

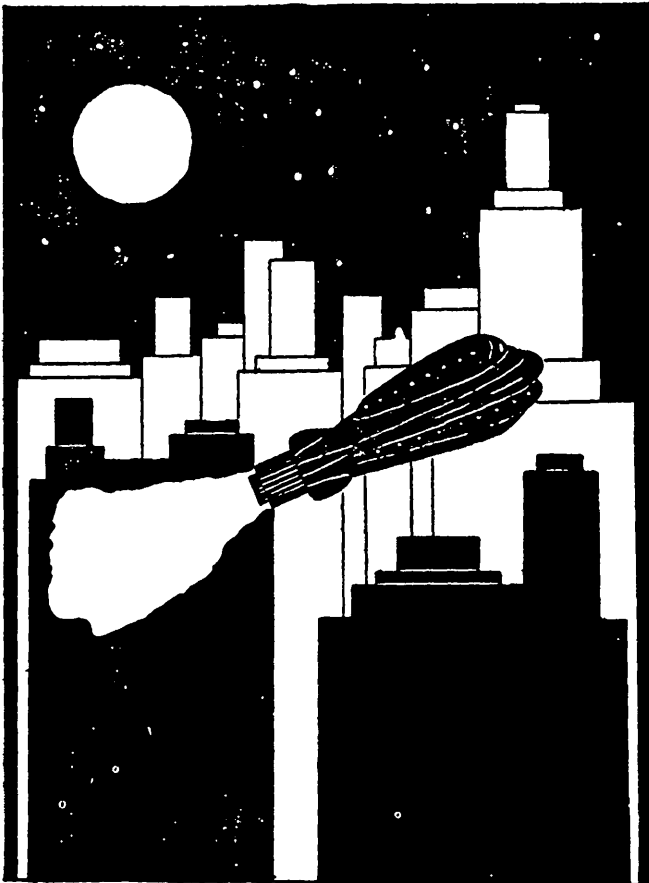
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RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT.

BY P. E. CLEATOR.

The formation of The British Interplanetary Society, in October, 1933, was only made possible by the sympathetic encouragement extended to the writer by three well known publications—"Chambers's Journal," The "Liverpool Echo," and The "Daily Express." Each contributed towards the vital publicity without which the Society would surely have remained but a mere dream.

It is only just, therefore, that the publications which so freely gave this invaluable assistance should receive the acknowledgement that is their due in this, the first issue of the Journal of the Society.

"Chambers's Journal" can claim the proud distinction of being over one hundred years old. No mean achievement, this. Yet that this venerable journal may fairly claim to have retained the spirit and vigour of youth is proven by the fact that at a time when other magazines viewed the subject of interplanetary travel with undisguised suspicion, "Chambers's Journal" unhesitatingly published a non-technical exposition on its possibilities.

It was with the aid of this article* that I was able to prevail upon the Editor of the "Liverpool Echo" to publish an appeal for members for the Society. Considering the "fantastic" nature of the scheme, the "Echo" was at once far-sighted and generous.

Now the "Liverpool Echo" is a well-known and widely read paper, and the appeal appeared under a caption calculated to attract attention. But it did not. Public apathy in the matter, it became evident, was not to be shattered easily. It seemed that nothing would suffice to disturb public indifference. But Mr. Moore Raymond, special correspondent for "The Daily Express," thought otherwise. Not only would he place the Society on its feet, but he would become a member.

And so the impossible happened. How he persuaded the Editor of "The Daily Express" to spread the news across the front page, I do not know. It is sufficient that he did. And so my troubles ended—or should I say really began? At any rate, from the deluge of correspondence which immediately resulted, there emerged The British Interplanetary Society.

And now let me introduce those enthusiasts who answered the call of progress—the Founder Fellows of the Society. We were very pleased to accept the services of Miss A. C. Heaton, M.P.S., as Treasurer of the Society. Miss Heaton, incidentally, has the distinction of being the Society's first lady Fellow.

Herr Richard Thiele and Herr Raymond Thiele are both Honorary Founder Fellows. Both are distinguished chemists, as capable as they are willing to be of service to the Society.

* "The Possibilities of Interplanetary Travel,"
in Chambers's Journal for January, 1933.

Another Honorary Founder Fellow whom I am proud to be able to name, is R. S. Chambers, Esq., whose kind interest in my work, as I have already mentioned, was responsible for the formation of the Society. So much is owing to this sponsor of our cause that I despair of ever being able to express my thanks adequately. Certainly the Society owes a debt here for which payment may never be paid.

As Vice-President, the Society is fortunate in having secured the services of Mr. C. H. L. Askham. He is known all over the world as G6TT, and at the moment he is engaged in a series of experiments with ultra-short wireless waves, the results of which may be of inestimable value to the Society.

Mr. L. J. Johnson is Hon. Secretary of the Society. Nobody envies him the task, but all are agreed that he performs it splendidly. Add to this the fact that his knowledge of astronomy is almost as extensive as space itself, and the extent of his usefulness will be apparent.

Mr. N. E. Moore Raymond I have already mentioned. To meet such a man is one of those fortunate events which occur perhaps only once in a life-time. What he has already achieved in the matter of publicity for the Society, is well known. And unless I am greatly mistaken, he will do much more in the future.

I need only state that Mr. J. Davies was introduced to the Society by Mr. C. H. L. Askham, with whom he is experimenting, for the extent of his usefulness to be appreciated. His call sign is G20A.

Mr. J. Toolan is an engineer too, but of a different branch—motoring. His knowledge promises to be extremely valuable to the Society.

The Society is deeply indebted to Mr. H. C. Binns for providing a convenient meeting place, and for his generous offer to act as accountant for the Society.

Finally, we have Messrs. McNab, N. Weedall, J. A. Free, and E. Roberts, four young but most enthusiastic members.

There you have the nucleus of the British movement in rocketry, around which will form—who can tell? The ultimate aim of the Society, of course, is the conquest of space and thence interplanetary travel. That such a programme entails the solving of a formidable array of problems there can be no denying. It is only over the solution or otherwise of these problems that opinion becomes sharply divided.

Strangely enough, the sceptics, who at the moment present an almost overwhelming majority, rarely claim to know anything about the subject which they so readily condemn. Their reasoning is almost invariably based on the fallacy that because the idea of

interplanetary travel is revolutionary, and, until recently, unheard of, that because, to them, it savours of the impossible, therefore it *is* impossible !

This very prevalent attitude towards any suggestion a little out of the ordinary cannot be too strongly condemned. Moreover, the fallacy of such an attitude has been exposed time and time again. So many "impossibilities" have come to pass, even within living memory, that it might be thought that extreme caution would now be used in the employment of the word "never." Such, however, is not the case. It is very evident that primitive superstition and incredulity were not banished with the arrival of wireless telegraphy and aeroplanes. Nor will they be, I fear, with the advent of interplanetary travel. It is a problem for the psychologist.

It is also a problem for the Society, whose immediate task is the stimulation of public interest in the subject of interplanetary travel, and the dissemination of knowledge concerning the true nature of the difficulties which at present hinder its achievement.

Sometimes, I am almost inclined to believe that this particular obstacle will prove greater than any one of the purely technical difficulties which await solution !

* * * * *

Among the various projects on which the Society is working at the moment is the construction of a rocket car. Except for a few technical details in connection with the motors themselves, the plans are now complete. It is hoped to gain much valuable information from the experiment.

* * * * *

As is well known, the question of a sufficiently powerful fuel is the main problem which hinders the achievement of space travel to-day. The Society has not been inactive as regards this important question. Unceasing research is being carried out, with the object not only of discovering new fuels, but also the best method of utilising them.

* * * * *

Another important line of research which members of the Society are carrying out is in connection with ultra-short wireless waves. Such waves are known to pierce the heaviside layer, hence their importance in connection with communications between vessels in space and the earth.

MEMBERSHIP.

Three classes of membership are open to individuals—Fellowship, Membership, and Associate Membership.

Fellows are entitled to all the rights and privileges of the Society, including a voice in the direction of its affairs, a participation in practical research work, and the holding of office. The subscription for Fellows is £2 2s. per annum. It may be paid quarterly by arrangement.

Members enjoy all the privileges accorded to Fellows except a voice in the direction of the Society. Primarily, Membership is for those persons who, while interested in the Society and its objects, do not desire to take an active part in the direction of its affairs. The subscription for Membership is 10s. 6d. per annum.

Associate Membership is essentially for those under the age of twenty-one. Associate Members will enjoy the same privileges accorded to Members. On attaining their majority, Associate Members, subject to the approval of the Council, will graduate to Fellowship or Membership, as they desire. The subscription for Associate Membership is 5s. per annum.

All classes of membership are open to members of both sexes. All members receive free copies of the *Journal of the Society*.

Ordinary meetings of the Society are held fortnightly, at which time addresses on all phases of the activities of the Society are presented by Fellows and invited speakers.

The Officers for the Society for 1933-1934 are :—P. E. Cleator, President ; C. H. L. Askham, Vice-President ; L. J. Johnson, Secretary ; and A. C. Heaton, Treasurer.

For further particulars and Membership Application Forms, Address all enquiries to :—

The Secretary,

The British Interplanetary Society,

34, Oarside Drive,

Wallasey, Cheshire, England.

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Those interested in the fascinating and at present baffling problems which surround the conquest of space should not fail to read :—

"The Possibilities of Interplanetary Travel,"

By P. E. CLEATOR, A.M.I.R.E., A.M.I.E.T., F.R.S.A.,

President of the British Interplanetary Society,

which appeared in *Chambers's Journal*, for January, 1933. The stock is limited. Obtain your copy now, 1s. 2d. post free from the Publishers :—

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