A JUBILEE

With this issue the BRITISH JOURNAL OF OPHTHALMOLOGY completes the first 50 years of its life, and the celebration of its jubilee is a fitting occasion to recapitulate its past and assess its present position.

It is true that in comparison with some other countries the history of ophthalmological journalism in Britain is relatively short, dating back for 109 years. The first ophthalmological journal to appear in the world was the Ophthalmologische Bibliothek, edited by Karl Himly and Johann Adam Schmidt from Göttingen, a journal which lived from 1801 to 1807; during the first half of the 19th century it was followed by five transient publications in Germany, one in France, and one in Italy, none of which survived the middle of the century. The first journal to survive was Annales d'Oculistique, which was started as Annales d'Oculistique et de Gynécologie by Florent Cunier of Brussels in 1838. This may seem a strange marriage, but Cunier's prescience is vindicated by the recent demonstration that the conjunctiva and the vagina both act as host (and hostess) to the TRIC-virus. However that may be, the union lasted only one year, whereafter the Annales started a celibate life limited to ophthalmology alone, was transferred to Paris in 1891, and this year published its 199th volume. The second earliest to survive was Albrecht von Graefe's Archiv für Ophthalmologie, first published in 1854, and now starting its 171st volume.

Shortly thereafter in England the quarterly Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital Reports was inaugurated in 1857, the twenty volumes of which extended over 60 years. It had the character of an ophthalmic journal rather than of hospital reports, but rightly retained its name since the articles were always written by men who had trained at the hospital or served on the staff. Initially edited by J. F. Streatfeild, it contained many classical papers and fully justified its existence. A second journal, the Ophthalmic Review, was edited by John Zachariah Laurence, who founded the Royal Eye Hospital, and Thomas Windsor. Its greatest claim to fame is that the second volume (1866) contained the first description of the Laurence-Moon syndrome. The life of this review was short (1864–7), but in 1881 it was revived by Karl Grossman of Liverpool and Priestley Smith of Birmingham. A third journal, The Ophthalmoscope, was founded by Sydney Stephenson in London in 1903.

These three sustained and supported British ophthalmology until the strains and stresses of the first world war compelled the profession to economize their resources and increase their efficiency by combining together. In 1916, therefore, the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital Reports, the Ophthalmic Review, and The Ophthalmoscope were combined by the formation of a limited liability company in which all British ophthalmologists were offered shares, and the first number of the British Journal of Ophthalmology appeared in January, 1917, under the editorship of Sydney Stephenson and the advice of an Editorial Committee of which John H. Parsons was chairman. The first article was a classical paper by Priestley Smith on the
blood-pressure in the eye. Thus it ran under the successive editorships of E. Erskine Henderson (1924) with whom Robert R. James acted as a collaborator (1925–29), then by James and F. Williamson-Noble (1930–48), and subsequently after 1950 until the present day by an Editorial Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Stewart Duke-Elder. In the meantime, since one of the features of the journal was the abstracting of ophthalmic literature, it was decided that a valuable service would be rendered to ophthalmology if the literature were reviewed and abstracted on a world-wide comprehensive scale. In 1947, therefore, Ophthalmic Literature appeared as a separate quarterly publication, sponsored by the British Journal of Ophthalmology, under the editorship of Duke-Elder. As is the case with all abstracting journals, the sale of which is limited in all countries, apart from libraries, to the more enthusiastic members of the profession, this journal was originally run at a considerable financial loss. Finding their reserves of cash fast running out, the Company responsible for the two journals therefore accepted the generous offer of the British Medical Association to publish them both retaining the same editorship, an arrangement still satisfactorily maintained.

The function of a specialized ophthalmic journal may be said to be three-fold: the presentation to its readers of new aspects and variants of disease together with new methods of diagnosis and treatment; the reporting of new scientific research related to the specialty; and the abstracting of world literature to keep its readers abreast with advances published in other journals. The first undoubtedly attracts most interest among the majority of ophthalmic readers and should probably be the main purpose of a primarily clinical journal. The second is of undoubtedly importance but modern research, with its highly specialized techniques described in a language replete with mathematical symbols too often hardly intelligible to the average ophthalmologist, does not claim so wide and popular an audience. It is interesting that during the 1950s, when research at the Institute of Ophthalmology began to blossom into maturity, the Editor received a constant stream of complaints from clinical readers all over the world that the Journal was becoming unreadably abstruse, and for this reason the Institute encouraged the publication of two purely scientific international journals in ophthalmology—Vision Research and Experimental Eye Research in 1961, which were shortly followed by Investigative Ophthalmology in America in 1962. Since luxurious provision has thus been made for the needs of research in ophthalmology and its related basic sciences, the policy of the Journal is therefore to remain essentially clinical and only to publish papers on research which are primarily related to clinical problems. The third function is amply catered for in Ophthalmic Literature.

The future of any journal depends, of course, rather upon those who contribute to it than upon the editorial staff; but it would seem that, depending primarily on British ophthalmology for which it acts as the essential expression and mouthpiece, with wide support from the Commonwealth and many foreign countries, the future of the Journal will remain secure. However that may be, those responsible for its publication are determined to make its future even better than its past; its fifty-first year will see an expansion in the size of each monthly issue and it is hoped to provide more liberal space for longer contributions provided they are original and of real significance.

D. -E.