The Société de Chimie Biologique was founded in 1914 in a small room of the Collège de France by Maurice Nicloux and a group of motivated chemists, biologists and physiologists. The aim of this enterprise was to initiate the gathering of scientists who share a common vision: the promotion of the study of the chemical and physicochemical reactions which are at the heart of any living cell or organism in nature. At the same time was founded the Bulletin de la Société de Chimie Biologique, the official publication of the Society. For a long time, chemical biology was merely a small appendix to chemistry, especially in teaching courses. Progressively, chemical biology became a respectable and full fledged discipline that experienced a spectacular development with the realization by the academic and industrial community of its importance for a detailed understanding of living organisms. Administratively, this recognition led, in April 1933, the Society to be promoted to the status of a Association d’utilité publique.

The evolution and complexification of the discipline led later to a change in name from chemical biology to biochemistry, emphasizing the intertwining of the two central components and stressing how transdisciplinarity constituted the core approach. Ironically, nowadays, the expression ‘chemical biology’ is regaining popularity to the point of superseding ‘biochemistry’ which tends to be relegated to sets of purification protocols and metabolic pathways. The discovery of the biological function of DNA, of its chemical nature by Watson and Crick, respectively, a biologist and a physicist, together with the first regulatory networks by the biologist and physicochemist Jacob and Monod, led to the development of a new field named molecular biology. For those who coined that name, the aim was to explain ‘all biology in terms of physics and chemistry’. Although we are still very far from reaching such an encompassing goal, molecular biology led to incredible and overpowering insights into the molecular function of key processes of living cells, from the structure of the ribosome to that of transmembrane ion channels. Not surprisingly, in 1992, the Society changed its name to the Société Française de Biochimie et Biologie Moléculaire (SFBBM).

Nowadays, the SFBBM, with about 2000 regular members, pursues its efforts to develop and promote Biochemistry and Molecular Biology in research and teaching, both in universities and centers of research as well as in industry. The Society publishes the monthly journal Biochimie which enjoys a solid and increasing reputation. Four times a year, each member receives a Newsletter, Regard sur la Biochimie, which presents minireviews and meeting reports as well as news from the Society and from related societies and academies, calendar of scientific events and career opportunities. The Society organizes or co-organizes annually several meetings and workshops, especially through or in association with the Groupes Thématiques which represent the main tendencies of modern biology. The Society has pledged to promote teaching and research in biochemistry. Consistent with undertaking, the Society provides fellowships for students and young scientists to attend meetings both in France or abroad. Each year, the Society awards two major prizes. The Dina–Surdin Prize is attributed to a post-doctoral fellow on the basis of the excellence of a PhD thesis. The Maurice Nicloux Prize is awarded to a young scientist for distinguished scientific accomplishments.

Members of the Society are involved in learned societies devoted to biochemistry at the international level. Thus, the Society belongs to the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) since its formation in 1964 and which now regroups 42 European Biochemical Societies. J.E. Courtois, then secretary general of the Society, was present at the first meeting of the FEBS Council in March 1964 in London and two past presidents of the Society have been chairman of the FEBS (J.P. Ebel and G. Dirheimer). The Society and its members are also strongly involved in the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (IUBMB), the current Secretary General of which is part of the Board of the Society (J.H. Weil). Such links allow our young members to benefit from the fellowships and awards distributed by those international bodies and to welcome in our laboratories foreign students or post-doctoral fellows as well as distinguished lecturers.

The SFBBM has over the years displayed a strong tradition of integrating evolution and adaptation. In these present times of calling into question biology and science in general, such a tradition inspires the biochemists and molecular biologists of today to strive towards the continuation of the scientific venture started 90 years ago.

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