Lectures on the history of the development of chemistry since the time of Lavoisier

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HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY.
LECTURES ON THE HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHEMISTRY SINCE THE TIME OF LAVOISIER

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

In placing these lectures before a wider section of the public, I consider it essential to indicate the point of view from which they have been prepared. I regard them as an attempt to follow the development of our ideas of to-day from those that were formerly current. Hence I have only gone back as far as Lavoisier; because our science assumed a new aspect in his hands, and because it may be held that, as regards development, we are still passing through the epoch inaugurated by him.

It has been my wish to arrange the matter of the lectures in such a way that the student may be enabled to obtain a survey of this portion of the history of chemistry with little trouble, and at the same time so that it may serve as a guide for those who may desire to engage their attention more particularly with special investigations in this department. On this account I have expressed myself as concisely as possible, whilst, on the other hand, I have supplied moderately complete references to the original literature in connection with the subjects treated of. A twofold result appears to me to be
attained in this way, inasmuch as the reader is placed in the position of being able to form an opinion forthwith regarding the value of the narrative, and to correct errors and omissions, while the labour of subsequent investigators is lightened. While I could scarcely consider it possible to give an absolutely accurate representation of the period in question, with its great wealth of discovery, still it has been my aim to furnish a useful contribution towards the history of the chief chemical facts and theories.

It is almost unnecessary to say that the book has no pretensions to completeness. I only felt justified in taking notice of those investigations and ideas which have exercised an influence upon the further development of chemistry, whereas I have at most merely referred to other investigations which, in my opinion, will still exert such influence. An objective treatment of the subject appeared to demand that it should be handled in this way.

I have not hesitated to carry the history of the development of chemistry down to the present day, although the difficulty of the task has been greatly increased by my doing so. It is certainly in this part in particular that many corrections will still be necessary before the end in view is attained. How different the latest phases of our science will appear to subsequent investigators! And yet the opinion of a contemporary is not without value also, when it is moderate and free from prejudices or special leanings. This is exactly what I have
striven to attain. If I have not always been successful in
doing so—if here and there I may have underestimated the
merits of some and unduly asserted those of others—this has
been unintentional. If I have been severe in my judgment, I
have at least been free from any personal feeling, and it has
always been the matter alone that I have attacked. Should I have
approached in some cases too closely to the limits of historical
accuracy, or should I not have succeeded in representing fairly
the claims of every one, I am fully prepared to rectify my error
as soon as I am convinced of it.

If my colleagues are interested in the subject, and assist
me with their knowledge and advice, it may soon be possible,
perhaps, to obtain an objective picture of the chemical theories
of the last hundred years. I desire that this book may be
regarded as an attempt in that direction, and that it may be
judged indulgently.

A. LADENBURG.

KIEL, December 1886.