

16.
Influence of
Liebig.

of organised nature. From this organic chemistry of the modern school Liebig turned away—continuing to lead research in the older and less fashionable direction. This choice is explained by the peculiarity of his great mind, which, while investigating details, never lost sight of the organic whole of natural processes, and which allowed itself many a flight of imagination into unexplored regions. In fact, if we review the work of Liebig from the side of the history of thought rather than from that of science, we must assign to it a very great and lasting influence. He was probably the first man of science who conceived the twofold meaning which belongs to the words, life and organism, a meaning which was known and appreciated by practical men, but which had, at that time, hardly received scientific recognition.¹ Life is not only defined, as Bichat put it, by the contrast with death; it is just as much defined by the idea of co-operation or solidarity: life is not only the property of individual beings, but also of the collection or society of several individuals in a larger organism. As such, political economy had conceived it long before Liebig's time, but Liebig was probably the first scientific thinker who studied the economy of nature, who fully realised the interdependence of animal and plant life, and tried to reduce this larger life of living things to scientific data and laws. Through him and his school two terms have become current in scientific and popular literature which, especially in the

¹ The idea of the dependence of living things on the environment, on the "milieu," was indeed fully recognised and emphasised by

Lamarck (see p. 314 *supra*); but the philosophical ideas of that great thinker were then unknown and disregarded.