

The view from the castle



The job of being Secretary of the Institution is complex, full of fascinating responsibilities, a learning process and, above all, pleasurable

This is my 174th *View from the castle*, and it seems perhaps an auspicious moment to quantify some of the feelings and reactions I have had in more than 20 years as director of the Smithsonian. The job of being Secretary of this Institution is one of the most complex and pleasurable in the world. To me the Smithsonian has a hypnotic fascination. What is it and why? We shall probably never be certain of the true meaning of its noble founder's words, "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men," any more than we can keep totally abreast of the task of interpreting history, art and science in all their manifold forms every day—past, present and future.

I can only say that the job has been a joyous one. It is a fascinating collection of responsibilities which seems to bring one new facets of information every day—an encyclopedic exercise.

A particular and never-ending satisfaction is that in the process of creating the Associates and introducing you to the Smithsonian in all its ramifications, I feel that I have contributed to your pleasure and your enlightenment. You have become a part of the Smithsonian (which perhaps you did not realize belonged to you), an Institution that our government had pledged to support on your behalf in 1846.

Another aspect of all this is that Congress and the government are immensely proud of the Smithsonian, just as the public is. It seems to shed a glow over the Mall that is both stimulating and reassuring. There is electricity, and surprise, and sometimes shock. This

excitement pervades the place; it is a reason for the pride we take in it. Those of us here find that excitement all-consuming.

In 14 years, SMITHSONIAN, our magazine for the Associates, has achieved much of what we set out to do. Like the rings of the Olympic symbol, our goals were interlocking: to explore the things that the Smithsonian is interested in, *might* be interested in, or *ought* to be interested in.

As with the seasons, the ends foreshadow the beginnings. What we know provides a measure of what we do not know. What we do not know presages what indeed we may know in the future. At the Smithsonian we have believed that life itself is an endless opening up of more opportunities for learning.

My esteemed successor and friend, Robert McCormick Adams, comes to the castle this month. Steeped in the values of history as seen through the eyes of an ecologically-minded archaeologist, he will, I know, exemplify those qualities enumerated in a resolution presented to the Board of Regents in December 1846 by one of its members, Robert Dale Owen (a Representative from Indiana who had played a crucial role in the acceptance by Congress of the Smithsonian bequest): "... that the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution be a man possessing weight of character and a high grade of talent ... eminent scientific and general acquirements ... a man capable of advancing science and promoting letters by original research and effort ... a man worthy to represent, before the world of science and of letters, the Institution over which this Board presides."

Amen!—and may the job be a joy and filled with fun.

S. Dillon Ripley