A STATE EXPERIMENT IN CHEMICAL RESEARCH

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At the Bristol meeting of 1875 my predecessor, Professor A. G. Vernon Harcourt, spoke to this section on the teaching of chemistry, and in the course of his very inspiring address he remarked that “the science of chemistry would advance more rapidly if it were possible to organize chemists into working parties having each a definite region to explore,” and he went on to inquire, “Is such an organization in any degree possible?”

I propose this morning to describe the attempt recently made by a department of state, namely, the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, to give effect to Professor Vernon Harcourt’s prophetic vision. The answer to his question is in the affirmative. Such an organization is in some degree possible, and has actually become an accomplished fact. I must, however, leave for one of my successors in this chair the further inquiry, “Can such an organization become permanent and still retain its primary and paramount function of chemical exploration?”

ORIGIN OF THE CHEMICAL RESEARCH LABORATORY

The work of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research began in 1915, and during the ensuing ten years the department had at various times become interested in investigations of a chemical nature, such, for example, as (1) large-scale researches on the chlorination of methane; (2) large-scale researches on the production of formaldehyde, (3) investigations on the production of glycerine, (4) investigations on the manufacture of chemical products from fish residues, (5) general researches on the corrosion of metals, (6) general researches on high-pressure reactions, including the reactions between carbon monoxide and hydrogen.

These investigations, which were undertaken mainly