

EDITORIAL

Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis

An address given to the Plenary Closing Session of the 2nd Rhodesian Science Congress.

I have not found it easy to make a distillation of the deliberations of the Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis section; the mixture has been too rich to admit of easy categorisation; and its components too uniformly excellent to make a high-lighting of this or that particular contribution other than invidious. I would rather, therefore, try to review the week in its wholeness and attempt some definition, however vague, of the totality of its impact.

What I must seek to define, in other words, is the contribution that this Congress has made to our view of Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis seen as a problem; a problem of the utmost practical importance, not only for Rhodesia, but for most of the African states to the north and east and west of us. One most encouraging thing that has emerged from the Congress is that the problem is one which is sometimes capable of spectacular solution, as in the reclamation of some 4 000 square miles of country from the tsetse fly in the south-eastern corner of Rhodesia, resulting from the joint activity of Rhodesian, Mozambique and South African entomologists. What has, less encouragingly, emerged is that the solution to the problem is often more elusive; that our knowledge of the factors involved is as yet not adequate to permit us accurately to predict the consequences of our activity. But in accepting this deficiency in our understanding we cannot but be heartened by evidence presented to us at this Congress of the enormous scale of research effort, here and elsewhere, directed towards the remedying of this defect. Every aspect of the tsetse fly's biology seems under current scrutiny, its behaviour, its reproductive physiology, its metabolism and so on; and few of the facts that emerge from these studies but will have relevance to the central problem. I am confident that with the increase in understanding that will come, however haltingly, from such work, our ability to assess any particular facet of the problem and

to define the appropriate course of action, will improve to the point where the word "failure" will become obsolete in the dictionary of Tsetse Control. You may think that there should be little left to learn about an insect which has been subjected to more careful scrutiny than any other during this century; but with tsetse flies it is not so much a case of learning as of unlearning. I think no delegate will have come away from the work of this section without the realisation that we must discard many of our cherished notions concerning tsetse biology in the face of current advances in our knowledge; this may be an uncomfortable thought for those of us who have lived long with the older notions, but since they are the very ones that have sustained our failures in the past, their passing can hardly be a matter for regret.

I said I would not dwell on detail, but I cannot forbear to mention a phrase that has been ringing in my ears for the past few days. It was Mr. Janhke, in his excellent paper on the economics of tsetse reclamation, who said that "tsetse control is an activity that tends to take on a life of its own". As I have myself been involved, in earlier days, with the control of tsetse flies, I cannot pretend to relish the implications of this phrase, but I recognise the element of its truth; and it is a truth that is of great importance to Rhodesia, as to other African states. One has seen too many examples of the divorce between tsetse control operations and the broader aspects of land-use planning to welcome the possibility of their recurrence. Even though that possibility may be remote in Rhodesia, it is well to be on guard. To put it another way, there is a picturesque saying current in tsetse circles of today which likens the large-scale and progressive reclamation of land from the tsetse fly to the process of rolling up a carpet. I think that as a result of the formidable research effort which has gone into the Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis problem, we shall soon know exactly *how* to roll up the carpet. But before we start to roll, I hope we will be very sure that we really want what is underneath the carpet.

E. Bursell,

*Chairman, Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis
Section, 2nd Rhodesian Science Congress.*