

through music education? Rhetorical questions may generate further discussion about a topic which, according to Volk, "is as much about people as it is about music" (194).

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Brundage, Anthony. *The People's Historian: John Richard Green and the Writing of History in Victorian England*. Westport, CT: London: Greenwood Press, 1994. xi + 184 pp. Index. Hard cover, ISBN 0-313-27954-3. \$59.95.

English and European scholars began serious attempts at writing social history during the eighteenth century. However, top-down methodological approaches that focused on elite individuals and institutions continued to dominate the historical landscape. That became especially true after about 1815, when, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, it seemed safer to write political history than social history.<sup>1</sup>

Not long after that, Leopold von Ranke began his long career as a professor of history at the University of Berlin. More than anyone else, Ranke, through his rigorous attention to written sources and verification of the same, "transferred history to the stage"<sup>2</sup> in the emerging European universities, and, in doing so, professionalized it. Ranke's reliance on official state documents and some of his attitudes led him to produce conservative historical accounts that focused on European national politics and religion at the highest levels, which sped historiography's return to narrative accounts that emphasized political history. Social historiography never disappeared completely, but for the most part it was not within the

<sup>1</sup>Peter Burke, "Rank the Revolutionary," in *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 43-44.

<sup>2</sup>Rudolf Vierhaus, "Leopold von Ranke: Historian and Teacher," in *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, 67.

purview of the new professional university-based historians of the nineteenth century. Moreover, social history accounts failed to capture the attention of the general reading public.

Some of that changed in 1874, when Macmillan published a single volume written by a thirty-three-year old amateur English historian named John Richard Green (1837-1883). To the surprise of nearly everyone, including the author and publisher, the book, *A Short History of the English People*, sold 32,000 copies in its first year. Eventually, with sales of one-half million copies, the *Short History* rivaled the sales figures for Thomas Babington Macaulay's multi-volume *History of England from the Accession of James II*. Green's accomplishment was astonishing in part because Macaulay was a highly respected author, whereas Green was an unknown.

The *Short History* was not unique in its treatment of common people, for Macaulay and others had done that. Rather, the striking thing about the *Short History* was that the author focused and organized the entire book on the theme of common people, their interests and activities, and especially their desire for freedom and self-government. Democratic stirrings were not unique to John Richard Green in Victorian England, but he alone among historians produced a work of scholarship that gave voice to those thoughts and impulses.

Anthony Brundage devotes only the first six pages to setting Green and his work in historical perspective. This is unfortunate because Green's importance to modern readers lies not in the *Short History* itself, but rather in the his contributions to historiography. The remainder of Brundage's book consists of a relatively straightforward account of John Richard Green's life and works. Essentially, the book is a biography with an introduction.

Green was, above all else, a social critic. He demonstrated that quality at young age, together with his gift for narrative, when he wrote a prize-winning essay that took the side of Parliament against Charles I, an effort that earned him an expulsion from school. He obtained the remainder of his early formal education from tutors, one of whom introduced him to the great English historian Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman*

*Empire*, which Green admired greatly. As a student at Christian-oriented Oxford University in the 1850s, Green became disgusted with the "system" in which "most tutors thought of themselves as in a comfortable holding pattern, awaiting well-paid livings in country parsonages" (p. 20). Brundage notes that Oxford had not yet become the serious, German-style university that it became in subsequent decades. In fact, Green refused to major in history at Oxford because the dons taught in "snippets." He studied physical science instead, a field that did not yet include studies of Darwinian evolution. In the end, Green obtained most of his education through self-study.

Brundage credits Green's expulsion from school, his critical attitude toward Oxford, and his father's death when Green was but fourteen years old, which forced him to take charity from difficult relatives, for "Green's natural spirit of independence" (p. 21). Regardless, by the time he graduated from Oxford, Green "had already developed an impatience with the traditional manner of presenting history as a chronicle of major political events" (p. 28), an attitude that was reflected in a commissioned series of articles on Oxford life in the eighteenth century that he wrote soon after graduation.

Between graduation and his examination for Holy Orders in the Church of England, Green visited Ireland, which further reinforced his opposition to what he saw as heavy-handed government policies, and sharpened his "acute sensitivity to geography that would be such a marked feature of his historical publications" (p. 30). During this interim, he also studied science and, interestingly, taught singing.

After being ordained as a deacon, Green worked in a ward house for the poor in London's East End, a section with unusually severe social problems. Never in good health, he transferred to a middle class neighborhood, but he became unhappy there and eventually transferred back to the East End. In the 1860s, about the time he became a priest, he became involved in such religious controversies of the day as Darwinism and the literalness of the *Bible*.

Financial pressures in Green's parish led him to begin writing for the *Saturday Review*. From 1867-74, he published 164 essays in that journal,

including articles, reviews, and historical sketches. These works included numerous discussions of "his views on the philosophy and scope of history." He criticized historians', antiquarians', and public officials' tendency to rely on government documents as sources. According to Brundage, "In the tendency to worship at the altar of primary-source research, Green saw the danger of historians becoming narrowly focused, dry-as-dust antiquarians." Green believed that "Breaking free of the distorted images reflected in central records . . . was the key to achieving a truer and more fully rounded picture of the past" (p. 59).

As the years passed, Green's political views became more and more radical. He criticized the Church of England for attempting to control education, including its dominance over Oxford University, and he took Premier Gladstone and other politicians to task for "lacking a clear vision of the nation's real problems" (p. 63). Green's increasing radicalism, his poor health caused by tuberculosis, his perilous financial situation, and some controversies over his sex life as a young cleric led him to leave the priesthood and sign a contract with Macmillan to write the *Short History*.

Green organized his book on principles of social and cultural history, not political and military events or foreign affairs. He included accounts of kings and generals, but "they had to share the stage with less exalted folk and less turbulent events" (p. 81). Brundage believes that the *Short History* represented a less radical shift in historiography than Green himself claimed for the book, but that "it was nonetheless significant" (p. 80).

Green worried about responses to his book, and indeed some "criticized him for downplaying military history, which would fail to excite schoolboys to arms" (p. 106). At least one historian sniped about amateurs writing for the mass market instead of for specialists. Still others read Green's book as an attack on the British monarchy, military, colonization practices, and the like. Nevertheless, the vast majority of reviewers were positive, including some of the leading historians and literary figures of the day. American reviewers were especially positive, perhaps because Green glorified the American Revolution and certain other aspects of American life. German reviewers were positive also, although some criticized the

book's inaccuracies, a criticism reputedly made privately by the American author of a highly favorable review also.

Oxford University honored Green for his work, and most historians praised the book highly. However, because he wrote popular history, the professional historical community did not fully accept him. Therefore, he had few prospects for a professorship at Oxford or elsewhere. Consequently, he continued to write for money, including a biographical series for Macmillan. Brundage speculates that Green might not have accepted a professorship anyway, because he valued his independence, preferred living in London, and needed to spend his winters in Italy for his health.

Eventually, one of Green's desires and one of his reasons for leaving the priesthood came to fruition when he married late in his relatively short life. Green and his wife, Alice, collaborated on several books during the six years of their marriage, the final six years of his life. This was an unusually productive period for Green, in part due to Alice's help.

By the time Green died in 1883 at age forty-six, history had become firmly established in the British university curriculum. As the field became increasingly specialized, historians came to view Green's work as superficial, with "feeble documentary foundations" (p. 162). Increasingly, professional historians eschewed Green's methodology and his ideology. Historical research became more and more specialized and fragmented, with more objective scientific approaches displacing the more literary approaches of the type that Green had employed: "the tightly structured, massively documented legal and institutional studies . . . [became] the new currency of academic respectability" (p. 161).

Nevertheless, Green's *Short History* outsold nearly all other history books of its day, and it was adopted widely as a school text. Brundage believes that popular history books by Green and a few others, rather than monographs produced by professional historians, "have been a major force in shaping whatever historical understanding may be said to reside among non-academicians" (p. 158). He also concludes that Green's approach to history paved the way for the more meticulous historians who tried alternative approaches in the twentieth century. Furthermore, Green "was a

superb storyteller and literary stylist, the best of his age," but his popularization of history and his break "with the methodological orthodoxies of his day" (p. 165) became his most enduring legacies.

This book could serve as a reminder to music education historians that methodological approaches and ideologies can and do affect historical writing, and that current practices emerged from past practices. Unfortunately, Brundage fails to set John Richard Green and his work in context, especially with regard to the heavy influence of positivist research methods and attitudes held by British historians at the time (and even more so by American historians). Green maintained friendships with some of those individuals, most notably, perhaps, William Stubbs of Oxford, an ardent admirer of Ranke and the great German historian's positivist approach.<sup>3</sup>

Ranke and his followers have had a strong, albeit indirect, influence on modern music education historiography. Brundage's failure to discuss adequately the dominant historiographical methodologies and attitudes of Green's era renders his book less valuable to music education historians than it might have been. Nevertheless, the final chapter of the book, entitled "Aftermath and Legacy," consists largely of meaningful interpretations of the various legacies of Green's life and work, with little emphasis on the details of his life. As the book's strongest chapter by far, it would be worthwhile reading for music education historians.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Jere T. Humphreys, review of *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell, in *The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 19 (May 1998): 211–212.

<sup>4</sup>Jere T. Humphreys, "The Content of Music Education History: It's a Philosophical Question, Really," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* (forthcoming).