

# THE ANALYST.

## ORGANIZATION AMONGST CHEMISTS.

WE have previously referred in these columns to a scheme which has been some eighteen months under consideration, for promoting organization amongst chemists, and we have, upon several occasions, given space to correspondents to point out the defects which they thought existed in the scheme. Some of our remarks, or the remarks of our correspondents, appear to have given offence to one of our contemporaries, who has recently warmly defended the scheme at present proposed, and who, by implication, charges us with breach of confidence in publishing private information, or information surreptitiously obtained on the matter. We emphatically deny this charge. All the information we have published has been obtained in the same honourable way as any other journal could have obtained it, if it had thought fit to do so.

Our own views on the matter are the same as they have been from the commencement. We quite agree that organization among *professional* chemists is in a general sense desirable, although the necessity for it is not perhaps so paramount as some would seem to think. A remark made at a meeting which has taken place in connection with the subject appears to us very much to the point. One of the speakers, a chemist of eminence, and a member of the organization committee said that "most of his "correspondents who were anxious for the promotion of the scheme had a grievance, "but the grievance was chiefly that they had not work enough to do."

We differ distinctly from the promoters of the "Institute of Chemistry;" first as to the objects which it can immediately accomplish. The promoters think *they* can discriminate between competent and incompetent chemists, and at once sift the wheat from the chaff so effectually, as to obtain the full confidence of the public, and drive the unfortunate chemists (?) whom they have, (by refusing to admit them as members of the Institute,) dubbed incompetent, to seek "fresh fields and pastures new." We have asserted from the first that they are unable to do anything of the kind. Men of business, who are the principal clients of professional chemists, are quite able to judge for themselves, as to the competence or incompetence of those whom they employ, and it will be many years before the Institute, even if it be formed at all, will exercise any appreciable influence in this direction. The only real foundation upon which the Institute can be started is, that every analyst who has been in practice for say one year, and who cannot be proved to have been guilty of unprofessional conduct, whatever that may mean, should, if he so wish, be admitted as a member. The Institute will thus be formed in precisely the same way as the Medical and Pharmaceutical Professions were organized, and the Society of Public Analysts was formed, the condition however being, that all who desire to claim admission on these terms, *i.e.*, compulsory admission, must do so within some definite time, say within three months of the formation of the Institute. After that time every fresh applicant for admission, whether he bears an honoured chemical name or is a young and unknown aspirant for scientific honours, should be compelled to pass a certain examination, and that examination once passed, his title to the advantages of the Institute, whatever they may be, should be as clear and indisputable, as the title of a man who has passed the proper examinations at the London University is to his B.Sc. degree.

In the second place we differ from the promoters because we hold that if such an Institute as this is to be of any use at all, it should not be a miscellaneous body, composed of men of science and men of letters, but must be strictly confined to *professional* chemists. We shall, of course, be expected to give a definition of what we mean by professional chemists, and our definition shall be a plain one; we understand by the term, men who earn an income, even if it be a poor one, (we will not say a *living*, or we should exclude many of those who might otherwise be eligible,) purely by the practice of professional chemistry as distinguished from pharmacy. We need hardly say that this definition would exclude many of the promoters of the present scheme.

It is not at all surprising that having made these two fundamental mistakes, the promoters should in their attempts to launch this scheme have fallen into others only a trifle less serious. Having come to the conclusion that such a scheme was desirable, their first step was to call a meeting, and this meeting, which was to consider the whole subject, should of course have been a public one, open to every professional chemist in "Great Britain and Ireland," instead of which it was convened by a private circular, which appears to have been sent to few beyond the personal friends of the promoters; and although men of undoubted scientific attainments, but who were *not* professional chemists, were present, and even our continental *confreres* were represented, the meeting consisted of only about 40 persons; while some dozen or so well-known professional chemists whose names have appeared in the *London Directory* for years, and twice that number of provincial chemists were conspicuous by their absence. It might be urged that they were absent because they had no wish to be present, but in many cases we have found that it was not so. The meeting was in fact a gathering rather of theoretical chemists, than practical analysts.

A copy of the circular fell into our hands, and we sent our representative to report the proceedings, but—mistake again—he was told it was a *private* meeting, and although it was "not possible to prevent his reporting it, yet it would be looked upon as a great "breach of confidence," if he did. We did not report that meeting, but in front of us as we write is the transcript of the shorthand notes then taken, and after all that has occurred we can scarcely consider we are any longer bound to view them as private. At this meeting a small committee of 11 was nominated, but the names were not separately put to the vote. At the conclusion, it was stated that all present would receive a notice of an adjourned meeting to receive the report of this Committee, but—mistake again—notice was not issued, or at any rate were not received in accordance with this statement. The adjourned meeting also was a *private* one, and although we knew of it, we declined to send our representative.

So on with all the ordinary meetings of this body, and yet in the notice of one, now lying before us, we find the first words are, "The adjourned general meeting to consider "the subject of organization of the chemical profession will assemble." *General* and *private* are hardly synonymous terms, yet on the corner of this printed notice of a "general meeting" appears in writing the word "private." Comment is needless.

Nevertheless these "private" "general" meetings have been held, and the gentlemen attending them have appointed a committee of some 50 of their friends to carry the scheme through—mistake again—these 50 may be and perhaps are, the 50 most clever, most competent, and most successful chemists in the country; but if this is so, there can be no doubt that if a public meeting of their *confreres* had been duly summoned, these 50

gentlemen would have been elected, and they would then have held office by a public vote instead of a private vote, if any at all. Again, this committee having selected their officers, instead of at once calling a meeting and forming the society, and taking the opinion of the general body of professional chemists as to the future steps to be taken, trusting in time to secure a Royal Charter, if the Society should be found to merit it, arranged instead to register themselves as a Limited Liability Company, with a Board of Trade License, (if they could obtain it,) to omit the word "Limited," so that the title really should be "Institute of Chemistry, Limited." Fancy the Geological or Astronomical Society in such a position as this, and yet if this Institute is to go on at all, it should occupy a position, at least, as important as either of these two societies. But space will not allow us to continue; we have pointed out much, but we could say more. Our contemporary really argues strongly in favour of the views we have taken; his own words are "The originators of this movement were not certainly and strictly speaking professional chemists, or *at least some of them were not.*" The italics are our own.

One word of advice and we have done—mistakes, and grave mistakes have been committed, let them be at once rectified, it is not too late even now. Let a Public Meeting be duly convened by advertisement and circular to every professional chemist in the kingdom, and the matter be fully discussed; a really representative committee should then be elected by ballot, which committee would have the confidence of the profession. They can then go on, with strength instead of weakness, and, if fortune favours them, fairly achieve the object which we, as well as they, wish to see accomplished.

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