

REVIEW

Teaching the History of Chemistry, A Symposium, San Francisco, U.S.A., April 1968, Edited by George B. Kauffman, Budapest Akademiai, Kiado, 1971, p. 222, \$7.80.

The book comprises 18 lectures delivered at the Symposium and six papers subsequently written specially for the volume. Twenty-four papers in the book cover a wide range of topics as well as philosophies.

The teaching of chemistry is examined as a part of the wider problems of History as well as History of Science, problems specific to the teaching of History of Chemistry are discussed at length, and in a series of articles the practice of teaching history of chemistry is discussed in a number of countries.

The excellent essays of eminent historians of chemistry have brought to the fore forcefully the current philosophy prevalent amongst the historians of chemistry and the pedagogical approaches. One feels the depth of scholarship of the authors as well as the refinement of the conceptual framework.

The book also brings out the limitation of approach equally forcefully—the absence of social background in the teaching of the subject, and the treatment of chemistry as a part of sociological developments in a number of countries or different developments in different culture areas reduce the utility of this volume.

It is rather surprising that not a single person was invited to deliver a lecture or contribute a paper on the interconnection of chemistry with social needs and developments in a country. In the absence of such a treatment some of the basic questions in the evolution of chemistry and its pattern of development are neither raised nor an attempt made to answer them. For instance, we do not know why chemistry developed rapidly in certain periods and stagnated in others, why in one period physical, in other inorganic and in another organic chemistry developed more rapidly. Similarly why centres of chemistry tended to shift from one country to another or why one country suddenly developed or continued to nurture one particular branch in chemistry as compared to others. A comparative study of different branches of chemistry in different periods of history and in different countries would throw considerable light on these problems. The absence of their treatment in a book of this nature, which is likely to be widely consulted and used in teaching, would have serious impact on the teaching and on the taught.

The treatment of a subject in abstract, in terms of its theoretical development, as an experimental technique, the growth of knowledge and endeavours to synthesize it, the interaction of one branch with other branches of science

or its development in the total framework of science are useful and such studies and their teaching cannot be ignored. But if we have to understand better the development of a branch, know the causes of development, the changes in the rate of growth, outlook and conceptual framework, we have to look for these outside the field of the subject and science, to society, its climate and the demands it makes on science. This useful book is only half book as it leaves out the latter area and thereby limits its utility to giving an idea of the problems of history of chemistry and its teaching.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

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