

## GERTRUDE BELLE ELION

When Hippocrates began to set medicine on a scientific footing, he predicted that humankind would soon have cures for all its diseases. That was in the fifth century B. C. If the problem of illness has proved less tractable than he anticipated, still, over the centuries, his dream of controlling disease has motivated the vital activity of medical research, a field in which Gertrude Elion has labored with gratifying and now widely recognized success.

Graduating in 1937 from Hunter College with a Phi Beta Kappa key and taking an M.S. at New York University in 1941, she worked at several jobs in biochemistry until 1944, when she joined Burroughs Wellcome, her professional home until retirement in 1983. During the decades her research has contributed greatly to human understanding of basic biological properties, particularly in purines and pyrimidines. And she has led in the design of numerous drugs. These drugs, mostly unpronounceable, play an important role in combating the rejection of transplanted organs and diseases such as herpes, gout, leukemia, malaria, and AIDS. The health benefits of her work are incalculable.

As her own work progressed, she has played an increasingly prominent part in professional activities. A past president of the American Association for Cancer Research, she is now a Presidential appointee on the National Cancer Advisory Board. She also chairs the steering committee of the Scientific Working Group on the chemotherapy of malaria for the World Health Organization.

In 1988 with two colleagues she received the Nobel Prize in Medicine -- a richly deserved honor for one who began her journey with few career models, yet managed to extend the frontier of knowledge and improve the health of the world. Today we salute Gertrude Belle Elion -- herself a transplant in North Carolina, but long since accepted -- with our degree of Doctor of Science.