



Frances Taylor and Cardinal Newman: A Literary Relationship

Catalogue of the exhibition held at St Mary's Convent, Brentford, September - January, 2010

Introduction

This exhibition, originally prepared for London Open House, is in celebration of the State Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the UK, and in honour of Cardinal John Henry Newman and his connection with Frances Margaret Taylor (Mother Magdalen Taylor, 1832-1900) who founded the convent in Brentford in 1880. On Sunday 19 September 2010 Pope Benedict XVI, who has a personal devotion to Cardinal Newman, added him to the list of those whom the Catholic Church regards as 'Blessed' (known as beatification). There is also a cause in the Church for the beatification of Frances Taylor, who was one of the large circle of literary associates and prominent Catholic men and women with whom Newman maintained a voluminous correspondence. Frances Taylor herself had a remarkable life of labour and achievement, culminating in the founding of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God in 1872, primarily to serve the urban poor.

1. Frances Taylor's Literary Work and the 'Dream of Gerontius'

Dr. J. H. Newman (1801-1890) was a founder and leading member of the Oxford Movement within the Church of England. His conversion to Catholicism in 1845 was the cause of much controversy, and was part of a movement which was to lead to a number of other high-profile conversions from Anglicanism, including H. E. Manning and Frances Taylor herself. Newman was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1847, becoming founder of the first English Oratorian order; he was elevated to Cardinal in 1879.

The small group of letters from Newman to Frances Taylor in the central archive of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God (SMG archive ref. IN/1/1-10) relate mainly to literary matters. Prior to entering the religious life, Frances Taylor had already established herself as a highly versatile and successful author, editor and journalist. In 1862, she became proprietor and editor of *The Lamp*, and, in 1864, in conjunction with the Jesuits, she became the founder editor of the important Catholic periodical *The Month*. Her first book was her powerful first-hand memoir of Crimean War nursing *Eastern Hospital and English Nurses*, (1856) which was published to considerable public acclaim, and was almost certainly only the second memoir of this nature to be published in England. We can imagine that many in Victorian England may have derived their image of Florence Nightingale, 'the Lady with the Lamp',

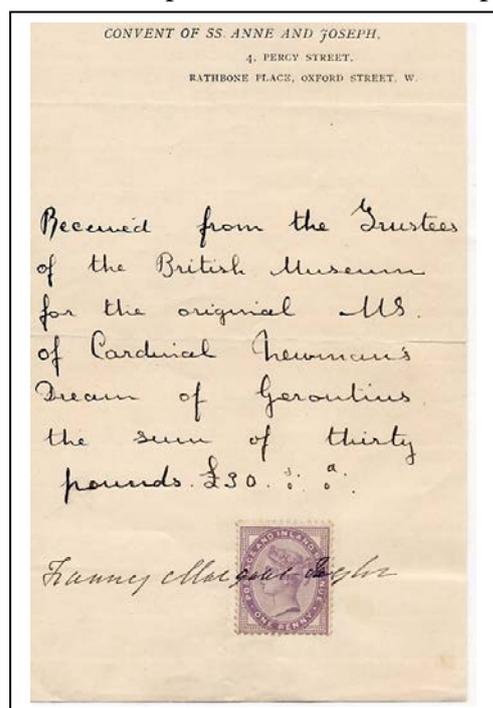
from a reading of this book. Frances Taylor had a pioneering role amongst that small band of Victorian women who led the way in the sphere of journalism and editing, at a time when women taking part in 'serious' journalism and social commentary was often looked down upon as 'unladylike', and Cardinal Newman was an early supporter.

Despite some initial ambivalence on his part, she managed to convince Newman to be a regular contributor to *The Month*. Newman's famous poem 'The Dream of Gerontius' first appeared in the May and June 1865 editions of *The Month*. It describes the drama of the journey of a soul from the verge of death to purgatory, guided by its guardian angel. The poem was to become even more famous following its setting to music by the great English Catholic composer Sir Edward Elgar in 1900.

Of the circumstances surrounding the publication of the poem, Frances Taylor's first biographer has written: '...the story has been told in another Catholic magazine, and repeated with modifications by Mother Magdalen herself, how a "distressed editor" once went to Dr. Newman to implore him for a contribution, and how, after a plea of want of leisure, he took from his waste-paper basket, a manuscript thrown in as valueless, and told her to use it, if she thought it worth anything. This proved to be the now world-famed "Dream of Gerontius", and the distressed editor was Fanny Taylor in search of copy for "The Month" '.

Whilst we may discount the idea that Newman intended to dispose of the original manuscript, his own account of the writing of the poem, in a private letter, certainly implies that he had no immediate intimation of its value for publication: 'I am as much pleased, and half-surprised that you and others should like the Dream of Gerontius. It was written by accident – and it was published by accident'.

The receipt for the sale of Frances Taylor's version of the MS. (shown left) is undated, but the headed paper, which is from the convent at 4, Percy Street in London, implies that its sale took place between 1886 and 1898, the years during



which this address was used by the congregation; 1891 seems to have been the specific date. The sale of the MS., for the sum of £30, may be seen as reflective both of Frances Taylor's business acumen and her lack of sentimentality; money to support her work with the poor of London was seen as a much greater priority than the ownership of an important literary manuscript. Nonetheless, she did retain her copy of Newman's *Verses on Various Occasions*, inscribed by the author and sent to her in 1868, the year of its publication. Unfortunately, the originals of these items are now too fragile to display.

On Newman's death in 1890, Frances Taylor wrote to one of her benefactors: 'what a long wonderful life has been vouchsafed to him. One feels that something has gone out of life after him.'

2. The Exhibition

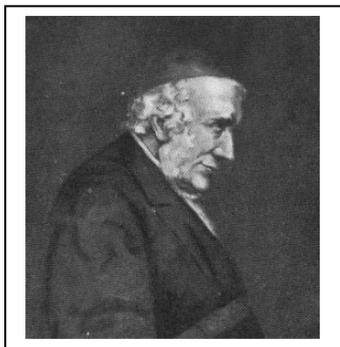
The SMG central archive in Brentford holds a number of letters from Cardinal Newman, but those selected here for display relate primarily to Newman's relationship with Frances Taylor. No copy out letters to Newman survive. In 1848 Newman established an Oratory at Maryvale, Old Oscott, later moving to Edgbaston, Birmingham. Most of the letters in the archives post-date this move, and are addressed from Birmingham. All of the letters held in the archives are reflective of the cordial and respectful relations between Newman and all of the parties involved. They also show the role of the correspondents in certain important episodes in Newman's career. See Joyce Sugg, *Ever Yours Affly, John Henry Newman and His Female Circle*.

Newman's correspondence with Frances Taylor may be described as occasional, being mainly related to specific events in her life and career when she had a need to call upon his assistance. In a letter to a mutual acquaintance, Miss Mary Holmes, (June 1867) he refers to a letter sent by Miss Taylor 'last year', but states 'I am not in the habit of correspondence with her'. Miss Holmes is referred to in Newman's letter to Frances Taylor of July 1867.

Frances Taylor may first have contacted Newman in December 1862, seeking contributions to *The Lamp*, though Newman had also contributed to an anthology called *Offerings for Orphans, a series of original pieces in Prose and Verse by Living Authors*, which she appears to have edited in 1861. Newman seems to have been ambivalent about this approach, partly because it came through Father Henry Formby, whose opinions he disapproved of. However, Newman did show great interest in *The Month*, and offered an article for it in June 1864. The other most significant part of the correspondence relates to Newman's attempt, at Frances Taylor's request, to intercede with his old friend from his Anglican days, Rev E.B. Pusey (shown below, left). This was in order that the family might obtain contact with Frances Taylor's sister, Emma, who was a member of an Anglican religious order, Priscilla Lydia Sellon's 'Society of the Most Holy Trinity' which Pusey had helped to found.

There follows a summary of the items on display.

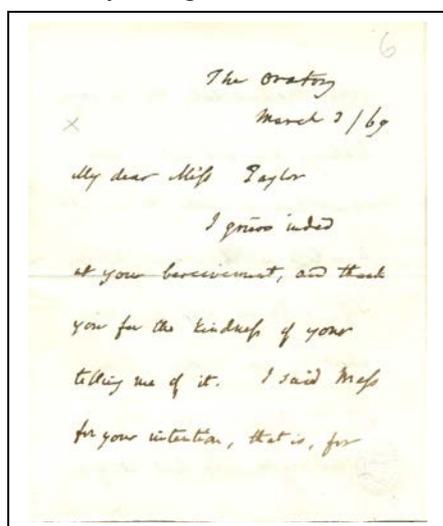
From left to right: a request for a copy of *The Month* to be sent to a Madame Pisani in Lucca (December 1864); a reply to a reminder for an article, [in the series 'Sayings of the Saints of the Desert', appearing in *The Month* October 1864-March 1866] delayed because of Newman's work on the second edition of his *Apologia [pro vita sua]* (March 1865); letter (February 1868) thanking Frances Taylor for sending a copy of her 'Meditations' [*Practical Meditations for every day of the Year*, translated from the French, (1868)], and asking whether she had received a copy of his verses [*Verses on various occasions* by J. H. N. (1868)]; a copy was sent c. January 1868. Also, undated photograph of Frances Taylor, (c.1860s, shown above on title page). The nearby photograph of Newman



appears to date from the same period. There are also three letters relating mainly to an attempt by Newman to intercede with Dr. Pusey on behalf of Frances Taylor's sister, Emma. Newman reports in the first letter (February 1867) that he has forwarded letters from Frances Taylor and her mother to Dr Pusey, and assumes that he has in

turn forwarded them [to Emma Taylor], despite his apparent disapproval of being treated as a 'channel'. In the second (July 1867) Newman expresses his disbelief that Pusey was aware that her sister had been sent abroad, or that 'he has that power over his convents that you think he has'. Pusey himself wrote to Frances Taylor in January 1867, in a letter overlooked by most subsequent biographers, saying: 'Your sister alone is responsible for her actions' (SMG archive ref. I/E2/32).

Also included (partial facsimile below) is a letter conveying Newman's condolences, in reply to a letter from Frances Taylor informing him of her mother's death (March 1869); and two letters relating to a Miss Crofts, who had sought assistance from Mother Magdalen and Lady Herbert, falsely claiming that she had been authorised by Newman (January-February 1873). The photograph (shown above, right) shows Frances Taylor in an early religious habit, c.1870. Also, there are two



unrelated letters: a letter acknowledging receipt of a book sent by Frances Taylor (December 1879) possibly the collection of stories entitled *Stoneleighs of Stoneleigh*; and the final letter (February 1885) seems to refer to Frances Taylor's concern to memorialise the achievements of her great friend and benefactor Lady Georgiana Fullerton (pictured, below right).

The only letter of Newman in the current display which is not written to Frances Taylor is one recently discovered from Newman to Cyril Dean, nephew of Frances Taylor. The letter, dated Nov 9th 1878 (SMG archive ref. I/A1/2/3/76), clearly refers to the death of Edward Brietzcke Dean

D.D. on November 7th 1878. Edward Dean was the husband of Charlotte Sarah Taylor (1825-1883), elder sister of Frances Taylor, and also a convert from the Church of England. Of their five children, two of the four girls were to enter their aunt's congregation as religious sisters. Amy Lucy Sobieski Dean (1865-1954) was the last child to be born to Edward and Charlotte Dean. She entered the congregation in 1885, taking the religious name of Sister Magdalen Aimée.



The remaining items indicate the continued interest which the Sisters took in the poem and its various incarnations, including Elgar's choral version (see illustrated book by the Elgar Birthplace Trust, *Dear Carice, Postcards from Edward Elgar to his daughter*). These include a

copy of the programme for a musical version of the 'Dream' by Fernand Laloux, a gentleman who appears to have been connected with the Jesuit Church of the

Immaculate Conception at Farm Street, London. The image of Newman is of the famous 1881 portrait by John Everett Millais.

Also represented is a correspondence dating from the 1930s between Mother Magdalen Aimée and Henry Tristram at the Birmingham Oratory over various matters, including the version of the 'Dream' published by the Catholic Truth Society in 1932, which neglected to mention Frances Taylor's role in its original publication. A copy with MS. amendments by Mother Aimée is displayed, and Tristram promised to include the amendments in the next CTS edition of the poem (see the editions displayed).

There is also on display surviving a letter dated June 1939 from John Murray at *The Month* to Mother Aimée, clearly replying to a letter of hers about the need for an article or reference (perhaps for the 75th anniversary of the journal) to the early years of the *Month*.

3. Select Bibliography

Dessain C. S. *et. al.*, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (31 vols, London and Oxford, 1961-1977)

Devas, F. C., *Mother Magdalen Taylor, Foundress of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God* (London, 1927)

Foister, Susan, *Cardinal Newman 1801-90, a Centenary Exhibition* (London, 1990)

Newman, J. H., ed. Fr. Gregory Winterton, *The Dream of Gerontius* (Oxford, 2001)

Sugg, Joyce, *Ever Yours Affly, John Henry Newman and His Female Circle* (Leominster, 1996)

Troughton, Sr. Mary Campion S.M.G., 'Life of Mother Foundress' (Privately printed 1972)

Appendix

Who was Cardinal Newman?

John Henry Newman was born in Old Broad Street in the City of London on 21 February 1801 and was baptised as a member of the Church of England when he was six weeks old. His father was a banker and his mother was of French descent. He was educated at Ealing School and in 1816, aged fifteen, he underwent his first religious conversion (to a more committed Evangelical form of Anglicanism). In 1817 he entered Trinity College, Oxford, where, three years later, he was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Arts, although he did not do as well in his final examinations as had been expected. However, in 1822 he was elected as a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and two years later he was ordained as a deacon in the Church of England, having decided upon the Anglican ministry. His first appointment was as curate at St Clement's Church, Oxford. He was ordained as a priest of the Church of England on 29 May 1825 and in January 1826 was appointed as a Tutor of Oriel College.

In 1828 Newman became Vicar of St Mary's, the University Church, where he soon gained a reputation as a diligent pastor and a fine preacher. In 1833 he went on a voyage to the Mediterranean, visiting Sicily and Italy, on which occasion he was struck down with a serious illness and nearly died. As he recovered, he wrote one of the most famous poems/hymns in the English language: 'Lead, Kindly Light.' As soon as Newman returned to Oxford in the summer of 1833 he became associated with John Keble, Edward Pusey and others in what became known as the Oxford Movement, an attempt within the Church of England to rediscover and promote its Catholic aspects. The Oxford Movement also gained the title 'Tractarianism' because a number of tracts or religious essays were written by its leaders. Newman himself was responsible for Tract 1 in 1833 and, most famously, Tract 90 in 1841, which argued that a more Catholic interpretation could be given to the quintessentially Protestant Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England – a view that caused uproar among his opponents. However, by this time, especially by having read a great deal of the early history of the Church and the writings of the Fathers, Newman was beginning to develop serious doubts about the claims of the Church of England to be a part, albeit reformed, of the Catholic Church. In 1843 he resigned as Vicar of St Mary's and with a small group of companions went to live at Littlemore, a village to the south of Oxford which was part of his former parish and where his mother had paid for the building of a small church. Although he no longer exercised his ministry as an Anglican clergyman, Newman spent his time in prayer and study, seeking to discern God's will.

On 3 October 1845 Newman resigned his Fellowship of Oriel College and three days later completed writing one of his most celebrated works, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, whereby he now recognised that it was in the Catholic Church that the fullness of the true Church established by Christ was to be found. On the evening of 8 October, amidst a heavy storm, the Italian priest, Father (now Blessed) Dominic Barberi, a member of the Passionist Order who had been working in England for some years, walked from Oxford to Littlemore, where, after having dried his clothes by the fire in the library, began hearing Newman's confession. This continued the next morning, 9 October, after which Blessed Dominic received John Henry Newman into full communion with the Catholic Church, together with a number of his companions. Newman subsequently received his First Holy Communion in the small Catholic chapel in Oxford and was later confirmed.

In September 1846, seeking to train for the Catholic priesthood, Newman entered the College of Propaganda Fide in Rome, where he was ordained on 30 May 1847. He then spent some months preparing to become a member of the Congregation of the Oratory, a community of priests founded in Rome in the sixteenth century by St Philip Neri. In 1848 Newman established the first Oratory in England at Maryvale, Old Oscott, near Birmingham. It was relocated to a disused gin distillery in Alcester Street, Birmingham, before a permanent foundation was made at Edgbaston in 1851, where the Birmingham Oratory still stands today. Another Oratory was established in London in 1849 (moving to Brompton in 1852), and today there is also an Oratory in Oxford itself (founded from Birmingham in 1990 and formally established in the former Jesuit Church of St Aloysius in 1993). In 1851 Newman was appointed as the founding Rector of the Catholic University of Ireland in Dublin, a task entrusted to him by the Irish bishops. The University opened in 1854, although Newman resigned his post three years later. In 1864 he published what is probably his best-known work, the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, which was a defence of his religious position occasioned by a personal attack by the author Charles Kingsley. Another very important book, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, was published in 1870, in which Newman set out his philosophy of religion. In 1875, in *A Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, he explained his response to the question of individual conscience in the light of the declaration of Papal Infallibility. In 1878 Oxford ‘forgave’ Newman, as it were, when Trinity College, his first college, made him an Honorary Fellow. In the following year Pope Leo XIII created Newman a Cardinal in recognition of his service to the Church. Newman received his red hat in Rome on 15 May 1879. His final years were spent in increasing retirement at the Birmingham Oratory, although until the end of his life Newman was a prodigious letter-writer. He died at the Birmingham Oratory on 11 August 1890 and was buried in the Oratory cemetery at Rednal, on the outskirts of the city, eight days later.

On 22 January 1991 Pope John Paul II declared John Henry Newman to be ‘Venerable’. This recognition by the Church was not simply on account of his scholarship but, firstly, because of Newman’s holiness of life. As well as being the greatest religious thinker in nineteenth-century England, John Henry Newman was primarily a parish priest and an educator. For beatification to take place a miracle is required. This occurred when Rev. Jack Sullivan, a permanent deacon from the United States, who was suffering from an incurable spinal condition, learned of Newman and decided to ask his intercession. He received a healing from God in 2001. After rigorous medical and scientific investigation by the Church, the healing was declared miraculous in 2009. With the recognition of a second miracle the path to canonisation (for Newman to be declared a Saint) would then be opened.

*Appendix by Father Stewart Foster
Brentwood Diocesan Archivist
September 2010*