PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS IN CHEMOTHERAPY

In the mind of every physiologist visiting Toronto to-day one recent advance in our science will certainly be uppermost. We rejoice with our colleagues here in a great achievement which has opened new vistas of knowledge to exploration, has brought relief to unmeasured misery, and has turned the eyes of a world, too often careless of such things, in proper gratitude and well-founded hope to this university and its medical school. Insulin, and its still marvelous and mysterious action, have held a prominent place in the interest of many of us, myself included, during the past year or two. In one of our meetings, however, we shall have the opportunity of considering the observations and opinions of many who are now working on its properties and their significance, and among them will be some who were associated with its discovery. I have thought it appropriate, therefore, to ask your attention to-day to some recent developments in a widely different field of investigation. The subject which I have chosen presents points of general physiological and biochemical interest, apart from its immediately practical importance for the treatment of disease. It has, further, in one way, a special appropriateness to this year’s meeting of the British Association. For our knowledge of an important group of diseases, caused by the parasitic trypanosomes, which have provided the experimental material for a very large proportion of chemotherapeutic investigations, we are in the largest measure indebted to the pioneer work of the distinguished president of the association, Sir David Bruce.

THE THEORETICAL ORIGIN OF CHEMOTHERAPY

Chemotherapy may be defined as the specific treatment of infections by artificial remedies. The object of those who study it is to find new remedies which will cure or arrest diseases due to infections, not by alleviating the symptoms or invigorating the patient, but by directly and specifically suppressing the infection. Chemotherapy, in this wide sense, is not entirely of recent growth. When the natives of Peru discovered the value in fevers of the cinchona bark, which the Jesuits brought to Europe in the 17th century, they had found a specific remedy for malaria, which is still the best available. Similarly the natives of Brazil had found in ipecacuanha, which reached

1 From the address of the president of the Section of Physiology of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Toronto, August, 1924.