

EDITORIAL

With this issue the *Journal of British Studies* enters upon its fifteenth year of publication. That may seem a short span or a brief life by the standards of the *English Historical Review*, but the proliferation of learned journals in the last decade makes *J.B.S.* one of the more mature and established scholarly publications in the country, even if it cannot quite be described, for better or worse, as a 'senior citizen.' Most of our readers are, no doubt, aware of the qualities of devotion, perspicacity, and craftsmanship which Willson Coates and Bernard Semmel brought to *J.B.S.* during their successive terms as editor. Under their trusteeship the *Journal* has grown steadily in the quality of its content and in the reputation it enjoys among scholars in this country and abroad. No editor following in the footsteps of such predecessors could fail to appreciate the responsibility inherent in trying to carry on the tradition of editorial vigilance and integrity established by his predecessors. In this respect Bernard Semmel deserves a special vote of thanks not only for the faith and good works invested in *J.B.S.* over the past five years but also for his skill and tact in ensuring a smooth transition from the old to the new editorial board.

By the same token, *J.B.S.* owes an incalculable debt – in ways not exclusively financial – to the managing editor, George Cooper of Trinity College, who has piloted the craft through the perilous waters of high finance and low circulation, since its launching in 1961. Indeed, the list of patrons, councillors, friends, and supporters of *J.B.S.* is too long to permit mention here. Suffice it to say that those countless people who have sustained the *Journal* by their subscriptions as well as their contributions, constitute that vital community without which no journal can effectively survive, let alone flourish. To all these loyal members of that community, many of whom remain anonymous, go our heartfelt thanks.

Under the new editorial board, some of whose members have advised previous editors, the *Journal* has every intention of trying to fulfill those criteria of excellence set forth by Willson Coates in the course of his inaugural "editorial" in the November, 1961 issue:

What is essentially or primarily factual, descriptive or narrative will be presented only if it is significantly new. Analysis, synthesis, interpretation and exploratory exegesis will be the characteristic functions of the *Journal*. It will aim to

select articles from contributors working in various disciplines and sharing such scholarly ideals as critical acumen, historical insight and distinction of style. The *Journal* will not be concerned with the printing of documents as such, or of book reviews in the ordinary sense. Instead, there will be review articles which put into a large context recent books of especial consequence, and bibliographical essays which appraise recent publications in a particular field.

To these observations we need add only the reminder that *J.B.S.* seeks to cultivate as many fields and perspectives relating to British society and culture as possible. May *J.B.S.* never be accused of imposing conformity or discouraging dissent. The *Journal* represents no special interest group and it eschews both the latest and the oldest fashions in the historical marketplace only when these produce mediocre or worse results. We construe that ambiguous phrase 'British Studies' to mean something less insular and exclusive than purely English history and something more precise than the deeds (or misdeeds) of all English-speaking peoples. Similarly, the term 'studies' should be taken as denoting work firmly grounded in documentary evidence and historical methods. In practice this means that the *Journal* welcomes contributions from historians of British arts and crafts as well as literature, science, and technology. In the hope of narrowing the gap which often separates departments of English from departments of history in universities, *J.B.S.* would like to publish more articles dealing with the social, intellectual, and cultural aspects of literature in the British Isles. The *Journal* also wishes to attract articles from scholars who inhabit the border lands or interstices between orthodox disciplines and whose work may well afford insights through the comparative analysis of Britain and some other nation or society.

Any self-respecting editor is, by definition, on the lookout for original work. An editor's chief difficulty, however, lies in finding material that strikes the informed reader as well as the author as meeting that description. Besides containing originality of thought such an article ought to have something of value to impart to non-specialists who are searching for analogies or insights applicable to their own special fields. The quest for this kind of excellence must be constant and, indeed, relentless, if the *Journal* is to continue its functions as both a reflection of the best work being done in British studies today and a stimulus to further work. In this context, the apt observations of F.W. Bateson about the editorial side of learned journals deserves to be quoted from the *Times Literary Supplement* (March 22, 1974):

. . . the central problem for a learned journal is not how to get itself started but how to maintain standards. Is the editor to wait and see what the post brings – a policy that may reduce him to printing extracts from a thesis . . . or, even worse, some rubbish that the editor's cousin has been unable to persuade any other journal to accept? Or is he to commission articles from reputable scholars or historians who may not be up to their usual form on this occasion? (My experience is that they often are not, a situation that will at best lead to embarrassment and may well end in angry letters.)

Although we hope that Bateson is not trying to make an invidious distinction between “reputable scholars” and “historians”, we agree wholeheartedly with his avowed object of finding and publishing work that meets his definition of “responsible originality” – namely, articles containing “new evidence, a plausible new interpretation of old evidence, an effective challenge to orthodoxy.” This search for genuine, as distinct from apparent, quality necessarily means that the number of disappointed authors, whose material is found unsuitable for publication, is not likely to diminish and may even increase. *J.B.S.* in sum, remains committed to the publication of articles that not only break new ground but, hopefully, convey their arguments in a style both crisp and lucid, devoid of jargon or rhetoric.

It would be inappropriate to speculate here about the directions the *Journal* will take in the next few years. The vagaries of learned journals are even more pronounced than those of the stock market. But it is worth mentioning that one of our editorial aims is to achieve a closer and more productive relationship between the *Journal* and the Conference on British Studies. In addition, the *Journal* hopes to profit from the advice and expertise of several official “correspondents” overseas, most of whom are teaching history in British universities, whose functions will include the referring of manuscripts to the editor and the conveying of news about significant work currently being done in their respective fields. The editor hopes, too, that unofficial correspondents, in particular readers or subscribers, will communicate their thoughts about ways of improving both the content and the form of the *Journal*. We appreciate good advice from anyone involved in the collective enterprise or intellectual commonwealth known as British Studies, just as we trust that these scholars will help us to guard against any debasement of *J.B.S.* coinage in the years ahead.

L.P.C. JR.