

little that was original in the new doctrines. But if they were so obvious, what are we to say of eminent chemists, as Black and Cavendish, who hesitated when they were presented, or Kirwan and Priestley, who rejected them? This at least shows that it required some peculiar insight to see the evidence of these truths. To say that most of the materials of Lavoisier's theory existed before him, is only to say that his great merit was, that which must always be the great merit of a new theory, his generalization. The effect which the publication of his doctrines produced, shows us that he was the first person who, possessing clearly the idea of quantitative composition, applied it steadily to a great range of well-ascertained facts. This is, as we have often had to observe, precisely the universal description of an inductive discoverer. It has been objected, in like manner, to the originality of Newton's discoveries, that they were contained in those of Kepler. They were so, but they needed a Newton to find them there. The originality of the theory of oxygen is proved by the conflict, short as it was, which accompanied its promulgation; its importance is shown by the changes which it soon occasioned in every part of the science.

Thus Lavoisier, far more fortunate than most of those who had, in earlier ages, produced revolutions in science, saw his theory accepted by all the most eminent men of his time, and established over a great part of Europe within a few years from its first promulgation. In the common course of events, it might have been expected that the later years of his life would have been spent amid the admiration and reverence which naturally wait upon the patriarch of a new system of acknowledged truths. But the times in which he lived allowed no such euthanasia to eminence of any kind. The democracy which overthrew the ancient political institutions of France, and swept away the nobles of the land, was not, as might have been expected, enthusiastic in its admiration of a great revolution in science, and forward to offer its homage to the genuine nobility of a great discoverer. Lavoisier was thrown into prison on some wretched charge of having, in the discharge of a public office which he had held, adulterated certain tobacco; but in reality, for the purpose of confiscating his property.¹⁴ In his imprisonment, his philosophy was his resource; and he employed himself in the preparation of his papers for printing. When he was brought before the revolutionary tribunal, he begged for a respite of a few days, in order to complete some researches, the results of which

¹⁴ *Biog. Univ* (Cuvier.)