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"Chemistry, in particular, is capable, when suitably presented, of making a strong appeal to the intelligence and the imagination; for, as the following pages are intended to show, it is the most romantic of all the branches of science; and in its variegated history, stretching back through unnumbered generations of alchemists into an indefinite past, its present votaries have (if they but knew) a richly human and humanistic heritage." — from the Preface

Written for the layman, this accessible history takes a broad, humanistic perspective, eschewing chemical equations and formulae. Instead it concentrates on the great figures of chemistry and the ideas that revolutionized the science, from earliest history to the modern era.

Much of the book is devoted to alchemy and such topics as the philosopher's stone, alchemical crypticism and symbolism, pseudo-alchemists, Paracelsus, and the "swan song" of alchemy as the scientific revolution took hold. In the final chapters, the author takes up the development of modern chemistry, including atomic theory, the nature of the elements, the beginning of organic chemistry, and more. Broad in scope, erudite yet readable, this rich and absorbing narrative will appeal to anyone interested in the long and colorful history of chemical science. Glossary. 50 illustrations.

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