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The Sectarian Myth in Scotland: Of Bitter Memory and Bigotry  
(review)

Ewen A. Cameron

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workers are under-represented in extant literature. It is understandable that with his own background and interests the author has a chapter on 'Smoking the Herring', which details the making of the traditional East Anglian bloater and the more recent history of the kipper. The penultimate chapter is on legislation relating to the herring, which details developments from the late eighteenth century to the recent provisions under the Common Fisheries Policy; it is to be noted that there is also an appendix in which there is an extended verbatim quotation from the observations of the Rev. Nigel Marsh on the herring in the important parliamentary report of 1800, which was effectively on the eve of the main phase of expansion. Half of the concluding chapter on the 'Legacy of the Herring' is somewhat surprisingly on the North-East USA and Canada: and herring have now become of minor importance, whatever their more important and colourful past. The final comments are on 'red herring' which is seen as an ironic term for the intention to mislead by laying false trails, and the stated corollary is that in our modern age of affluence we have perhaps forgotten how to live.

The book is well illustrated by a wide range of evocative photographs and lino cuts; and while these add an important dimension to the text, on a number of occasions they could have been better reproduced—although this would no doubt have added to the cost of production. Even so these are essential in helping the author to capture the atmosphere of the herring fisheries.

The book will find a wide readership, and that is not likely to be confined to those places where the herring and the herring fishery are important parts of tradition and folk memory; but it will be more useful for checking on memorable episodes and eye-catching details than as a balanced and in-depth historical work.

*University of Aberdeen*

JAMES R. COULL

*The Sectarian Myth in Scotland: Of Bitter Memory and Bigotry*

By Michael Rosie

ISBN1403921679

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2004. £45.00. Pp. x, 184.

Sectarianism is a vexed issue in Scottish history and public life, discussion habitually serves to inflame rather than to inform and usually has a narrow frame of reference: football, schools, parades. In this book Michael Rosie seeks to begin a new analytical and rational discussion of the topic. The first part of his argument is that Scotland is not a sectarian society; that there is no evidence of sectarian views extending beyond the bounds of individual prejudice to characterise politics or the organisation of society. The most obvious comparison is with Northern Ireland, where confessional politics and social organisation along the lines of denomination are much more evident. Most of Rosie's clearly argued conclusions are drawn from statistics from the census and a variety of surveys of opinion; sometimes the reader wishes for a more textured discussion, but it is Rosie's intention to argue from evidence considered to be as objective as possible in order to counter the partisan views which have coloured much earlier discussion of the topic. He finds little support for the contentions that voting patterns correlate with religious denomination; the notion of a Roman Catholic bloc vote for Labour is undermined, as is the image of a Presbyterian Unionist phalanx. In matters of identity he argues for a relegation of religious persuasion as an explanation of attitudes towards, and perceptions of, Scottishness. He concludes on this aspect: 'If contemporary Scottishness is

understood as a landscape of social justice, of welfare provision, and of collective responsibility for the weak, then is it really any surprise that Catholics, Protestants and the non-religious are united in a sense of themselves as Scottish?' (p.70)

In what might appear to be an odd structural juxtaposition, the second half of the book moves from the contemporary to the historical; this is, however, explicable in the nature of Rosie's thesis and in that of the arguments he is seeking to counter. He argues that the 'sectarian myth' lives on despite the absence of real evidence for the persistence of sectarianism itself in today's Scotland because there is a perception that 'the past' was a sectarian place. He points out, however: 'to find that religion and politics mixed much more in the past is not the same thing as finding sectarianism, nor prejudice, nor bigotry. Rather it is to find that the past was more religious.' (p. 70). The remaining sections of the book deal with such historical topics as: the relationship between the labour movement, the Irish community and Roman Catholicism; the development of Roman Catholic education, leading up to and following the Education Act of 1918; the anti-Catholic campaigns of leading Presbyterian clergymen in the inter-war period; and the activities of such organisations as Alexander Ratcliffe's 'Scottish Protestant League' and the 'Protestant Action Society' led by John Cormack. Rosie's conclusion is that the evidence surrounding these episodes does not provide convincing support for a sectarian history of Scotland. For example, the apparent sectarian atmosphere of the inter-war period can be more sensibly characterised as short-lived sound and fury from small groups and isolated individuals; it did not take root in institutional, public or political life in Scotland. Rosie does not have a great deal to say about these topics that is original, but their inclusion here is an important building block in his argument and it complements the fresh research in the first part of the book. Historians are wont to criticise social scientists for lacking historical perspectives so it would be churlish to do other than compliment Dr Rosie for his well worked consideration of the historical dimension. To be slightly more critical, it might be said that there is a gap in the book: the consideration of the contemporary scene and the discussion of the pre-1939 period leaves a large hole in the middle. Pro-found changes took place in Scotland in the period between 1945 and 1970 which are rarely explored: Unionism, and elements of unionism, peaked and then declined; church adherence reached a high point before giving way to secularisation; and the economy changed in a way which made sectarian practices in the workplace—a topic not much discussed in this book—difficult to sustain. That Michael Rosie is not the only scholar to elide this important period does not entirely get him off the hook.

What is the overall significance of this book? Those who argue for the enduring nature of sectarianism might be culpable—certainly if we follow Rosie's argument—in the perpetuation of an imagined grievance; but are those who take the opposite extreme guilty of a comfortable self congratulation about the benign nature of Scottish society? Perhaps. This is not, however, the view adopted or recommended by Rosie. His concluding chapter is an exhortation to more critical approaches to the topic; he ends by arguing that '[m]uch of the debate about sectarianism has proved imprisoned in an imagined history, invoking exaggerated terrors at the outset of a new era for Scotland.' (p. 150) It is to be hoped that this new era includes a more mature, less sectarian debate about sectarianism. This book could well be the start of it.