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Editorial

AUGUSTUS de Morgan in 1865 wrote an entertaining account of what he called the *Editorial System*, which could not ‘conveniently be explained by editors themselves, and *edited* journals generally do not like to say much about it.’ Because reviews were anonymous, the editor ‘may claim, and does claim and exercise, unlimited right of omission, addition and alteration’. His reviewers were no more than contributors; but usually editors and contributors came together through ‘elective affinity’, so that most articles appeared much as they were written.

The only alternative was ‘the modern French plan of no articles without the signature of the writers’, then favoured by no ‘collective party’. Modern editors may envy their Victorian predecessors; but we operate under the French plan. Our reviews and articles are signed expressions of opinion for which the author is responsible, though articles always and essay reviews generally are refereed. As such, they represent a serious but personal view. Unlike editors of nineteenth-century Reviews, we do take pains to avoid selecting reviewers from some one party.

It is therefore our policy not normally to publish replies to reviews, or to remarks made in articles; thus keeping out exchanges which would be tedious or unedifying to most readers, and usually simply draw more attention to the original attack. The way to reply to a supposed misrepresentation is through an article or note, which will be duly refereed. That way, we may hope to get trenchant reviews and firm expressions of opinion—nobody wants bland or tepid periodicals—without personal vituperation. History of science, like a good scramble, should be exciting, exacting and amusing.

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