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ROBERT SHACKLETON 1919-1986

THE DEATH OF ROBERT SHACKLETON, Bodley's Librarian from 1966 to 1979 and thereafter Marshal Foch Professor of French Literature in the University of Oxford, has been very widely noticed in the northern hemisphere for reasons that will be at once apparent to readers of the obituaries written by scholar-librarians, bibliophiles, bibliographers and specialists in the French Enlightenment (eg. Giles Barber in *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, 1986, II, pp. 171-5 and in *Bulletin du Bibliophile*, 1987, pp. 241-4; William Barber in *French Studies*, XLI, 1987, pp. 247-9; Jean Sgard in *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Etude du XVIII^e Siècle*, n° 61, avril, 1987, p. 10; Jean Ehrard in *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 87, 1987, pp. 172-3). It may appear surprising that our Society should want to join the chorus of praise and regret, but it will be seen that Shackleton was much more than an enthusiastic visitor to Australia and that his passing deserves not only the tribute of exact reminiscence, but also a brief commentary with somewhat broader implications.

There is no need to set out in detail the imposing list of Shackleton's scholarly and administrative achievements, honours and distinctions. This task has been admirably and authoritatively performed by Giles Barber, although it is appropriate to add that the French themselves recognised the Englishman's pre-eminence in Montesquieu studies, a concession of some weight in a national tradition that is guarded with fierce jealousy. For us it is enough to remember one who did us the honour - in 1970 - of becoming a life member of the Society and who subsequently remained in touch with our endeavours. Alongside the official record one can therefore lay out some personal memories that say something about the qualities and idiosyncrasies of an exceptional individual.

Robert Shackleton's name was known to me, of course, long before he first visited this country to attend the Second David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar in Eighteenth Century Studies in August 1970. Anybody concerned with French studies and having Oxford friends could not fail to be aware of one of the dominant personalities of the profession in Britain. Four years at the Bodleian had not lessened Shackleton's commitment to scholarship, but it was the ambassador-librarian who addressed the Friends of Monash University Library and the bibliophile come bibliographer who attended the first annual meeting and conference of our Society at the State Library of Victoria. Immediately we discovered common ground in a passion for books and, more specifically, in concern with techniques for dating and localising eighteenth-century piracies. Shackleton's personal collection had provided one of the bases for Richard Sayce's celebrated 1966 article in *The Library*, and in 1979 he was to write a foreword for the reprint of *Compositorial Practices and the Localization of Printed Books 1530-1800* (Oxford Bibliographical Society, Occasional Publication n^o 13) issued after the premature death of his friend and colleague.

Apart from a pleasant interlude of unfettered exploration of the then uncatalogued pre-1801 French books of Monash University Library, Shackleton's first brief sojourn in Melbourne had an inevitable gastronomic dimension as well. At a private dinner offered by the President of the Society for speakers and distinguished guests at the conference, the habitue of European restaurants discovered - and carried away the recipe for - *salade a la d'Argenson*. It was not often that one could introduce a new book or dish to Shackleton...

Over the following decade and a half there were several opportunities to meet again, mostly in the northern hemisphere. In Oxford in 1974 our path to readers' tickets in the Bodleian was smoothed and, more important, we had a first viewing of Shackleton's splendid personal collection in his rooms at Brasenose. After we had admired an incomparable assemblage of early editions of Montesquieu - the underpinning of his Lyell Lectures of 1984 - I asked insistently and rather malapropos about Diderot, a principal concern of that particular sabbatical leave. Finally Shackleton confessed, with some embarrassment, that Giles Barber kept discovering that the so-called first editions bequeathed by Enid Starkie were piracies. Having sworn - in all sincerity - that the latter were more interesting anyway, I was rewarded by the sight not only of the deceptive reprints but also of one of only two known copies of the March 1751 issue of the *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*. Delighted at this rehabilitation of one item from the Starkie legacy, the owner immediately arranged for me to take away a photocopy of the leaves that had been added to the first issue of February 1751. For Shackleton, as for all true scholars, learning was responsible sharing with others.

The pattern continued through further encounters in 1974, in 1978, in Australia again in 1980, in Rome at a conference in 1983, in Oxford in 1984 and finally and fleetingly at the first of D.F. McKenzie's Panizzi Lectures in November 1985. The addresses of backstreet booksellers all over Western Europe were freely given, even after I brought back from one of them a Montesquieu edition (illustrated, as it happens, in the ANZEIP *Instruction*

Manual) that was not then - to Shackleton's chagrin, after quick verification in a pocket notebook - in the collection destined for the Bodleian. The confraternal spirit of collectors is stronger than any disappointment that another has reached a specific goal first.

There were constants in our contacts: a readiness to share meals, some prepared in comfort in Melbourne, others got together by expedients in cramped and ill-equipped Paris flats; the pleasure in talk about books; a certain taste for cutting academic gossip. It was a measure of Shackleton's sense of the Australian scene as well as of his commitment to Oxford that his barbs could fly at Australian prime ministers and administrators as well as hapless Cambridge librarians. Despite the visible physical disabilities of his last years there was no dimming of these qualities and characteristics. I like to remember him over a sandwich lunch in his flat in Oxford in early 1984 displaying the treasures accumulated over a lifetime and added to the day before at an antiquarian booksellers' fair in the Randolph Hotel. There was an entirely justifiable and quiet pride in his bibliophilic achievement.

Shackleton's prejudices and loyalties were open for all to see. He made little effort to conceal his distaste for the direction - theoretical, speculative, anti-empirical - literary studies have taken everywhere in recent years. Telephoned in Oxford during the winter of 1980-1981 during a period of convalescence, he admitted that only a French subject would have induced him to travel to Cambridge for my Sandars Lectures. Suggestions in my paper at the Rome conference that Sayce, whatever the undeniable merits of his 1966 article, had not said the last work on compositorial practices were received a little as though this were *lèse-majesté*. His allegiance to tradition even took unexpected forms: having arrived early and in need of rest before a dinner party in Melbourne in 1980, he elected to settle in a quiet corner with my copy of the 1631 second edition of the works of Malherbe. Clearly refreshed, he was as trenchant later in his judgements as the merciless founding arbiter of French classicism.

On one point of interest to Australian bibliographers Shackleton formed the opinion in 1970 that, despite a promising beginning, the National Library of Australia was far from possessing an appropriately strong eighteenth-century and Enlightenment collection. This moved him, several years later, to propose to the then Director-General an arrangement whereby, in return for an immediate payment, the non-Montesquieu part of his personal library would pass to Canberra after his death which, even in 1978, he did not see as very far distant. I made a written appraisal of the collection's scholarly value after a visit to Oxford early in 1978, and I believe others were involved in the negotiations. In the event the National Library declined to play Catherine the Great to Shackleton's Diderot. The unusualness of the arrangement and the presence of many duplicates were alleged as reasons for the decision. The John Rylands University Library of Manchester was for its part quite happy to sign a highly advantageous contract and to reinforce resources that were already superior to Canberra's. Must bureaucratic rigidity and lack of imagination lose us every opportunity?

Robert Shackleton's was a life that bore witness to the necessary union of scholarship and acquisitive ingenuity in librarians. In a world in which, it is now increasingly clear, great public reference libraries may have to take over from universities as the centres and propagators of humanistic culture it will be important to encourage that sort of creative skill alongside routine administrative competence and professional expertise. The values that Shackleton defended on numerous occasions, notably at our annual meeting in 1980, are more than ever indispensable and must not be allowed to pass from among us.

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