

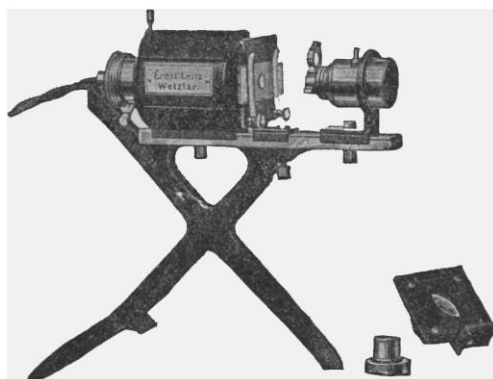
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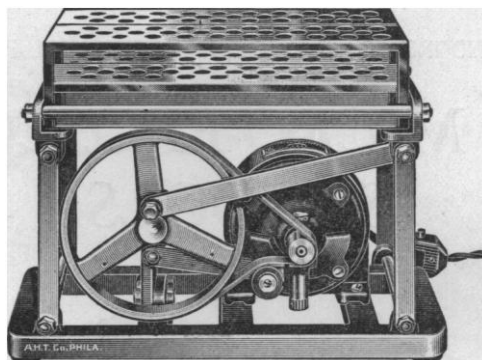
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# SCIENCE

VOL. LXVI

NOVEMBER 4, 1927

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## WHAT CAN THE MODERN CHEMIST LEARN FROM THE OLD ALCHEMY?<sup>1</sup>

It was with very sincere pleasure that I accepted appointment to the non-resident lectureship in chemistry at Cornell for the coming term. I keenly appreciate the honor of the invitation, not only because it gives me opportunity of being a teacher in this famed university, but also, and even more, because of what I can here learn, for it is with us men of science from Europe as it was in the early days with the philosophers of old Greece, a Plato, or a Pythagoras: they journeyed as wise men to Egypt and returned as students of the wisdom of the Egyptian priests.

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The subject which I have chosen for this introductory lecture is, "What can the modern chemist learn from the old alchemy?"

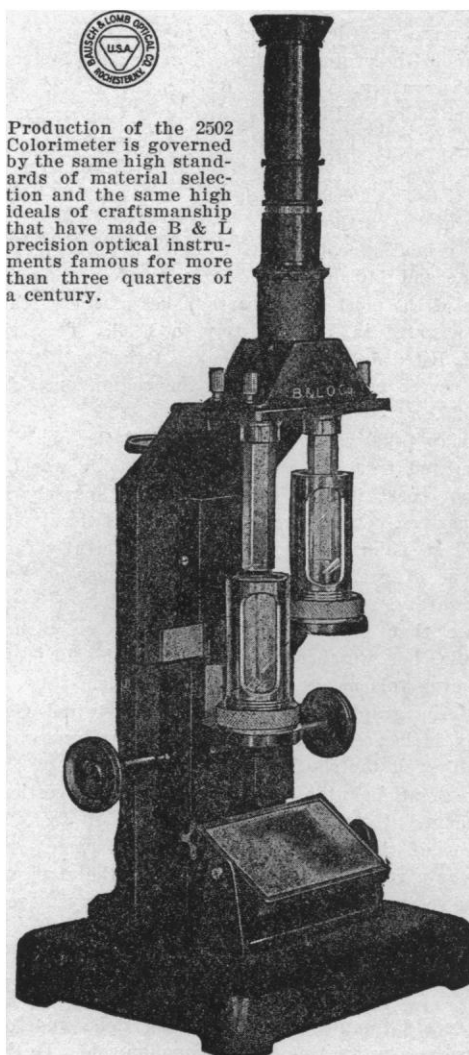
By some this question may be received with astonishment, while others may raise energetic protest. What? We modern chemists, the witnesses and workers of this "Age of Chemistry," can learn something from the old alchemy, full as it was of errors and fantasies! The daily press is constantly announcing the startling results of scientific research: "The riddles of the world are solved!" . . . "The proton has been isolated!" . . . "Atoms have been decomposed!" . . . "The chemical elements have been changed one into another!" . . . "The philosopher's stone has finally been found!" . . . "The transmutation of cheap elements into gold has been accomplished and patented," etc., etc. It almost seems as if we chemists were on the direct road to become God-like and all-powerful, but if we actually were so all-powerful, what would there be left for us to learn, and how could we control the enormous forces which we had developed?

<sup>1</sup> Introductory public lecture by Professor Paul Walden, of the University of Rostock, non-resident lecturer in chemistry at Cornell University.

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