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978-0-521-08127-6 - Leibniz in Paris, 1672-1676: His Growth to Mathematical Maturity

Joseph E. Hofmann

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HIS GROWTH TO
MATHEMATICAL MATURITY

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To my very dear wife and
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PREFACE

The original German edition (Munich 1949) of this book, completed in manuscript in 1946, was, unavoidably, to a large extent based on shorthand excerpts from sources that could not at that time, immediately after the end of the war, be checked and verified. When, therefore, twenty years later, Mr A. Prag of Oxford and Mr D. T. Whiteside of Cambridge approached me with a proposal for preparing its English translation, it soon became clear to me that the original text would require thorough revision, now that its documentation could be based directly on sources once again fully available, and correction following standard new editions which had appeared in the meantime.

The present revised translation may serve to supplement the first volume, now in the press, of Leibniz' *Mathematisch-naturwissenschaftlich-technischer Briefwechsel* (in the third series of the current Berlin Academy edition of his *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*). This contains all texts, derived wherever possible from the Latin, English, French, Dutch and German primary manuscripts relating to Leibniz' formative stay in Paris during 1672–6, together with a general introduction, explanatory notes and detailed indexes. The present monograph seeks to make known to a wider circle of readers what seems to me the essence of this textual volume, stressing the complicated interconnections and developments of this period of Leibniz' life. To make clear to what extent Leibniz was indebted to others and how he himself reacted to such external stimulating influences, I discuss on the one hand the many communications sent to him or to which he had access: where it will become evident that his main advance was to synthesize their isolated results in an ingenious and perceptive manner; and on the other hand I draw for enlightenment on his surviving research papers and annotations, most as yet still unprinted. For the notes made during his stay in Paris we have Rivaud's brief indications of their content in his *Catalogue critique* of the Hanover manuscripts, but this can, because of its highly

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condensed form, serve merely for a first orientation. We may also there find detailed locations of the manuscripts, and in the present work therefore I add such information only when we have to do with papers not listed in the *Catalogue*. By such a policy I hope to render my presentation easier to follow, shortening the footnotes without, I trust, sacrificing their scholarly exactitude. With the same end in view I have condensed the references by employing codings whose denotations are given in the list of abbreviations. All dates of letters quoted are given in full with corresponding Gregorian (New Style) dates supplied in parentheses when appropriate – where only one form appears, the date is the New Style; moreover, since the British New Year then began on 25 March, it is convenient to add the equivalent Gregorian figure: thus for instance I write ‘25 January (4 February) 1675/6’. In citing printed works a main consideration has been the wish to refer to those which Leibniz himself saw or to which he might reasonably have had access. Where able to quote reliable modern editions, I refer the reader to the best – in the case of letters generally to one only, so as not to overburden the chronological register. Books are cited by standard short-titles by which they will be readily identifiable. Papers and treatises by the main characters in our story are listed not in the general chronological register but will be found under their author in the Index of names. As an exception, papers first published in contemporary periodicals are briefly cited in the chronological index, with cross-reference to the author index where the full titles appear; the periodicals themselves are listed separately. Books and papers by secondary authors are noted individually in the footnotes, usually with their date of publication, in an abbreviated form, keyed to the author index, thus avoiding a separate listing of modern literature.

For the translation itself and for their continuous assistance in reshaping my text I owe both A. Prag and D. T. Whiteside a deeply felt debt of gratitude; I am also grateful for their many services to the members of the Leibniz Archive in Hanover: K. Müller, A. Heinekamp, H. Immel and H.-J. Hess – the last of whom has also helped with the proof-reading; to C. J. Scriba and his Berlin colleagues M. Folkerts and E. Knobloch; to W. Totok, Director of the Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek in Hanover for his ready assistance; and above all to my wife Josepha for her unswerving support and quiet collaboration.

If any reader of the book concerned over its finer detail is thereby

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stimulated to undertake further research of his own into the origins and development of Leibniz' mathematical ideas, then I would feel that my primary purpose in making this modest contribution to its continuing story has been achieved.

Ichenhausen
May 1972

J. E. HOFMANN

Early in October 1972 Professor Hofmann sent a last addition to his notes for this book incorporating one of his most recent finds in the Leibniz manuscripts. On 9 November he was knocked down by a motor-car while on his early morning walk and some six months later he died – on 7 May 1973, two months after his 73rd birthday.