

helped in drawing such conclusions as they may wish by eleven tables, scattered through the introduction, dealing with the distribution of ‘Open’ and ‘Close’ parishes in rural Warwickshire, the Sunday School scholars in different denominations, the social class of nonconformist signatories to census returns – to name but a few matters. Additionally, users are helped by a grouped set of eight maps which plot the distribution of Anglican churches, Wesleyan Methodist chapels, Primitive Methodist chapels, ‘Other’ Methodist chapels, Independent chapels, Baptist chapels, ‘other’ chapels and Roman Catholic chapels respectively. Beginning and end paper maps identify by name county boundaries, parish boundaries and registration district boundaries, and ‘Open’ and ‘Close’ parishes respectively. One can still argue about the significance of what the 1851 census as a whole tells us but there can be no doubt that it is valuable to have another county’s returns made so readily and expertly accessible. The Dugdale Society is to be congratulated on moving, for the first time, into the nineteenth century!

PERSHORE

KEITH ROBBINS

*Religion and politics in the Risorgimento. Britain and the new Italy, 1861–1875.*

By Danilo Raponi. Pp. xi + 302. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. £60.

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Raponi’s book places the relationship between Protestantism and the Italian Risorgimento at the centre of the historical enquiry, in line with a historiographical tradition which may be traced back to the great doyen of ‘Protestant Risorgimento’ studies, the Italian Waldensian scholar, Giorgio Spini. Raponi goes a step further in that he locates this field of enquiry in the context of the postcolonial studies of recent decades, interpreting the relationship between British Protestants and Italy through Edward Said’s now familiar lens of cultural imperialism. Following a trajectory embarked upon by others (Maura O’Connor, and more recently, Annemarie McAllister) in the context of the British orientalisering ‘gaze’ on the Italians (‘inner European orientalism’), Raponi has chosen to focus on an aspect which postcolonial scholars had hitherto neglected, namely, British Protestants’ encounters with the religious question in liberal Italy. Previous, more traditional, historiography had analysed this relationship – known to have coloured British attitudes towards the national unification movement in the revolutionary years; particularly after the reinstatement of the Catholic hierarchy in Britain, in 1851, it was known that Protestant anxieties had been heightened. Raponi, however, by analysing a wealth of original documents, contributes towards a more sophisticated understanding of British Protestants’ constructions of the Italians in the newly unified nation, also known as liberal Italy: the author is particularly interested in highlighting the connections between religion and British foreign policy, challenging the ‘secularisation thesis’ still prevalent in diplomatic history (p. 22), and contributing a novel, welcome perspective in the context of the centrality that ‘culture wars’ have been shown to occupy in nineteenth-century Europe.

The transnational approach is central to Raponi’s enquiry. In analysing Protestants’ encounters with Italy the book moves seamlessly from the analysis of

traditional anti-Catholic discourses of the conservative and Evangelical establishments (ch. i) to the arguably more interesting dissection of the intentions of the missionary societies (chs ii, iv). The 'civilisational missionary' perspective, which provides the focus of the book, is identified and critiqued through a detailed analysis of different typologies of proselytisation: Anglican preachers, nonconformist missionaries and grassroots colporteurs. The study of the latter, identified by Raponi as 'intercultural agents' and 'informal or private diplomats', is a strikingly original feature of the book: as it is convincingly argued, 'petty' Evangelicals, 'the missionary and revolutionary in human clothes' matter, as they were the vehicle through which ideas bigger than them reached spheres of society, 'the "murky shallows", that otherwise would have ignored them' (p. 20).

The sensitive intricacies of diplomacy (chs iii, v), centred around the unresolved 'Roman Question', are also skilfully brought to the fore thanks to the careful analysis of the role of Odo Russell, from 1858 'the unofficial representative of the British government in Rome', and nephew to the Foreign Secretary, John Russell. Refuting previous historians' suggestions of his alleged sympathy for Catholicism (p. 119), Raponi underlines the historiographical neglect of Odo Russell's despatches as main channels of information for the British government on the political situation of the Papal States. The analysis of Odo Russell's reports is particularly interesting as it brings to the surface how well informed the British were on the pope's most covert political strategies: indeed, we learn, so hostile was the papal government to the new nation that in 1867 it allegedly 'instructed the clergy and the Bourbon Party to join with the Republicans and vote for the Mazzinian candidates, in the hope of ... creating difficulties in Italy' (p. 179).

Raponi's skill is evident in his ability to draw the readers' attention equally to Odo Russell's world of diplomacy and to the underworld of humble colporteurs, adopting, in the latter case, a 'history from below' approach convincingly adapted to the religious and transnational context. While the book is possibly most innovative when dealing with colporteurs and 'cultural agents', Raponi is aware that 'it would be wrong to dismiss the importance of high politics and the role of the state' (p. 20). As far as high politics is concerned, however, this aim is only partly achieved if we consider the role that the Established Church played in the context of the relations between the new Italy and its potential religious reformation: an analysis of the official policies recommended by the bishop of Gibraltar to chaplains residing in unified Italy is surprisingly absent. In particular, Bishop Sandford's relationship with the missionary societies and his recommendations to the chaplains in the new Italy appear like a neglected piece of this jigsaw: including this would have added a further dimension to this otherwise well-researched, sensitive and beautifully written book.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

MARCELLA PELLEGRINO SUTCLIFFE