

MILTON BURTON I remember May 15, 1942, the day that I arrived to go to work on the job. It was in the early evening. I checked in at the Miramar Hotel—that first (slightly strange) resort of nearly all of us on Woodlawn Avenue—and a little while later was greeted in the lobby by Harry Spedding, Glenn Seaborg, and one other person (it may have been Charles Coryell). I was in my natural state of ebullience and began talking about some work I had been doing. I used the word "photochemistry". Immediately there was a hush. Spedding whispered to me that I mustn't use that word because people would associate it with me and begin wondering what I was doing in Chicago. And, I presume, thus arrive at the conclusion that we were working on the development of an atomic bomb.

Security was an enigma to me then and I won't say what it is to me now. I remember some time later that Coryell and I were reprovved for referring to K in a sidewalk conversation. We were talking about potassium* but the woman who overheard us knew k only as a mysterious, secured and thus sacred symbol and promptly reported us. I am certain that k as the reproduction factor for a nuclear reactor meant nothing at all to her.

I remember Lewis and Randall's book *Thermodynamics*† in which they told how release of atomic energy could be involved in the production of the sun's energy. In the 1920s we had all taken it for granted that a similar process was ultimately to be produced on earth, but not in our lifetimes. Then Taylor's *Treatise on Physical Chemistry*‡ described the von Halban suggestion for obtaining atomic energy. Again we put this down as something very, very far in the future. Well, those things weren't nearly as far in the future as we had thought.

In our group were a number of young men—all of them impudently young. And it wasn't merely that they had the audacity, they had the effrontery to assume that a thing like large-scale plutonium production could be accomplished. I think that effrontery is the peculiar quality of genius—this willingness to say "The past has nothing to do with what I now propose to do. Prejudice that we may have absorbed from our teachers has nothing to do with what we are going to do. We are just going ahead and do it because it can be done". Seaborg's people did these things.

*K is the symbol for potassium.

†*Thermodynamics and the Free Energy of Chemical Substances*, Gilbert N. Lewis and Merle Randall, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1923.

‡*Treatise on Physical Chemistry*, Hugh S. Taylor (Ed.), D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1924.