An Introduction to Nineteenth Century France.

Lough, John and Muriel Lough. *An Introduction to Nineteenth Century France.* London: Longman, 1978. x + 350 pp.

Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamus in illis. At recent meetings in North America of professional historians, a majority has finally opined that the "New History," that is social history, is not going to go away. The one hundredth issue of *Daedalus* in 1970 (later re-published as *Historical Studies Today,* F. Gilbert and S. Braubard, eds. [New York: W. W. Norton, 1972]) put a final seal on the proposition.

To historians of education, the lateness of this discovery is cause for a little polite merriment. History of education and the "new" history, while not coterminous in content or aims, have certainly grown in harmony as well in numbers of practitioners at least since 1960. The slowness of older learned societies to acknowledge these facts has yet fully to be explained.

North Americans must, then, be surprised at the wide acceptance in European academic circles of studies in the history of education. The book here under review makes this point very well indeed, if by implication.

John and Muriel Lough set out to produce a textbook on nineteenth century French history—economic, political and "social"—for university and advanced secondary school students interested primarily in French literature. Someone, after all, has to introduce these aesthetes to the "real" world of politics, power and money, the context in which literature comes to be. In doing so, the Loughs appear to have read perhaps two hundred recent books and articles on French history produced in France and in the English-speaking world since 1950. At the same time, of course, they have drawn from a much broader acquaintance with nineteenth century French fiction and poetry.

In the light of all this, it is most significant that the Loughs' book devotes no less than 15 percent of its pages to public and private education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Twenty years ago, it should not have been necessary in a cramming manual (which is the essential character of this book) to do so. But in deriving an account of nineteenth century French society from recent historical and literary publications, the Loughs necessarily made the evolution of education in France an essential element of their account. For at least a tenth of French books, articles and theses on the period produced since 1960 have in some way to do with education. An interesting, and perhaps clinching fact about the evolution of French historical studies in the 1970s: No. 4 of *Histoire de l'Education,* a new periodical published by the Institut National de la Recherche Pédagogique, Paris, issued April 1979, and containing no less than 1,134 items in a single bibliographical list of articles, theses and books in the field from the year *1976 alone.*

The Lough *Introduction,* although faithfully reporting the content of other peoples' recent historical researches, is of little interpretive value. There is one massive exception to this generalization, to which we shall presently return.

Almost everywhere, there is evidence that the Loughs have only a nodding acquaintance with rich French archives on which they might have drawn. I am concerned here chiefly with educational issues, so offer an example or two of weakness on this score only.

The *Introduction* contains extensive discussions of education and literacy. They are both the book's chief weakness and its main strength. In their work on literacy among nineteenth century French men and women, the Loughs quite rightly point to the wide range of commercial, familial and religious experiences that might make a person functionally literate (by whatever definition). At the same time, however, they make claims both implicit and explicit about the lack of a widespread and accessible system of public education, claims that do not stand archival scrutiny. One has the impression that an enormous building boom followed the introduction of compulsory elementary education under the Ferry legislation, 1880-1882. But as the T series in any of the provincial archives will show, and as F 17 shows in the Archives Nationales in Paris, the building was necessary not because there had been no schools before 1880—but because they were so abominably housed that new buildings had become absolutely necessary. In the six *départments* which together constituted the academic region (Academie) of Caen, only three tiny communes were unprovided with elementary schools as early as 1870 (many of them, admittedly, Catholic schools). Some regions of the country were worse off, but not many. The big problem of the 1870s was that of finding money for public building of any kind, particularly until the reparations bill from the recent Franco-Prussian War (1870) had been met. At any rate, little of this explanatory material found its way into the Lough volume.

Perhaps worse, the Loughs failed to take seriously the function of the public education system as a device for social and geographic mobility. This is now so well known and established a fact that its absence from the *Introduction to Nineteenth Century France* leaves one a little breathless. It may well have been true that at least some peasant boys and girls pressed on with schooling and with learning to read and write, precisely because it meant a way out of their social predicament.

This weakness in the book is all the more inexplicable considering its overwhelming strength in one department: the authors' treatment of the *writer and and his public* in nineteenth century France. There is no other single treatment of the status, likely geographic origins, training (both formal and informal) and likelihood of financial return for the whole class of French writers so lucid and insightful as that of John and M. Lough. It is, of course, to be expected from the author (John Lough) who produced *The Writer and his Public in France From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). Still, it is a signal achievement, and probably justifies the purchase of the volume. Here, the Loughs very nearly make up for their earlier interpretive and documentary lapses. Certainly, they point the way (one hopes) to comparable volumes on writers and their publics in a great many other nations.

A last quibble: if any single section of the book demonstrates the need for a bit more homework, it must be the final list of "Suggested Readings." Almost incredibly, it misses the first volume of Theodore Zeldin's *France, 1848-1945: Ambition, Love and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1976), and such easily accessible English translations as Georges Dupeux's influential *French Society, 1789-1970* (London: Methuen, 1976). This last named book is so interesting that it may have caused the Loughs to wonder why they had produced their own. Could academic pique explain the absence of the other volumes? Surely not, although the volumes that *are* included are of such doubtful and mixed value that one must needs consider the possibility.

Still and all, this reader found the summary of French educational history provided by the Loughs a most convenient one, and actually relished the final third of the volume, filled as it is with the intricacies of that most bizarre of relationships: that between writer, publisher and public.

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