

Sect. 2.—Reception and Confirmation of the Theory of Oxygen.

THE Oxygen Theory made its way with extraordinary rapidity among the best philosophers.⁶ In 1785, that is, soon after Cavendish's synthesis of water had removed some of the most formidable objections to it, Berthollet, already an eminent chemist, declared himself a convert. Indeed it was so soon generally adopted in France, that Fourcroy promulgated its doctrines under the name of "La Chimie Française," a title which Lavoisier did not altogether relish. The extraordinary eloquence and success of Fourcroy as a lecturer at the Jardin des Plantes, had no small share in the diffusion of the oxygen theory; and the name of "the apostle of the new chemistry" which was at first given him in ridicule, was justly held by him to be a glorious distinction.⁷

Guyton de Morveau, who had at first been a strenuous advocate of the phlogistic theory, was invited to Paris, and brought over to the opinions of Lavoisier; and soon joined in the formation of the nomenclature founded upon the theory. This step, of which we shall shortly speak, fixed the new doctrine, and diffused it further. Delametherie alone defended the phlogistic theory with vigor, and indeed with violence. He was the editor of the *Journal de Physique*, and to evade the influence which this gave him, the antiphlogistians⁸ established, as the vehicle of their opinions, another periodical, the *Annales de Chimie*.

In England, indeed, their success was not so immediate. Cavendish,⁹ in his Memoir of 1784, speaks of the question between the two opinions as doubtful. "There are," he says, "several Memoirs of M. Lavoisier, in which he entirely discards phlogiston; and as not only the foregoing experiments, but most other phenomena of nature, seem explicable as well, or nearly as well, upon this as upon the commonly believed principle of phlogiston," Cavendish proceeds to explain his experiments according to the new views, expressing no decided preference, however, for either system. But Kirwan, another English chemist, contested the point much more resolutely. His theory identified inflammable air, or hydrogen, with phlogiston; and in this view, he wrote a work which was intended as a confutation of

⁶ Thomson, ii. 180.

⁸ Thomson, ii. 183.

⁷ Cuvier, *Eloges*, i. p. 20.

⁹ *Phil. Trans.* 1784, p. 150.