



## J. R. Baker, Editor 1946 to 1964

THE success of a scientific journal in recording the advancement of knowledge depends upon two things: it must record current research, and it must maintain the highest critical standard in publication. There is some latent antagonism between these two duties which it is for an editor to overcome. Current research is, and must be, contemporary, and there is always some distortion in the contemporary view of a science. It is also exposed to the danger that, because it is necessarily concerned with current unproven hypotheses in which the worker is deeply interested, it may be exposed to less criticism than mature reflection would show it to deserve. On the other hand, the maintenance of a high standard depends in part upon experience of past work which has proved itself and upon a power to judge new ideas critically: the danger here is that it can lead to a conservatism which does not keep pace with the advancement of knowledge; one which tends to accept nothing for the first time.

The *Quarterly Journal of Microscopical Science* in its earlier days under the late Professor Goodrich followed the current morphological traditions of his time. The *Journal* then in 1946 not only passed to new editors, but its field was adapted to the rapidly changing biological outlook. As one of the new Editors, I was particularly concerned with functional morphology. But my colleague John Randal Baker already saw that the field of the *Journal* must swing towards the cell and its ultrastructure. That was eighteen years ago and no one in 1946 could foretell how great a field of research was about to be opened up.

No one could possibly have been better equipped for the task of editing the *Journal* than John Baker. His intense interest and technical excellence in microscopy gave him an unrivalled power over his material. He realized the enormous fund of information to be obtained not only from the then new methods such as phase-contrast microscopy, but also from the critical use of the old methods. He and the students under his guidance showed the extent to which staining methods could give reliable information of the chemistry of cell inclusions. But most important of all was his realization that a fixed and chemically treated cell was necessarily an artifact. The structures seen were not those of the living cell, but the resultants of their treatment, yet provided this was borne in mind sound conclusions could be reached about the living structure.

To have such a background was one half of the necessary ingredients for a good Editor for the *Journal*. The other half consisted of a variety of qualities, rare in any one man: the power to read and correct for press long manuscripts without fatigue impairing the judgement; the ability to see the thread of interest and importance in ill-expressed and turgid writing; the ability to be firm with and helpful to good authors; and above all the possession of a natural kindness and understanding to help the young contributor. Add to these the thorough mastery of his native language and the skilful

handling of proofs, and of a University Press and its inhabitants, and one has a picture of John Baker the Editor. The *Journal* and its contributors are in lasting debt to him.

As a man of science he has always been rather before his time. The significance of his ideas has often not at once been appreciated. All the stress he laid upon the significance of artifacts was to prove invaluable during the development of the electron microscope and the interpretation of the configurations which that instrument displayed.

Nineteen years is a long spell for the arduous work of editorship and it is fairly the turn of younger men to carry the burden. Dr. A. V. Grimstone now joins Professor Callan as Editor, and we may look forward to the further implementation of the *Journal's* present policy, initiated by Dr. Baker, of concentrating on cell biology and organic fine structure. The present Editors, and all of us, are in debt to John Baker for what he has so splendidly done. It is good to think of the happy years of research which now lie ahead of him—with one less burden to distract him.

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