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MOLECULES1

By Professor N. V. SIDGWICK
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It is commonly assumed that chemistry, like physics, can prevail everywhere, but on inquiry it can be readily seen that this is by no means so; it is only under rather exceptional conditions that chemical processes can occur. This is a matter which concerns every one, and not chemists alone, because it is only where chemistry is possible that life is possible. Indeed, that is one reason why the limitations of chemistry have not always been recognized, because we are enclosed within the same limits ourselves.

Chemistry is commonly called molecular physics: it is the investigation of the structure and behavior of those little groups of atoms which we call molecules, whose almost infinite repetition constitutes the chemical substances of our ordinary experience. The first point therefore is to know what molecules are, and in general terms why they are formed.

1 The Maiben Lecture delivered before the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Denver, June 22, 1937.
Editor's Summary

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