From the Ancien Régime to the Popular Front

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Essays in the History of Modern France in Honor of SHEPARD B. CLOUGH

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Preface

WERE WE TO FOLLOW the precedent of a number of *Festschriften* this preface would be given over to a celebration of Shepard Clough's rich achievement as a scholar, the offices he has held, and the distinctions he has received. As former students of his, we cannot help contemplating such a prospect with pride, but we hope we are not too proud when we say we feel these things are well known. In turning from the more conventional appreciation, we are moved by the consideration that whatever broader appeal this volume may have, it is, in a sense, a very private tribute to a man whose human qualities we recognize along with his eminence as a scholar. To put it another way, in this preface and in the essays that follow, we would honor Shepard Clough as great teacher and good friend.

We would also like to record our gratitude that our seminar experience in that so well remembered study on the fifth floor of Fayerweather continues to live for us. To explain this fully would involve more encomiums and sentimentality than the Vermonter in our master might appreciate. One of our number, however, volunteered an explanation with more than a touch of Yankee forthrightness. "I'm writing something today," he said, "and I still think Shep Clough's going to be looking at it, that he's going to be tearing it to pieces next Tuesday. You know—*I'm glad* I feel that way!"

But our continuing experience operates on things more tangible

than memories. Shepard Clough never stops giving of himself generously and convivially to us, whether it be on Morningside Heights, in Paris, or at professional meetings—places and organizations where we know he has more important responsibilities than furnishing the counsel we seek. Each of us carries his own debt of gratitude on this score. For many of us the magnitude of it did not become apparent until we took on academic and scholarly responsibilities of our own. From this remove, Shepard Clough's accomplishments as teacher and scholar seem to become equivalent to the legendary, a model for us to copy but perhaps never achieve. We acknowledge that we continue to be his pupils in many respects.

Several colleagues, not of our number, have called the attention of the present writer to our close and durable relationship with our mentor and remarked, not without envy, that it has probably produced a unique sodality. Many of us know that this is so. In presenting this volume, we would like Shepard Clough to know it, too.

The editor wishes to thank all those who contributed studies that would have found their place between these covers if space and exigencies of theme and balance had permitted. That determining the scope of this volume was a problem can be appreciated by anyone who knows Shepard Clough's wide-ranging interests. The editor is painfully aware, for example, that this collection of essays fails to do honor to his important contributions to Italian economic history and to the study of such problems as the definition of civilizations and the role of values in human behavior. But *est modus in rebus*. In place of a prodigal feast, the contributors to this volume hope they have presented a reasonably sufficient one. It is their wish that it will offer something of value to students of modern French history, meet with some approbation by Shepard Clough himself, and recreate, however imperfectly, some of the ambiance of his many memorable seminars.

The editor wishes to thank the Graduate Council of the University of Kansas for a grant to prepare the manuscript of this volume and the Department of History, Columbia University, for a grant towards publication from the William A. Dunning Fund. He also wishes to express his gratitude for the encouragement and

support of Mr. Henry H. Wiggins, Assistant Director, Columbia University Press. Finally, he would like to acknowledge that the original inspiration for this volume belongs to Charles Freedeman, and that Charles Freedeman, Paul Beik, and Martin Wolfe have been constant and valuable collaborators in bringing it to completion.

CHARLES K. WARNER

Lawrence, Kansas
April, 1969

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The Encyclopédie *as a Business Venture*

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IT HAS LONG BEEN RECOGNIZED that the *Encyclopédie* was a powerful agent of change in the realm of ideas and values. Among other things, the effect of this change was to facilitate the emergence of middle-class consciousness and to encourage the development of capitalist economy. Though one may say in general that the point of view of the *Encyclopédie* was that of liberal mercantilism, there were at least two major articles—"Fermiers" and "Grains"—by Dr. François Quesnay, the founder of the Physiocratic school, in which laisser-faire principles were expounded. Rationalism, hedonism, utilitarianism, and individualism, all of which have frequently been seen as essential components of the business mentality, permeated the seventeen volumes of the *Encyclopédie*'s text, and in the twelve volumes of illustrations there is enough exact information on industrial processes that if one set were to survive the destruction of our civilization, it would be possible (if the ability to read the French language also survived) to reconstitute the technology of eighteenth-century Europe. What is perhaps less well appreciated is that the publication of the *Encyclopédie* itself represented an economic achievement of considerable importance, marking some significant developments in the history of French publishing. At every stage of the enterprise, moreover, business calculations played a far from negligible role, and governmental policy toward the *Encyclopédie* was strongly influenced by economic considerations.

If Diderot was the chief architect and moving spirit on the edi-

torial side, the chief entrepreneur of the "encyclopedic manufacture" was André-François Le Breton, a man who embodied a good number of the traits we are accustomed to associate with the modern businessman.[1] Energetic, shrewd, far-sighted, ambitious, hard-driving, and unscrupulous, he had risen from modest beginnings to become the successful publisher of the *Almanach Royal*. When, late in 1744 or early in 1745, the young English bank clerk, John Mills, came to him with a proposal to translate Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* (two volumes in folio) into French, Le Breton grasped the commercial possibilities at once and formed a partnership with Mills, who apparently let it be understood that he was in a position to put up part of the capital. Later, when the two partners fell out, Le Breton acted vigorously and decisively to eliminate Mills and secure full ownership of the *privilège* (royal letters-patent conveying an exclusive right to publish and sell the projected work).[2] Finding that the *Encyclopédie* (now expanded to five folio volumes, including one of illustrations) was too large an undertaking to finance alone, Le Breton formed a syndicate with three other booksellers, keeping a half interest for himself; the actual printing was to be done in his shop and was to be paid for before any profits were distributed.[3] Le Breton then proceeded

[1] Le Breton's personal qualities emerge from Diderot's correspondence, esp. from his letters to Sophie Volland (G. Roth, ed., *Denis Diderot, Correspondance* [Paris, 1955–65] 11 vols.). Much additional information is contained in the voluminous material relating to the lawsuit (1771–78) involving the publishers of the *Encyclopédie* and Luneau de Boisjermain; the bulk of these papers is in Bibl. Nat. MSS. Fr. 22,069 and 22,086.

[2] Bibl. Nat. MSS. Fr. 22,069, folios 263–67. In these "Pièces Justificatives" annexed to a *Mémoire pour P.-J.-F. Luneau de Boisjermain, souscripteur de l'Encyclopédie* (Paris, 1771) one finds copies of various "arrêts" of the Conseil d'Etat du Roi dating from 1743 to 1746 and relating to the *Almanach Royal*, the association between Mills and Le Breton, their subsequent quarrel, and the new *privilège* granted to Le Breton. For these episodes one should also consult F. Venturi, *Le Origini dell'Enciclopedia* (Rome, 1956) and "Le Origini dell' Enciclopedia in Inghilterra," *Itinerari*, Nos. 9–10 (Genoa, 1954), pp. 200–20.

[3] "Livre des Délibérations des sieurs Le Breton, David *l'ainé*, Durand et Briasson, Libraires à Paris, intéressés dans l'impression du Dictionnaire des Arts et Sciences de Chambers et Harris, traduit en français" (hereafter cited as "Délibérations"). This document (Archives Nationales U-1051) contains the record of decisions reached by the four associated publishers between 1745 and 1762. Along with some accounts it was apparently left behind by mistake in 1778 when the rest of the publishers' records (subpoenaed during their lawsuit against Luneau de Boisjermain) were returned. Discovered by Louis-Philippe May, these documents were published in the *Revue de synthèse* (XV, 1938; hereafter abbreviated as Rs.) and in the *Synthèse historique* (VIII, February, 1938). All subsequent references in this article are to the published texts. For details

to drive a series of hard bargains with his chief editors (of whom Diderot was the second in chronological sequence, the Abbé de Gua de Malves having proved to be a poor administrator during the year of his tenure), and with his other collaborators. In the end, overanxious about his good relations with the royal authorities, Le Breton did not even keep faith with Diderot by respecting the integrity of his text—though we now know that the damage was far less extensive than Diderot believed.[4] Poetic justice is perhaps satisfied by the fact that Le Breton, having made a handsome fortune from the *Encyclopédie,* went bankrupt when some of his other ventures came to grief. If not particularly attractive as a person, Le Breton deserves to be recognized as one of the outstanding entrepreneurs of eighteenth-century France.

For in material respects as well as in its cultural significance the publication of the *Encyclopédie*'s twenty-eight massive volumes (thirty-five if we include the twelfth volume of plates, the four-volume supplement and the two-volume analytical table published by Charles-Joseph Panckoucke after Le Breton and Diderot had ceased to have any connection with the enterprise) was by any standards a noteworthy event.[5] No previous "inventory of knowledge" had been nearly as large; none had been the joint product of nearly 150 specialized contributors; none had enjoyed such strong financial backing; none was so expensive to produce; and probably none was commercially anywhere near as successful. Le Breton and his three associates may well have been substantially correct in their claim that the *Encyclopédie* was, up to that time, "the most important and extensive publishing venture ever undertaken." [6] The details of this business enterprise should be of considerable interest both to business historians and to students of the history of thought and culture.

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of the agreement of October 18, 1745, constituting the syndicate, see *Rs.*, XV, 15–16; also the "Addition au Traité cy-dessus, en datte du 14e novembre 1745" (*Rs.*, p. 17).

[4] Douglas E. Gordon and Norman L. Torrey, *The Censoring of Diderot's* Encyclopédie *and the Re-established Text* (New York, 1947).

[5] Torrey, comparing the *Encyclopédie* with other major publishing ventures of the early modern period, called it "the biggest with respect to its bulk, the capital invested, the number and distinction of the contributors." Cf. "L'*Encyclopédie* de Diderot, une grande aventure dans le domaine de l'édition" (*Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France,* July–Sept., 1951) p. 306.

[6] "Réflections ultérieures . . ." [June 10, 1777] (Bibl. Nat. MSS. Fr. 22,069, fol. 431).

The history of the publication of the *Encyclopédie* falls naturally into three stages. First, there was a five-year period of preparation leading up to the distribution of the Prospectus of 1750 and the opening of the public subscription in October of that year. During this time a number of false starts were made, the plan of the work was revised and enlarged, and an adequate editorial staff, headed by Diderot and d'Alembert, was finally constituted. The second stage lasted until the "suppression" of the *Encyclopédie* in 1759. Despite the crisis of 1752, when the whole enterprise barely survived the *affaire* of the Abbé de Prades, and despite a continuing chorus of hostile criticism, seven volumes appeared. The number of subscribers grew far beyond the number originally hoped for, the government's attitude was generally benevolent, and from a commercial point of view the affair seems to have prospered mightily. A period of some anxiety must have followed the revocation of the *privilège* in March, 1759; but once again the support of public opinion and the connivance of sympathetic officials made it possible to survive the storm. Malesherbes, the Director of Publishing, gave permission for the opening of a new subscription for four supplementary volumes of plates, thus relieving the publishers of the obligation to refund money for the volumes of text as yet unpublished. After 1762 it was even possible to proceed quietly with the printing of the last ten volumes of text and to distribute these to the subscribers early in 1766 thanks to the willingness of the authorities to look the other way. No further difficulties arose and, with the delivery of the eleventh volume of plates in 1772, the original *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and Le Breton was finished. Each of these periods can be traced in considerable detail from the records available, and each has a special interest because of the changing character of the enterprise and the new kinds of business problems that arose.

The first five years of the *Encyclopédie*'s history are especially instructive for the student of the book trade in eighteenth-century France. The work had not yet assumed the ambitious proportions that its growing success and notoriety were to make possible after 1751. Thus, in the incubation stage between 1745 and 1750, it exhibits more faithfully than at a later stage the normal conditions and problems of the publishing industry in that period. In par-

ticular, the first projects and early arrangements reveal the extent to which book publishing was bound up with governmental action and with the system of corporative regulation maintained by the Ancien Régime. Official good will and patronage were, from the very beginning, indispensable: not only was it necessary to obtain official permission to publish and to solicit subscriptions; it was also necessary to cope with the complex problem of censorship, involving (in addition to the Council of State and the Chancellor) the Parlement of Paris, the Sorbonne, the archbishopric of Paris, various prelates influential at Court, and the papacy itself. The hostile influence of the Jesuits had to be counterbalanced. Official and semiofficial bodies, notably the Academy of Sciences, needed to be conciliated on occasion. Competitors bent on plagiarism or outright piracy both inside and outside of France had to be dealt with.[7] Finally, the guild regulations of the Communauté des Libraires et Imprimeurs de Paris had to be complied with or circumvented. Operating within this intricate web of power and influence Le Breton needed all his abundant resources of initiative, tact, and ingenuity to keep on good terms with all factions, some of which might well be at loggerheads with others at a given moment.

As if this were not enough to tax the powers of an entrepreneur, Le Breton—even after forming a syndicate with three other leading publishers—had to contend with a serious shortage of working capital. Commercial credit was indeed available, but, as we shall see, the prevailing interest rates were so high as to be virtually prohibitive. This situation, which is no doubt traceable to the underdevelopment of the French money market, seems to have been a serious obstacle to expansion in the book trade as in other branches of French economic life in the middle of the eighteenth century. Le Breton's solution was to get the buyers of the *Encyclopédie* to put up the major part of the required capital; indeed, the size and timing of payments was arranged in such a way as

[7] The publishers' "Délibérations" contain a resolution of October 28, 1751, authorizing Briasson and David to go to London at the syndicate's expense to negotiate with printers who had begun a pirated edition there; the two emissaries were empowered to offer, in exchange for the abandonment of this project, a certain number of copies of the Paris edition "at a very low price"; if this did not work, they were to try to sell the London publishers sheets of the *Encyclopédie*'s illustrations (*Rs.*, pp. 25–26). Apparently the Londoners were bought off, for we hear no more of this particular venture.

to build up a large interest-bearing surplus in the hands of the syndicate, thus greatly increasing the eventual net profits.

During the first five years, however, this solution was not available, and this period must have been extremely difficult from a business point of view, for no money was coming in and a great deal was going out. Before breaking with Mills, Le Breton had tied up some 5,000 livres in the venture. On the signing of the agreement with three other publishers (Briasson, Durand, and David *l'aîné*) on October 18, 1745, a total of 20,000 livres was paid in by the four members of the syndicate, half by Le Breton and the other half jointly by his three associates.[8] According to the code of regulations governing the book trade, no advance subscriptions could be solicited from the public until the entire manuscript of the proposed work had been approved by the official censor.[9] By 1751 the *Encyclopédie* had come to enjoy enough official favor that this rule was relaxed to permit each volume to be examined separately in advance of publication, but during the first five years there was no possibility of borrowing from the future purchasers of the work.

Yet heavy outlays had to be made, as the publishers' accounts show, to pay the editors, translators, consultants, contributors, and copyists, not to mention type founders, compositors, pressmen, engravers, papermakers, and the like. Consequently the syndicate was obliged to borrow, no doubt reluctantly, within a few months after its coming into existence; on February 28, 1746, a loan of 16,000 livres was obtained from the banker Valmalette for one year; the interest, amounting to 3,680 livres and 7 sols, was paid in advance, giving a rate of 30 percent per annum. This loan was repaid when it fell due on March 10, 1747, and thereafter the working fund was replenished by periodic assessments, with each associate paying in proportion to his share (one half for Le Breton and one

[8] "Traité de société, en datte du 18e octobre 1745" (*Rs.*, pp. 15–17).

[9] "Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat du Roi du 10 avril 1725 portant réglement sur le fait de la Librairie et Imprimerie," reproduced in "Pièces Justificatives," Bibl. Nat. MSS. Fr. 22,069, fol. 262. Art. III of this "Code de la Librairie," as it was unofficially called, provided that "There shall not be offered to the public any subscription except for the printing of very large works which could not be printed without this aid, unless permission has been granted by the Garde des Sceaux consequent to the approval which has been accorded to such works, in their entirety, by the censors whom he has appointed. . . ."

sixth for each of the other three).[10] By September 1, 1750, a month before the publication of the Prospectus and the first receipts from subscribers, the four associates had invested a total of 69,825 livres 18 sols and 3 deniers.[11]

Next to the problem of working capital the most troublesome of the publishers' concerns in these early years was that of finding a suitable editor. The first choice, the Abbé Jean-Paul de Gua de Malves, was a distinguished philosopher and scientist, a man who had many original ideas and a great deal of enthusiasm, but who proved to be deficient in organizing ability and practical sense.[12] His grandiose projects involved the publishers in ill-advised expenditures in such matters as the purchase of manuscripts from inept contributors. Not only was he paid a handsome salary (18,000 livres for an agreed period of two years) but he received during the year of his actual incumbency large additional advances which the publishers were able to recover only by legal action. Their books show that the Abbé de Gua was still paying off these debts as late as 1766. His contract with the publishers was dissolved by mutual consent on August 3, 1747.[13]

On October 16 of the same year Le Breton and his associates signed a new contract with Diderot and d'Alembert, who thus became joint editors, though the main administrative responsibility was to be Diderot's.[14] Both had been on the payroll since the beginning of the previous year, Diderot as translator and author,

[10] "Délibérations," *Rs.*, pp. 17, 20–21. Actually it is difficult to know whether they paid 8 percent or 30 percent because the entry in the "Délibérations" just cited gives the *amount* of interest, spelled out in words, as "trois mille six cents quatre vingt livres sept sols" (which works out to 30 percent per annum), while another ledger, the "Etat de la recette acuelle" showing receipts from all sources from 1746 to 1768, gives (under the entry of Feb. 28, 1746) the terms of the loan from Valmalette as "payable à un an à 8 percent d'interest" (*Rs.*, p. 99). There seems to be no way of reconciling this flat contradiction in the publishers' own records.

[11] "Etat de la recette actuelle" (*Rs.*, p. 101).

[12] Franco Venturi, "Le Origini dell'Enciclopedia," has collected the relatively few biographical facts available on this gifted but eccentric individual. One of his more ambitious (and no doubt costly) ventures was building and operating a machine for extracting gold dust from river sand.

[13] For the terms of his contract and the agreement *sous-seing privé* dissolving it, see *Rs.*, pp. 18–20 and 21. On Feb. 16, 1748, the company authorized Briasson to incur any legal expenses necessary to recover the sums advanced to the Abbé "jusques à parfait payement de ce qu'il nous doit" (*ibid.*, p. 22).

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

d'Alembert as consultant on science and mathematics. (Contrary to what has long been believed, it was not Diderot who brought d'Alembert into the enterprise, for the latter's name appears for the first time in the publishers' accounts several months earlier than that of Diderot.)[15] Diderot did, however, recruit two friends, Eidous and Toussaint, who had helped him translate James's *Medicinal Dictionary* for Briasson. Little by little a group of writers was formed, most of whom received very low piecework wages, while a few were accorded lump-sum payments for articles on specified subjects.[16] Perhaps with their previous experience in mind, the publishers offered the new editors far less generous terms than the Abbé de Gua had enjoyed: each was to receive a monthly stipend of 144 livres. D'Alembert was to earn a total of 3,000 livres (of which he had already been paid 600); Diderot was to receive 1,200 livres upon publication of the first volume and a total of 6,000 in monthly payments.[17] This suggests that the *Encyclopédie* was still conceived on a fairly modest scale, for the period of d'Alembert's projected employment may be computed from the above data at a year and a half and that of Diderot at three and a half years.

It is not altogether clear when or by whom the decision was taken to enlarge the *Encyclopédie* from the five folio volumes contemplated by Mills's Prospectus of 1745 to the ten volumes promised by Diderot's Prospectus of 1750. Possibly there was no single decision and the manuscript simply grew, as was apparently the case between 1750 and 1772, when ten volumes became twenty-eight. The collaborative plan of work doubtless tended to produce such a result, for contributors who were specialists in their own fields may well have found it difficult to keep within the limited space assigned to them; indeed, Diderot seems actually to have

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Cf. "Délibérations," *Rs.*, p. 22, under date of Oct. 19, 1747, for example: "It has also been decided that we will conclude an agreement with M. Le Roy *le fils* for the articles on clock-making, lock-making, description of mathematical instruments, and other subjects for a fee of 300 livres and a copy of *Chambers's Dictionary* when it is printed." This entry, incidentally, confirms that at the moment of Diderot's installation as chief editor the publishers were still thinking of their enterprise as a translation (with some expansion) of an existing work and not as a new and original publication.

[17] "Délibérations," *Rs.*, p. 21.

encouraged expansion in such cases.[18] Authors working on space rates had an obvious incentive to "pad" their articles, and the publishers, who planned to sell the completed work at so much per volume, had no special interest in keeping the work on a modest scale. On the other hand, there seems to be no conclusive evidence to support the subsequent charge of Luneau de Boisjermain, a dissatisfied subscriber, who accused the publishers of planning deliberately to circumvent their original promises in order to make a larger profit by selling a larger number of volumes.[19] Diderot

[18] See his article "Encyclopédie" in Vol. V (1755) of the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, . . . par une société de gens de lettres, . . .* (Paris, 1751–72; 28 vols. in folio). He explains that his method was to give each author a brief sketch of the article desired, often an article from Chambers, with a request to expand and improve; in this way, the author was less likely to be put off by the magnitude of the task (since apparently he was not being asked to produce an original piece of work) and was more likely to deliver his copy on time; in the majority of cases, moreover, the result was a new and far more substantial article because in the process of "revising" the author would little by little discard the unsatisfactory older material and add his own. Like all great editors, Diderot seems to have had a good grasp of the psychology of authorship.

[19] See notes 1 and 2 above. See also *Recueil des Mémoires composés par P.-J.-F. Luneau de Boisjermain sur le procès criminel que les sieurs Briasson et Le Breton lui ont intenté . . .* (Paris, 1770–72; 34 pièces); *Mémoires pour les libraires associés à l'Encyclopédie, contre le sieur Luneau de Boisjermain* (Paris, 1771); *Mémoire pour Luneau de Boisjermain* (Paris, 1777), MS. 4-bis, Cercle de la Librairie (Paris). Luneau de Boisjermain was an author and free-lance publisher as well as a forwarding agent for persons in the provinces wishing to obtain the books of Paris publishers more quickly and cheaply than was possible through normal channels of trade. Since his activities infringed a guild monopoly, Luneau was prosecuted in 1768 by the Syndics of the Communeauté des Libraires et Imprimeurs de Paris, who at that moment happened to be Briasson and Le Breton. To get revenge Luneau bought from one of the original subscribers a certificate that entitled him to receive the volumes yet to appear and then went into court in the role of a subscriber seeking a refund on the ground that the number of volumes was greater and the price per volume higher than originally promised. Technically his case was strong, for the conditions of the Prospectus had, indeed, not been adhered to, partly because acts of the public authority had intervened and partly because the publishers had used plausible pretexts for raising their prices, especially after 1765. Diderot, who had discovered Le Breton's treacherous tampering with his text in 1764, seems to have encouraged Luneau and to have given him much inside information; he later rallied to the publishers' side after Luneau had accused him of complicity in the "plot" to swindle the public by padding the *Encyclopédie*. The lawsuit dragged on through the courts until 1778, when Luneau, unable to prove bad faith on the part of the publishers, lost his final appeal to the Parlement of Paris. His many long legal briefs, which he had printed and distributed to the public, contain a vast amount of useful information, not only because of his knowledge of the book trade, which was exhaustive, but because he drew on Diderot's personal knowledge of the "secret history" of the encyclopedic enterprise. Finally, he was able