

# The Catholic Boys at Ackworth

## From Letters before and after their time there

By way of Appendix to the article by Reginald Reynolds on "The Catholic Boys at Ackworth" (*Journal F.H.S.*, vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 57-71) we are glad to print the following extracts from letters between members of the Dziewicki family. These personal communications between members of the family, supplied by John S. Stephens, amplify most interestingly and further elucidate the story of the conversion of the boys to the Roman Catholic faith and of Michael Henry's subsequent migration to Poland and adoption of Polish nationality.

Dr. Marek Waysblum has contributed an illuminating note which is printed at the end of the letters.

SINCE Reginald Reynolds wrote on *The Catholic Boys at Ackworth* I have found among the belongings of their sister, Gertrude Dziewicka, a small packet of letters from her brothers. Those from Michael Henry to herself cover only the last two years of his life, 1926-1928. Most of them are written from Cracow. On 22nd January, 1927, he wrote of their father, Severin B. Dziewicki :

" He was an extraordinarily versatile man. Reading Latin poets, writing poetry (Polish, of course), making friends with all the cultured professors he came into contact with, making electrical machines and giving us shocks with Leyden jars ; expert in foreign cookery, in gardening, in brewing beer, in raising tomatoes in our garden (in those days nobody knew what a tomato was, at least in the West of England)—and so on, and so on. He had a taste for pretty nearly everything—except saving money. Had he had *that* (for I know he earned a great deal by his lessons) things might have turned out very differently for all of us. But he liked to show off—what you now call swank. But he was a man of great courage and self-control in an emergency. I remember how one evening as we were going about Aylestone Hill with Mother and him, some drunken men came behind us singing, and one of them approached lurching behind Mother, and singing Good-night ! Father expected some outrage. He did not say one word, but silently cudgelled the man about the legs five or six times. The man whined ' What you doin' that for ? I didn't hurt you ! ' and slunk away, much sobered. Father never said one word but continued his walk. I didn't know what it all meant, I was perhaps eight then, but I felt very proud of Father. And Mother too, I suppose.

“ My father took the unwise risk of going to Poland to visit Uncle Roman with an English passport : he was in danger of Siberia. He gave Edward a beating (English fashion) for being naughty, and old Mme. D. was not even huffed !<sup>1</sup>

“ He certainly had great talents of making himself liked by everybody, and loved by some. Mother and he quarrelled sometimes, I know, but they made it up directly. Mother was enormously under his influence, that was almost magnetic. If he had tried, he would have made me worship him, but he loved Theodore better—and showed it very plainly sometimes. Yet, at others, I remember him very tenderly. You see he passed like lightning from one mood to another, quite what Bourget in his *Cosmopolis* calls ‘ l’instantanéité slave.’ Yes, and makes me hope for him. Who knows but what, in his last instants, struggling in the icy waters of the Lugg, he may have turned instantaneously to God with sorrow for any misdeeds in the past ! ”

In another letter Michael Henry Dziewicki took up the subject again :

“ I am writing in the old Quaker strain—my grandfather’s inheritance, and my father’s too, who often had, as my mother had too, fortnights and more of religious ardour.”

The boyish memories here recorded must go back to Henry’s<sup>2</sup> days as a pupil at the Hereford Cathedral School.

At this point I must begin to quote the letters which the three brothers wrote from their school at Polignan to their sister Mary at the Ursuline Convent at Boulogne. In one of these Henry at the age of eighteen idealizes the home of their childhood at Hereford :

“ O, we were happy then. Dear Mary, neither you nor I have forgotten that time. How could we forget Rose Cottage, with its honeysuckle porch, and its green lawn, and its beautiful apple trees loaded with fruits ? Alas ! it seems to me as a dream of Paradise.”

In the register of Sibford School, Henry’s arrival is recorded on 23rd October, 1862. As there were then no Christmas holidays he must have been at school at the time of his father’s death. Theodore, nearly three years his junior, followed him there on 24th July, 1863. In his first letter to G. K. Hibbert, 9th May, 1922, Henry wrote of his time at Sibford : “ I took up the teaching and doctrines of the Society of Friends so heartily that I even thought of asking to become a member.” Both brothers were assiduous

<sup>1</sup> Madame Dziewicka (Aunt Theophila) once told Gertrude that this visit was in 1859. Such was the exiled revolutionary’s prestige that she took no offence when he thus chastised her small boy.

<sup>2</sup> I refer to him as Henry, the name by which his relations knew him.

contributors of essays at meetings of the Leisure Hour Improvement Society. On 8th August, 1864, Henry received a prize of two shillings for an essay on "Temperance." Other subjects of his essays were "The Human Frame" and "The Lion." He was evidently happy at Sibford and enjoyed Robert Mennell's gift of photographs of the school which he had not seen for nearly sixty years. In a letter to Gertrude, the old man wrote of "Sibford and its neighbourhood, all yellow stones and yellow earth."

We know from Henry's letter to Gerald Hibbert how their grandfather removed the boys and sent them with their younger brother, Roman, aged only seven, to school at Polignan in the Haute Garonne. They arrived on Henry's fourteenth birthday, 21st March, 1865, only a week after leaving Sibford. The first of their letters, dated 30th April, is written in tolerably good French by Theodore to Mary, already at Boulogne. In it he says that he had thought it was impossible for their mother to come and hopes that she will not come yet. Did the boys travel alone, crossing to Boulogne and leaving Mary there? No escort is mentioned or implied. A further question must now be asked. Who induced Joseph Jones to send the four children to Catholic schools? A clue is provided by their younger sister Gertrude,<sup>1</sup> who followed Mary to Poland and spent some years teaching the children of Princess Woroniecka at Kanie, near Lublin. Soon after starting work in October, 1886, she wrote :

"The Countess Bodenham is her (Princess W.'s) Aunt, so I expect she will be writing to her to know all about us. It is rather unpleasant, because I suppose the C'tesse will say she has done such a lot for us, etc."

I can only take this as a confirmation of what Gertrude told a relation,<sup>2</sup> that a Polish Baroness (or Countess), a friend of the Dziwickis, arranged for the children to go to school in France and paid their expenses. Countess (more correctly Mrs.) Bodenham lived at Rotherwas House near Hereford, and Gertrude spent some months with her there in 1890, as

<sup>1</sup> A great number of Gertrude's letters to her "Aunt Annie" (Anne Jones of Hereford) have been preserved. They are full of lively descriptions of her life as a governess in Poland and Russia between 1886 and 1914.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted for this information to Mrs. Gertrude Margry, who was named after her second cousin Gertrude Dziwicka, and knew her well in Paris in 1910.

appears from subsequent letters. From all this it seems probable that it was Countess Bodenham who persuaded Joseph Jones to send the four children to France in 1865.<sup>1</sup>

As 1865 went on, the boys' letters told Mary much about their life at school. In June, Henry wrote :

" M. l'Abbé Bize hurries us on very much indeed to get into the Latin class after the vacation. On the whole, I feel the change bitterly from our old school in England to this one in France. Not that we have not plenty of companions, not that the masters are not kind to us (indeed I think they are as kind to us as the French nature allows), not even our lessons which are not easy, weigh me down : it is the thought of a foreign land. I think you, though all alone in Boulogne, ought to be more happy than we ever can be here. You are so much nearer your friends and the dearest thing of all—HOME."

By September the experience of home-sickness was giving way to another. Both the elder boys were involved in arguments with their teachers about the sacraments, and wrote to their grandmother Mary Jones. Henry asked her how the Friends, with their view that all communion is spiritual, explain the text I Corinthians x, 16.

" Here I think St. Paul speaks very plainly about a *cup* and *bread*. The Friends have nothing like this although they profess to be the nearest of all to the early Christians. That they used to have a Lord's Supper is plain from the following chapter (verses 20 to 34). If you will show me the true sense of this passage I shall be much obliged to you, for the Catholics often show it to me to confound my Protestant views."<sup>2</sup>

Theodore, in his note on the same sheet, asks for " a book upon the Sacraments by the ' Church of England ', because I have got to make my first communion next year." Poor little Roman added in French that he was very unhappy and complained of one of the masters.

On 14th January, 1866, Mary Jones wrote to her daughter Elizabeth Stephens, telling her of letters received from France.

" The boys seem to be getting on very well in their studies, and each of them have had prizes and marks of Honor. I wish it was not Catholics they were with, though I believe it will be difficult to make Henry one. He is a very sensible boy and argues with the priests on baptism, etc.—I expect to little purpose."

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Marek Waysblum's note at the end of the present article confirms this and gives information about Mrs. Bodenham's aristocratic Polish connections.

<sup>2</sup> *Sacraments, a Quaker view*; by Alfred Kemp Brown, M.A., B.D., 1924, reprinted 1947, well states the Quaker position. Ed.

Thus we see Mary Jones beginning to face what was inevitable. She seems to have cherished fewer illusions than her husband. Unfortunately there are no letters after this until May, 1867, when the boys had returned to Polignan from Ackworth.

On their journey to Polignan in April, 1867, the boys stopped at Boulogne to see Mary. Her Mother Superior gave them some books, including *The Stranger's Guide to the Church*. In Paris they hoped to see Princess Sulkowska and Père Perreau, but found neither at home. Evidently they had introductions dating back to their former stay at Polignan. Reaching there on 19th April, "we were *very* heartily welcomed by both masters and boys: everybody wanted to see us." Both boys' letters are headed by a cross, and Theodore begins "Dear Sister Mary Agnes." They use their new Christian names with the zeal of converts. Henry Severin is now Michael Henry, and Theodore is Stanislas, while Roman has become Joseph. On the same sheet, also headed by a cross, is a letter from Henry to the Mother Superior:

"Dear Madam, I write to you today to ask you a favour, a spiritual one, be it understood. You know that Jesus has said 'If any two of you shall agree touching anything you shall ask on earth, I shall grant it you.' I therefore beg your prayers in unison with mine to the end that Thomas Hartas (the boy who wished to be a Catholic) may be befriended by Catholics, and brought to Polignan. The prayer seems very unlikely to be answered but faith can do anything. Also if we ask the blessed Virgin to pray to that effect, Jesus will refuse her nothing. You will think it strange that I take such interest in him, but as he was my schoolfellow, before I knew his thoughts, I said to myself, 'What a pity such innocence should not know the true religion.' In effect, everybody except himself said he was the best boy in the school for religion. He was partially illumined, I being the feeble instrument, and now is surrounded by enemies, who wish to darken his mind. But God, the protector of innocence and truth, will, I am persuaded, hear my prayers, and yours if you accede to my request."

It is touching to see Henry thus continuing his work for the salvation of Thomas Hartas' soul. He does not refer to him again.

A few months later, Theodore tells Mary, "Today I asked leave of my professor, Mr. l'abbé Cazeneuve, to write two letters, one to Mr. Eyston and one to you." Can this Mr. Eyston be the "Catholic friend in Hereford" to whom

Henry refers in his first letter to Gerald Hibbert? It is clear from the remainder of this letter that the boys were concerned for their mother, who evidently had an unsatisfactory post somewhere in France, but not near Boulogne. The Mother Superior, now "Mère générale des études," had promised to try to find a situation for her. This must be taken to indicate that Jane was by the end of 1867 on the way to conversion. Little Roman, writes Henry on the same sheet, "is filled with the best dispositions; he works like a horse and attacks every difficulty like—a pontifical Zouave attacks a Garibaldian."<sup>1</sup>

In 1868 the boys began to learn Polish while on a visit to the Polish school at Lalande, near Toulouse. They then sent to Paris for a dictionary, and with the aid of a grammar and a guide to modern conversation were soon able to make sense of a Polish book. Henry and Theodore even told Mary in July, 1869, that they hoped to begin speaking Polish to each other. Roman, now eleven, was tackling this "very, very hard language" too, and the brothers exhorted Mary to do likewise. "You must have very much perseverance for such work," Theodore wrote, "and be seriously decided to stick to it."

"If I had not thought what a shame it would be for a Pole to be ignorant of the language of his ancestors and his country, I should often have left it off"

Henry added. Theodore enclosed with his letter an English poem on Poland which begins:

"Dear sister in my soul bright hopes oft glow  
To see ere long our cherished country free,  
Our cruel despots in the dust laid low  
And our fleets floating proudly o'er the sea."

The verses "are not well done, I know, but they express my thoughts." Ardent Polish patriotism had evidently taken its place alongside zeal for the Catholic faith in the boys' minds.

Their Polish and English connections intrigued their French schoolfellows. Henry wrote to Gertrude not long before he died of some French acquaintance of his youthful days.

<sup>1</sup> On 3rd November, 1867, Garibaldi after invading the Papal States, had defeated the forces of Pius IX at Mentana, only to be routed immediately by the Pope's French allies.

“ Funny she was disappointed in us. Did she think we should be dressed in square caps and Polish uniforms ? Of course we looked a good deal like the other boys, but they saw and knew the difference between us and they used to think us very eccentric (originaux).”

In a letter to Mary, dated 7th November, 1869, Theodore used the words, “ I am pretty well, so are my brothers, who are in better health than I am.” Roman, he says, is now almost as tall as himself. Theodore had always been small and rather frail. He died suddenly in January, 1870, aged just sixteen. Henry was at first unconsolable. He sent Mary a gloomy poem of six stanzas in French, written “ at a time when grief blinded me altogether.” At first life did not seem worth living without the beloved brother. But after a time Theodore became for him the guardian angel of the Dziewicki family. In May, 1872, he wrote :

“ Who could deny that our coming to Polignan was a wonderful present of God’s love, sent particularly to me as the eldest, but to all three in general ? And I do know also that our leaving Polignan was a signal favour ; I may not say why now, but it will appear clearly to all of us at the last day. Let us confide in the mercy of God, and the never failing protection of our guardian angel ; let us remember how we have been brought out of the land of Egypt, as Israel of old, without miracles, it is true, but in a most extraordinary manner ; how we have been kept in this desert and fed miraculously.”

The letter ends with thoughts of Poland, for Mary was soon to visit her relations there. “ You are the forerunner ; we perhaps may come afterwards.” Henry was right, for both he and his sisters spent the best part of their lives in the land of their fathers.

JOHN STURGE STEPHENS

#### NOTE

The rather puzzling problem of the Catholic education of the Quaker boys may be solved if we turn to the personalities of their Catholic protectors in Hereford. As mentioned in Reginald Reynolds’s article, Henry Dziewicki, when faced with his grandfather’s opposition, sought advice and help of some Catholic friends at Hereford. On the other side, Gertrude Dziewicka—in her rather mordant way—mentions a Countess Bodenham to whom her sisters and brothers were indebted in some way or other, and who took interest in their family. According to Gertrude, she was a self-styled countess, and had no right to any title at all.

All this squares perfectly if we turn to the family of Bodenham, or rather De la Barre Bodenham of Rotherwas, one of the oldest and most influential Catholic families of Herefordshire. In the period critical for the young Dziewicki generation, the representative of this

family was Charles de la Barre Bodenham of Rotherwas Park, J.P., and D.L., Knight of the Order of St. John (1813-1883). His father, Charles Thomas Bodenham (1783-1865) was one of the leaders of English Catholics, and still a young man, was an elected member of the Catholic Board. His mother, Elizabeth Mary Weld, was a known Catholic scholar and writer whose exposition and defence of Catholic faith, "Mrs. Herbert and the Villagers, or Family Conversations on the principal duties of Christianity" (Dublin, 1853) won a sanction of both the hierarchy and of popularity, and ran into seven editions. Through his mother, he was related to Cardinal Thomas Weld (1773-1837). The Bodenham family—in opposition to the liberalizing "political" trend of the English Catholic nobility—represented the most rigid orthodoxy and unflinching attitude against any attempt at any compromise with the English Church and state. Both the father and son Bodenham were partisans of the Jesuit order, and that at a time when it could not be said to enjoy great popularity among the English lay Catholics and Catholic secular clergy.

In 1850, apparently during one of his journeys in Europe, Charles Bodenham junior made the acquaintance of a Polish girl, Irene—Marie Dzierżykraj-Morawska. Her father, Joseph Dzierżykraj-Morawski, of Oporów, in the Great Duchy of Poznań (d. 1853), a late Referendar of State of the Great Duchy of Warsaw,<sup>1</sup> derived from a family known for their ardent Catholicism and intellectual preoccupations. Her mother Paula *née* Countess Lubienska belonged to a family which had many intimate connections with England. The Morawski family had a few outstanding representatives among the Polish political emigration in France, and was in close touch with their circles.

Charles Bodenham married Irene Marie Morawska in 1850. Although English genealogical sources liberally bestow a count's title on Mrs. Bodenham's father, he did not belong to the titled branch of his family, and Gertrude was apparently voicing the opinion of her Polish aristocratic employers when informing her English relatives that Mrs. Bodenham had no right to the title to which she was pretending. On the other hand, her mother-in-law signed her book Countess E. M. Bodenham. It is not impossible that the Bodenham family held a papal title which the male members of the family did not dare to use in this country, and which by right of courtesy and aristocratic connections was allowed to the ladies of the family. The Rotherwas estate and its lord's name later on passed on to a Polish relative of Irene Marie Bodenham, Louis Łubieński (b. 1853) who assumed the combined name of De la Barre Bodenham-Lubienski and married into the English nobility.

The above data solve the problem of connections between the descendants of the Quaker bookseller from Hereford and Mrs. Bodenham and her noble Polish relatives in France. It is clear that

<sup>1</sup> Grand Duchy of Poznan, created by the Vienna Treaty, was under Prussian occupation, 1814-1918. Grand Duchy of Warsaw (1806-1814), an independent state in personal union with Saxony, was created by Napoleon from Polish territories won from Prussia in 1806 and from Austria in 1809.



Mrs. Bodenham regarded it as her patriotic and religious duty to rescue the children of her late countryman from the danger of denationalization and heresy. And in view of both the Bodenhams' and the Morawskis' connections with the Jesuit Order, it becomes clear why the boys were sent to Polignan, and Mary to the Ursuline convent at Boulogne, why Henry's life and career took such an unexpected turn, and in what way Gertrude and Mary found aristocratic employers in Poland.

Henry's enthusiasm for Pontifical Zouaves may have had its source not only in his religious zeal and in the atmosphere of a French Catholic school of 1867. After the failure of the 1863-1864 insurrection in Poland, two members of the Morawski family served in this corps d'élite.

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