



Vittoria Accoramboni
Stendhal
(Translator: C K Scott Moncrieff)

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About Stendhal:

Marie-Henri Beyle (January 23, 1783 – March 23, 1842), better known by his penname Stendhal, was a 19th century French writer. Known for his acute analysis of his characters' psychology, he is considered one of the earliest and foremost practitioners of the realism in his two novels *Le Rouge et le Noir* (The Red and the Black, 1830) and *La Chartreuse de Parme* (The Charterhouse of Parma, 1839). Source: Wikipedia

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Unfortunately for myself as for the reader, this is not a work of fiction, but the faithful translation of a most serious narrative written at Padua in December, 1585.

Some years ago I happened to be in Mantua; I was in search of sketches and small pictures in keeping with my small income, but I wanted only the work of painters earlier than the year 1600; about that date originality in Italian art, already greatly imperilled by the seizure of Florence in 1530, finally perished.

Instead of pictures, an aged patrician of great wealth and great avarice offered to sell me, at an extremely high price, some old manuscripts yellow with age; I asked leave to look through them; he consented, adding that he trusted to my honesty, that I would retain no memory of such spicy anecdotes as I might find, if I did not purchase his manuscripts.

On these terms, which appealed to me, I perused, to the great detriment of my eyesight, three or four hundred volumes in which had been jumbled together, two or three centuries ago, accounts of tragic adventures, letters challenging people to duels, treaties of peace between neighbouring nobles, memoranda upon every sort of subject, etc., etc. The venerable owner asked an enormous price for his manuscripts. After duly bargaining with him I acquired for a considerable sum the right to have copies made of certain stories which appealed to me and which illustrate Italian customs in the sixteenth century. I have twenty-two folio volumes of them, and it is one of these stories, faithfully translated, which the reader will find in the following pages, provided that he is endowed with patience. I know the history of the sixteenth century in Italy, and am of opinion that what follows is perfectly true. I have taken pains to arrange that the translation of that old Italian style, grave, direct, supremely obscure, and loaded with allusions to the things and ideas that occupied the world under the Pontificate of Sixtus V (in 1585) should shew no traces of the fine literature of to-day, or of the ideas of our unprejudiced age.

The unknown author of the manuscript is a circumspect person, he never judges any action, never leads up to it; his sole business is to relate things truthfully. If now and then he is unconsciously picturesque, that is because, in 1585, vanity did not enwrap a man's every action in a halo of affectation; he felt that he could exert an influence over his neighbour only by expressing himself with the utmost possible clarity. In the year 1585, with the exception of the fools kept at courts, or of poets, no one dreamed of making himself pleasant in speech. People had not yet learned to say: "I will die at Your Majesty's feet," when they had just sent

out for post horses with which to fly the country; this was perhaps the one form of treachery that was not in use. People spoke little, and everyone paid the most careful attention to what was said to him.

And so, gracious reader, look not here for a quick and savoury style, sparkling with up to date allusions to the latest fashions in feelings, do not, above all, expect the captivating emotions of a novel by George Sand; that great writer would have made a masterpiece of the life and misfortunes of Vittoria Accoramboni. The sincere account which I present to you can claim only the most modest advantages of history. When it so happens that, travelling post, alone, as night is falling, your thoughts turn to the great art of knowing the human heart, you may take as a basis for your conclusions the story told in the following pages. The author says everything, explains everything, leaves nothing to the reader's imagination; he wrote twelve days after the death of the heroine. [Footnote: The Italian manuscript is deposited at the office of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.]

Vittoria Accoramboni was born of an extremely noble family, in a small town in the Duchy of Urbino, named Agubio. From her childhood, she was everywhere singled out, on account of her rare and extraordinary beauty; but this beauty was the least of her charms: nothing was lacking of those qualities which make one admire a girl of exalted birth; but nothing else was so remarkable in her, or as one might say nothing seemed so miraculous, amid so many extraordinary qualities, as a certain altogether charming grace which, at the first glance, won her the hearts and allegiance of all beholders. And this simplicity which gave authority to her slightest word was troubled by no suspicion of artifice; from the first one felt confidence in a lady endowed with such extraordinary beauty. One might, with a superhuman effort, have resisted this enchantment, had one merely seen her; but, if one heard her speak, if especially one was privileged to hold any conversation with her, it was quite impossible to escape so extraordinary a charm.

Many young gentlemen of the city of Rome, where her father lived, and where one still sees his palazzo in the Piazza Rusticucci, near Saint Peter's, sought to win her hand. There was much jealousy, and indeed rivalry, but in the end Vittoria's parents chose Felice Peretti, nephew of Cardinal Montalto, now Pope Sixtus V, whom God preserve.

Felice, the son of Camilla Peretti, the Cardinal's sister, was originally named Francesco Mignucci; he took the names of Felice Peretti when he was formally adopted by his uncle.

Vittoria, on entering the Peretti family, took with her, unawares, that superiority which may be called fatal, and which accompanied her everywhere; so that one might say that, in order not to adore her, one must never have set eyes on her. [Footnote: One sees at Milan, if I remember rightly, in the Ambrosian Library, sonnets full of grace and feeling, and other pieces of poetry, the work of Vittoria Accoramboni. Sonnets of no little merit were composed at the time upon her strange fate. It appears that her intelligence was equal to her beauty and her charm.]

The love that her husband felt for her was akin to madness; her mother-in-law, Camilla, and Cardinal Montalto himself, seemed to have no other occupation in the world than that of guessing Vittoria's wishes, so as to seek at once to gratify them. All Rome marvelled to see how this Cardinal, the modest limits of whose fortune were as well known as his horror of all forms of luxury, found so unfailing a source of pleasure in anticipating Vittoria's every wish. Young, brilliantly beautiful, adored by all, she could not help having, at times, some extremely costly fancies. Vittoria received from her new relatives jewels of the greatest price, pearls, in short all the rarest treasures of the goldsmiths of Rome, who at that time were very well supplied.

For love of this charming niece, Cardinal Montalto, so famous for his severity, treated Vittoria's brothers as though they had been his own nephews. Ottavio Accoramboni, as soon as he had completed his thirtieth year, was, on the representation of Cardinal Montalto, nominated by the Duke of Urbino and created, by Pope Gregory XIII, Bishop of Fossombrone; Marcello Accoramboni, a young man of fiery courage, accused of a number of crimes, and zealously pursued by the *corte*, [Footnote: This was the armed body responsible for the public safety, the police and detective force of the year 1580. They were commanded by a captain styled Bargello, who was personally responsible for the execution of the orders issued by Monsignore the Governor of Rome (the Chief of Police).] had with great difficulty escaped more than one prosecution which might have cost him his life. Honoured with the Cardinal's protection, he was able to recapture some sort of tranquillity.

A third brother of Vittoria, Giulio Accoramboni, was admitted by Cardinal Alessandro Sforza to the highest honours at his court, as soon as Cardinal Montalto had proffered the request.

In a word, if men know how to measure their happiness, not by the boundless insatiability of their desires, but by the real enjoyment of the advantages which they already possess, Vittoria's marriage to the nephew of Cardinal Montalto might have seemed to the Accoramboni the

acme of human happiness. But the insensate desire for vast and uncertain advantages is capable of plunging the men most richly blessed with fortune's favours into strange and perilous channels of thought.

And very true it is that if any of Vittoria's relatives, as was widely suspected in Rome, helped, in his desire for an ampler fortune, to rid her of her husband, he very soon afterwards had occasion to realize how much wiser it would have been to content himself with the moderate benefits of a pleasant fortune, and one that was so soon to rise to the very summit of what human ambition can desire.

While Vittoria was living thus like a queen in her own house, one evening when Felice Peretti had just retired to bed with his wife, a letter was handed to him by a certain Caterina, a native of Bologna and Vittoria's waiting woman. This letter had been brought by a brother of Caterina, Domenico Acquaviva, surnamed *il Mancino* (the left-handed). This man had been banished from Rome for various crimes; but, at Caterina's request, Felice had procured for him the powerful protection of his uncle the Cardinal, and the *Mancino* frequently came to the house, Felice placing great confidence in him.

The letter in question purported to be written by Marcello Accoramboni, of all Vittoria's brothers the one that her husband loved most dearly. He lived as a rule in hiding, out at Rome; at times, however, he took the risk of entering the city, and then found a place of refuge in Felice's house.

In the letter delivered at this unusual hour, Marcello appealed for help to his brother-in-law Felice Peretti; he implored him to come to his assistance, adding that, for an affair of the most urgent importance, he was waiting for him by the Montecavallo palace.

Felice informed his wife of the contents of the strange letter that had been brought to him, then put on his clothes, taking no weapon but his sword. Accompanied by a single servant who carried a lighted torch, he was about to leave the house when he found his way barred by his mother Camilla, and all the women of the house, including Vittoria herself; they all besought him, most urgently, not to leave the house at that late hour. As he did not give ear to their prayers, they fell on their knees, and, with tears in their eyes, implored him to listen.

These women, and Camilla especially, had been struck with terror by the accounts of the strange occurrences that were reported every day, and remained unpunished during the Pontificate of Gregory XIII, a time of incessant trouble and unparalleled violence. They were further struck by this consideration: Marcello Accoramboni, when he ventured to make

his way into Rome, was not in the habit of sending for Felice, and such an action, at that time of night, seemed to them quite out of the question.

Filled with all the fire of his age, Felice paid no heed to these grounds for alarm; but, when he learned that the letter had been brought by the *Mancino*, a man to whom he was greatly attached and had been of service, nothing could stop him, and he stepped out of the house.

He was preceded, as has been said, by a single servant carrying a lighted torch; but the unfortunate young man had scarcely begun to ascend the Montecavallo when he fell, shot by three arquebuses. His assailants, seeing him on the ground, flung themselves upon him, and stabbed him again and again with daggers, until he appeared to be quite dead. Immediately the fatal tidings were conveyed to Felice's mother and wife, and through them reached the ears of the Cardinal his uncle.

The Cardinal, without moving a feature, without betraying the slightest emotion, promptly called for his clothes, dressed himself, and then commended himself to God, as also that poor soul (taken thus unawares). He next went to his niece, and, with admirable gravity and an air of profound peace, succeeded in restraining the womanly cries and lamentations which were beginning to ring through the house. His authority over the women was so effective that from that moment, and even when the body was being carried out of the house, nothing was to be seen or heard that in the least degree exceeded what occurs in the best regulated families on the occasion of the most natural deaths. As for Cardinal Montalto himself, no one could discover in him the signs, even in a modified form, of the most ordinary grief; nothing was altered in the order and outward show of his existence. Of this Rome was speedily convinced, after observing with her customary curiosity the slightest movements of a man whose feelings had been so profoundly outraged.

It so happened that on the day after Felice's death the Consistory, or Court of Cardinals, was summoned to meet at the Vatican. There was not a man in the city who did not suppose that on this first day, at least, Cardinal Montalto would excuse himself from this public function. For there he would have to meet the gaze of so many and such curious spectators. The slightest movements would be observed of that natural weakness which it is always so desirable to conceal when from an eminent position one aspires to another more eminent still; for everyone will agree that it is not fitting that he whose ambition it is to exalt himself above the rest of mankind should shew himself to be human like the rest.

But the persons who held these ideas were doubly mistaken, for in the first place, following his custom, Cardinal Montalto was among the first

to appear in the Hall of the Consistory, and secondly it was impossible for the most discerning to discover in him any sign whatsoever of human sensibility. On the contrary, by the replies which he made to those of his fellow Cardinals who, in view of so painful an event, sought to offer him words of consolation, he succeeded in filling everyone with amazement. The constancy and apparent immobility of his nature under the shock of so fearful a tragedy at once became the talk of the town.

True it is that at this same Consistory certain persons, more conversant with the arts of the courtier, ascribed this apparent insensibility not to a want of feeling but to a wealth of dissimulation; and this point of view was shortly afterwards adopted by the mass of courtiers, for it was evidently to his advantage not to shew himself too deeply injured by an outrage the author of which was doubtless highly placed and might perhaps, later on, be able to bar the way to the supreme dignity.

Whatever might be the cause of this evident and complete insensibility, one thing certain is that it affected the whole of Rome and the court of Gregory XIII with a sort of stupor. But, to return to the Consistory, when, all the Cardinals being assembled, the Pope himself entered the hall, he at once turned his eyes towards Cardinal Montalto, and tears were seen on His Holiness's cheeks; as for the Cardinal, his features shewed no sign of departure from their normal immobility.

The astonishment waxed twofold when, during this same Consistory, Cardinal Montalto having gone up in his turn to kneel before the throne of His Holiness, and to render an account to him of the matters under his charge, the Pope, before allowing him to begin, was unable to restrain his own tears. When His Holiness was at length able to speak, he sought to console the Cardinal by promising him that prompt and stern justice would be done upon the authors of so appalling an outrage. But the Cardinal, after most humbly thanking His Holiness, begged him not to order any inquiry into what had occurred, protesting that, for his own part, he willingly forgave the author of the crime, whoever he might be. And immediately after this petition, expressed in the fewest possible words, the Cardinal passed to a detailed account of the business for which he was responsible, as though nothing out of the common had occurred.

The eyes of all the Cardinals present at the Consistory were fastened upon the Pope and upon Montalto; and although it is certainly most difficult to deceive the practised eye of a courtier, yet none of them dared say that Cardinal Montalto's face had betrayed the slightest emotion on witnessing, at such close quarters, the grief of His Holiness, who, tell the truth, was almost out of his mind. This amazing insensibility on the part

of Cardinal Montalto never relaxed during the whole of the time occupied by his duty with His Holiness. Indeed, the Pope himself was impressed by this, and, the Consistory at an end, could not help remarking to the Cardinal of San Sisto, his favourite nephew:

"*Veramente, costui è un gran frate!*" (Truly, this fellow is a thorough friar!) [Footnote: An allusion to the hypocrisy which their critics suppose to be frequent among friars. Sixtus V had been a mendicant friar, and persecuted in his order. See his Life, by Gregorio Leti, an amusing historian, and no more mendacious than any other. Felice Peretti was murdered in 1580; his uncle was created Pope in 1585.]

Cardinal Montalto's mode of behaviour differed in no respect during the period that followed. As is the custom, he received the visits of condolence of the Cardinals, Prelates and Princes of Rome, and with none of these, whatever their existing relations, did he allow himself to give utterance to a single word of grief or lamentation. With all of them, after a brief commentary on the instability of human affairs, confirmed and fortified by sentences and texts taken from the Holy Scriptures or from the Fathers, he promptly changed the subject, and began to speak of the news of the town or of the private affairs of the person who was conversing with him, exactly as though he had wished to comfort his comforters.

Rome was particularly curious to know what would happen during the visit that would have to be paid him by Prince Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, to whom common report ascribed the death of Felice Peretti. The general opinion was that Cardinal Montalto would not be able to remain face to face with the Prince, and engaged in private conversation with him, without allowing some indication of his true feelings to appear.

At the moment when the Prince arrived at the Cardinal's, the crowd in the street and round the door was enormous; a vast number of courtiers filled every room in the house, so great was the curiosity to study the two men's faces. But on neither one nor the other could any of the observers distinguish anything out of the common. Cardinal Montalto conformed to everything that the rules of behaviour at court prescribed; he imparted to his face a most remarkable air of hilarity, and his tone in addressing the Prince was full of affability.

Immediately afterwards, as he stepped into his coach, Prince Paolo, finding himself alone with his intimate courtiers, could not help saying with a laugh: "*In fatto, è vero che costui è un gran frate!*" (Indeed, it is true, the fellow is a thorough friar!) as though he had wished to confirm the truth of the words let fall by the Pope a few days earlier.

Wise men have thought that the conduct observed in these circumstances by Cardinal Montalto paved the way for him to the throne; for many people formed the opinion of him that, whether by nature or from virtue he could not or would not do harm to anyone, even when he had every reason to be angry.

Felice Peretti had left nothing in writing with regard to his wife; consequently, she was obliged to return to her own home. Cardinal Montalto handed over to her, before her departure, the clothes, jewels, and, generally speaking, all the gifts that she had received while the wife of his nephew.

On the third day after the death of Felice Peretti, Vittoria, accompanied by her mother, went to live in the palazzo of Prince Orsini. Some said that these ladies were led to adopt this course by anxiety as to their personal safety, as they appeared to be threatened by the *corte* [Footnote: The *corte* dared not venture into a Prince's palazzo.] with a charge of having *consented* to the homicide that had been committed, or of having at least had cognisance of it beforehand; others thought (and what occurred later on seemed to confirm this view) that they were led to adopt this course in order to bring about the marriage, the Prince having promised Vittoria that he would marry her as soon as she should be no longer tied to a husband.

Anyhow, neither then nor later was it ever definitely known who had been responsible for the death of Felice, although everyone had his suspicions of someone else. Most people, however, set the murder down to Prince Orsini; it was generally admitted that he had a passion for Vittoria, he had shewn signs of this which could not be mistaken; and the marriage that followed was a strong proof, for the bride was so inferior in station that only the tyranny of amorous passion could raise her to a plane of matrimonial equality. [Footnote: Prince Orsini's first wife, by whom he had a son named Virginio, was a sister of Francesco I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, and of the Cardinal Ferdinand de' Medici. He put her to death, with the consent of her brothers, because she had had a love affair. Such were the laws of honour conveyed to Italy by the Spaniards. The unhallowed loves of a woman were as grave an offence to her brothers as to her husband.]

The common herd were by no means discouraged in this attitude by a letter addressed to the Governor of Rome which was made public a few days after the crime. This letter purported to have been written by Cesare Palantieri, a young man of a fiery spirit who had been banished from the city.

In this letter, Palantieri said that it was unnecessary for His Most Illustrious Worship to give himself the trouble of seeking elsewhere for the author of the death of Felice Peretti, since he himself had procured his assassination in consequence of certain differences which had arisen between them some time earlier.

Many people thought that the murder had not been committed without the consent of the Accoramboni family; they accused Vittoria's brothers, who were supposed to have been led astray by the desire for an alliance with so powerful and wealthy a prince. Marcello in particular was accused, on the strength of the letter which had made the unfortunate Felice leave his house. Harsh things were said of Vittoria herself, when people saw that she consented to go and live in the palazzo Orsini as a future bride, so soon after the death of her husband. It was highly improbable, they suggested, that two people would come like that, in the twinkling of an eye, to a hand-to-hand encounter, if they had not, for some time at least, been engaged with weapons of longer range. [Footnote: An allusion to the custom of fighting with a sword and a dagger.]

The inquiry into the murder was conducted by Mon-signor Portici, Governor of Rome, by order of Gregory XIII. All that one gathers from it is that Domenico, sur-named Mancino, arrested by the *corte*, confesses, without being put to the question (*tormentato*), in his second examination, dated February 24th, 1582:

"That Vittoria's mother was responsible for everything, and that she was assisted by the maid from Bologna, who, immediately after the murder, took refuge in the citadel of Bracciano" (which belonged to Prince Orsini, and into which the *corte* would not dare to penetrate), "and that the instruments of the crime were Macchione of Gubbio and Paolo Barca of Bracciano, *lancie spezzate*" (soldiers) "of a gentleman whose name, for fit and proper reasons, has been omitted."

To these *fit and proper reasons* were added, I imagine, the entreaties of Cardinal Montalto, who persistently begged that the inquiry should be carried no farther, and indeed there was no more talk of a prosecution. The Mancino was released from prison with the *precetto* (order) to return at once to his own home, on pain of death, and never to leave it again without express permission. The enlargement of this man occurred in the year 1583, on the feast of Saint Louis, and as that day was also Cardinal Montalto's birthday, the coincidence confirms my belief that it was at his request that the matter was thus brought to an end. Under so weak a government as that of Gregory XIII, a prosecution of that sort was liable

to have the most disagreeable consequences without any compensating advantage.

The activities of the *corte* were thus suspended, but Pope Gregory XIII still declined to give his consent to the marriage of Prince Paolo Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, to the widow Accoramboni. His Holiness, having sentenced the lady to a sort of imprisonment, gave her and the Prince a *precetto* not to make any contract of marriage with one another without express permission from himself or his successors.

In due course Gregory XIII died (early in 1585), and the legal experts consulted by Prince Paolo Orsini having given the opinion that the *precetto* was annulled by the demise of the sovereign who had imposed it, the Prince decided to marry Vittoria before the new Pope should be elected. But the marriage could not be celebrated so soon as the Prince wished, partly because he was anxious to have the consent of Vittoria's brothers, and it so happened that Ottavio Accoramboni, Bishop of Fossombrone, refused absolutely to give his consent, and partly because it was not expected that the election of a successor to Gregory XIII would be so soon completed. In fact the marriage was solemnised only on the day on which the Papacy was conferred upon Cardinal Montalto, the person so deeply interested in this affair, that is to say on the 24th of April, 1585, this coincidence being either accidental on the Prince's part, or deliberate, he being glad of an opportunity to shew that he was no more afraid of the *corte* under the new Pope than he had been under Gregory XIII.

This marriage caused a profound shock to Sixtus V (for such was the name selected by Cardinal Montalto); he had already discarded the outlook upon life appropriate to a friar, and had raised his mind to the level of the exalted rank in which God had now placed him.

The Pope, however, shewed no sign of anger; only, Prince Orsini, having called upon him that same day with the rest of the Roman nobility to kiss his foot, and with the secret intention of trying to read, on the Holy Father's face, what he had to expect or to fear from a man hitherto so little known, discovered that it was no laughing matter. The new Pope having gazed at the Prince in a singular fashion, and not uttered a single word in reply to the compliments which he addressed to him, the Prince made up his mind to find out without more ado what were His Holiness's intentions with regard to himself.

Through the channel of Ferdinand, Cardinal de' Medici (the brother of his first wife), and of the Spanish Catholic-Ambassador, he begged and obtained of the Pope an audience in his private chamber: there he

delivered to His Holiness a studied speech, and, without making any reference to the past, congratulated him on his new dignity, and offered him as a most faithful vassal and servant all his possessions and all his forces.

The Pope [Footnote: Sixtus V, elected Pope in 1585 at the age of sixty-eight, reigned for five years and four months: there is a striking similarity between him and Napoleon.] heard him with unusual seriousness, and finally replied that no one was more anxious than himself that the life and actions of Paolo Giordano Orsini should for the future be worthy of the Orsini blood and of a true Christian knight; that as for what he had been in the past in his relations with the Holy See and with the Pope's own person, no one could say more to him than his own conscience; that nevertheless he, the Prince, might be assured of one thing, namely, that just as he, the Pope, willingly forgave him anything that he might have done against Felice Peretti and against Felice Cardinal Montalto, he would never forgive him what in future he might do against Pope Sixtus; consequently he ordered him to proceed at once to expel from his household and from his domains all the *banditi* (outlaws) and evildoers to whom, until then, he had given asylum.

Sixtus V was a singularly effective speaker, whatever tone he might adopt; but when he was angry and threatening, one would have said that his eyes flashed lightning. One thing certain is that Prince Paolo Orsini, accustomed all his life to be feared by Popes, was led to think so seriously of his own position by the Pope's way of speaking, the like of which he had not heard for thirteen years, that no sooner had he left His Holiness's Palace than he hastened to Cardinal de' Medici to tell him what had occurred. After which he decided, on the Cardinal's advice, to send packing, without a moment's delay, all the fugi-tives from justice to whom he had given asylum in his palazzo and on his estates, and began to look about for some honourable pretext for leaving the territory subjected to the power of so resolute a Pontiff.

It should be explained that Prince Paolo Orsini had become extraordinarily stout; his legs were thicker than an ordinary man's whole body, and one of these enormous legs was afflicted with the disease known as the lupa, or wolf, so called because it has to be fed upon an abundance of fresh meat which is applied to the affected part; otherwise the violent distemper, finding no dead flesh to devour, would begin to attack the living flesh that surrounds it.

The Prince made this malady an excuse for going to the celebrated baths of Abano, near Padua, on territory belonging to the Venetian

Republic; he set off with his new bride about the middle of June. Abano was a safe haven for him, since, for a great many years past, the House of Orsini had been tied to the Venetian Republic by a chain of mutual services.

Having reached this land of safety, the Prince's one thought was to combine the delights of several places of residence; and, with this object, he took three magnificent palazzi: one at Venice, the palazzo Dandolo, on the Rio della Zacca; the second at Padua, and this was the palazzo Foscarini, on the splendid *piazza* called the Arena; for his third abode he chose Salo, on the charming shore of Lake Garda: this had originally belonged to the Sforza Pallavicini.

The Signori of Venice (the Government of the Republic) learned with pleasure of the arrival within their borders of so great a Prince, and at once offered him a most noble *condotta* (that is to say a considerable sum paid annually, which the Prince would be expected to spend on raising a body of two or three thousand men, of whom he would assume the command). The Prince hastily rejected this offer: he sent word to the Senators that albeit, by a natural inclination and one hereditary in his family, he felt himself drawn to the service of the Most Serene Republic, yet, inasmuch as he was for the time being attached to His Catholic Majesty, it did not seem to him proper that he should accept any other engagement. So decided a response created some warmth of feeling among the Senators. At first they had thought of greeting him, on his arrival in Venice, and in the name of the people as a whole, with a most honourable reception; they now decided, in view of his reply, to allow him to enter the city as a private person.

Prince Orsini, who was kept well informed, vowed that he would not go to Venice at all. He was already in the neighbourhood of Padua, he made a detour through that admirable country, and betook himself, with his whole retinue, to the house prepared for him at Salo, on the shores of Lake Garda. There he spent the whole of that summer amid splendid and varied diversions.

The time for a change (of residence) having come, the Prince made a number of little expeditions, after which he found that he could no longer endure fatigue as in the past; he began to be alarmed for his health; finally he thought of going to spend a few days at Venice, but was dissuaded by his wife, Vittoria, who begged him to remain at Salo.

There are some who have expressed the opinion that Vittoria Accoramboni was aware of the peril which threatened the life of the Prince, her husband, and that she made him stay at Salo only with the

object of taking him, later on, out of Italy, to some free city, for instance, in the Swiss Cantons; in this way she would safeguard, in the event of the Prince's death, both her own person and her private fortune.

Whether or not this conjecture be well founded, the fact remains that nothing of the sort occurred, for the Prince, after a fresh attack of his malady at Salo on the 10th of November, at once had a premonition of what was in store.

He felt sorry for his unfortunate wife; he saw her, in the fine flower of her youth, left as poor in reputation as in worldly goods, hated by the reigning princes of Italy, little loved by the Orsini, and without hope of another marriage after his death. Like a great-hearted gentleman, faithful to his pledged word, he made, of his own accord, a will by which he hoped to assure the unfortunate woman's fortune. He left her, in money or in jewels, the considerable sum of one hundred thousand piastres, [Footnote: About two million francs in 1837.] apart from all the horses, carriages and movable property which he had used on this expedition. All the rest of his fortune he left to Virginie Orsini, his only son, whom he had had by his first wife, the sister of Francesco I., Grand Duke of Tuscany (the wife whom he had killed on account of her infidelity, with the consent of her brothers).

But how uncertain are all human anticipations! The arrangements which Paolo Orsini thought must assure perfect security to that unhappy young woman, proved to be the cause of her utter and immediate ruin.

After signing his will, the Prince felt slightly better on the 12th of November. On the morning of the 13th he was bled, and the doctors, whose only hope lay in a strict diet, left the most definite orders that he was to take no food.

But they had barely left the room before the Prince insisted that dinner should be brought to him; no one dared oppose his wishes, and he ate and drank as usual. Scarcely was the meal ended before he lost consciousness, and two hours before sunset he was dead.

After this sudden death, Vittoria Accoramboni, accompanied by Marcello, her brother, and by the whole of the deceased Prince's household, repaired to Padua to the palazzo Foscari, situated near the Arena, the palazzo in fact that Prince Orsini had taken.

Shortly after her arrival, she was joined by her brother Flaminio, who stood high in the favour of Cardinal Farnese. She then began to take the necessary measures to obtain payment of the legacy which her husband had bequeathed to her; this legacy amounted in cash to sixty thousand piastres, which were to be paid to her within a period of two years, and

this sum was independent of her dowry, jointure, and all the jewels and furniture actually in her possession. Prince Orsini had ordered, in his will, that in Rome or such other city as the Duchess might choose, a palazzo should be bought for her to the value of ten thousand piastres, and a vineyard (a country house) of six thousand; he had further laid down that provision should be made for her table and for the whole of her service as befitted a woman of her rank. The household was to consist of forty servants, with a corresponding number of horses.

Donna Vittoria had great hopes of the favour of the Princes of Ferrara, Florence and Urbino, as well as of that of Cardinals Farnese and de' Medici, appointed by the late Prince the executors of his will. It is to be observed that the will had been drafted at Padua, and submitted to the judgment of the most excellent Parrizoli and Menocchio, the leading professors of that University, and among the most famous jurists of the present day.

Prince Luigi Orsini arrived at Padua to carry out whatever might have to be done with regard to the late Duke and his widow, before proceeding to take over the government of the Isle of Corfu, to which he had been appointed by the Most Serene Republic.

There arose first of all a difficulty between Donna Vittoria and Prince Luigi with regard to the late Duke's horses, which the Prince said were not movable property in the general acceptation of the term; but the Duchess proved that they must be regarded as movable property so called, and it was decided that she should retain the use of them until the question was settled; she gave as a surety Signor Soardi of Bergamo, Condottiere to the Signori of Venice, a gentleman of great wealth and of the highest rank in his own country.

Another difficulty then arose with regard to a certain quantity of silver plate which the late Duke had handed over to Prince Luigi as a pledge for a sum of money which he had lent the Duke. Everything was decided by recourse to the law, for His Serenity (i.e. the Duke) of Ferrara took care that the last wishes of the late Prince Orsini should be given entire fulfilment.

This second question was settled on the 23rd of December, which was a Sunday.

That night, forty men entered the house of the aforesaid Accoramboni. They were dressed in coats of cloth, cut in a fantastic manner and so arranged that they could not be recognised, unless by the sound of their voices; and when they called to one another they made use of cant names.

They began by making a search for the Duchess herself, and, when they had found her, one of them said to her: "Now you must die."

And without giving her a moment, while she was begging to be allowed to commend her soul to God, he stabbed her with a fine dagger below the left breast; and, turning the point of it in all directions, the cruel wretch asked the unhappy woman several times to tell him if it was touching her heart; at length she breathed her last. Meanwhile the others were looking for the Duchess's brothers, one of whom, Marcello, escaped with his life, because he could not be found in the house; the other was stabbed by a hundred blows. The murderers left the dead bodies on the ground, the whole household weeping and shrieking; and, having seized the strong box containing the jewels and money, took their departure.

The news of this crime came rapidly to the ears of the magistrates of Padua; they had the bodies identified, and sent to Venice for further orders.

Throughout the Monday, an immense crowd assembled round the aforesaid palazzo and in the church of the Eremitani, to see the bodies. The curious were moved to pity, especially when they saw the beauty of the Duchess: they wept for her misfortunes, *et dentibus fremebant* (and gnashed their teeth) at the murderers; but as yet these were not known by name.

The *corte* having arrived at the strongly founded suspicion that the crime had been committed by the order, or at least with the consent of the said Prince Luigi, summoned him before it, and as he sought to appear in corte (before the court) of the Most Illustrious Captain with a train of forty armed men, the door was barred, and he was told that he must enter with three or four only. But, as these were crossing the threshold, the others dashed in after them, thrusting aside the guards, and the whole body entered the court.

Prince Luigi, appearing before the Most Illustrious Captain, complained of this insult, asserting that he had never received such treatment from any Sovereign Prince. The Most Illustrious Captain having asked him if he knew anything of the death of Donna Vittoria, he replied that he did, and had ordered a report to be made to the officers of justice. It was proposed to take down his answer in writing; he protested that men of his rank were not bound by that formality, and, apparently, might not be examined at all.

Prince Luigi asked leave to dispatch a courier to Florence with a letter for Prince Virginie Orsini, to whom he was making a report of the

proceedings and of the crime. He shewed a false letter, not that which he intended to send, and his request was granted.

But his messenger was arrested outside the city and carefully searched; the letter was found on him which Prince Luigi had shewn, and also a second letter concealed in one of his boots; this ran as follows:

"To THE LORD VIROINIO ORSINI.

"Most Illustrious Lord,

"We have put into execution what was agreed upon between us, and so successfully that we have completely taken in the Most Illustrious Tondini" (this is apparently the name of the head of the corte which had examined the Prince), "so that I am regarded here as the most gallant gentleman alive. I did the deed in person, so do not fail to send at once you know whom."

This letter made a strong impression on the magistrates; they made haste to send it to Venice; by their orders the gates of the city were shut, and the walls manned by troops, day and night. A warning was published threatening severe penalties to any who, knowing the identity of the assassins, should fail to communicate what he knew to the authorities. Such of the assassins as gave evidence against any of their number were not to be molested, in fact a sum of money was to be paid to them. But about the seventh hour of the night, on Christmas Eve (towards midnight on the 24th of December), Aloisio Bragadin arrived from Venice, with ample authority from the Senate, and orders to secure the arrest, alive or dead, and at no matter what cost, of the afore-mentioned Prince Luigi and all his men. The said Signor Avogador Bragadin, the Signor Capitano and the Signor Podestà made their headquarters in the fortress.

Orders were issued, on pain of the gallows (*della forca*) to all the militia, horse and foot, to assemble well armed round the house of the said Prince Luigi, which stood near the fortress and adjoined the Church of Sant' Agostino on the Arena.

When the day (which was Christmas Day) came, an edict was published in the town calling upon all the sons of Saint Mark to arm themselves and hasten to the house of Don Luigi; those who had no arms were summoned to the fortress, where they would be given all that they required; this edict promised a reward of two thousand ducats to whosoever should hand over to the *corte*, dead or alive, the said Don Luigi, and five hundred ducats for the person of each of his followers. There was furthermore an order that any who were unarmed were on no account to approach the Prince's house, so that they should not be in the way of the fighting men were the Prince to think fit to make a sally.

At the same time siege guns, mortars and heavy artillery were mounted on the old walls, opposite the house occupied by the Prince; others were mounted on the new walls, which overlooked the rear of the said house. On this side the cavalry had been posted in such a way as to be able to move freely, should they be required. On the banks of the river Brenta people were busily arranging benches, cupboards, carts and other such things suitable for parapets. It was hoped in this way to put a stop to the movement of the besieged, should they attempt to march out in close order against the populace. These parapets would serve also to protect the gunners and infantry against the arquebusades of the besieged.

Last of all, a number of boats appeared on the river, opposite and on either side of the Prince's house, filled with men armed with muskets and other weapons calculated to harass the enemy should he attempt to break out: meanwhile barricades were erected in all the streets.

While these preparations were being made, a letter arrived, couched in the most dignified terms, in which the Prince complained of being found guilty, and of seeing himself treated as an enemy, and indeed a rebel, before any investigation had been made into the crime. This letter had been composed by Liveroto.

On the 27th of December, three gentlemen, among the foremost in the city, were sent by the magistrates to Don Luigi, who had with him, in his house, forty men, old soldiers all of them and inured to danger. They were found to be engaged in fortifying the house with parapets made of planks and soaked mattresses, and in making ready their arquebuses.

These three gentlemen announced to the Prince that the magistrates were determined to seize his person; they advised him to surrender, adding that, by so doing, before the first shot was fired, he would have some hope of being treated with mercy. To which Don Luigi replied that if, first of all, the guards posted round about his house were withdrawn, he would go to the magistrates accompanied by two or three of his men, to discuss the matter, on the express understanding that he should be free to return at any time to his house.

The ambassadors took a note, written in his hand, of these proposals, and returned to the magistrates, who refused the conditions, acting especially on the advice of the most illustrious Pio Enea, and of other nobles there present. The ambassadors then returned to the Prince, and informed him that, if he did not make a surrender, pure and simple, of his person, his house would be razed to the ground by artillery; to which he replied that he preferred death to such an act of submission.

The magistrates gave the signal for the battle, and, although it would have been possible to destroy the whole house almost with a single discharge, it was decided to proceed more slowly, to see whether the besieged would not agree to surrender.

This plan proved successful, and saved Saint Mark a great deal of money which would have had to be spent on rebuilding the ruined parts of the bombarded palace; it did not, however, meet with general approval. If Don Luigi's men had acted without hesitation, and had made a dash from the house, the success of the siege would have been far from certain. They were old soldiers, they had no lack of munitions, of arms or of courage, and above all it was to their interest to win; was it not better for them, if the worse came to the worst, to die from the shot of an arquebus rather than by the hand of the executioner? Besides, with whom had they to deal? With a wretched band of besiegers with little experience of arms, and the Signori might then have had cause to repent of their clemency and their instinctive tenderness.

So they began by bombarding the colonnade that ran along the front of the house; then, aiming a little higher, destroyed the front wall of the building behind it. Meanwhile the men inside fired round after round from their arquebuses, but with no effect beyond wounding a humble citizen in the shoulder.

Don Luigi cried in the most impetuous fashion: "Battle! battle! war! war!" He was greatly taken up with casting bullets from the pewter of the plates and the lead from the windows. He threatened to make a sally, but the besiegers adopted new measures, and brought up guns of a larger calibre.

The first shot fired from these brought down a great piece of the house, and a certain Pandolfo Leupratti of Camerino was buried in the ruins. This was a man of great courage, and a bandit of considerable importance. He was banished from the States of Holy Church, and a price of four hundred piastres had been placed on his head by the most illustrious Signor Vitelli, for the death of Vincenzo Vitelli, who had been attacked in his carriage, and killed by arquebus shots and dagger thrusts, given by Prince Luigi Orsini through the instrumentality of the said Pandolfo and his associates. Stunned by his fall, Pandolfo was incapable of making any movement; a servant of the Signori Capodilista advanced upon him armed with a pistol, and very courageously cut off his head, which he made haste to take to the fortress and hand over to the magistrates.

Shortly afterwards a shot from another gun brought down a wall of the house, and with it the Conte Montemelino of Perugia, who died amid the ruins, blown to pieces by the ball.

After this a person was seen to leave the house named Colonel Lorenzo, of the nobility of Camerino, a man of great wealth who had on several occasions furnished proofs of his valour, and was highly esteemed by the Prince. He was determined not to die without striking a blow of some sort; he tried to fire his gun, but when he pressed the trigger, it so happened, doubtless by the will of God, that the arquebus missed fire, and at that moment a bullet went through his body. The shot had been fired by a poor devil, an usher in the school of San Michele. And while he, to gain the promised reward, was approaching his victim to cut off his head, he was forestalled by others nimbler, and, what was more, stronger than himself, who took the Colonel's purse, belt, gun, money and rings, and cut off his head.

The men in whom Prince Luigi had reposed most confidence being dead, he was left in great embarrassment, and it was observed that he no longer made any movement.

Signor Filenfi, his *maestro di casa* and secretary in civilian attire, made a signal from a balcony with a white handkerchief that he surrendered. He left the house and was taken to the citadel, *led by the arm*, as is said to be the custom of war, by Anselmo Suardo, Lieutenant to the Signori (the magistrates). Being immediately examined, he said that he was in no way to blame for what had occurred, because he had arrived on Christmas Eve only from Venice, where he had been detained for some days on the Prince's business.

He was asked how many men the Prince had with him, and replied: "Twenty or thirty persons."

He was asked their names, and answered that there were nine or ten of them who, being persons of quality, ate, like himself, at the Prince's table, and that he knew their names, but that of the others, people of a vagabond life who had but recently joined the Prince, he had no personal knowledge.

He gave the names of thirteen persons, including the brother of Liveroto.

Shortly afterwards the artillery placed on the city walls opened fire. The soldiers posted themselves in the houses adjoining that of the Prince to prevent his men from escaping. The said Prince, who had been running the same risks as the two whose death we have related, told those round about him to hold out until they should receive a message written

by his hand and accompanied by a certain sign; after which he surrendered to that Anselmo Suardo, already named. And, because he could not be taken in a coach, as was laid down, on account of the great crowd of people and the barricades that blocked the streets, it was decided that he should go on foot.

He marched amid a party of Marcello Accoramboni's men; he had on either side of him the Signori Condottieri, Lieutenant Suardo, other Captains and gentlemen of the city, all well provided with arms. Next came a strong company of men at arms and soldiers of the city. Prince Luigi wore a suit of brown, his stiletto by his side, and his cloak gathered under his arm with the most elegant air; he remarked with a disdainful smile: "*If I had fought!*" almost implying that he would have won. Brought before the Signori, he at once bowed to them and said:

"Sirs, I am the prisoner of this gentleman," pointing to Signor Anselmo, "and I am extremely annoyed at what has happened, by no fault of mine."

The Captain having ordered the stiletto which he wore at his side to be taken from him, he leaned against a balcony and began to trim his nails with a pair of small scissors which he found there.

He was asked whom he had in his house; he named among the rest Colonel Liveroto and Conte Montemelino, of whom mention has been made above, adding that he would give ten thousand piastres to redeem the life of one of them, and for the other would give his very life's blood. He asked to be taken to a place befitting a man of his rank. Matters being thus arranged, he wrote with his own hand a message to his supporters, ordering them to surrender, and sent his ring as a token. He told Signor Anselmo that he gave him his sword and his musket, requesting him, when those weapons should have been found in his house, to make use of them for his sake, as being the arms of a gentleman and not of any common soldier.

The troops entered the house, making a thorough search of it, and at once held a roll call of the Prince's men, who survived to the number of thirty-four, after which they were led out two by two to the prison of the Palace. The dead were left to be devoured by the dogs, and a report of the whole affair was sent to Venice.

It was noticed that many of Prince Luigi's soldiers, who had been implicated in the crime, were no longer to be found; the people were forbidden to harbour them, any who did so to be punished with the destruction of his house and confiscation of his property; those who

denounced them were to receive fifty piastres. By this method several were apprehended.

A frigate was dispatched from Venice to Candia, bearing orders to Don Latino Orsini to return at once on a matter of great importance, and it is thought that he will lose his command.

Yesterday morning, which was the feast of Saint Stephen, everyone expected to see the death of the aforesaid Prince Luigi, or to hear it announced that he had been strangled in prison; and would have been greatly surprised had it been otherwise, since he was not a bird to be kept for long in a cage. But that evening the trial was held, and on Saint John's day, shortly before dawn, it became known that the said Lord had been strangled, and that he had made a good end. His body was carried without delay to the Cathedral, accompanied by the clergy of that church and by the Jesuit fathers. It was left exposed all day on a table in the middle of the church, to serve as a spectacle to the people and as a mirror to the inexperienced.

On the following day his body was conveyed to Venice, as he had ordered in his will, and there buried.

On Saturday two of his followers were hanged; the first and principal was Furio Savorgnano, the other a common person.

On Monday, which was the penultimate day of the aforesaid year, they hanged thirteen, several of whom were of high nobility; other two, one named Capitan Splendiano and the other Conte Paganello, were led through the town and mildly tortured; on reaching the place of execution, they were beaten, had their heads broken, and were quartered, the life being still in their bodies. These men were noble, and, before they took to evil courses, were extremely rich. Some say that it was Conte Paganello who killed Donna Vittoria Accorainboni with the cruelty that has been recorded. To this it is objected that Prince Luigi, in the letter already quoted, attests that he did the deed with his own hand; this may perhaps have been from vainglory, like that which he shewed in Rome when he had Vitelli murdered, or else to win more favour from Prince Virginie Orsini.

Conte Paganello, before receiving the fatal blow, was stabbed repeatedly with a knife below the left breast, so as to touch his heart, as he had done to the poor woman. In this way it came about that he shed a perfect torrent of blood from his breast. He remained alive for more than half an hour, to the great astonishment of all. He was a man of five and forty, who shewed signs of abundant strength.

The gibbets remain standing to dispatch the nineteen that are still alive, on the first day that is not a holiday. But, as the executioner is extremely tired, and the people in a sort of agony after witnessing so many deaths, their execution is being postponed for these, two days. It is expected that none of them will be left alive. The one exception made, among the persons attached to Prince Luigi, will perhaps be Signor Filenfi, his *maestro di casa*, who is giving himself infinite pains (and indeed the matter is one of importance to him) to prove that he had no share in the crime.

No one, not even the oldest inhabitants of this city of Padua, can remember, by a more just sentence, the lives of so many persons to have been ever forfeited, on a single occasion. And the Signori (of Venice) have acquired for themselves high renown and a good reputation among the most civilised nations.

Added by another hand.

Francesco Filenfi, secretary and *maestro di casa*, was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, the cup-bearer (*coppiere*) Onorio Adami of Fermo, and two others, to one year's imprisonment; seven others were sent to the galleys, with fetters, while seven were released.

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