

While Davy was delighting crowded audiences with his eloquence, his discoveries, and their wonderful results, Wollaston was pursuing his solitary experiments on a scale so small that scarcely three persons could witness them at once. While Davy was firing his potassium with ice, and making mimic volcanoes heave by the oxidation of his new metals, Wollaston was extracting, by minute analysis, from the refractory and unoxidable ores of platinum, substances previously undetected, which, neither by their quantity nor their characters, could ever interest any but a man of science. While Davy was charging his prodigious battery of 2500 pairs—the largest which has ever been constructed (a homage to his genius, provided by his numerous admirers)—Wollaston was proving, after his fashion, how similar effects could be produced by the very same agency on a small scale; and with no greater apparatus than a sheet of zinc, a few drops of acid, and an *old thimble*, he would gratify his friends by exhibiting the mimic glow of an almost microscopic wire of platinum.* Davy seemed born to believe, Wollaston to doubt. Davy was a poet; Wollaston a mathematician, or, at least, capable of becoming a great one. Davy announced his discoveries in fiery haste, and presented all their consequences and corollaries as a free gift to mankind; Wollaston (estimating more truly the rarity of the inventive faculty,) hoarded every observation, turned it over and over, polished it, rendered it exact beyond the reach of criticism, and then deliberately laid it before the world. He had the coldness and the accuracy of Cavendish, but he lacked the spur of his genius, and the wide grasp of his apprehension. Among other legitimate results of discovery, Wollaston was not unwilling to claim for his own the material benefits which such researches sometimes, though rarely, yield; whilst Davy, as we have seen, spurned every possible attribution of an interested motive. Davy never made a shilling in his life, save as an author or a lecturer, (except as paid assistant to Dr. Beddoes); Wollaston realised a fortune by his art of working platinum. Davy was admired by thousands at home and abroad; Wollaston was little known except to a small circle who could appreciate the resources of a mind rarely opened in confidence to any one, and of which the world was only partially informed. The composure of his death-scene rivalled that of Black and Cavendish. His disorder was one of the brain. When he had lost the power of speech, his attendants remarked aloud that he appeared unconscious. Making a sign for a pencil and paper, he wrote down a column of figures, added them up correctly, and expired.

A still different type is presented by Dalton; born in humble circumstances, a consistent Quaker through life, scantily educated, and laboring under disadvantages of person and manner: he maintained himself in a grade barely above poverty by private teaching, and without friendly encouragement, with deficient means, and apparatus rudely constructed by his own hands, we find him making discoveries by which the world now ranks him as the very first in the annals of Chemistry, yet which were at the time but coldly acknowledged; nor was it till towards the close of a long life that scientific honors were

* So wonderful was his skill in dealing with the minutest quantity of a substance, that it used to be said—give him a scrap of mineral only visible in the microscope, and he will tell you not only what it is, and where it came from, but also the name of the person who quarried it!