Preface

The present volume examines the time period before there was a coherent scientific community devoted to the study of macromolecules. It starts with a series of studies of particular polymeric materials that were important in this pre-paradigm period. The history of natural rubber is followed from the time of the great French explorers (1735) to the formulation of the first successful theory of rubber elasticity (1935). The history of polystyrene is presented from the discovery of styrene in the late eighteenth century to 1935. The first commercially successful polymeric material synthesized completely from inexpensive small molecules, Bakelite, provides a fascinating story of both academic and industrial chemistry. The story of the polysaccharides and Sir Norman Haworth (Nobel 1937) completes the studies of materia polymerica. The crowning event in the prehistory of polymer science is the Faraday Society Discussion of 1935 on Polymerization. A history of the Faraday Discussions that led up to this event is presented. The chronicle of the Faraday Society includes Discussion Meetings that went from glory to glory until the Society was absorbed by the Royal Society of Chemistry. The book concludes with an essay on the prehistory of polymer science. The factors that influenced this history form a fascinating study of the formation of a now thriving scientific research community.

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