

EDITORIAL

BEGINNING to edit a general journal, we can only hope that Aristotle was right in claiming that an educated man should be able to form a fair off-hand judgement as to the goodness or badness of an expert's exposition. Following a series of editors who have displayed this universal education in their selection, scrutiny and improvement of papers submitted to them is a humbling task; and it is both a pleasure and a duty to record how much the journal owes to Nicholas Fisher who has been editor for some five years. The recent survey of members of the British Society for the History of Science shows how much the journal has been liked and appreciated.

Journals like ours are unlikely to be bought on impulse in supermarkets, but they may as well catch the eye of the browser in the library and please that of the member of the Society. Dr Fisher began the process of redesigning the cover which has only been carried through after his retirement from the editorship; the new design, by Suzanne Perkins to whom we are very grateful, has been welcomed by the Council and will allow the journal to be cited more expeditiously, and thus perhaps even more often, as *BJHS*. We have also changed our printer and hope that the journal will be even clearer to read; and that the change in the outside will not lead to any falling off of standards inside. These will depend upon those anonymous experts, the referees to whom papers are sent for evaluation. In the nature of the case, they cannot be publicly thanked by name but our debt to them is enormous and we shall continue to need the services of many authorities in this way.

Historians of science now engage in a very wide range of studies, and we must try to ensure that members of the Society and other readers of the *BJHS* become aware of the most interesting work going on anywhere in the world. Even an editor of universal education could hardly keep up with it all, and the Council has agreed to the appointment of an Editorial Board whose members will be responsible for taking papers in their fields through the refereeing stage. This step should bring even more authority to the journal, speed up decisions on papers submitted to us, and save the editor some labour.

So that their contributions will be of interest to a general readership including all the members of the Society, we ask authors to take pains to place their topics in context, both ancient and modern. We shall now ask for abstracts of papers, to help authors decide what they have been trying to say, and why; and referees will look as always for extensive primary and secondary citation. We were not born yesterday, and our work must be seen to relate to that of our contemporaries; that is the real sign of professionalism. Since our papers are not only for a few experts in a narrow field, they should be attractive and well-written; crisp, elegant and witty papers are better than dull ones, and these qualities do not entail

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superficiality. Papers for the *BJHS* have always varied in length, and short papers or notes are often appropriate and always welcome.

Book reviews were what most members of the Society said they looked at first; partly because these are more wide-ranging than the articles, there being more of them, they are an exceedingly important part of the journal. We thank our reviewers for being speedy and for confining themselves within imposed limits of length. Members asked for reviews to come out more quickly, and this we shall try to achieve; but this will entail stricter limits of length, and reviewers may have to remember journalistic dodges like always omitting one's first paragraph, and deleting any phrase that seems especially fine. We are very grateful to John Durant for continuing as Book Reviews Editor.

Judicious essay-reviews also play an important part in a general journal. They are not extended book reviews, but essays that take off from a book or perhaps an issue of another journal; and they demand the talents of a Macaulay or a T. H. Huxley, who can sketch for us how research is moving in some sphere, or indicate how sources of a kind previously neglected might illuminate our own field. We shall hope too to publish further essays describing collections of books, manuscripts and instruments in Britain.

However good the contents of a journal, it needs in some sense to pay its way. We are very fortunate that the Society sees the publishing of the *BJHS* as its major activity, absorbing most of its income—its conferences being self-financing. The History of Science in Britain will suffer from the devastating cuts in the public money made available for higher education; and the *BJHS* will lose an element of concealed subsidy in the form of typing and copying services and so on which can no longer be provided by universities. Contributors will have to learn to read the editor's handwriting; will have to send two copies of their papers; and will have them returned for retyping if they make extensive changes by hand or if they fail to conform to our guidelines.

Sometimes it may be possible to group articles and reviews so as to give a definite theme to an issue of the *BJHS*, and indeed as befits 1982 (the centenary of Darwin's death) we have a number of 'Darwinian' items this time. Because we have such a general readership, this is something to do with care; and like everything else it depends essentially upon the contributions that come in. Wintering far inside the Arctic Circle in 1819–20, Edward Sabine, FRS, twitted non-contributors to his *North Georgia Gazette*, and repudiated the suggestion that he was only prepared to accept 'trifling nonsense'; we cannot but do the same.