



The Chemical History of a Candle

By Michael Faraday

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The Chemical History of a Candle By Michael Faraday

Excerpt: ...and will continue so for a long time. As long as we supply oxygen, so long can we carry on the combustion of the iron, until the latter is consumed. We will now put that on one side, and take some other substance; but we must limit our experiments, for we have not time to spare for all the illustrations you would have a right to if we had more time. We will take a piece of sulphur-you know how sulphur burns in the air-well, we put it into the oxygen, and you will see that whatever can burn in air, can burn with a far greater intensity in oxygen, leading you to think that perhaps the atmosphere itself owes all its power of combustion to this gas. The sulphur is now burning very quietly in the oxygen; but you cannot for a moment mistake the very high and increased action which takes place when it is so burnt, instead of being burnt merely in common air.

Illustration: Fig. 24. I am now about to shew you the combustion of another substance-phosphorus. I can do it better for you here than you can do it at home. This is a very combustible substance; and if it be so combustible in air, what might you expect it would be in oxygen? I am about to shew it to you not in its fullest intensity, for if I did so we should almost blow the apparatus up-I may even now crack the jar, though I do not want to break things carelessly. You see how it burns in the air. But what a glorious light it gives out when I introduce it into oxygen! Introducing the lighted phosphorus into the jar of oxygen. There you see the solid particles going off which cause that combustion to be so brilliantly luminous. Thus far we have tested this power of oxygen, and the high combustion it produces by means of other substances. We must now, for a little while longer, look at it as respects the hydrogen. You know, when we allowed the oxygen and the hydrogen derived from the water to mix and burn together, we had a little explosion. You remember, also, that when I burnt the oxygen and the...

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Editorial Review

About the Author

One of the greatest experimental scientists of all time, Michael Faraday (1791-1867) essentially created the science of electrochemistry, developing the first electric motor, electric generator, and dynamo.

Michael Faraday: An Electric Personality

A major figure in nineteenth-century science, Michael Faraday (1791–1867) made immense contributions to the study of electricity and magnetism, discovering the laws of electromagnetic induction and electrolysis. His experiments are the foundation of subsequent electromagnetic technology. He also had a sense of humor. When the Prime Minister of England William Gladstone asked Faraday what the usefulness of electricity would be, Faraday famously replied, "Why, Sir, there is every possibility that you will soon be able to tax it!" In addition to being a great experimenter, Faraday had the gift of exposition for a popular audience, as seen in the books which Dover has reprinted, *The Forces of Matter* (2010), *Experimental Researches in Electricity* (2004), and perhaps his most famous single book for the general reader, *The Chemical History of a Candle* (2003).

It is reliably reported that Einstein had a photograph of Faraday on the wall of his study alongside portraits of Isaac Newton and James Clerk Maxwell.

In the Author's Own Words:

"The world little knows how many of the thoughts and theories which have passed through the mind of a scientific investigator have been crushed in silence and secrecy by his own severe criticism and adverse examination: that in the most successful instances not a tenth of the suggestions, the hopes, the wishes, the preliminary conclusions have been realized." — Michael Faraday

Users Review

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Brian Lowe:

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