

Nicholas Schofield, *Victorian Crusaders: British and Irish Volunteers in the Papal Army 1860-70*, Warwick: Helion and Company, 2022, pp. xv + 205, £29.95, ISBN: 978-1-915070-53-1

Saint George and old England for ever!  
Once more her sons arm for the fight,  
With the cross on their breasts to do battle  
For God, Holy Church, and the right.  
Twine your swords with the palm branch, brave comrades,  
For as Pilgrims we march forth to-day;—  
Love God, O my soul, love Him only,  
And then with light heart go thy way.

We come from the blue shores of England,  
From the mountains of Scotia we come,  
From the green, faithful island of Erin,—  
Far, far, from our wild northern home.  
Place Saint Andrew's red cross in your bonnets,  
Saint Patrick's green shamrock display;—  
Love God, O my soul, love Him only,  
And then with light heart go thy way.

These, the first two verses of the 'Song of the English Zouaves', which prefaced Joseph Powell's 1871 memoir, *Two Years in the Pontifical Zouaves, A Narrative of Travel, Residence, and Experience in the Roman States*, conjures the spirit of thousands of foreign volunteers who served in the army of the Papal States in the 1860s— at the sharp end, in other words, of the international, Catholic 'Anti-Risorgimento' which sought to uphold the integrity and independence of the Papal States against the encroaching forces of Italian nationalism. A prime —and notably bloody— cockpit of the culture wars which wracked the Catholic world in the nineteenth century, the cause of these volunteers was anathema to Liberal nationalists and to anti-clericals, as it was to most Protestants in Great Britain, where Garibaldi and his Redshirts were lauded and mimicked, while the cause of Pope Pius IX was held in proportionate (and predictable) abhorrence. The exploits of the 1,600 English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh volunteers who form the subject of this book were, therefore, a significant and fascinating manifestation of the awkward position of Catholics in the British Isles in the mid-nineteenth century— symptomatic of their counter-cultural loyalties, their abiding distinctiveness, and the limits of their assimilation within the overwhelmingly Protestant culture and polity of the United Kingdom.

Comprising only a small proportion of foreign volunteers in the last army of the Papal States, Pope Pius IX's British and Irish volunteers

were concentrated in two units that form the focus of this book—the short-lived, 1,300-strong and fairly homogenous Irish Battalion of St Patrick (raised in 1860), and the multinational Pontifical Zouaves (formed in 1861, which enlisted nearly 11,000 recruits, 328 of whom were from the British Isles, before their disbandment following the fall of Rome in 1870). In the course of fifteen chapters, Nicholas Schofield, archivist of the Archdiocese of Westminster and a lecturer in Church History at Allen Hall, traces the history of these units against the backdrop of the Risorgimento and Anti-Risorgimento; the legal constraints of Britain's Foreign Enlistment Act of 1819; the shifting sands of European great power politics; the recurrent (and surprisingly effective) reform of the Pontifical Army in its twilight years; the campaigns of 1860 (against the Piedmontese), of 1867 (against Garibaldi's Redshirts), and of 1870 (against the overwhelming numbers of the Italian Army, after the French, Rome's protecting power, had evacuated the Eternal City). A final chapter considers the 'Afterlife' of the Pontifical Zouaves, including the role played by certain (non-British) veterans in protecting the missions of the White Fathers around Lake Tanganyika.

Amidst the overarching politics and accounts of their campaigns, fascinating details emerge. For instance, Schofield disputes the conventional wisdom around the rout of the Redshirts at the Battle of Mentana in 1867: they were not so much decimated by the intervention of the French, armed with their brand-new Chassepot rifles, which were later to wreak carnage in the Franco-Prussian War, as plainly outmatched by the Zouaves in a classic, stand-up fight between these, the ultimate champions of their respective causes. Furthermore, and as the ultimate in military bling, the flashy Zouave style (which originated in the French conquest of Algeria and was widely modelled in the American Civil War) was at first considered too 'Mahommedan' for the cream of the Pontifical Army. Most interesting, however, are the chapters that profile the soldiers of these units, exploring their piety, pastimes, and the cultural and political crosscurrents of their milieu. The Battalion of St Patrick, for example, was partly inspired by the success of Britain's Volunteer movement, an upsurge of amateur soldiering triggered by the assumed threat of Napoleon III's France. Moreover, and notwithstanding the keen and varied efforts of the Papal Defence Committee in Britain, there remained significant disincentives to enlistment in the pontifical forces: against a background of ambient anti-Catholicism, and the recent agitation against the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales, such a militant response to the Roman Question was widely seen as unduly

provocative, as well as potentially illegal. Finally, even their shared role as neo-crusaders and prospective Catholic martyrs could not overcome the political tensions between English and Irish volunteers: while the former were predisposed to showy celebrations of the birthday of Queen Victoria, the latter were badly tainted by suspicions of Fenianism (so much so, that their ranks were purged after a requiem mass was allegedly held for the Fenian ‘Manchester Martyrs’ of 1867). In one particularly rich appendix, Schofield painstakingly lists scores of English and Welsh Zouaves, including their places of birth and particulars of service, thus helping to illuminate a social diversity that was distinctly at odds with the rank and file of the contemporary British Army, in which, of course, many more thousands of Catholics preferred to serve.

In short, this is a fine and important study of the Catholic response to the *Risorgimento* in the British Isles, one which contributes to a growing body of European scholarship on the army of the Papal States and on the Pontifical Zouaves in particular, whose broader history has already been related to an Anglophone readership in the form of Charles A. Coulombe’s *The Pope’s Legion: The Multinational Fighting Force that Defended the Vatican* (St Martin’s Press, 2008). But why has it taken quite so long (150 years) for this colourful and fascinating story to receive the in-depth treatment it so clearly warrants in the historiography of British and Irish Catholicism? And why has it fallen to a publisher who specialises in military history (companion volumes include studies of the Portuguese Civil War of 1828 to 1832, and of the War of the Pacific of 1879 to 1883) to produce a work of this kind— that is, a thorough, well-written and copiously illustrated study that will likely prove more familiar to wargamers than to students of the history of Catholicism in Britain and Ireland? Certain answers suggest themselves. Besides the sheer range and intricacy of the sources involved (Schofield must be congratulated on his perseverance, especially under lockdown conditions), the evolution of the modern papacy (especially its eventual rapprochement with the Italian state), and the functional pacifism of post-Vatican II Catholicism have likely served to suppress interest in this subject. There may, of course, be other reasons too, but this chronic neglect is telling, especially given the vaunted place of transnational history within the academy. Still, and whatever the cause of that previous neglect, Schofield’s study has amply compensated for it, extending and enriching our understanding of mid-Victorian Catholicism in the British Isles and its role in the vicissitudes of Pope Pius IX and the last throes of the Patrimony of St Peter.

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