“God for Harry, England and St. George!” Medieval English History in the Novels of G. A. Henty

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In 1872, a few months after the end of the conflict, G. A. Henty, who had been a war correspondent, published The Young Franc-Tireurs and Their Adventures in the Franco-Prussian War. In the hundred or so historical novels he would subsequently write, the young reader will have occasion to witness similar historical events, seen through the eyes of a protagonist, a boy of his own age; this in many titles is explicit: With Clive in India (1884), With Wolfe in Canada (1887), With Moore at Corunna (1898), With Buller in Natal (1901). This paper will discuss the books Henty dedicated to the history of England in the Middle Ages: Beric the Briton (Romanization), The Dragon and the Raven (King Alfred and the Danes), Wulf the Saxon (the Norman Invasion) and half a dozen others. At school history was schematic, indeed boring; for the avid readers we then were, History, authentic History, was that described by Henty.