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SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT AND MEDICINE¹

By Dr. LAFAYETTE B. MENDEL

STERLING PROFESSOR OF PHYSIOLOGICAL CHEMISTRY, YALE UNIVERSITY

MODERN medicine presents many aspects. Its fields of influence and interest have expanded into a mighty domain with the passing of the centuries. The varied and increasingly significant activities therein now awaken the concern not only of the practitioner but also of the layman. Public health and preventive medicine have become problems for the state as well as the individual citizen. A century ago the distinguished physician Laënnec asserted, with what was perhaps an exaggerated modesty, that "the aim of medicine is the cure of disease." He promptly added that this end might be attained in a multitude of ways, among which was a consideration of the nature of diseases.

The medicine of to-day is no longer satisfied with a program limited primarily to practical therapy. New enthusiasms have been developed. In discussing the

changes of view-point that have been instituted in recent years, A. E. Cohn² remarked:

We should perhaps add, by way of interpreting or perhaps of supplementing Laënnec's meaning, that we believe it necessary as the basis of therapeutics to understand the mechanisms, that is to say, the processes which underlie the manifestations of disease, for it is these which it is one of our functions to attempt to correct. That is our practical aim. We have learned a lesson also in another direction. It is that, as in other disciplines, learning may be pursued for its own sake. And the reason for this is twofold. Men have learned that the direct is not always the shortest road to the attainment of their objects. It is true that results, ultimately of practical value, have issued from disinterested learning. But this argument still is based on utility and leaves many persons imbued with natural curiosity with-

¹ The Alpha Omega Alpha lecture, delivered at New Orleans, May, 1932.

² A. E. Cohn, *Jour. Clin. Investigation*, 1: 1, 1924; also "Medicine, Science and Art," University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1931.

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