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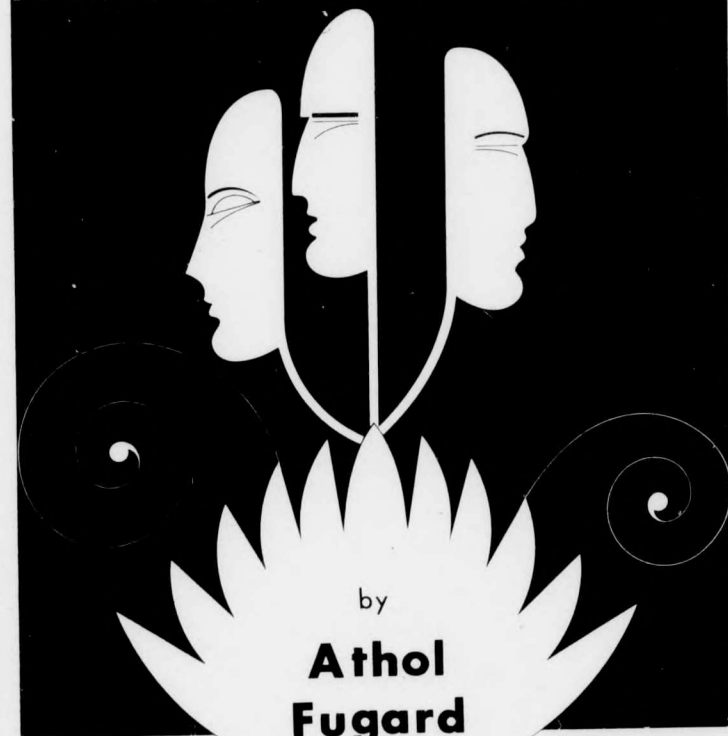
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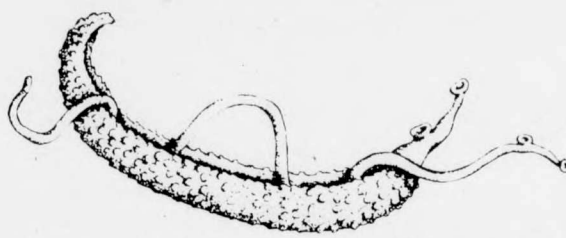
York Scientists Fight Parasite

York scientists have recently begun conducting experiments directed towards battling Schistosomiasis, the second major cause of sickness and death in tropical climates.

The Schistosome is a blood fluke, a parasitic worm which lodges in the liver and often spreads to the nervous system. A heavy infestation of the worms leads to death, usually because of damage to the liver or the spinal cord. There are other horrible symptoms and death may only follow several years of suffering.

"The main difficulty in fighting a parasitic disease is to find a remedy which will damage the parasite without hurting the patient," according to Dr. Rod Webb, chief investigator in the York study. "Present therapeutic techniques involve the use of poisons to kill the adult worms; these drugs are almost as toxic to man as they are to the parasite."

Webb's approach is to try and find a way to disrupt the animal's life cycle. "Because it takes a



large number of parasites to cause the disease we are hoping to interfere with the Schistosome's reproductive cycle, so that there will never be a large enough number in the patient to cause any danger," explained the scientist.

Webb and his colleagues have discovered that octopamine, a chemical which is used by some nerves to transmit their signals, is found in the Schistosome. "Since octopamine is not found in human nerves, at least not in the peripheral nervous system, this may be the key to developing drugs which will affect the parasite but not the patient."

Webb emphasized that this is still a very preliminary study. "Now we must investigate the exact role of octopamine in the

Schistosome. It is very important to work out the basic biology of the parasite in order to find its most vulnerable point," he said.

The scientist's hope is that "this work will eventually lead to the development of anti-octopamine drugs which, when given at the appropriate times, will disrupt the nervous system of the parasite and prevent its reproduction." This, in the scientist's opinion, "may prove to be a valuable weapon against one of the greatest scourges of mankind."

The investigation is part of a larger research programme in the neurosecretion group of the Department of Biology, which is attempting to understand the basic biology of nerves and hormones in the invertebrates.

James A. Carlisle

I'll Bet You Didn't Know

Excalibur

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