

Banquet Speech

Sir Henry Dale's speech at the Nobel Banquet in Stockholm, December 10, 1936

The whole world admires the fidelity and the wide international vision with which his countrymen have fulfilled the great Trust committed to them by Alfred Nobel, a loyal son of this country and a citizen of the whole world. Among those in all countries who are engaged in the scientific researches which he planned to honour and to encourage, the award of a Nobel Prize stands, without challenge, as the premier distinction to which they can aspire, and the supreme international recognition of their work.

As one of those who, on this occasion, receives this great honour, sincerely distrustful of the claim of my own work to this distinction, I am conscious of a real sympathy with our colleagues here in Stockholm, on account of the anxieties which must weigh upon them, in their great and difficult responsibility of making these awards. I am glad and proud, however, to share the general and grateful conviction, that these decisions are made after an exhaustive examination of claims and a scrupulous weighing of evidence, with no consideration but that of the merits of the work itself.

It seems to me not without significance, that Alfred Nobel defined the field of researches to be recognized by one of his prizes, as that of "Physiology and Medicine". His aim, in all his plans, was the promotion of human health and happiness; but I think that we are entitled to suppose that, in naming Physiology with it, showed a conviction that the practical and beneficent science of Medicine, with its direct concern for the preservation of health and the healing of disease, grows and flourishes only with a steady cultivation of those experimental sciences in which it is rooted and from which it draws its nourishment. We may surely trace in this conjunction a design to encourage and to reward those who till the soil and sow the seed of exact science, together with those who have the added joy of reaping the harvest of life-saving knowledge. Here, again, I am confident that world opinion acclaims the steady hand, with which the Nobel Committee of the Caroline Institute, in discharging their Trust, have held the balance justly between these related and complementary aspects of the Founder's intention. In recent years we have seen them give due honour to fundamental researches over a wide range of subjects in physiology, biochemistry and pathology, and we have seen them honour, with no less justice, discoveries which have found immediate use in the treatment of diseases. This year, by what comes to me as a marvellous stroke of fortune, their choice has fallen on researches belonging, perhaps, to the borderland between physiology and pharmacology. Let me say that my pride and pleasure in this award is greatly enhanced by the fact that I share it with my old and intimate friend, Professor Loewi. Otto Loewi and I first met as young men, some 35 years ago, in the London laboratory then and for many years afterwards known to all the world by the work of Bayliss and Starling. Loewi then worked for a further short period in the Cambridge laboratory of my earlier teacher, J. N. Langley; so that I feel that to some extent we inherited a common tradition, from great men of the generation of our teachers. We met again when I went for a time to the

Institute of [Paul Ehrlich](#) in Frankfurt, Loewi being then in Marburg with Hans Horst Meyer, who still sustains his weight of honoured years. In the years that have intervened, though our lives and our work have been widely separated on the map of Europe, and though for tragic years all contact between us was prevented by the disastrous clash of national enmities, we have retained unbroken a scientific and personal friendship, which is now strengthened and sealed by the honour in which I am proud to be associated with him. Though our work has been done independently, the natural lines of its development have more than once converged. The work in which my colleagues and I have been engaged in the past few years, and which has brought to me this great recognition, is largely a development from Loewi's discoveries of 10 to 15 years ago. We have both, I believe, followed this line of enquiry for the simple physiological interest of the new principle which Loewi's experiments first clearly established, and to which our own have given a wider application; but I feel a confidence, which I expect that Professor Loewi shares, that this principle, with its widening scope, will yet have an influence and an application in the understanding and the scientific treatment of disease. There are signs of this already, but I believe that the future will show it in such measure as to justify the faith in which Alfred Nobel linked Physiology and Medicine.

I thank you again for this magnificent reception, for the great honour which I have received, and for your generous and gracious hospitality.

From [Les Prix Nobel en 1936](#), Editor Carl Gustaf Santesson, [Nobel Foundation], Stockholm, 1937

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