
Breakthroughs in Chemistry. *Peter Wolff.* Signet Science Library, The New American Library, New York (Paperback), 1967. x+336 p. $.75.

Wolff had as his aim in this book the compilation of excerpts from original papers (or their English translations) by chemists concerned with the composition of matter. Selections were taken from the published works of Robert Boyle (urging reliance on data obtained from experiments), Joseph Priestley (discovery of oxygen), Lavoisier (role of oxygen in combustion), Dalton (his atomic postulations) Avogadro (number of particles in a gas), Faraday (electrochemical decomposition), Mendeleev (periodic law), Marie Curie (the discovery of radium), and Niels Bohr (structure of hydrogen atoms). Each excerpt is preceeded by a short introduction that places the excerpt in history, tells where it was originally published, and what the author's stated purpose was in writing it. Further, each excerpt is followed by a longer essay by Wolff, which attempts to elucidate the achievements of each of the original authors. Because the scientists, particularly from Avogadro on, addressed themselves to an audience of fellow scientists, and Wolff, in his textual section, is addressing either the literate, interested adult, or the intelligent high school student, the work appears uneven, although it may be the best design to serve the needs of this particular audience.

Wolff, from his selections, obviously believes that the greatest "chemical breakthrough" was the elucidation of the atom. An equally good case might be made for the description of the nature of the chemical bond being the major breakthrough, thereby elucidating all chemical reactions. If Wolff's premise be granted, then it can only be wondered that he did not see fit to include at least a hint of the Boscovich atom, certainly as decisive as the Daltonian atom in the history of chemistry.

These objections aside, the book does serve a purpose, for it presents, in a handy and inexpensive format, some excerpts from the writings of some of our great chemical forbears.

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