## Contents

## Introduction 1

- 1 The great stench 7
- 2 Culture clash 9
- 3 The reveries of Kekulé 10
- 4 Röntgen's rays 12
- 5 Light on sweetness: the discovery of aspartame 14
- 6 Otto Stern's sulphurous cigars 15
- 7 Metchnikoff restored to life 17
- 8 An ill wind 18
- 9 Marie Curie and the Immortals 18
- 10 'Every integer his personal friend': Hardy visits Ramanujan 20
- 11 David Hilbert's eulogy 22
- 12 Rabi meets his match 22
- 13 The Bucklands explode a miracle 24
- 14 Farmyard thermodynamics 25
- 15 Newton ponders 25
- 16 Rutherford finds a solution 27
- 17 The vanishing blackboard 28
- 18 Cats and dogmas 30
- 19 But what use is it? 31
- 20 Unlocking the chains 31
- 21 Of life and death 35
- 22 Mathematical peril 36
- 23 Fortune favours the ham fist 37
- 24 To discern a true vocation 40
- 25 The Pauli principle 40
- 26 The first eureka 43
- 27 Lordly disdain 44
- 28 A martyr to science 46
- 29 The marble and the mop 46

- 30 Pythagoras's theme 48
- 31 New ways with barometers 50
- 32 The professor remembers 52
- 33 Dalton's daltonism 53
- 34 The trick of the tick 55
- 35 Comfort in adversity 56
- 36 Winter in Paris: Becquerel and the discovery of radioactivity 58
- 37 The unbreakable cypher 60
- 38 Two hundred monks aleaping and the devil in the bottle 62
- 39 The success of the operation and the death of the patient 64
- 40 Pendant professor 65
- 41 Feud 66
- 42 The man of few words 67
- 43 Mauled by the Bulldog 71
- 44 Damping the canine rotor 74
- 45 Nemesis in Nancy 74
- 46 Mathematician's melodrama 78
- 47 Ben Franklin stills the waves 80
- 48 Fraternal fire 81
- 49 The wages of sin 82
- 50 Loving an enzyme 84
- 51 The poltergeist next door 85
- 52 The problem solver 86
- 53 The Resonance Bridge 88
- 54 A laboratory libation 89
- 55 Slot machine yields jackpot 90
- 56 Shooting down Venus 92
- 57 None so blind 93
- 58 Raising the dead 97
- 59 Vibrios in Vienna 98
- 60 Drowning the telephone 99
- 61 Trouble at t'lab 101
- 62 The child is father to the man 104
- 63 Hooke's tease 105

- 64 Know your adversary 106
- 65 The divine spark comes by night 107
- 66 Following by example 110
- 67 Science for survival 110
- 68 The hounding of J. J. Sylvester 112
- 69 The quiet American 113
- 70 Solving the insoluble 114
- 71 A sceptic confounded 116
- 72 Wrong experiment, right conclusion 116
- 73 Old soldiers never die 118
- 74 A case of night starvation 119
- 75 Fortunate furtive encounter 120
- 76 Eddington's disobedient conscience 121
- 77 Smoking for the Führer 123
- 78 Polish and perish 125
- 79 Baccy and quanta 126
- 80 The country doctor, his captive, and the professor 128
- 81 Whispers from the void 128
- 82 The lying stones of Mount Eivelstadt 131
- 83 The mind of a mathematician 132
- 84 The old melon 133
- 85 Strong medicine 135
- 86 A Russian tragedy 139
- 87 The way of the world 142
- 88 Tug of war on the thread of life 142
- 89 The trivial and profound 146
- 90 Phlogiston consigned to flames 148
- 91 The errant compass 149
- 92 Liberation by fire 150
- 93 How small is small? 151
- 94 Seeing sparks 152
- 95 A Victorian tragedy, a twentieth-century sequel 154
- 96 A visit to the Führer 156
- 97 Butterfly in Beijing 158

- 98 Cook knows best 160
- 99 Chemistry in the kitchen: the discovery of nitrocellulose 161
- 100 The living fossil 161
- 101 The sound of physics 163
- 102 Grand Guignol 164
- 103 The mathematical wallpaper 165
- 104 Out of the mouths of poets 169
- 105 Venomous vermin 169
- 106 A principle misapplied 172
- 107 A message from space 173
- 108 The emperor's chessboard 175
- 109 A modest appraisal 177
- 110 The little green men who weren't 178
- 111 The virtues of squalor 179
- 112 Hevesy's subterfuge 184
- 113 Crystal clear 185
- 114 Little brown dog 187
- 115 Friends and enemies 190
- 116 The maestro's gaffe 191
- 117 Hybrid vigour 194
- 118 Buffon's balls of fire 195
- 119 Science in extremis and the phosphorescent toothpaste 198
- 120 Their Lordships kick a football 201
- 121 The power of incantations 204
- 122 Hoax! 204
- 123 Humphry Davy gives himself airs 207
- 124 Truth stranger than fiction 209
- 125 The mosquito bites back 210
- 126 Some are born great 212
- 127 Victorian vitality 213
- 128 Charles Goodyear vulcanizes 215
- 129 Pasteur wields the tweezers 216
- 130 The limits of logic 217
- 131 As in a dream 218

- 132 Metal takes wing 221
- 133 A mathematical death 222
- 134 Shocking experiment 223
- 135 Galton surpassed 224
- 136 Beef and ale 226
- 137 The wrath of fools 228
- 138 Domestic horror show 231
- 139 A ball on Mars 231
- 140 Boyle on the boil 232
- 141 The physicist as travelling salesman 235
- 142 Monsieur LeBlanc's solicitude 235
- 143 The emperor and the scientist 237
- 144 The man of principle 238
- 145 The stolen invention 239
- 146 The Jesuits and the bomb 241
- 147 Ferreting out a virus 242
- 148 A man's world 243
- 149 The shock of recognition 245
- 150 Fruits of the sea 247
- 151 A slice of pi 248
- 152 The last of the true amateurs 249
- 153 Dr Pincus's pill 252
- 154 The frivolous philosophe 253
- 155 Koch on cooking 254
- 156 The heat of the light 254
- 157 A world of science in a teacup 256
- 158 A copper or two 257
- 159. The savants and the chauvinists 258
- 160 The case of the flaccid ears 260
- 161 The good-natured philosopher 262
- 162 A myth and its genesis 264
- 163 'Where the hormones there moan I' 265
- 164 The disagreeable man 266
- 165 The crackle that made history 267

- 166 The physicist's peregrinations 268
- 167 From mania to miracle 270
- 168 Madame la savante 271
- 169 The gold standard 274
- 170 Margin of error 275
- 171 Pomposity and circumstance 276
- 172 The use of vacations 277
- 173 The lecturer's craft 278
- 174 The purple cloud 279
- 175 The fist in the fistula 280
- 176 Tripping over an answer 281
- 177 Throwing the hounds off the scent 282
- 178 The body's bounty 285
- 179 The flat-earther's revenge 285
- 180 Potholes on the path to fame 287
- 181 Humboldt's stratagem 289

Credits 291

Name index 293

Subject index 299