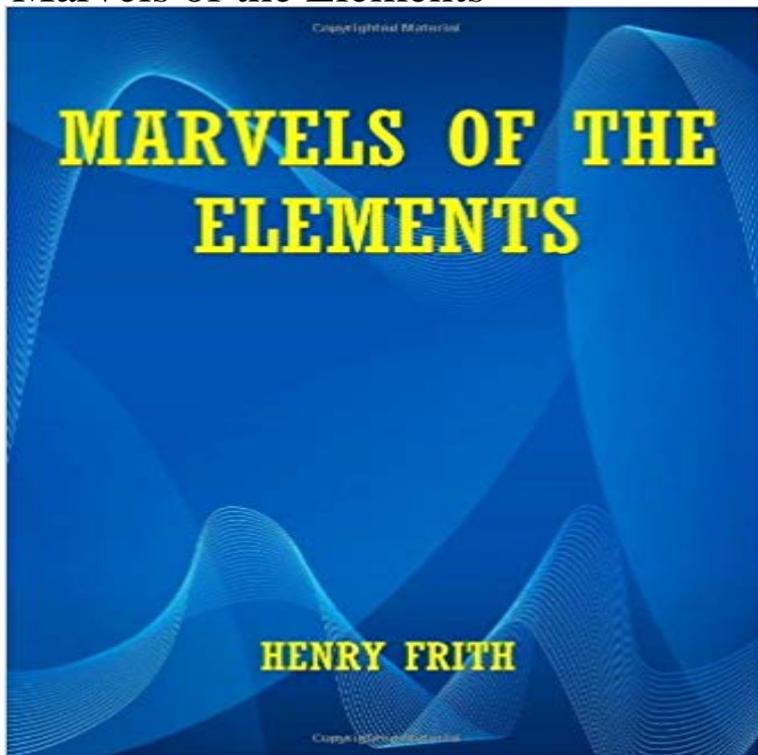


## Marvels of the Elements



An excerpt from the Preface: TO the child and the savage everything is equally strange and unknown. They do not even imagine that there are such things as elements and compounds. They see certain things, and they perceive or feel certain effects. Water boils and steam rises. Fire burns, and if a hot thing is touched pain is felt. Heat is the first thing the effects of which are noticed, in addition to such things as downpour of rain and brightness of light followed by darkness. And from the study of the effects of heat many of our most important discoveries have arisen. It is very difficult to realise what an enormous step in advance was made when mankind first began to have some real knowledge about the various substances we see around us, to find out their differences, and to learn that they can be made to change in some regular ways by heat or by letting them mix with each other. The high position to which man had advanced before he began to find out these things may serve as one measure of the difficulty he had experienced in getting at nature's secrets. It was not till after the middle of the last century that Joseph Black, a professor at Edinburgh, arrived at the idea that heat positively disappears in melting ice, leaving the water produced from it no hotter than the ice, although much heat is needed to melt the ice. The same he found to be the case in changing water into steam. From this discovery came many others which have revealed new worlds to us in the substances which surround us, and not only so, but have given us the power of making a vast number of new substances previously unknown, some of which have proved of the utmost benefit, such as chloroform, while others are of much more doubtful value, such as dynamite. When it was discovered that in the heating of limestone to make quicklime a particular kind of air was given off, which we now call carbonic acid gas, and which was

found to be poisonous, and that this gas was identical with a gas given off in the breath of animals, and which will render the air of any room poisonous if the ventilation is bad, a most important means of advance was put in the chemists hand. What did it mean, that a gas could be locked up, as it were, in a solid stone and then given out again by heating it, and that the same gas should come out of the bodies of men and animals? Till those questions were answered there could be no rest for the mind anxious to know something of the secrets of nature, and the chemist and natural philosopher have gone on and on until they have conquered those secrets and a multitude more beside.

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