

Another voice: the history of England for Catholic children of 1850

John A Marmion

In the study of English school text books on history by Valerie Chancellor there are a number of the texts used in the Catholic schools of the time, but the one under review here was not known to her. Her *History for their Masters: Opinion in the English History Textbooks 1800 - 1914* published by Kelley (New York 1970) looks at one hundred and fifty texts, but only a few of these were written for Catholic schools, and none earlier than the work under consideration. This has been omitted from previous study as it is an extremely rare book, and was thought to have been lost. But now that a text is to hand it is worth considering it against the backcloth so well provided in Chancellor's work.

The History of England was published in 1850 with no author's name given, though actually by Emily Bowles, who was at that time a nun in the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, and who went on to publish a number of works, though none of them for schools.¹ The publishers were Bums and Lambert of London who were producing various works for the Catholic community in England. The volume has 402 pages with a further eight of appendices. There is a frontispiece engraving of the meeting of Edward III with the Black Prince after the Battle of Crecy. The small volume is three and a half inches by five and a half, cloth bound. Emily Bowles produced a second and final edition (which I have not seen) in 1866.

The author, Emily Bowles, came from a well-to-do family, and she and her brother Frederick became Catholics in the Oxford Movement, while two other brothers John and Samuel remained Protestants. Frederick joined the Oratory with Newman in 1847, while Emily joined Cornelia Connelly at Derby in the foundation of a new religious order for the education of girls in 1846. Six years later she was sent to Liverpool as superior to found a convent and school. Later she borrowed, without permission, money to found a teacher training college and ran the Society into a debt of six thousand pounds. In this crisis she was removed as superior in December 1854, and two years later Bishop Goss of Liverpool dispensed her from her vows and she left the Society. Although she had written *The History of England* while a nun, so that legally it was the property of the Society, Cornelia Connelly allowed her to take the copyright with her, in spite of the crippling debt in which she left the new order.²

Obviously from the date of publication the work was written before Emily Bowles went to Liverpool, and was intended for the schools which the Society was founding. These were poor schools in London, and later Liverpool (for a time), Preston, and what was then called middle schools in St Leonards on Sea, Blackpool, and later York. While the work would not seem to be suitable for the poor schools, for a while it was certainly used in the others, and seems to have justified the second edition.

In the general context of school histories

The works studied by Valerie Chancellor are various in their mode of presentation; some of the earlier texts are in the form of a catechism of history, with questions and brief answers. These were hardly likely to excite any real interest in history, and could be numbered among those castigated in the Taunton report as 'neither knowledge nor interest is excited by the sort of manuals it is now profitable to work at.'³ But Marshall, a Catholic Inspector in 1853 in his report was arguing for the importance of history in the poor schools, reporting that Holy Cross boys in Edinburgh 'Incomparably the best boys's school I have visited' covered the whole of British history by home reading in the third class. And a little mixed school (boys and girls) founded by Sir Charles Tempest at Broughton (Yorks) had introduced history a couple of years ago very successfully, and with no loss to other subjects.⁴ So there was a market in the Catholic schools, even in the poor schools, for a text, and further publications throughout the Victorian years confirm this.⁵

Chancellor has noted that the history texts become more jingoistic towards the end of the nineteenth century and that heroes like Drake, Grenville, Marlborough, Wolfe, Clive, Nelson and Wellington, as well as the Victorian favourites, Havelock and Gordon, predominate, though somewhat balanced by more peaceful men like Stephenson and Wilberforce, but, she adds, the latter are in the minority.⁶ She found problems about some of the religious opinions expressed, and that 'a convenient scapegoat at home for the shortcomings of the past was provided by the Roman Catholic minority'.⁷ Most of the textbooks were overwhelmingly Protestant in character; (she excludes Flanagan, Drane and Livesey as obviously by Catholic writers), and notes that some have used Lingard. In actual fact Cobbett used Lingard with characteristic licence as his basis for his *History of the Protestant Reformation*, a work which had, by contemporary standards a huge circulation. Apart from noting these religious biases Chancellor also finds that many of the textbooks have clear social implications; when power had passed to the upper middle classes their standards, were held as the ideal, and only towards the end of the period were expressions of disapproval and contempt for the lower classes even modified. The books confirmed the English constitution, and constitutional progress, and were clearly against revolutionary doctrine, and even against the Chartists. The texts were designed to educate the rising generation to uphold the traditions of society, rather than to reform them. Clear opinions were expressed about morality, the virtue of thrift, and the place of England in the world; most writers had exalted views of Britain's achievement and place in the world. In many texts the Whig view of history, which Lingard had challenged, still predominated. And in some Hume was obviously the master. While the monarchy was sacrosanct, individual kings were often subjected to fierce scrutiny. Finally there was very often a certain simplicity in the opinions expressed about the past. This was a characteristic and a striking feature.

With this general view of a wide range of history texts, it is possible to look at the work of Emily Bowles, and place it in the context of its time.

Characteristics of The History of England

There are fifty-eight chapters covering the centuries from the Ancient Britons to Catholic Emancipation and 'our present condition'. The text is continuous without illustrations (other than the [frontispiece](#)). There are however a few literary breaks. So in the midst of the Crusades and Richard the Lion-Heart there is a diversion to Robin Hood's piety, and that the only sorrow he had was not being able to go to Mass always on Sundays. This observation is followed by a fragment of one of the poems of the time.

In summer, when the shaws be sheen
And leaves be large and long,
It is full merrie in faire forest
To hear the blackbird's song;

And the sixth and final verse reads;

'The one thing that grieves me,' said Robin,
And does my heart much woe,
That I may not, no solem day,
To Mass nor Matins go.

Later she quotes a song written by Montrose before his execution, and some controversial verses written by the Jacobites.

Some chapters could well have been read to a class. So, for example, she relates how Cardinal Langton came to England, and together with the Bishops and Barons combined to stop King John from doing any more mischief; and with the Charter of Henry the First restored lost liberties. She lists some of these (though inexplicably leaves out the first 'ut ecclesia anglicana libera sit'), and advises the pupils that the Charter is in the British Museum, where they could see it. She finishes the long chapter with the loss of the crown jewels in the Wash and the king's death at Newark. And she adds, characteristically; he ordered his body be buried near

St Wulfstan's shrine in Worcester Cathedral; so that even this most miserable king upon his deathbed turned with reverence to the relics of the blessed Saints; and thus we see that the great and mighty of this world are forced to recognise and bear witness to God's chosen Friends and Servants.

The history tends very much to turn around kings, battles and struggles with the Church. Kings are often characterized, the Sea Kings, the Red King, the Scholar King, the Lion Heart, the Usurper, the Hunchback, the Wicked King (Henry VIII), Foolish King James, Holy King James, the Dutch King, and the final style is that good kings are brave handsome and generous (with occasional lapses noted); others are wicked, often ugly and sometimes cowardly. The contrasts are clearly and sharply drawn. And opinions are very definite, even in chapter headings, such as 'The Dutch King and England's Shame' (ch. XLIX).

In some of her general treatment and judgements she would seem to be using Lingard's *The History of England* which in ten volumes covers the centuries from the invasion of the Romans to the accession of William and Mary. The first portion of this had appeared in 1819 and his complete work was available by the end of 1849. Moreover there was available to the nuns at St Leonards an extensive library belonging to the old priest, Mr Jones, who was something of an antiquarian. It included a *Metrical History of England* by Thomas Dibdin (1818) in two volumes, various sets of Lingard, including his *Anglo Saxon Church* with a note within indicating that it was to be read at dinner time on Sundays and Feasts after the readings of the day. There were also copies of Cobbett, Maitland and Fleury. There was a copy of Mary Ann Rundall's *Symbolic Illustrations of the History of England* of 1815.⁸ Though not in Mr. Jones's library, the school at some date also possessed Maria Callicott, *Little Arthur's History of England*, Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England* in eight volumes; though the edition is 1851; Rollin, *Ancient History* 1770, and Richmal Mangnall's *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions* in an edition of 1852. As not all the books in use can have survived (the Society of the Holy Child Jesus could not find a single copy of Bowles history in all their convents!) these remnants are a fair indicator of the works which were available to Emily Bowles in her work.

I have only compared some of her passages with Lingard's treatment to find that she uniformly simplifies the accounts, and often misses many of his more measured judgments. Her description of the departure of the Romans suggests that she had a romantic view of their rule; the Romans were obliged to go home to defend their own country. Before they went, they built a wall from one side of Britain to the other, that is, from the German Ocean to the Solway Firth, to prevent the Picts and Scots from coming in, and then they sailed away, and left the poor Britons to take care of themselves. As soon as they had set sail, the Picts and Scots appeared in great crowds, and laid the whole north of the country waste. The Britons were carried away to be made slaves, with their corn and cattle, and their houses and barns were burned. In their misery the Britons sighed for the kind, gentle government of their old masters.

She is of the opinion, firmly expressed, that the Plantagenets were better than the Tudors. The historian Hume is dismissed as a Protestant and an infidel. William the Conqueror when dying leaves the kingdom to William and five thousand pounds to Henry. About to deal with the two of them Emily Bowles warns her young readers, 'Certainly, you will not like either of these selfish princes'. Pope Innocent the Third is depicted through the interdict as restoring the ancient right of the people in England, and King John is dismissed as the very worst king in our history. A contrast is provided by plenty of saints from St Neot advising Alfred, to Joan of Arc, Thomas More, St Edmund of Abingdon, Edward the Confessor. St Dunstan, Thomas Becket, John Fisher; Charles the First made a brave death, and Charles the Second had the help of Fr Hudleston (who had helped him after the battle of Worcester) on his deathbed. William Pitt is clearly something of a hero of the author, and writing of Nelson and the battle on the Nile, she quotes the verses of *The Boy stood on the burning deck*, as the pleasantest thing to think of in these battles. She finishes her work with some pages on the changes in society in general, with railways, gas lighting, and best of all the end of the persecution of Catholics, and their spread throughout the kingdom with a final page on the role of Bishop Wiseman. Wiseman had requested the foundation of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, and had been a patron for a while.

Conclusion.

Her work is a clear improvement on the catechisms of history which were in use in some of the schools. It is

also superior to many of the continuous texts available in the mid-nineteenth century.⁹ It is not over jingoistic, but shows a proper pride in the country. It is optimistic in its view for the Catholic community, and is able to correct some of the popular prejudices of the time. The presence of saints in the text gives a welcome relief from kings and princes, and there are occasional excursions into a little social history, and attempts to relate to poetry and literature which could easily be extended in class. To this extent it is a very open text, and indicates it is the work of a teacher and not (as some were) a university lecturer, or an author away from the pressures of the classroom. As an introduction to geography the final appendix offers a list of the English Colonies, which include four in Europe(!), Gibraltar, Heligoland, Malta and the Ionian islands, together with their produce. The rest of the colonies are more obvious, and the final lines suggest the confidence of imperialism; this completes that chain of our country's possessions, which literally girdles the globe. Clearly a voice from another age.

Availability of this text

In an article in *Paradigm* 12 Dec. 1993, I indicated that no copy of *The History of England* was available, and that I could not get an answer from the two libraries in the US said to be in possession of one. Chris Stray wrote to say that it might be possible to track one down and asked whether I had tried the internet. He mounted a search and eventually a microfilm of the whole text was purchased from UCLA. Shortly afterwards Pat Garrett found a copy which she passed on to Chris Stray and he to this author. The Microfilm is now in the Mayfield Archives of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and the textbook will also be lodged there soon. My grateful thanks to Chris Stray and Pat Garrett.

Notes

1. Valerie E. Chancellor, *History for their Masters: Opinion in the English History Textbook, 1800-1914* (New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1970). For Emily Bowles see Radegunde Flaxman, *A Woman Styled Bold: The Life of Cornelia Connelly, 1809-1879* (London: 1991). The whole of chapter ten is concerned with the financial crises and Emily Bowles' role in this. For a list of her publications I have used the National Union Catalog 70; 418, which gives *Auriel Selwode* (1908); *In the Camargue* (1873-1877); *Irish Diamonds* (1864); *The Life of St Jane Frances Fremyot de Chantal* (1872, 1874, 1888); *Madame de Maintenon* (1888); *A Sister's Story* (1868) translated from the French.
2. In a religious order the member of the community is supported by the Order, and in return their works belong to the order. Normally a lady joining a convent would bring a dowry which would be returnable if at a later stage she left.
3. The reference to Taunton is from D. Beales, *The Student's Text Book of English and General History*. Further references will be found in J.L. Dobson 'The teaching of history in English grammar Schools and Private Schools 1830-1870' *Durham Research Review*, Sept 1957 pp 129-141, esp p. 134.
4. Marshall's report is in *The Catholic School* III (ii), Oct, 1854, p. 79. I have used a microfilm of this as it is rare.
5. I think Chancellor missed James Burke, *Abridgement of the History of England* by John Lingard. Adapted for the use of schools (Dublin 1854); Townsend (=John Morrisey?) *An Introduction to English History from the Text of J. Lingard*. Arranged for the use of schools. (Dublin 1867). An Ursuline nun in Cork had already produced some interesting texts; Sister Mary Ursula Young, *Sketch of Irish History by way of Question and Answer for the Use of Schools* (Cork 1815). *Questions on the History of the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Ireland*. (Cork 1815). Her work is studied by Alfred O'Rahilly in 'An Ursuline writer on Irish History' *Journal of the Cork Historical & Archeological Society* 47, 1942. Also *A System of Chronology facilitated by the Mnemonics for the Use of*