



The Enlightened Joseph Priestley: A Study of His Life and Work from 1773 to 1804

Robert E. Schofield

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Winner of the 2006 Roy G. Neville Prize for Biography Awarded by the Chemical Heritage Foundation,
inThe Enlightened Joseph Priestley Robert Schofield completes his two-volume biography of one of the
great figures of the English Enlightenment. The first volume, published in 1997, covered the first forty years
of Joseph Priestley's life in England. In this second volume, Schofield surveys the mature years of Priestley,
including the achievements that were to make him famous the discovery of oxygen, the defenses of
Unitarianism, and the political liberalism that characterized his later life. He also recounts Priestley's flight to
Pennsylvania in 1794 and the final years of his life spent along the Susquehanna in Northumberland.

Together, the two volumes will stand as the standard biography of Priestley for years to come.

Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), a contemporary and friend of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson,
exceeded even these polymaths in the breadth of his curiosity and learning. Yet Priestley is often portrayed
in negative terms, as a restless intellect, incapable of confining himself to any single task, without force or
originality, and marked by hasty and superficial thought. In The Enlightened Joseph Priestley, he emerges as
a man who was more than a lucky empiricist in science, more than a naive political liberal, more than an
exhaustive compiler of superficial evidence in militant support of Unitarianism. In fact, he was learned in an
extraordinary variety of subjects, from grammar, education, aesthetics, metaphysics, politics, and theology to
natural philosophy. Priestley was, in fact, a man of the Enlightenment. Praise for The Enlightenment of
Joseph Priestley (1997): It is with great pleasure that one turns to this long anticipated biography of Priestley
by Robert Schofield. . . . The Enlightenment of Joseph Priestley begins the daunting task of finally producing
an integrated overview of Priestley the man, the scientist, the theologian, the political theorist, and the
educator begins, rather than completes, because Schofield has chosen to terminate his account in 1773, the
year that Priestley turned forty. The amount of information on Priestley is so vast that at least two volumes
will be required to complete the task. . . . Though chemists will be disappointed that Schofield's decision to
terminate his account in 1773 means that most of Priestley s most important work on pneumatic chemistry is
not covered, they will still find the book of great interest and will be likely, like the reviewer, to keep their
fingers crossed in anticipation that we will soon see the publication of volume two.

--William B. Jensen, Journal of Chemical Education

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