IMMUNOLOGICAL PROPHECY FROM ANCIENT HIEROGLYPHICS

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Our first half-century of modern immunology has been characterized by recurring waves of clinical hope and clinical disappointment. A hundred theoretically logical, monovalent, polyvalent, prophylactic and curative antisera proposed, clinically tested and commercially exploited during the transitional years of the twentieth century. Ninety-five per cent. of them thrown into the clinical discard. An equal number of theoretically logical, monovalent, polyvalent, prophylactic and therapeutic vaccines. A scant 5 per cent. of them of more than historic interest. A thousand frantic clinical trials with theoretically logical opsonic index and leucocytic extract. All shelved with the miasmases and phlebotomies of our Revolutionary ancestors.

And we call this scientific medicine.

1 Read before the Pasteur Society of Central California, San Francisco, California, May 1, 1929, and before the American Association for the Study of Allergy, Portland, Oregon, July, 1929.

This overwhelming clinical disappointment has served one useful purpose. It has graphically dramatized the errors and inadequacies of the immunological theories from which the proposed clinical methods were logical and consistent deductions. No immunological hypothesis of the past half-century has had a clinical verification probability of more than 5 per cent.

The pressing need of clinical medicine at the present time is a radically new immunological theory, basic hypotheses more nearly consistent with clinically verifiable fact. I have thought that we might possibly obtain hints as to the probable nature of such a theory from the discarded immunological "lunches" of primitive medicine, jungle hypotheses jettisoned by the shifting theologies of medieval civilization.