little interest in following the formulas recommended by the manufacturers of chemistry sets, safe and sure as they are.

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TAKE THE YOUNGSTER from New Jersey who showed precocious interest in atomic fission: "About a week ago, I discovered how to make a small atomic bomb by putting certain chemicals together and wrapping them in a paper," he reported. "Then I took them outside and lit a match to them, and ran. There was a bright light which could be seen for blocks . . ."

For some strange reason of his own, a Philadelphia boy decided to make a "Thiani gun" with his chemistry set. "You put certain chemicals in a test tube, then fit a cork tightly into the tube. And heat the substance until the cork flies off," he explained, adding, "do not stand in front of the gun, or the cork might hurt your face!"

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THESE TESTIMONIALS came to the A. C. Gilbert Co., a toy manufacturer, which holds annual contests for small-fry scientists. "There may be a few things kids can't do with their chemistry sets," the firm declares, "but there's little they're not working on from turning base metals into gold, to a cure for the common cold and the predictability of redeye in fruit flies."

"I have obtained some cold germs," began one letter from a young chemist whose optimistic treatise ended: "I think I will then have produced a cure for the common cold."

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THREE YOUNGSTERS in Cleveland won a \$100 prize for inventing a chemical process to produce a new kind of plastic. They decided to use the money to expand their laboratory—which then consisted of a converted fruit bin—and "manufacture drugs to benefit mankind."

Another 16-year-old in Jackson Heights, N. Y., however, commandeered his mother's pressure cooker and baby bottles to sterilize red-eyed fruit flies.

But don't blame junior. Who put that chemistry set in Santa's pack anyway?