

BAHNR 1: 52-4.

“Per me, vivere e Cristo”: La vita e l’opera del Conte Piero Guicciardini nel centenario della sua morte 1808-1880

D.D. Ronco,

Unione Cristiana Edizioni Bibliche: Fondi, Italy, 1980

173pp. Lit 14,000.

Supplemento al Libro “Per me vivere e Cristo”

D.D. Ronco (ed.)

Unione Cristiana Edizioni Bibliche: Fondi, Italy, 1986

143pp. Lit 7,500.

“Crocifisso con Cristo”: Biografia di Teodorico Pietrocola-Rossetti

Daisy Dina Ronco

Unione Cristiana Edizioni Bibliche: Fondi, Italy, 1991

219pp. Lit 14,000.

La fede e l’opera di Matilde Calandrini (dalle lettere a Gian Pietro Vieusseux)

D.D. Ronco

Privately printed: University of Wales, Bangor, n.d. .

Risorgimento and the Free Italian Churches now Churches of the Brethren

Daisy D. Ronco,

Privately printed: University of Wales, Bangor, 1996

120 pp. £5.00.

It is nearly twenty years since *The Witness*, in 1980, carried five excellent papers by Doctor Daisy Ronco on ‘The evangelization of Italy in the nineteenth century’. Since then, Dr. Ronco, who for a time taught at Clarendon School and later was in charge of Italian Studies at the University College of North Wales in Bangor, has demonstrated in a succession of publications the scholarship and extensive research on which her earlier articles were based. From as early as the 1840s there were important links between the Brethren in the United Kingdom and the Italian Evangelical Christians, and in consequence Dr. Ronco’s work is of value not just for an understanding of Italian developments but for the light which she sheds on the Brethren movement as a whole.

The earlier history of the Brethren in Britain has been well researched but too often it has been treated as an isolated phenomenon with little attention paid to the post-Napoleonic continental *réveil* (particularly in Geneva) which was a significant factor in the movement’s origins. One of the virtues of Dr. Ronco’s most important volumes—namely her biographies of Count Guicciardini and Teodorico Pietrocola Rossetti—is that her subjects are located in a truly European context. Long before they came to England, there were important factors in the development of Guicciardini and Rossetti which the historian cannot afford to ignore. Any understanding of Rossetti’s life work must take into account the influence of Lamennais and the fervent nationalism of Italians like Mazzini in the 1840s. Similarly the enlightened social ideals of Swiss liberals like Eynard and Vieusseux, and the piety of the Swiss *réveil*—well exemplified in the work of Matilde Calandrini—were crucial elements in Guicciardini’s development before he came to England. Dr. Ronco at least places her subjects in these contexts though she does not enlarge on them at any length. Indeed, in the case of Guicciardini when she mentions the Swiss influences she is inclined to minimise their

importance insisting that the Tuscan Evangelical movement of the 1840s was ‘an indigenous phenomenon—independent and in no way sectarian.’¹ A fuller and more comprehensive analysis of these earlier factors in the development of Guicciardini and Rossetti is provided in some of the essays delivered by Giorgio Spini and others at the ‘Convegno di Studi su Piero Guicciardini’ in Florence in 1986,² but Dr. Ronco’s biographical studies are indispensable background reading. Indeed it is clear from her work on Matilde Calandrini that she is well aware of the significance of the Swiss *réveil*. Her discovery, in the Biblioteca Nazionale, of Calandrini’s extensive correspondence with Jean Pierre Vieusseux, has enabled her to reconstruct this pious Swiss philanthropist’s contribution to Tuscan life in the 1830s and 40s. Sad to relate, this volume is already out of print.

In her biographies of Guicciardini and Rossetti, Ronco has worked through a mass of contemporary writings and periodical publications as well as considerable quantities of MS material preserved in such places as the Rossetti collection at Spinetta Marengo, the *Echoes of Service* files in the Christian Brethren Archive in Manchester, and the Guicciardini family archives in Florence. In the last of these she has effectively used Rossetti’s correspondence with Guicciardini to illuminate the relationship between the emotional and poetic evangelist and his somewhat insensitive and demanding aristocratic patron. In this connection, the Rossetti biography contains valuable documentary appendices which are particularly informative about the critical years of 1863-66 when the anonymous publication of *Principii della Chiesa...* was the occasion of a great deal of sorrow and unreasonable behaviour. I suspect that all these letters are from the Guicciardini archive but unfortunately their provenance is not always indicated. Such an omission however, is far from typical as Dr. Ronco is usually scrupulous in giving her references. Another point which is worth making concerns pages 34-5 where she has confused Rossetti’s ‘beloved friend and patron Dr. Chapman’ with the saintly Robert Cleaver Chapman of Barnstaple. In fact the friend and patron of Rossetti’s exile was Matthew James Chapman (1797-1865) a scholar and doctor of medicine whose wife was probably a sister-in-law of the Brethren missionary Leonard Strong. This however is a solitary mistake, and it has been made by several other readers of Rossetti’s letters!

All of the works, to which I have so far referred, are in Italian, but a separately published *Supplemento* to the Guicciardini biography contains photographic reproductions of the Count’s twelve reports in English published between 1857 and 1863 together with the annual letters printed and circulated by the editors of *The Missionary Echo* from 1863 to 1883 (the year of Rossetti’s death). This is a particularly valuable collection of primary source material as the only complete set of Guicciardini’s twelve reports was hitherto only to be found in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence while the other letters have been taken from copies preserved at Spinetta Marengo and Manchester.

Dr. Ronco’s scholarship is not only judicious and balanced, but her work is also enhanced by a deep sympathy for those about whom she is writing. Her father was a respected elder in the Brethren Assembly in Genoa to whose ‘unbending loyalty to the “liberty which is in Christ”’ Professor Domenico Maselli paid tribute, maintaining that Cesare Ronco had been ‘for over seventy years, the discerning conscience of the Brethren movement in Italy.’³ His daughter’s achievement has been to ensure that the movement need not be ignorant of its

1. *Per me vivere...*, p.31.

2. L. Giorgio, M. Rubboli, (eds), *Piero Guicciardini, 1808-1886, un riformatore religioso nell’Europa dell’ottocento*, (Florence, 1988).

3. D. Maselli, *Libertà della Parola* (Turin 1978), p.162.

origins. As if her earlier labours were not enough, Daisy Ronco felt that when the 'International Brethren Conference on Mission' was being held in Rome in June 1996 it was only appropriate that the participants should be acquainted with the developments to which she had devoted so much work. In *Risorgimento and the Free Italian Churches* she has produced a readable account in English which summarises much of her earlier work. It will be a valuable 'crib' for historians who want to use her more detailed Italian studies but who are perhaps intimidated by the language of Dante!

Timothy C.F. Stunt