Matilda Betham-Edwards, Franco-British Cultural Go-between

Martyn Cornick
University of Birmingham

Synergies *Royaume-Uni et Irlande* n° 2 - 2009
pp. 55-68

Summary: *Matilda Betham-Edwards was a nineteenth-century writer who represented France to the British public in articles in reviews, magazines and books. After her death in 1919 her work seemed to have disappeared entirely from view until the publication of Joan Rees's 2006 biography. In 1908, however, a month before the opening of the Franco-British Exhibition at the White City, it was reported that because of her long career and her services to Franco-British understanding, Betham-Edwards would have an exhibit devoted to her work. Her work was appreciated during her lifetime, both officially as well as by her readers, as in 1891 she was promoted Officier de l'Instruction publique, a signal French honour believed to be the first such award granted to a British person. This article explores how she explained the French to the British as well as the nature of her contribution to the Entente cordiale.*

Keywords: *National representations, Franco-British exhibition, Victorian women, Entente cordiale, French Third Republic*

Résumé : *Matilda Betham-Edwards expliquait les Français et la culture, et la société, françaises au public britannique dans les revues, les magazines et les livres. Après sa mort en 1919, son œuvre semblait avoir disparu entièrement, du moins jusqu'à la publication de la biographie de Joan Rees en 2006. En 1908 pourtant, un mois avant l'ouverture de l'Exposition franco-britannique à la White City de Londres, pour marquer sa longue carrière et ses services au rapprochement franco-britannique, il fut annoncé que Betham-Edwards serait honorée d'une présentation de ses livres. Son œuvre fut appréciée de son vivant tant par les autorités que par son audience, car en 1891 elle fut promue Officier de l'Instruction publique, honneur jamais accordé jusque-là à un citoyen britannique. Cet article étudie comment elle représentait les Français aux Britanniques, ainsi que la nature de sa contribution à l'Entente cordiale.*

Mots-clés : *Représentations nationales, Exposition franco-britannique, femmes victoriennes, Entente cordiale, Troisième République*

"The sunniest-tempered, wittiest, most inventive people of Europe."
(Betham-Edwards, 1891: 704)

"If I have in the smallest degree contributed to this end, that is to say, to a better understanding of French and English, I shall be more than compensated for my labours in French fields."
(Betham-Edwards, 1894: 328)

Of the nineteenth-century writers on the British side of the Channel to represent France in articles in reviews and books, none would seem to be more neglected than Matilda Betham-Edwards. She seemed to have disappeared entirely from view, that is, until the publication of a biography by Joan Rees (Rees, 2006). Yet in 1908, a month before the opening of the Franco-British Exhibition at the White City, the *Daily Chronicle* (16 April 1908) reported that because of her long career, and because she had done more than any other "to show France to the English," Betham-Edwards would have an exhibit devoted to her work at the White City. The references at the end of the present article list the nine books displayed in the Palace of Women's Work, in the view of the French official report,[1] a large and rather tasteless hall near the Court of Honour at the centre of the Exhibition. After her death in 1919, and despite a fulsome appreciation by the eminent women's campaigner Sarah Grand (in Betham-Edwards, 1919), she and her work faded away. That her work was appreciated during her lifetime, both officially as well as by her readers, is further reflected in the fact that in 1891 she was promoted *Officier de l'Instruction publique*, a signal French honour believed to be the first such award granted to a British person (Rees, 2006: 2). During the First World War, Raymond Poincaré allowed his photograph to be used as the frontispiece for her last book on France, thus bestowing the presidential seal of approval: "By most courteous permission and with profound respect, inscribed to M. Raymond Poincaré, the honoured President of the French Republic" (Betham-Edwards, 1917: frontispiece). Between the 1870s and the 1890s, not only was her work on France and the French routinely serialised in middle- and high-brow Victorian periodicals, some of her works, the books on France and her novels (she published well over 20), were also published in the popular, and, one would say today, mass-market *Library of British and American Authors* produced in Leipzig by Bernhard Tauchnitz, whom she knew well (Betham-Edwards, 1919: ch. IV). It cannot be doubted, therefore, that she enjoyed considerable success and esteem during her lifetime, although by her own admission her work on France sometimes seemed to be more a labour of love than a lucrative professional activity.

Given that her display of books at the White City earned her the award of a *médaille d'or*, we shall explore some of her work as a cultural go-between (a *passeur culturel*), an activity which was fully harmonious with the purpose of the "Franco" (as it was popularly known), remembering too that the Exhibition had been explicitly conceived to "put the seal on the Entente [cordiale]" (Cornick, 2006). After a brief biographical sketch, we will focus on the nature of the travels she made, through which she built up an extensive knowledge of France, expertise at once economical, geographical, historical, social and political. Finally, we will examine how she herself encouraged the Franco-British *rapprochement* which ended in the Entente and its celebration at the White City in 1908.

Travel and scholarship on France

Matilda Betham-Edwards was born in 1836 in Westerfield, Suffolk, the daughter of a farmer and an antiquarian mother. Her French teacher at school in Ipswich developed her interests in France and the French language. In later life she explained this predisposition to Francophilia: "For myself I cannot too much rejoice that partly by accident of birth — my maternal grandmother being French — and partly by choice, from childhood upwards France has been the land of my adoption" (Betham-Edwards, 1917: xvi). In her late teens, she wrote her first novel, and made her first journey to the Continent in 1863. When her sister died, she moved to London in 1865. From her early thirties onwards, she began to move in Francophile literary circles, making the acquaintance (among others) of Coventry Patmore, Henry James, Frederic Harrison, Clement Shorter and George Eliot. She also befriended Barbara Bodichon, née Leigh-Smith, a pioneer of women's rights and, later, a co-founder of Girton College, Cambridge. In 1867 Betham-Edwards was invited to French North Africa, travelling there with Bodichon, who, with her doctor husband Eugène Bodichon, exercised a long-lasting socio-political influence over Matilda, as reflected in the appreciations she wrote on the couple after their deaths.[2]

Betham-Edwards's first long stay in France began in August 1875, when she went to report on the Science Conference being held there. As she puts it in her *Anglo-French Reminiscences*, "I started with a small portmanteau for Nantes, intending to stay for twelve days; the flying visit was turned into a sojourn of as many months" (Betham-Edwards, 1900: 1). She prepared for her travels by obtaining letters of introduction. This distinguished her from the ordinary tourist, who, obliged to stay in hotels, was not able to observe French life at such close quarters. For all her visits to France, this is mostly how she proceeded, as she makes clear in a note at the end of one of her serialised works:

> I make it a rule never to patronise a hotel if I can possibly help it; my theory is that the mere tourist sees nothing — at least to write about, and that the only way to make travel, especially French travel, profitable is to live among the people and see things from their points of view. Thus I get handed on from one French friend to another, and make as many possible excursions from the same starting point, instead of flying from point to point by railway (Betham-Edwards, 1878b: 380).

Self-consciously following in the footsteps of her fellow-countryman Arthur Young, Betham-Edwards travelled throughout much of France and observed at close quarters most classes of French people in all sorts of walks of life. In the case of her first journey to Nantes, in 1875, she obtained lodging with the widow of Dr Ange Guépin, a celebrated and much regretted political figure. He had been one of the heroic 'Republicans of [18]30'. Through such influences, Matilda was drawn to utopianism, early socialism, republicanism and rights for women; Mme Guépin had moved in the company of Michelet, Henri Martin, Jules Simon, Louis Blanc, Ledru Rollin, and so on. As Matilda puts it: "the *élite* of Liberal intellect and principle rallied round the Breton savant and his wife" (Betham-Edwards, 1900: 9; for further details, see Pilbeam, 2000). Using

Nantes as a base, she then travelled around Brittany and the Vendée, noting her observations for publication, first in *Fraser's Magazine*, then in book form (Betham-Edwards, 1877a).

Matilda consciously followed in the footsteps of her Suffolk predecessor, Arthur Young; she was also very well informed. Time and again, for instance, she refers to works of the economist Alfred de Foville (1843-1913), which she often uses to provide a powerful statistical underpinning for her judgements on the progress of the Third Republic (e.g. Foville, 1890). Her own researches were remarkable. Not only did she use guide books such as the French *Guides Joanne* (an equivalent of the English *Murray's Handbooks for Travellers*), she also drew on the scholarship of historians such as Alfred Rambaud and Jules Michelet, the geographer Élisée Reclus, and the political economist Henri Baudrillart (1821-1892). She referred too to a wide range of French and British reviews and newspapers, including the *Revue des deux mondes* and the liberal *Daily News*, which had a natural interest in things French.

What are some of the major themes in Betham-Edwards's travel writings? The two most important themes to emerge from a study of her work are life in the countryside, and education, both of which she perceived as essential to France's progress. In this regard, one could say that in some ways her work presages that of Eugen Weber's classic, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Weber, 1979). In the introduction to her edition of Arthur Young's *Travels in France*, praise is heaped upon the system of peasant ownership of farms: "nothing has done more to improve the condition of the peasant and of husbandry within the last fifty years" (Betham-Edwards, 1889b: vi). She admits, of course, that life in the French countryside was never easy, but such things are relative: compared to Young's day, a hundred years on after the outbreak of the French Revolution, with the application of new agricultural techniques, and improved education, in the 1880s the peasants' lot had indeed improved. Relative too were conditions in different parts of France. For instance, the benefits of modern life had taken much longer to penetrate into Brittany, whereas to read her account of the thriving dairy industry in the Seine-et-Marne department, "we might suppose that here at least the dreams of the Utopians had come true, and that poverty, squalor, and wretchedness were banished for ever" (Betham-Edwards, 1878b: 371). She was deeply impressed by the outwardly beneficent paternalism of some French enterprises, such as existed at Menier's "Chocolate City", at Noisiel on the Marne, and the *cités ouvrières*, such as the pioneering scheme at Mulhouse, made possible through the philanthropic capitalism of the textile magnate, Jean Dollfus.[3] Here in Dollfus's *cité ouvrière*, she writes, the "general aspect […] is one of thrift and prosperity, and it must be borne in mind that each dwelling and plot of ground are the property of the owner, gradually acquired by him out of his earnings" (Betham-Edwards, 1884a: 188). As in almost every small or medium town in France that she visits, she is impressed by the cultural infrastructure: in addition to schools, there are "free libraries for all, and a very handsome museum". These were not used exclusively by the educated middle classes; they were frequented too, she reports repeatedly, by aspiring workers, peasants, and their families.

It is striking how Betham-Edwards's Francophilia infuses her interpretations and observations with optimism, even idealism; in view of her own leanings, this is perhaps not surprising. However, she is not equally enamoured of all areas of France, as exemplified by her visit to the Auvergne, in the summer of 1879:

> In Brittany and Franche-Comté all shortcomings are made up for by the charming courtesy, *bonhomie*, and honesty of the people. I am obliged, much against my will, to confess that the character of the Auvergnat — at least that phase of it with which tourists come into contact — is the least amiable and pleasant to be found in all France. Auvergne, indeed, is a country to paint and admire, not a country to love. It is unique, weird, picturesque, astounding, but it is disagreeable; the only corner of my beloved France in which I shall never again willingly set foot (Betham-Edwards, 1880b: 189-190).

The insolence and greed of the Auvergnats are "proverbial", she complains; indeed this was commonly agreed among the French. The only two places where the visitor is not shamelessly cheated are the post-office and railway station. Clearly she is fascinated by the extraordinary landscape around Clermont-Ferrand, with its volcanic *Puys*. She does not, however, admire the town itself, which, apart from being "one vast camp", is further spoiled by the state of the streets: "no French town of its size have I seen with such objectionable gutters. […] The gutter is the sewer, the rag-bag, the waste-paper basket, the cinder receptacle, the sink of the inhabitants". In view of such a health hazard, she wonders how "typhoid fever does not ravage the population" (Betham-Edwards, 1880b: 191). In the same article, and based upon her observations of family life in this militarised town, Betham-Edwards makes some generalisations about how excessively pampered children might explain certain facets of the French "character":

> Here permit me to observe, in parentheses, that it is quite easy to understand the excitability and vivaciousness of the French character when you have followed the career of a French baby. […] Certainly Frenchwomen make the most devoted mothers in the world, but at the same time they make their children the most exacting of human beings. May not the uncompromisingness of the French character be traced to these early influences? (Betham-Edwards, 1880b: 193)

Leaving her digression on "character" to one side, her enthusiasm for the French landscape wins through, and, against the prevailing convention, she sums up the impression made upon her by the *Puys*: "To my thinking these panoramic mountain ranges, today blue and vapoury as cloudland, are lovelier than Switzerland" (Betham-Edwards, 1880b: 197). To encourage her readers to share her Francophilia, and in spite of her previous disobliging comments, she offers a generalised, if not idealised, picture of life in rural France:

> Riom is another charming little town of quite another kind. […] Here all is exquisite cleanliness, trimness, and elegance even. Why is it, however, that irrespective of architecture and costume, French towns are so much more varied and animated than our own? There are not indeed one, but a dozen reasons. First of all, the almost daily markets; […] then there is that quaint French window gardening and pavement

> gardening, the streets blazing with oleanders, magnolias, and other tropical plants; and, lastly, there is the out-of-door existence here on a scale wholly unfamiliar to ourselves. (Betham-Edwards, 1880b: 199)

Education is the other constant preoccupation in her work. In her book *France of Today*, she draws a striking contrast to illustrate the type and scale of educational progress in France:

> During my residence at Nantes in 1875-76, the notice "*Écrivain public*" would frequently meet my eyes. Indeed, the paid letter writer did most of the correspondence in country places. M. Jules Simon, in his admirable little work, *Le Livre du Petit Citoyen*, thus describes the rural Brittany of his youth: "There were no schools anywhere. In order to find them you had to go to the towns" (Betham-Edwards, 1894: 305 [Appendix I]).

Successive educational reforms, however, had revolutionised the situation: in 1880, she writes, "of the 56,000 communes of France, only 243 remained without primary schools". Great advances had been made in secular and free secondary education open to both sexes. Advances in technical education had also been considerable: she notes that the number of *écoles professionnelles* had grown from 26 in 1879, to 400 in 1883. The geographer Reclus had credited Bordeaux as the first city to open such a school for girls; but the true pioneer here, Betham-Edwards insists, had been Dr Guépin, one of her heroes, whose "public-spirited wife" she had lodged with at Nantes: "A committee was formed, donations flowed in, the municipal council supported the scheme, and in 1873 the school was in working order" (Betham-Edwards, 1894: 309).

This, broadly, is how Betham-Edwards proceeded: using her own travels and experience, she would flesh out her observations with evidence from mainly French authorities. She wrote admiringly of her adopted country, a Francophile so passionate that she often couched her representation of French advances in such a way as to appear to compare unfavourably with conditions in Britain.

Considering that she embarked upon her work on France during the period immediately following the Franco-Prussian War, there is one permanent shadow which extends across her largely bright portrayal of things French: this is the matter of the two "lost provinces", Alsace and Lorraine. The theme permeates her work, no more so than in the pages devoted to this region, from the early 1870s down to her last books, conceived and written as they were during the First World War. To take an example from 1883, she describes the entry across the new frontier into "Prussian Elsass", at St. Marie-aux-Mines. Her description of the changing topography reflects her own *parti pris*:

> We first traverse a fruitful, well-cultivated plain, watered by the sluggish Meurthe, then begin to ascend a spur of the western chain of the Vosges, formerly dividing the two French departments of Vosges and Haut Rhin, now marking the boundaries of France and Prussian Elsass. Down below, amid the hanging orchards, flower gardens and hay fields, we were on French soil, but the flagstaff, just discernible on yonder green pinnacles, marks the line of demarcation between France and the newly acquired territory of the German empire. For the matter of that, the Prussian helmet makes the

> fact patent. As surely as we have set foot in the Reich, we see one of these gleaming casques, so hateful still in French eyes (Betham-Edwards, 1883a: 118).

Despite the annexation, the people here remained fiercely patriotic: "In season and out of season", she insists, "the same sentiment comes to the surface. '*Nous sommes plus Français que les Français*'" (Betham-Edwards, 1883b: 120). She returns in the second instalment of this essay more forcefully to the theme. At first, the Alsatians had refused to believe that the Prussian occupation was permanent, but now illusions were shattered. "French parents of children born since the war must now or very speedily decide whether their sons are to become Prussian or French citizens". Then came the unkindest cut of all: "After the age of sixteen a lad's fate is no longer in their hands; he must don the uniform so odious in French eyes, and renounce the cherished *patrie* and *tricolor* for ever" (Betham-Edwards, 1884a: 182).

She continues her journey to Strasbourg, where the new Prussian-built railway station attracts attention. The façade is adorned with bas-reliefs, "not in the best of taste", she complains, as they give an idealised representation of the surrender of the city to the German Emperor. This was the last thing that the population needed, as the bombardment, destruction and loss of life and property remained all too present in the people's memories. She even reports how a bystander made a play on words on one of the German inscriptions: "*Im alten, und im neuen Reich*' ('In the old and new empire') becomes '*Im alten, reich, im neuen, arm*' ('In the old, rich, in the new, poor'). Most harrowing of all, however, is the evidence of the wanton destruction of war: "there is very little to see at Strasburg except the cathedral now" (Betham-Edwards, 1884a: 184-5). During the siege of 1870, "the Library, with its 300,000 volumes and 1,500 manuscripts", the priceless *Hortus Deliciarium* among them, were all destroyed in the bombardment, along with the Museum, the Protestant Church, the theatre and the Palais de Justice, 400 private houses and 1,500 civilians. The only comfort to be drawn from this state of affairs was the fact that the patriotism and spirit of resistance of the French remnant of the population remained defiantly high:

> One lady was visited at seven o'clock in the morning by the functionary charged with the unpleasant mission of finding out how and where her boy was educated. "Tell those who sent you", said the indignant mother, "that my son shall never belong to you. We will give up our home, our prospects, everything; but our children shall never be Prussians." True enough, the family have since emigrated. No one who does not live in Alsace among Alsatians can realise the intense clinging to France found among the people, nor the sacrifices made to retain their nationality. And it is well the true state of feeling throughout the annexed territory should be known outside its limits (Betham-Edwards, 1884a: 186).

Given Betham-Edwards's self-professed Francophilia, none of this is particularly surprising. What is remarkable, however, is that just after the outbreak of war in 1914, she collected together extracts of her writing on Alsace in support of the French war effort, and dedicated *Under the German Ban in Alsace and Lorraine* to Maurice Barrès:

> Monsieur et très honoré confrère,
> A plusieurs reprises vous m'avez exprimé votre appréciation de mes études sur l'Alsace et la Lorraine. Permettez-moi de dédier ce petit volume à l'auteur illustre de *Colette Baudoche*, dont chaque page exquise retrace toute la tragédie et tout le crime de l'annexion (Betham-Edwards, 1914: flyleaf).

In an introductory note, Matilda, referring already (in October 1914) to atrocities committed by the German military, writes that the die had been cast with the brutality of the Prussians' pillaging of Avallon, in upper Burgundy, during the Franco-Prussian War:

> What I had no place for in a tourists' guide [*Murray's Guide*, which she had been commissioned to edit] was the story of that ferocious raid, not only blankets, bedding, and articles of mere money's worth being carried off, but clocks, valuables, curios, any and everything of intrinsic value; not even family relics and heirlooms were spared. I mention this fact because it was not common, the Avallonois had tried to defend themselves, hence the pillage. Ruthless as was Prussian warfare two generations ago, they were civilised compared to the horrors witnessed today (Betham-Edwards, 1914: 6-7).

Thus Betham-Edwards was prepared to mine her observations of the Prussian occupation in France dating from 20 to 30 years previously to support the Franco-British propaganda effort in the new war, which this time directly involved the British as the military partners of France.
We should now turn to our final section on how Betham-Edwards fostered Franco-British understanding.

Fostering Franco-British Understanding

As Betham-Edwards observed the Third Republic progressing in great strides, and once her work had become more established, she was invited to judge others' work on France. She did so in an effort to foster better understanding between the two nations. Quoting a writer in the *Daily News*, she stressed that "we must be prepared for new generalisations as to French manners. The old conventions of caricature will no longer serve" (Betham-Edwards, 1894: 327). Long review articles on two very different books afford an insight into how her work strove to challenge conventional views and caricatural stereotypes of the French.

The first treats P. G. Hamerton's *French and English*, published in 1890. Hamerton, an artist and writer, had married a French woman, Eugénie Gindriez, and moved to France in 1861 to settle eventually in a relatively remote area, near Autun. Betham-Edwards used her essay in the *Fortnightly Review* to draw contrasts with England: it reflects her own interests, not to say *parti pris*, and much of it focuses on a central concern, that of the role of Frenchwomen, and how they suffered from the persistent influence of Catholicism. This religious influence was a constant bugbear for Matilda. She believed that most Catholic-educated Frenchwomen saw the Republic as "*la canaille*": "The vast majority of Frenchwomen are still wedded to dogma and the reactionary principle" (Betham-Edwards, 1891: 701). And yet so much weight was given to marriage in France. In Matilda's eyes, socially and intellectually husband and wife remained strangers

to each other, with men taking refuge in friendship, and women in "maternal affection"; on both sides "illicit amours" were frequently encountered. There was a tendency to treat the child as a "fetish", with the consequence that some French children tended to lack discipline and were spoilt; once they left home, they were, in some extreme cases, at risk of suicide. Furthermore, the "Civil Code" needed thorough revision, as the law still classed women with "idiots and minors" (Betham-Edwards, 1891: 704). This said, however, Republican legislation over the previous two decades had enabled women to take "enormous strides". Such views on Frenchwomen pervade her work.

The French were proverbially thrifty, a characteristic attested to by much first-hand observation on Matilda's part, and one which she admired greatly. She noted that the number of post-office savings accounts had doubled between 1880 and 1890. More than once she wrote that the Eiffel Tower, weighing between seven and eight million kilograms, were it to be recast in silver to represent these savings, would have to have an additional two storeys built on it to account fully for the deposits of the thrifty French.

Yet Betham-Edwards differed from Hamerton in one essential regard: their attitude towards the possibilities of improved friendship between the two nations. "Anything like cordial friendship", she writes of Hamerton, "much less intimacy, he evidently regards as wholly Utopian" (Betham-Edwards, 1891: 706). Her firm belief was that the English were no longer "magnificently hated" in France. Two phenomena over the previous twenty years had sparked a tangible *rapprochement*: first, cheap travel, whereby the Hastings workman could now and again spend a long weekend on the French coast for a few shillings; and, second, interestingly enough, the development of and visits to international exhibitions. The Centennial Exhibition of 1889, she writes, had attracted tens of thousands of visitors from Britain, and people of all classes had returned home with "quite altered views of France and the French character". Already in 1878, Matilda had reported on the throngs of people, many of them English, enjoying the modern delights of the Exhibition in Paris (see Betham-Edwards, 1878a). Finally, quoting a retired French notary, Betham-Edwards underlined the need for an international league of public instruction. And she herself, in the same year as this article was published, was promoted *Officier de l'Instruction publique*. She was the very embodiment of this spirit of understanding, an agent of what we might call the "*entente culturelle*".

The second critical review appeared at a moment of heightened tension between the two nations, and offered a sharp critique of J. E. C. Bodley's two-volume magnum opus on France (Betham-Edwards, 1898; Bodley, 1898). Her review appeared in Leo Maxse's *National Review*, which played no small part in advancing the Dreyfusard cause (see Cornick, 2006b). For Betham-Edwards, Bodley's work was marred by its Ultramontanism and its strong anti-Republican bias. Bodley seemed to believe that "English travellers never quit the beaten track", because he admitted to being astonished at an encounter with an English traveller in Bourges. Yet her own observations showed that over the years since the establishment of the Third Republic, increasing numbers of British people were travelling to France, and not always to the usual tourist destinations.

Increasing trade between the two countries meant that British commercial travellers were more and more frequently to be seen throughout France. She proceeds to demolish, or at least question, some of Bodley's arguments. Part of the problem was that his arguments "re-echo in English dress the views of M. Taine" (Betham-Edwards, 1898: 424). In the early 1890s, Bodley had indeed sought advice from Hippolyte Taine, and frequented his milieu (as recalled in Vogüé, 1901). Bodley attributed all failings in contemporary France to the Revolution, including even the quality of hotels and railways: these were much more prosaically to be explained by other factors, said Betham-Edwards, citing principally the monopolistic nature of certain French railway companies. In sum, this was Republican France viewed through "Ultramontane spectacles". Referring to authorities on France whom Bodley had not used or, at least, had not quoted from (including Alfred Rambaud whose work, she said, was now on the Modern History tripos at Oxford [Rambaud, 1888]), Betham-Edwards refuted Bodley's condemnation of the atrocities of the Revolution, which were but a "drop in the ocean" compared to those committed on French soil in the name of religion. Writing of torture under the *ancien régime*, and long before Michel Foucault, she condemns the atrociously cruel execution of Damiens (cf. Foucault, 1975). Bodley relied too much, she maintains, on the naïve credulity of his readers. Finally, with considerable self assurance and conviction, she asserts that "France is now Republican to the backbone", having survived the three crises of Boulanger, Panama and the assassination of President Carnot. The implication was that it would also survive the Dreyfus Affair, which was now dominating politics both in France and elsewhere in Europe. She concludes by pointing out that whereas Bodley may have spent seven years researching his book, her own knowledge was based on 22 years' accumulated travels and observations.[4]

In the final chapter of her *Reminiscences*, Betham-Edwards treats directly the theme of Anglo-French relations. Despite the Republic's rapid progress and the spread and democratisation of travel, during the last few years of the 19th century relations had noticeably deteriorated. This paradoxical situation was to be explained, she said, through two factors: "First and foremost we have the Ultramontane detestation of a Protestant and democratic nation, next, the political jealousy of our colonial expansion" (Betham-Edwards, 1900: 307). Although she does not mention it, contemporary readers of the *National Review* would have grasped immediately that Matilda was making barely disguised references both to the politico-religious tensions of the Dreyfus Affair (in which the Protestant British were alleged to be co-sponsors of an anti-French *syndicat*), and to the perceived arrogance of the British over the Fashoda crisis of November 1898, coinciding as it did with the continuing upheavals of the Affair. For Betham-Edwards, on both sides of the Channel an over-excitable, even jingoistic, mass circulation press was to blame for stoking up mutual resentment.

Once the Dreyfus Affair had subsided, and following the accession of King Edward VII, who played a major role in bringing the French and the British closer together, Betham-Edwards rejoiced in the prospect of an *entente*. A year before the signing of the Entente cordiale, and to mark the new King's momentous official visit to charm the French in May 1903, she published a celebratory sonnet in the *Westminster Gazette*:

France and England

May 1, 1903
Fair sister France, Britannia hails this day,
Auspicious harbinger, delayed too long!
In storied page, on canvas and in song,
Shall live the advent of King Edward's May.

Our paths lie parallel by land and sea,
A kindred spirit animates our laws,
Together we have triumphed in the cause
Of sovereign right and dearest-bought liberty.

Thy sunny shores are England's pleasure-ground,
Thy arts, thy letters, have their votaries here,
And Albion's muse unto French hearts is dear.
Why have we sat so long apart and frowned?
Let us no longer wiser moods withstand,
But cherish peace and progress hand in hand!
(quoted from Betham-Edwards, 1917: flyleaf)

A new era of genuine rapprochement had begun. Four years after the signing of the Entente in April 1904, the great White City exhibition would celebrate all aspects — political, economic, and cultural — of the Franco-British relationship.

In conclusion

Matilda Betham-Edwards considered education, dialogue, and exchange between nations to be paramount. She ends her chapter on Anglo-French relations by quoting the French sociologist, Adolphe Coste, in support of her reasoning:

> As civilisation advances and international relations increase, an adopted country will generally be added to that of our birth, a country of which the language and literature, the arts and history, will be familiar to us, and with whose inhabitants we form alike commercial and social relations.[5]

As becomes clear from a study of her writing on France, Betham-Edwards firmly believed that international exhibitions were among the most effective mediating channels through which to bring the culture of the "adopted country" to the adopting public. After all, she had visited those of 1878, 1889 and 1900. Thus, following the thaw initiated in 1903 by King Edward VII in the icy relations between the two nations, a "new era" had been inaugurated. Towards the end of a life devoted to Franco-British amity, and looking back on those halcyon days of the Entente, Matilda saw the White City exhibition as having represented the pinnacle of her hopes:

> An understanding based upon "all-saving common sense", common interest, and the fitness of things has brought nations together. And of the many evidences of good-fellowship, the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908 was the most gratifying, and, when

> we review the past, surely the most astounding! For what Utopian, what French or English dreamer, could have foreshadowed the Tricolour and Union Jack fluttering over a British-Franco Exhibition on the banks of the Thames? Truly, as the Greek tragedian wrote, "Things which are not accomplished, and unthought-of events have the gods brought to pass" (Betham-Edwards, 1917: 28).

The true tragedy, however, is that despite the efforts made on both sides of the Channel between 1903 and 1914 to use the Entente to promote "Universal Peace" in Europe, the outbreak of the Great War shattered all those hopes. As Geoff Dyer perceptively puts it: "Life in the decade and a half preceding 1914 has come to be viewed inevitably and unavoidably through the optic of the war that followed it" (Dyer, 2001: 5). This is partly to explain why Matilda Betham-Edwards's books on France disappeared so quickly from view.

Notes

[1] "…le Palais des Travaux de la Femme (anglais) d'une architecture trop chargée et d'un goût peu sûr"; quoted from Guyot and Sandoz, 1917, II, 107.
[2] See Betham-Edwards, 1885 and 1892; also Betham-Edwards, 1919, chapter III. For a fascinating account of her principal journey to Algeria, see Betham-Edwards, 1877b.
[3] On Menier's "Chocolate City", see Betham-Edwards, 1878b: 374ff; on the *cité ouvrière* in Mulhouse, see Betham-Edwards, 1884a: 186. (In 1908 Chocolat Menier would have a pavilion at the White City Exhibition).
[4] This was not the only critique of Bodley, whose book stimulated much debate in the reviews.
[5] Betham-Edwards, 1900: 313-314, quoting from A. Coste (1842-1901), *Les principes d'une sociologie objective*, Paris: Alcan, 1899.

Bibliography

Works by Matilda Betham-Edwards awarded a Gold Medal at the Franco-British Exhibition, 1908:

(1877a) *A Year in Western France*. London: Longmans, Green.

(1879) *Holidays in Eastern France*. London: Hurst and Blackett.

(1889a) *The Roof of France*. London: Longmans, Green.

(1889b) Arthur Young's *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789*, with an 'Introduction' by M. Betham-Edwards. London: George Bell.

(1894) *France of Today,* 2 vol. London : Percival and Co.

(1900) *Anglo-French Reminiscences*. London: Chapman & Hall.

(1902) *East of Paris*. London: Hurst and Blackett.

(1905) *Home Life in France*. London: Methuen.

(1907) *Literary Rambles in France*. London: A. Constable and Co.

Journal articles by Matilda Betham-Edwards used in this study:

(1875) 'The Science Congress at Nantes', *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 12, October, 528-538.

(1875-6) 'In Western France', *Fraser's Magazine*, vols. 12-13, November 1875 to April 1876.

(1877b) 'Progress of Colonisation in Algeria, *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 16, October, 422-441.

(1878a) 'Social Aspects of the Paris Exhibition', *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 18, August, 208-225.

(1878b) 'Holidays in Eastern France [1-4]', *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 18, September to December.

(1880a) 'Among French Friends in Burgundy', *Fraser's Magazine*, no. 603, March, 392-402.

(1880b) 'A Month in Auvergne', *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. 42, July, 189-200.

(1881) 'A Recent History of the Second Empire', *Temple Bar*, vol. 62, Sept-December, 55-81.

(1883a) 'In the Heart of the Vosges', *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. 48, September, 394-402.

(1883b) 'In Alsace-Lorraine', *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. 49, December, 117-124.

(1884a) 'In Alsace-Lorraine', *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. 49, January, 182-189.

(1884b) 'A Chapter on French Geography', *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. 50, May, 47-52.

(1885) 'Eugène Bodichon; a Republican of 1830', *Temple Bar*, vol. 74, July, 331-340.

(1891) 'French and English', *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 50, November, 701-707.

(1892a) 'Madame Bodichon: A Reminiscence', *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 51, February, 213-218.

(1898) 'A Publicist's View of France' [Review of J.E.C. Bodley, *France*, 2 vol., 1898], *National Review*, vol. 31, May, 422-431.

Other works by Matilda Betham-Edwards used in this study:

(1892b) [Editor] *Murray's Handbook for Travellers to Eastern, Central, and Southern France*. London: John Murray.

(1914) *Under the German Ban in Alsace and Lorraine*. London: Dent.

(1917) *Twentieth-Century France, Social, Intellectual, Territorial*. London: Chapman and Hall.

(1919) *Mid-Victorian Memories*. London: John Murray.

Other works:

Anon. (1919), 'Death of Miss Betham-Edwards', *The Times*, 7 January.

Bodley, J. E. C. (1898), *France*, London: Macmillan (2 vol.).

Cornick, M. (2006a), '« Sceller l'Entente » : l'importance politique et internationale de l'Exposition franco-britannique, Londres, 1908', in Cooper-Richet, D. and Rapoport, M.,

L'Entente cordiale. Cent ans de relations culturelles franco-britanniques (1904-2004). Paris: Éditions Créaphis, 245-260.

Cornick, M. (2006b), 'The Impact of the Dreyfus Affair in late-Victorian Britain', *Franco-British Studies*, no. 22, Autumn: 57-82.

Dyer, G. (2001), *The Missing of the Somme*. London: Phoenix Press.

Flint, K. (2004), 'Hamerton, Philip Gilbert (1834-1894)', *Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: OUP.

Foucault, M. (1975), *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, Paris: Gallimard.

Foville, A. de (1890), *La France économique*, année 1889. Paris: Armand Colin.

Guyot, Y. and Sandoz, G.-R. (eds) (1917), *Rapport général de L'Exposition franco-britannique de Londres 1908*. Paris: Comité français des Expositions à l'étranger, 3 vol.

Hirsch, P. (2004), 'Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891)', *Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: OUP.

Pilbeam, P. (2000), 'A forgotten socialist and feminist: Ange Guépin', in Cornick, M. and Crossley, C. (eds), *Problems in French History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Rambaud, A. (1888), *Histoire de la civilisation contemporaine en France*. Paris: Armand Colin. Successive editions of this work appeared well into the 1900s.

Rees, J. (2006), *Matilda Betham-Edwards, Novelist, Travel Writer and Francophile*. Hastings: The Hastings Press.

Thirsk, J. (2004), 'Matilda Betham-Edwards', *Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: OUP.

Valbert, G. [pseud. of Victor Cherbuliez] (1894), 'Le voyage d'une anglaise en France', *La Revue des deux mondes*, 1 septembre, 217-229.

Vogüé, E.-M. de (1901), 'Un regard anglais sur la France', *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 juin: 677-693.

Weber, E. (1979), *Peasants into Frenchmen. The modernization of rural France 1870-1914*. London: Chatto & Windus.