CORRESPONDENCE

CACOETHES SCRIBENDI

To the Editors of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF OPHTHALMOLOGY.

DEAR SIRs—Your annotation, "Cacoethes Scribendi," in the October issue prompts me to reply, not because it seems to me an important contribution to the War effort, but rather as a protest against the constant but usually ill-informed references in the Press to War Office ineptitude. Since the prescription of spectacles does not seriously affect security, that at least can be answered.

I personally could imagine nothing more sensible in a relatively small place as Moorfields where patients are seen by a surgeon, walk to the spectacle department to order their glasses and return in a few days to pay for and claim them, that the filling up of one form should be sufficient.

In the army, however, the problem is somewhat more complex, for by the time the spectacles appear the soldier may be transferred to another area, while the financial part of the transaction is borne not by the patient, but by the Treasury. Even so, the army has gone one better than Moorfields, for a system is now being extended as rapidly as the trade can meet the enormous demands involved, whereby the soldier gets his refraction done by the specialist, walks next door where his spectacles are glazed on the spot by a sergeant optician, and then walks out with his spectacles on his face. It may surprise your annotator that the efficiency of the system is marred by the filling up of only one form.

Presumably your annotator was referring to the older system wherein spectacles are glazed in a central depot. In this a form is made out in triplicate (not quadruplicate), but, curiously, the War Office provides the forms made up in pads so that carbon copy-sheets can be slipped in. The "enormous amount of clerical work" referred to therefore amounts to the specialist writing out the prescription once (just as in Moorfields)—unless he is mentally dull and backward. Each copy has a specified purpose; the first is retained in the clinic for reference; the remaining two are sent to the depot. Here one is retained for necessary purposes of reference (I take it that the optician at Moorfields also keeps a record, made out, perhaps, more laboriously—or if he doesn't, he should); the other is sent with the spectacles to the soldier for purposes of checking and is signed by him as a receipt, which finds its way to Finance and is paid. If your annotator would lift his mind above the narrow parochialism of Moorfields and imagine himself catering

for hundreds of thousands of cases of refraction per annum in constant movement not only in this country, but abroad, and if, having done so, he can devise a more simple but still efficient system and one which at the same time will provide, in the interests of his Income Tax, an adequate financial check over a multitude of small transactions running in the aggregate to hundred of thousands of pounds per annum, I will personally welcome him most cordially at the War Office. and he will have ample opportunity of re-organizing the whole affair. I have a suspicion, however, that despite anything that may have happened in the Crimean war, he will find that the Army Medical Directorate takes no pleasure in the multiplication of unnecessary army forms.

Yours faithfully,

STEWART DUKE-ELDER, COLONEL,
Consulting Ophthalmic Surgeon to the Army.
The War Office.

October 10, 1941.

We apologise for our "quadruplicate" error, and at the same time wish to thank Colonel Sir Stewart Duke-Elder for his authoritative statement which answers the criticism in the annotation as far as spectacles are concerned.—EDITOR.

NOTES

BRITISH JOURNAL OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

Increase in
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As will be easily understood, this increase has been necessitated by the rise in the cost of every single item of expenditure, paper, printing and distribution, in some instances up to double the pre-war cost.

The management will make every effort to keep the Journal up to its present high standard both in quality and quantity, and hopes it may rely on its subscribers to provide the necessary funds to make this possible.

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Death

WE are sorry to see in the August Number of the *American Journal of Ophthalmology* the announcement of the death of Dr. Claude Thomas Wolfe on April 9, 1941. Dr. Wolfe was born in 1883, the