

Correspondence

To the Editor of the Journal of British Studies:

I was one of the earliest admirers of Sir Lewis B. Namier; but I regret to see your pages open to a Namierite who attacks Herbert Butterfield in terms that seem quite unjustifiable.

Butterfield, in fact, had a sizable admiration for Sir Lewis. On page 200 of Butterfield's *George III and the Historians* he says:

His *Structure of Politics* (1929) not only enriched this side of the study of George III's reign with new analyses and new techniques, but attained types of result which possess a remarkable precision, results that stand as a solid contribution to scholarship. It has rightly been said of Sir Lewis Namier that "he uses the microscope at one moment and the telescope at the next – both with equal effect"; and in him the kind of industry which is not merely patient but which generates high pressure is assisted by a brilliant imagination which does not refuse to take risks.

On page 202 he writes:

Let it be clear from the first that the strength of the Namier school really rests on the massiveness of its detailed researches. Its contribution has been imposing in this respect, and such a contribution has a permanent value – an importance that is not going to be undermined by differences of opinion or fluctuations in intellectual fashion.

Butterfield's criticism of certain Namierites goes to their limited interpretation of the master and their air of exclusive omniscience.

I met Sir Lewis in the summer of 1929 when his reputation as a historian was just getting under way. His *Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* had just appeared. I was struck with his novel methodology. I was then in London working on a biography of General Jeffery Amherst and wrote to Namier requesting an audience. He responded promptly, we met at a pub for lunch and talked the whole afternoon. He talked with considerable candor, expressing worry about his future. He was conscious of being a foreigner and was concerned lest traditional British doors be closed to him. (In this he obviously underestimated English openmindedness.) He was aware that his system was typical of German scholarship's attention to infinite detail, but he felt that such application was needed to "clarify" (his word) the course of English

history in the eighteenth century, but he did not shut his eyes to the importance of the total perspective.

Possibly because I was an American and not involved in British university affairs, Namier was exceptionally frank. He said that he had set out to make money in the business world so that he could carry his work to conclusion whether or not the English university authorities should accept him. If in his later years he adopted a somewhat arbitrary arrogance it may have been partly a defense mechanism. It was necessary for him to be on top of the heap, he could not afford to be less.

Now the clamor of the modern Namierites has taken some strange directions, such as the struggle for the corpus of George III as though he were their exclusive property. There has been so much feuding on this subject that my publisher, Little, Brown, could not locate a British professor willing to be a biographer of that unfortunate king. Similarly, in this country the topic has been thought to be a risky one. At the Conference on British Studies some four years ago a Columbia University professor presented a penetrating paper on George III. When it was suggested to him that he undertake a full length life of the Monarch, he replied that he simply did not have the courage to do it, saying: "What would not the British historians do with my book!" The publishers finally came to me, because of prior work that I had done on the eighteenth century and in due course my biography of *George III, the Story of a Complex Man* appeared in the U.S.A.; so far I have not been scalped by the American reviewers. The book will appear in England in 1962 and obviously the nature of its reception is yet to be seen. This discussion of George III as an historical football is pertinent because Namier himself emphasized the complexity of the king's character. Namier's Academy of Arts Lecture of 1953 is reprinted in his book on *Personality and Powers*, and though he referred to George III as "a much maligned man," yet he appraised the king's personality in devastating terms:

George III's attachment was never deep: it was that of a drunken man to railings – mechanical rather than emotional. Egocentric and rigid, stunted in feelings, unable to adjust himself to events, flustered by sudden change, he could meet situations only in a negative manner, clinging to men and measures with disastrous obstinacy. But he himself mistook that defensive apparatus for courage, drive, and vigour, from which it was as far removed as anything could be.

I submit accordingly that the attacks on Butterfield by some

modern Namierites are quite unjustified. Butterfield's *George III and the Historians* is fully aware of the various interpretations that have been made of the king's acts and character. If he refers to certain Namierites as "atomizers" and "head counters", they should accept the criticism with good grace for there is some truth in it.

Very truly yours,

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To the Editor of the *Journal of British Studies*:

In response to the letter of Professor Charles Mullett printed in the last issue of the *Journal of British Studies*, will you kindly print the below paragraph taken from Dr. Stanley Pargellis's review of the *New Guide to Historical Literature* in the October 1961 number of the *American Historical Review*, p. 77:

Graduate students and teachers will welcome this volume. Critics, and there will be critics, should read with care the general introduction and the introductions to each part. They should remember that it took four years to compile and that publications after 1956 are not therefore systematically included. The specialist should remember that it is not meant for him in his own field, but for the student and the teacher. And it should be said, as for any selective bibliography, that one man's judgments seldom exactly match those of others, and that editors cannot wield too ruthless a blue pencil on the offerings of unpaid contributors. The series of *Bibliographies of British History*, when completed, will contain some 50,000 titles; the British history section in the *Guide* had to be limited to 715. The question critics should ask is not whether certain good books have been omitted, but whether those books were essential ones for inclusion within the intent and purpose of the editors.

Yours sincerely,

SIDNEY A. BURRELL