

THE EDITORS AND THE JOURNAL

Percipient users of this Journal will note that it is now no longer edited by Sir Vincent Wigglesworth and Professor J. A. Ramsay. Older readers will reflect that such changes of Editorship have been rare events: in fact, if we set aside the brief original Editorship of Professor Crew (1923-5), this is only the second editorial turn-over in the Journal's 50 years. We hope that the new Editor, Dr J. E. Treherne, and his associates, will regard this as a good omen.

The *British Journal of Experimental Biology* (as the *J.E.B.* was originally called) first appeared in October 1923 under the 'Managing Editorship' of F. A. E. Crew, assisted by an Editorial Board. That first number gave notice of the proposal to form a 'British Association of Experimental Biology' (the embryo of the Society for Experimental Biology). These twin events reflected the rapidly growing interest (particularly among the post-war generation of biologists) in the application of experimental methods and physico-chemical principles to the biological sciences which, particularly in the case of animal biology, had hitherto been dominated by the post-Darwinian preoccupation with comparative anatomical and embryological investigations.

The new Journal soon got into financial difficulties and Dr G. P. Bidder produced a solution which seems in keeping with the empirical and experimental spirit which lay behind the foundation of both the Journal and the Society: he formed a limited liability Company (the Company of Biologists Limited), persuaded his biological colleagues to buy £5 shares (with no expectation of dividend!) and thus produced the working capital which the Journal needed. The first meeting of the Company's Board of Directors took place in Dr Bidder's home in October 1925, and almost the first business was to appoint Mr James Gray (later Sir James Gray) 'to act as Editor of the British Journal of Experimental Biology with a provisional remuneration of £10 (ten pounds) per each number issued'. It was also resolved that 'the Editor be requested to be present at the Board Meetings except when the Secretary be otherwise instructed'.

These two early decisions of the Board affected the destiny of the Journal fundamentally. First, by appointing Gray as sole Editor, the Board placed the Journal, in a very personal sense, in the hands of a young experimental biologist of rising stature and broad interests who was to form its character and nourish its growth for the next 30 years. Secondly, they laid the foundations (carefully formulated in the Company's articles of association) for the partnership between the Editor, with sole responsibility for the selection of articles; and the Company which had no editorial role other than that of appointment, but which took full responsibility for business management. Thus from its early days the Journal has been owned and managed, neither by a commercial publisher nor by a scientific society, but by a formally-constituted Company (now limited by guarantee: those early share-holders were repaid or donated their holding to the Company) whose members are themselves mostly professional scientists and familiar, at first hand, with many of the problems with which an Editor is faced.

Gray's control over the Journal was that of a wise and beneficent autocrat. The Editorial Board which he inherited soon disappeared, and the papers he felt unable to referee himself were referred to colleagues, often within his own Department at

Cambridge. He knew personally most of the contributors, or at least those under whom they had worked. He could be warmly encouraging to the young, but could also say 'no' firmly and finally when necessary. This way of running the Journal was exactly to the taste of the Company of Biologists which attached great importance to there being a single Editor with complete control over the editorial policy of a Journal. So much so that, towards the end of his Editorship when Gray wished for some assistance, the Company had to pass a special resolution that 'the Directors be authorised to appoint an additional Editor or Editors of the Company's Journals' (the Company by then also owned the *Quarterly Journal of Microscopical Science*, later the *Journal of Cell Science*; and was soon to start the *Journal of Embryology and Experimental Morphology*).

Gray's additional Editor was Dr (now Professor) J. A. Ramsay. Gray remained responsible for selecting articles, but Ramsay did the detailed editing, for which he had a very remarkable flair, soon being able to edit a manuscript (in pencil: second thoughts were possible!) while reading it through critically and for the first time.

The appointment of Ramsay as additional Editor was particularly fortunate because Gray himself resigned two years later and, although Ramsay was unwilling to take sole charge of the Journal, Professor (now Sir Vincent) Wigglesworth would only accept an editorial appointment provided he had Ramsay as co-Editor. Ramsay was prepared to sacrifice many evening hours a week in the reading and editing of papers, but had a deep distaste for any form of committee work. Thus Wigglesworth became the Editor who negotiated policy matters with the Company; otherwise the two Editors, sharing similar views as to the efficient use of time, developed a very close and effective partnership. And whereas the Company's other Journals acquired professional editorial assistants in addition to their two (or sometimes three) Editors, Wigglesworth and Ramsay, both active in research, teaching, writing and in many other spheres, continued to produce the ever-expanding *J.E.B.* with only the help of Mr K. C. Williamson, Professor Gray's one-time research assistant whose loyal service to the Journal over 39 years has recently been celebrated with a dinner and presentation.

Throughout his Editorship, Gray had been concerned lest he should have insufficient articles, at 'make-up', to fill the next part. This may indeed have been a real worry in the Journal's early days, but it is hard to believe much risk existed 30 years later and the Company used to urge him to publish everything he'd got and thus reduce publication delays. Certainly the new Editors were faced with a different problem: how to keep the Journal within reasonable bounds. Maintaining a high standard was not enough: papers had also to be diverted on grounds of subject matter. Yet this was still the *Journal of Experimental Biology*, founded by those with the broadest biological outlook and inspired – so Professor Pantin wrote in his tribute to Sir James Gray's Editorship, (*The Journal and its Editors: J. exp. Biol.* 1955, 32, 1–3) – by Bayliss's *Principles of General Physiology*. But a journal's distinctive character, not necessarily detailed in its title but nevertheless recognized by those who use it, is one of the most important contributions as Editor makes to it. Gray had already made his mark: the Journal's interest in certain aspects of cytology and ciliary movement, and in animal mechanics, can be traced back to the two principal phases in Gray's own researches. Early papers in neurobiology came from Gray's student

These topics continue to be well represented in the *J.E.B.* but the new Editors attracted additional ones. Papers on osmo-regulation and ion transport can be related to Professor Ramsay's distinguished contributions in this field; while the use of insects as experimental material for the study of many general biological problems is, of course, associated in a very special way with Sir Vincent Wigglesworth, many of whose now-classical papers have themselves appeared in the *J.E.B.* over a long period.

When the Company of Biologists were recently confronted with the need to appoint a new Editor, they started by asking what sort of journal the future *J.E.B.* should be. In particular, had the time come to specialize in some restricted aspect of experimental biology? Opinion was canvassed widely and there appeared to be near-unanimous contentment with the existing *Journal*, with its known areas of special interest but with sufficient flexibility to accept papers over a very wide field and to reflect the changing emphases in research. On these terms Dr Treherne has been appointed the new Editor and we welcome him into office, as we also thank the retiring Editors for their long and devoted services to the *J.E.B.*

D. A. PARRY

