

EDITORIAL

THIRTY YEARS OF *BIOCHEMICAL PHARMACOLOGY*—40 YEARS OF PERGAMON PRESS

The first issue of *Biochemical Pharmacology* appeared in July, 1958, only seven months after Bob Maxwell had been approached by me to start this new journal. Bob did not require much persuasion; indeed, he had already decided that Pharmacology would be an area on which the then rapidly expanding Pergamon Press would focus. He gave the venture enthusiastic support from the start and I have the happiest memories of discussions with him on the means of getting the journal underway. The timeliness of a journal dedicated to reporting studies which bear directly on the mode of action of drugs at the sub-cellular and biochemical level was reflected by its immediate success—at least in financial terms. Already in its first year the journal was profitable, and Bob Maxwell's undertaking to underwrite its cost for several years if needed had not to be called on. Within a year or two of the start of the journal, sub-departments in Universities and eventually whole departments began to adopt the name of *Biochemical Pharmacology* and the journal preceded the recognition of biochemical pharmacology as a distinct discipline. The initial editorial team had close scientific and personal ties and the philosophy of the journal stemmed from Sir Alexander Haddow, Sir Rudolph Peters and Zenon M. Bacq. The three were linked scientifically by their work on the biological and biochemical effects of the war gases. Peters and Bacq, unbeknown to one another because they were separated by World War II, recognised the importance of the reaction of war gases with cellular sulphhydryl compounds. Bacq referred to the blister and tear gases as "thiolpreves" and these studies led him to the discovery that sulphhydryl compounds and notably β -mercaptoethylamine would protect animals against ionizing radiations but were not useful when given after radiation exposure. On the other hand, Peters had found a very useful sulphhydryl-containing antidote to some war gases, known as

British anti-Lewisite. All of these were examples of drug development that followed upon good biochemical pharmacological investigations. Haddow concentrated on the anti-cancer activities of the mustard gases and developed derivatives and analogues of the nitrogen mustards, such as chlorambucil, melphalan and busulphan, which 35 years later are still amongst the most useful drugs in the armoury of the medical oncologist. Arnold Welch, who had worked with Peters in Oxford, was persuaded to become the Editor of the American Content and in Welch the journal had a pioneer biochemical pharmacologist whose department was a pacemaker in the development of anti-cancer agents which act at the level of nucleic acid synthesis. Maurice Welsch agreed to become the Editor for the European continent and his expertise in the field of microbial antibiotics balanced the Board's interests. None-the-less, cancer chemotherapy was initially emphasised in *Biochemical Pharmacology* because the progress in the field relied to a large extent on biochemically-oriented investigations, which set the journal apart from much of the classical pharmacology at that time. Currently, the journal no longer has a preponderance of cancer-orientated papers because other areas of pharmacology have become progressively more biochemical.

My thirty years of association with *Biochemical Pharmacology* as Executive Editor have been rewarding and exciting and these sentiments are shared by Arnold Welch who is now Chairman of the Editorial Board. The two of us "oldies" are joined by Alan Sartorelli and Jacques Gielen in wishing Bob Maxwell well on his 65th birthday which coincides with the 40th Anniversary celebration of Pergamon Press.

PETER ALEXANDER
Executive Editor