Editorial

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Teaching of chemistry in our universities is confined mainly to describing the reactions and properties of chemical substances, their principles and theories and a little bit of laboratory work consisting essentially of old-fashioned experiments. None of the Indian universities, including the premier institutions, teach any aspect of history of chemistry; not even a cursory reference is made to a contextual situation, while many European and American do so as a separate course or as part of a course. We may teach the Diels–Alder reaction, Faraday's laws or Woodward–Hoffmann rules, but we do not even bother to know why they bear those names. (Not many chemistry teachers, let alone students, can distinguish between Hoffmann (Roald) and Hofmann (August Wilhelm), who are separated by more than a century.) Yes, it is not possible to devote much time to these historical aspects, given the time constraint. Considering the fact that chemistry affects every sphere of human activity, its history is rich and its learning is exciting. Behind every discovery there is a fascinating story which can inspire students to learn more. Unfortunately, our education system simply ignores the existence of these stories and the persons who made it all happen.

However, *Resonance*, right from its inception, has aimed at filling this gap by featuring famous scientists. The practice has continued without exception, and Justus von Liebig is the 208th scientist appearing in this issue. When I mentioned Liebig's name to chemistry teachers, it was quite surprising that many did not know anything about him except that his name is associated with a type of condenser. But when they see the range of his contributions to chemistry and their applications, I am sure they will be astonished to find the impact he made on the development of chemistry during the mid-nineteenth century. Liebig was not just an individual but an institution. He originated the idea of a research group headed by a professor and trained a large number of great chemists, e.g, Kekule, Hofmann, Fehling and Erlenmeyer, and promoted institutional laboratories rather than private ones. His method of analysis accelerated the determination of molecular structure, and his work on plant nutrition brought about a minor revolution in agricultural practice and research. His influence rings a note even today in the way we teach and do our laboratory work, carry out qualitative and quantitative analysis, apply fertilizers to crops and a lot more. I am sure readers would want to know more about him. I also wish that our chemistry teachers will consider telling some historical anecdotes now and then in their classes.