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Cornelia Connelly and School Textbooks

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Cornelia Connelly was the foundress of the Holy Child nuns and an outstanding educationalist. Although she was an American by birth, and brought up an Episcopalian, she found herself in Derby in 1845 in the course of creating an order of catholic nuns with the education of girls as their main vocation. In her work she was a contemporary of Liverpool's Blackburne House and about a decade ahead of Miss Buss and Miss Beale, and far wider than either in what she achieved. By the time of her death in 1879 her society had made seventeen foundations, mostly in England, but also in France and America. The majority of these were schools for the poor, but there were also middle schools (in the Victorian sense of the term) and one training college at St. Leonard's on Sea. Many of the foundations combined a poor school and a middle school on adjacent sites, with one helping to finance the other. There were also orphanages. And behind all these projects was a definite and well developed philosophy of education, embodied in her *Book of Studies* (1863). During the period 1846 to 1879 some 244 nuns had been professed in the Society, and the majority of them trained as teachers.¹

Very fortunately an abundance of material remained to illustrate the quality of the schools which the nuns were running in the nineteenth century, even down to some teachers' notes and pupils' work. But two areas presented difficulty. There is no adequate study of the work of the Teaching Orders, so that it required some wide research to situate the work of Cornelia Connelly within general church history. And although the nuns had preserved some of the original textbooks, the present knowledge of nineteenth century textbooks for girls' schools in England was somewhat fragmentary. Moreover there seemed to be a dearth of them in the John Rylands University Library where the research was undertaken. So at this stage I began to assemble a collection, against which to evaluate the quality of choice the foundress had made in her selection and to serve also as reference material for a thesis on the subject.²

The *Book of Studies* was first published by the Society in 1863, and was normally known by this title, though in full it is *The Book of the Order of Studies in the Schools of the S.[ociety of the] Holy Child Jesus*. The use of 'order of studies' suggests a relationship with the famous *ratio studiorum* of the Jesuits, which has been extensively studied, and was widely influential for centuries. It is known that Cornelia had been looking at this, but she was certainly independent and experienced, by virtue of her American education and bringing up her own daughters, to know that something different was needed for girls. *The Book of Studies* also provided both a syllabus and a method of teaching. It also gives references to textbooks which by 1863 were in use in the schools. As there were plenty of other sources specifying the texts, and some books were still in the archives, it was easy to build up a substantial list of books used by the Society. This then raised the question of the quality of the choice which the nuns had made.

Their choice was influenced by three of the Inspectors of the day, Stokes, Marshall and Matthew Arnold. It is not possible to trace how many of the 260 books were entirely a personal selection or the result of advice, but they comprise a rare view of texts used by pupils, mistresses and also students in the training college. They included foreign texts in French and Italian (Cornelia had learnt both these languages), plays, works on art and drawing as well as the more commonplace texts on arithmetic, geography and English literature, as well as grammars, teachers' manuals, histories and religious textbooks.³ It is possible to offer a bald list of them, and the conclusion that those chosen were among the best available. There is just a hint that the nuns were not entirely satisfied with what was available, and they printed a few things of their own, including some cards

for use in learning foreign languages, a history of England and a book of poems, *Legends of Our Lady & The Saints* (1870).

A surprise item in the list was citologie, which turned out to be the work of H. A. Dupont (1767-1855), a phonetic method (if teaching how to read quickly, and there was a copy of Blackstone's *English Constitution* which may have been used in the training college. The greatest strength in the whole collection was the textbooks for an art course, the like of which was not to be found in English schools until the last decade of the century, under the influence of William Morris. This was not to provide accomplishments for genteel young ladies, since at least part of the art course was taught in the 'poor schools'. Cornelia's philosophy was that art as a discipline ranked immediately after reading and writing, and was a universal language, and also a discipline which called for close attention, leading to wonderment and contemplation. In the middle of the last century inspectors often lamented the lack of books in the poor schools; by contrast some of the reports note the abundance of them found in her nuns' schools.

Early in the nineteenth century Ireland may have been producing more appropriate school-books through the work of the Kildare Place Society. The Sunday schools in England were supported by the publications of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The Christian Brothers in Ireland followed this lead, as shown by Brother Michael O'Loughlin's account book.⁴ From Sommerstown in 1849 to 1856 he was carefully reading the textbooks he was distributing in England through a number of outlets. Some of the inspectors queried the selection of reading texts in the Christian Brothers series of readers, but this series was quite extensively used in catholic schools for a number of decades. There is an interesting collection of all these still to be seen in Dublin.⁵ A final interesting, and often tantalising, source was the advertisements at the back of many of the publications themselves. Sources such as these give some indication of works for schools in England in the middle of the last century, few if any of which are available to scholars, even in university libraries. This further prompted the desire to accumulate a personal collection.

A wide range of books was found, ranging from Mrs. Marcet's *Conversations on Chemistry*, which had been a spur to the career of Michael Faraday, to some of the *Royal Readers* published by Nelson. There were spelling and grammar books from the works of William Cobbett to William Irvine's *The Parts of Speech*; the SPCK *Supplement to the Third Reading Book - scriptural and miscellaneous lessons*, and many anonymous spelling books. History books included some copies of Ince's *Outlines* which Dorothea Beales thought inculcated 'Romish doctrines'. (I looked but did not find what she was objecting to.) The Brothers of the Christian Schools published *A Treatise on Modern Geography* in London in 1842; the SPCK their *Elements of Geography* in 1860. Many texts on arithmetic by James Trotter were found. Ingram's *Principles of Arithmetic* seems to have started in 1826 and had reached a fifty-eighth edition by 1885. James Reed offered the (undated) *Arithmetic for Schools*. And in this fashion names and lists became realities, and the collection grew to about four hundred titles.

I was particularly grateful to previous workers in the field: authors such as Valerie Chancellor, whose *History for their masters: opinion in the English history textbook, 1800-1914* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970) was most valuable of all, Ian Michael, Vaughan, McHugh, Harper and Hodgson and others listed below. The history of educational theory is important, but even more vital is the study of what actually happened in the schools, and this cannot be realistically achieved without attention to the books available. It was therefore a matter of regret that an SHCJ text *History of England for Catholic Children* proved to be unavailable. This book was first published anonymously in 1850, and later with an abbreviated title, the 'author given as Emily Bowles in 1866 and the publisher as Peter Cunningham. There is no copy in Cambridge University Library or the British Library. According to the National Union Catalog (70. p. 418) there are two in the USA but letters to the libraries proved to be unsuccessful.

References

1. Those who wish to know more of a considerable lady and her achievement will look to *A Woman Styled Bold* by Radeuncle Flaxman (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1991) and for her domestic struggles Julianne Wadham, *The Case of Cornelia Connelly* (Collins, 1956). After Vatican II her order has tended to reduce commitment to schools, except on the foreign missions, in favour of various works where they can contribute specialist skills. The reasoning behind this is that the need in nineteenth century England was to provide education for the poorest section of society, but now that this is well catered for the sisters can best serve the community by meeting other areas of need.

2. Marmion, John P. *Cornelia Connelly's work in Education, 1848-1879*. Doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 1984. (University Microfilms ref: 8602723)

3. For the full list of books, see Marmion *op. cit.* pp. 95-104.

4. 6th January, 1849 to 8th February 1856. The original is now in the Archives of the Christian Brothers Generalate in Rome. A xerox copy was supplied to the author by courtesy of the Christian Brothers in Ireland. Their O'Connell School (North Richmond Street, Dublin) has a remarkable collection of their textbooks. Sir Joshua Fitch criticised the 'Irish books', particularly as readers, but a quick survey of the reading books of the Christian brothers suggested to me that for their day they were a very good start.

5. *Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education* (London) vol. 50 (1847-8) XI-XXV & pp.24-25. *Parliamentary Papers 1854* vol. 51 pp. 540-547; *ibid. 1850* vol. 44. pp. 666-668, for examples of inspectors' reports giving lists of textbooks for schools. To this may be added the *Minutes of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland*.

[Canon Marmion has generously presented his collection to the John Rylands Library, in the hope that it can be maintained intact and used by other scholars, since his professional duties prevent his developing it further.
Ed]