In 1838 Parliament passed legislation enabling Great Britain to become a party to international copyright agreements, and in the following decades a number of such treaties were signed with European states. However, Americans were suspicious about international copyright and feared that it meant exploitation and domination of their book trade. As a young nation the United States wanted the freedom to borrow literature as well as technology from any quarter of the globe, and it was not until 1891 that Congress finally recognized America’s literary independence by authorizing reciprocal copyright agreements with foreign powers.

Well before Anglo-American relations were disrupted by the Civil War of 1861–5, a number of authors, publishers, and politicians in both countries emphasized the advantages of copyright between these two English-speaking nations. At times their efforts seemed close to success, reinforced as they were by political intrigue and diplomatic manoeuvres. In 1854 the issue even became the subject of a legal decision before the House of Lords. That same year an Anglo-American copyright treaty already signed by the American Secretary of State and the British Minister in Washington awaited final confirmation by the Senate. This volume deals with why failure attended these many efforts during the years 1815–54. A good deal of attention is also given to describing the ways in which authors and publishers functioned in the absence of an Anglo-American agreement.

In the chapters which follow I have taken minor liberties with the spelling and punctuation of quoted passages in the interest of clarity and intelligibility. This in turn serves to remind me how enormously indebted
I am to those who facilitated my research into previously unpublished materials on both sides of the Atlantic. In the section of Acknowledgments I mention these sources by name, but here I should like to express my deep sense of gratitude to those who helped to finance my undertaking. During the past ten years Wabash College has been most generous in supporting my project in its various phases. I am also greatly indebted to grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Philosophical Society, and the Social Science Research Council.

May I also take this opportunity to mention a few of the many individuals who have sustained me throughout the past decade with advice and encouragement: Mr Simon Nowell-Smith of Oxford; Mr Ronald E. Barker of the Publishers' Association in London; Dr Marjorie Plant, former Deputy Librarian of the London School of Economics and Political Science; Professor Robert K. Webb of Columbia University; Professor Richard D. Altick of Ohio State University. Finally, only those who know something of my working and writing habits can begin to appreciate Patience Barnes’s contribution to this project. As wife, editor, and critic, she has also served as intrepid travelling companion and documentary sleuth. Together we dedicate this volume to our children, Jennifer and Geoffrey, who have crossed the Atlantic many times, sharing our preoccupation with writing and research.

J. J. B.
Wabash College
Crawfordsville, Indiana