

ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT

as recounted by his wife Maria in the memories of their daughter Emilia

«It was August 1834 and your father was on his way to Tuscany, where as you know Grand Duke Leopold ruled, with certain messages. These messages were to remain unknown to the Papal State, through which he had to transit, but also to Tuscany where various friends were waiting for him. When a government tries to oppress the people with various taxes, with humiliating laws, when it calls for the intervention of other governments to support itself with arrogance, to make itself feared, then the people tries to rebel to overthrow the domination... and conspires. [...]

When your father was studying in Forlì, he got in touch with Maroncelli, who was a fervent patriot, and many others, and became associated with them. Born in a free land, he felt pity for so many unfortunate people, and out of love for the common homeland and pity for the sufferers, he offered his heart, his intelligence and his work.

He thought that he was safe; he believed that as a member of another state he would not have been suspected and would have been able to act without danger and without being observed; but this was not the case. A coward acted as an informer, and while your father was passing through the mountains of the Papal State on horseback in the company of a trusty farmer, he suddenly saw armed men, Papal soldiers, swarming around him. He did not hesitate, and with the desperate readiness of one who sees death before his eyes, he took out the document he was holding, placed it in his mouth and swallowed it. Overwhelmed by the soldiers, he was pulled down from the horse, thrown to the ground and, with the knees on his chest, forced to spit out the document he had swallowed with so much effort! He resisted, and from the little he spat out not even a name could be read, and if they had been able to read, every name read was a life lost!

They chained him up, took him to the fort of San Leo and after a few days he passed through Verucchio amidst the soldiers. Here, upon seeing him, Miss Adelaide Ripa, filled with patriotic love like all her family, felt so much pain that she fell to the ground as if dead. They then took him to Rimini and finally to the prison in Forlì where he remained for six months. My dears, I suffered so much! [...]

My brother-in-law Stagni Ambrogio consoled me and doctor Giuseppe Bergonzi, a good and fervent patriot connected with your father, took care of me and encouraged me to have hope [...] as soon as possible, I went, accompanied by Stagni, to Bologna to the Cardinal Delegate and explained the innocence of my dear Belzoppi. I prayed for his old parents of whom he was the only son, for three innocent creatures of whom he was father... and for me who needed the support of the partner God had given me.

I was rather relieved to be allowed to speak to him at the Forlì prison where we went and showed Lieutenant Colonel Freddi the Delegate's order. If I wanted to tell you how I felt in that time of waiting and in the time I was with him, I would not be able to!

The Colonel was always present, wrapped in a black cloak, he looked like an evil genius: he held the watch in his hand and after the agreed half-hour had passed, he separated us. I left regretting that I had not told him all that was necessary, and all that my heart wanted to tell him!

Six months passed where we did everything we could to free him; finally the Papal Government, urged also by the Republic, which demanded its citizen, was persuaded to let him go free, finding no serious offence of which to convict him. [...]

At the arrival of such glad news, our hearts were filled with joy, we cried out of relief, and deeply moved, we prepared to go and meet him. Meanwhile, the entire country was preparing to celebrate the return of such a beloved and popular citizen. [...]

At last he appeared: there was a unanimous cry of "long live Belzoppi, long live our fellow-citizen... he has been returned to us... always with us...". Then some of the more devoted raised you from the carriage and, lifting you on their arms above the crowd, shouted: "here they are, here they are, Belzoppi, your daughters!" [...]

What a moving and heart-warming scene! ... In the evening there was a general celebration: everyone wanted to see the prisoner of the papal police, hug him and talk to him. In the house, sweets and liqueurs were passed around to all those lords and commoners who came to see him, while wine and cake were distributed under the porch and in the hallway to all those who gathered around the house.

Here, my dears, is the explanation of your confused memories about which you repeatedly asked me for clarifications. Shortly afterwards, poor Grandpa Vincenzo was struck by apoplexy, which was allegedly caused by the emotions he felt. Poor old man! He had withstood pain, he could not withstand joy...»