

Preface

A song by Schiller, an ode by Keats, or a lyric by Musset is a creation without which we should all be poorer; for although thoughts may be shared, each language has its own native genius that in some respects is irreplaceable. But however true this may be in literature, it does not apply to science. Rarely does scientific writing become sublimated into an art; when it does we are the gainers; but the gain is incidental, for in this sphere language is secondary to sense, and to be meaningful to a multilingual audience, the beauty of individualism should give way to communal directness and simplicity.

If the scientist makes any attempt to keep up with world literature in his subject, the unnecessary burden thrown upon him by this curse of Babel is immense. A working knowledge to read, if not to speak, English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian, is essential; and multilingualism is attained only after much travail except by the few. To this are our children to add Russian – and Chinese? We look back with envy to the days when the learned men of mediaeval Europe talked to each other freely and without restraint in Latin. We may – or may not – regret that the experiment of Esperanto met with little response. We may – or may not – hope that the war-time expedient of Basic English, realized in practice by the Scandinavian countries and the Japanese, may eventually become more widely used. But today the outdated claims of nationalism are still too urgent for such sanity – even among scientists.

For these reasons – it is to be hoped as a temporary expedient – the International Council of Ophthalmology has sponsored the writing of this dictionary to help the ophthalmologist to read, and perhaps to write, in a language other than his own, by providing him with the translations of the technical words commonly used in his specialty. The five languages most important in modern ophthalmological literature have been included and Latin has been added since it so often provides a common root and may serve as a guide in the interpretation of technical terms in other less widely used tongues. It is to be hoped that the book will fulfil its purpose and supply a need which the Council thinks may be widespread.

This – the first attempt to compile such a dictionary in ophthalmology – does not claim perfection. It includes terms common in ophthalmological usage such as are not readily obtained elsewhere either in an ordinary dictionary or in a multilingual medical dictionary. There are doubtless omissions and the compilers of this book would be glad if any suggestions for improvement were sent to the publishers. To them – S. Karger of Basel – the authors and the International Council are greatly indebted for their enterprise in assuming financial responsibility for this venture and for the care and trouble they have expended on its production.

The authors would also particularly like to thank Professor Pio Ciprotti of Rome for his kindness in collaborating with Bietti in the Latin translations; he has shown considerable versatility on occasion in moulding an ancient language to suit modern requirements. They are also indebted for extensive secretarial assistance to Mrs. Raymonde Heinzen of Zürich, Miss Margrit Scherer of Zürich, Miss Rosamund Soley of London and Miss Emilie Thalmann of Zürich, without whose help the work could not easily have been accomplished.

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