

The duties of man

THE DUTIES
OF MAN AND
OTHER ESSAYS
BY JOSEPH
MAZZINI



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INTRODUCTION

I

JOSEPH MAZZINI died on March 10, 1872. Two days later the *Times* recorded the event in these words "We have to announce to-day the death of a man who in his time has played a most singular part upon the theatre of European politics ; one whose name has for years been regarded as a symbol of Revolution, or rather Republicanism ; one in whose personal character there were many fine and noble qualities ; but still a man who was feared even more widely than he was loved, and one whose departure from the scene of action, to say the least, will be no unwelcome news to several crowned and discrowned members of the family of European sovereigns. He was the man who ever 'troubled Israel' by his ceaseless efforts in the cause of Republicanism, and now at length he is at rest. He died on Sunday at Pisa." A selection from the writings of this terror of principalities and powers is reprinted in this little book. The most timid and law-abiding citizen need not fear to turn over its pages. Two years ago the Italian people celebrated the centenary of Mazzini's birth. The King and his Ministers went in state to hear him eulogised ; commemorations were held in the government schools by order of the Minister of Instruction ; and the flags of Italy and England were wrapped around his monument.

Mazzini's name is not now as familiar to English ears as it was in the mid-Victorian period. Other days, other heroes. A Scottish university professor used sometimes to take a census of the students who had read *Sartor* as a rough test of Carlyle's place in the reading of young

Scotsmen. The results showed that Carlyle was following the bag of meal and becoming a traditional diet. A teacher who should number the students of our universities who had read the *Duties of Man* would meet with a more intelligible but not less complete ignorance of an inspiring book, and with a knowledge of its author which never went beyond coupling him with Garibaldi. Their fathers, who were boys in the fifties and sixties, probably marched through the village street shouting :

I wish I had a penny !
What for? What for?
To buy a rope, to hang the Pope
Instead of Garibaldi.

Boys are readier to chant the exploits of a soldier in a red shirt than the ideas of a prophet in a black coat, and the people are mostly boys. But that Mazzini's name will live on among those of Italy's greatest citizens and the world's best men, seems now beyond dispute. He has never enjoyed the ready applause accorded to the successful soldier, nor the sometimes sinister fame achieved by the successful statesman. Just as in the days of his flesh he passed along the by-ways of Europe, an exile from every land but our own, ever conspiring and ever eluding the authorities, so his subsequent influence has been fugitive, secret, noiseless, but none the less real, deep, persistent. His best compositions have had little vogue, but they are treasured by the musicians who know. Out of print, and unguessed at by the multitude, their teaching has inspired some of the most unselfish activities of our time,—the devotion of some settlement worker or East-End doctor, of some incorruptible councillor or ardent co-operator, of some labour leader or nationalist. But Mazzini's most precious bequest to the world was not a bundle of essays, but a noble life. Like Socrates he lived his philosophy, but in circumstances much more intricate and baffling than those which beset the Athenian. The story of those circumstances is part of the general history of Europe in the nineteenth

century. In so far as Mazzini shared in them they have been narrated for English readers most fully and judiciously by Mr. Bolton King. A sympathetic memoir was written by Madame Venturi, and there are the admirable Essays of F. W. H. Myers and William Clarke. The story of the Roman Republic has been well told by Mr. R. M. Johnston.¹ Mazzini's own autobiographical notes are included in the collected edition of his writings.² These sources, and Mazzini's own words wherever possible, have been freely used in the short sketch which follows.

II

In the eighteenth century princes ruled over tracts of land rather than nations. The distinction was clearly seen when the French Revolution threw the people to one side and the government to the other. It is a commonplace to say that Napoleon builded better than he knew, and that instead of making France supreme in Europe he roused the slumbering spirit of nationality everywhere. Himself an Italian, pride of race united with the desire to overthrow the Austrian dominion in Italy, and led him deliberately to encourage national aspirations there. In 1800 he defeated the Austrians at Marengo, and proceeded to divide the Italian spoils among his relatives and generals. Their rule had all the unlovely features of the time—secret police, press censorship, nepotism, intrigue, plunder. Local prejudices were outraged; tens of thousands of Italians fell fighting in Spain and Russia under a foreign flag. On the other hand, the Napoleonic régime crippled feudalism, strengthened the central authority, established schools, braced the soldiery, and generally quickened the energies of the people. Napoleon fell. Scheming diplomats at Vienna parcelled out the Italian peninsula afresh between scheming kings and clerics. Austria and Piedmont became the predominant partners. The republics of

¹ To this list must now be added the important work of Mr. G. M. Trevelyan: *Garibaldi's Defence of the Roman Republic*.

² London: Smith, Elder.

Venice and Genoa were doomed. The people, always dreading absorption by France, welcomed back the old rulers, good and bad alike. With them came the anachronisms of the old order, "the legal abuses, the feudal privileges, monasteries, ecclesiastical courts, the disabilities of Jews and Protestants." Reaction against the disturbing ideas of the Revolution led to distrust of education and the suppression of opinion. An epidemic of criticism was endangering eternal salvation. "The Liberals are sinners," declared the Duke of Modena: "pray for their repentance, but punish the unrepentant."

Meanwhile a young Genoese was pondering over forbidden French newspapers which his father kept hidden behind his innocent medical books. This inquisitive youth was Joseph Mazzini, born on June 22, 1805. Visitors to the City of Palaces will recall the house in the Via Lomellini; the Greek and Italian legends; the faded wreaths from some loyal republican club; the soiled and shabby copies of Guicciardini's *History*, Robertson's *Charles V.*, Emerson's *English Traits*; the courteous attendant who presents the stranger with a copy of the *Duties of Man*. The father was a professor of anatomy at the university, the mother a woman of strong intellect and deep affection. Both were alive to the mighty movements going on around them, and their son heard daily the republican talk of parents "whose bearing towards high or low was ever the same." He was a delicate child, and apparently never went to school. While a worthy old priest taught him the Latin declensions, the pupil was learning to revere the republics of Greece and Rome. At fourteen he matriculated at the University. He chafed at "chapels" and the innumerable formalities expected from the students. His gentle nature and acute mind won him an easy ascendancy over his companions. "Simple and economical in his own habits," wrote one of them, "he always found means generously to assist the wants of those around him; indeed he carried this disposition to excess; for, not content with giving away his books

and money, he constantly bestowed even his clothes upon the needy among his fellow-students." It was intended that he should follow his father's profession, but he sickened at the dissecting-room and turned to law. His real mistress, however, was literature—"a thousand visions of historical dramas and romances floated before my mental eye"—and he would have served her with fine devotion had not a more imperious rival claimed his loyalty.

The wind bloweth where it listeth. The call to Mazzini came on a Sunday in April 1821, when he and his mother and a friend of the family were walking in the streets of Genoa. They were suddenly accosted by "a tall, black-bearded man, with a severe and energetic countenance, and a fiery glance that I have never since forgotten. He held out a white handkerchief toward us, merely saying, 'For the refugees of Italy.' My mother and friend dropped some money into the handkerchief, and he turned from us to put the same request to others." The man was one of a crowd of revolutionists who had flocked to Genoa after a fruitless insurrection against Austria. The incident made a deep impression on the boy of sixteen. His spirit was crushed by the impossibility he felt of ever conceiving by what means to free his country from the foreign yoke. "In the midst of the noisy, tumultuous life of the scholars around me, I was sombre and absorbed, and appeared like one suddenly grown old. I childishly determined to dress always in black, fancying myself in mourning for my country." It was not easy to give up literature for politics. He read what books in Italian, French, and English he could lay hands on at a time when "half the masterpieces of contemporary European literature came under the censor's ban." He steeped his mind in the Bible and Dante Shakespeare and Byron, Goethe and Schiller. Byron's passion for history, his hatred of the doctrines of the Holy Alliance, his sympathy with heroic endeavour, his exposure of the sterility of egoism, explain the high place which Mazzini always gave him among the world's poets. But it was from the pages of Dante that he drew the richest nourish-

ment. Across five centuries of glory and shame, liberty and servitude, deep called unto deep in the spirits of the two men. The thought that seethed within the soul of the great Florentine was now stirring afresh in the bosom of the young Genoese—the yearning for unity, moral and political, founded upon some great organic authoritative idea, the love of country, the worship of Rome, the sublime vision of the destiny in store for her, leading the human race in holiness and truth. The pedantic critics and syllable-splitters were all astray. One had made Dante Guelph; another Ghibelline; nearly all proved him an orthodox Catholic. He was none of these, cried Mazzini; he was a Christian and an Italian.

But it was no time for variant readings. The critic must give way to the apostle. He found a pulpit in a commercial paper published at Genoa, then in another at Leghorn. Both were suppressed. Three articles were written for the chief Italian review, the *Antologia*. But this was not enough for his ardent spirit. He joined the secret society of the Carbonari. It had once been the rallying-ground of enthusiastic Liberals who aimed in a vague way at independence, but it was now a declining force, and a number of unsuccessful risings had brought discredit upon it. It offered a way of usefulness, however; but Mazzini chafed under its fantastic ritual, its negative programme, its patriotism that looked to France for deliverance. He was already dreaming of a very different society. But despotic governments dislike dreamers. Mazzini was arrested, ostensibly on the charge of introducing a recruit into the ranks of the Carbonari, really, as the Governor of Genoa told his father, because he was a thoughtful young man of talent, fond of solitary walks by night. "We don't like young people thinking without our knowing the subject of their thoughts." From his cell in the fortress of Savona he looked out upon "the sea and sky—two symbols of the infinite and, except the Alps, the sublimest things in nature." Here, with a Bible, a Tacitus, a Byron, and a friendly greenfinch for companions, he had leisure to elaborate the plan of "Young Italy."

III

The ideas of Italian unity and independence were not born with Mazzini. In the distant past there had been Dante and Rienzi. In the immediate past there had been the French Revolution, Napoleon, Romanticism—all active in the years surrounding Mazzini's birth. Romanticism has been called the starting-point of the modern political schools in Italy, the precursor alike of Young Italy and the Moderates. It was more than a mere literary revolt ; it was a propaganda of political ideas for which some of its apostles suffered the horrors of the Spielberg. Songs, plays, pamphlets, novels, were the vehicles of the new movement. Editions of Dante appeared literally by the dozen. In 1820 the *Antologia* was founded in order "to make Italy know itself." Seven years later Manzoni published his famous novel, in which the discerning could read the meaning as clearly as we now read it in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. Wherein did Mazzini differ from these distinguished predecessors and contemporaries? He set their ideas on fire. Where they were literary he was political ; where they were critical he was constructive ; where they were merely moral he was passionately religious.

He came out of prison with a programme, the magnificent daring of which can only be realised by those who know the Italy of the time—morselled out into a mosaic of states, divided by differences of speech and temper, honeycombed with secret associations and spies ; an aristocracy fawning on the foreign conqueror ; a common people "eating Austria with their bread," and drugged by opera, carnival, and charity ; a Church respected in proportion as one travelled away from the centre of her influence to the circumference. Out of the midst of this degradation, in it but not of it, Mazzini, young and poor, lifted up his voice : "I see the people pass before my eyes in the livery of wretchedness and political subjection, ragged and hungry, painfully gathering the crumbs that wealth tosses insultingly to it, or lost and wandering in riot and the intoxication of

a brutish, angry, savage joy ; and I remember that those brutalised faces bear the finger-print of God, the mark of the same mission as our own. I lift myself to the vision of the future, and behold the people rising in its majesty, brothers in one faith, one bond of equality and love, one ideal of citizen virtue that ever grows in beauty and might ; the people of the future, unspoilt by luxury, ungoaded by wretchedness, awed by the consciousness of its rights and duties." He bade his countrymen unite and drive the Austrian out, heedless of help from France. "No nation deserves freedom or can long retain it which does not win it for itself. Revolutions must be made by the people and for the people." It was useless waiting for opportunities—they must be made. But it was to be war, not only on the Austrian, but on Italian ignorance, dissension, and vice—the wretched brood of oppression. Servile habits and unworthy affections must go. The nation must purify herself in order to fulfil her mission. The sole path to victory was through sacrifice—constancy in sacrifice. In the name of God and the people, he invited Italians to march through poverty, exile, and death to a free country. The second of these alternatives was to fall to his lot immediately. Released from Savona, he was offered "internment in a small town, or exile." He chose the latter, and in February 1831 said his good-byes to his family, crossed the Alps to Geneva, went thence to Lyons and Marseilles. Here, in a small room, with a handful of patriots recruited from the refugees in the town, he unfolded his plans for transforming Italy into a free, independent, republican nation. Unity was to be sought for by armed insurrection ; social reform by political action and education. The aims of Young Italy were to be public ; its methods, perforce, secret. To work in the open would be to march straight to the Spielberg or the scaffold. "I never saw," wrote Mazzini in after years, "any nucleus of young men so devoted, capable of such strong mutual affection, such pure enthusiasm, and such readiness in daily, hourly toil, as were those who then laboured with me. We had no office,

no helpers. All day, and a great part of the night, we were buried in our work, writing articles and letters, getting information from travellers, enlisting seamen, folding papers, fastening envelopes, dividing our time between literary and manual work. . . . We lived as equals and brothers ; we had but one thought, one hope, one ideal to reverence. The foreign republicans loved and admired us for our tenacity and unflagging industry ; we were often in real want, but we were light-hearted in a way, and smiling because we believed in the future." The young leader united to an indomitable spirit a striking presence. His English biographer quotes a description of him as he appeared at this time : "His long, curling black hair, which fell upon his shoulders, the extreme freshness of his clear olive complexion, the chiselled delicacy of his regular and beautiful features, aided by his very youthful look and sweetness and openness of expression, would have made his appearance almost too feminine, if it had not been for his noble forehead, the power of firmness and decision that was mingled with their gaiety and sweetness in the bright flashes of his dark eyes and in the varying expression of his mouth, together with his small and beautiful moustachios and beard. Altogether he was at that time the most beautiful being, male or female, that I had ever seen, and I have not since seen his equal." Thirty years later Jowett told a correspondent, "Some friends of mine, who know him (Mazzini), assure me that he has the greatest fascination of manner they have ever met with."

The young band worked with an enthusiasm which stirred a quick response at home. Articles, manifestoes, pamphlets poured from their leader's fervid pen, were printed and smuggled into Italy in barrels of pitch and bales of drapery, and thrilled their readers with their elevated thought and glowing prose. "Climb the hills," he bade them, "sit at the farmer's table, visit the workshops and the artisans, whom you now neglect. Tell them of their rightful liberties, their ancient traditions and glories, the old commercial greatness which has gone ; talk to them of the thousand forms of

oppression, which they are ignorant of, because no one points them out." Lodges sprang up in the chief towns of the north and centre, thousands of recruits were enrolled, and by 1833 the Austrian Government considered "Young Italy" sufficiently dangerous to declare membership thereof high treason punishable by death.

IV

For centuries Piedmont had been a buffer state, struck now by France, now by Austria. In such a position it was natural that the arts of diplomacy and war should absorb the main energies of the little kingdom. It was natural, too, that patriots of all parties should look to Piedmont to lead in the struggle against Austria. Mazzini now appealed to its king to head the national movement. The character of Charles Albert offers interesting parallels to that of another potentate who in our own day has had to confront revolution. He was pathetically regarded as the leader of causes he dreaded. "Everybody," it was said, "expects a constitution from Charles Albert." In his youth he had dallied with the Carbonari, but his Liberalism was a spent sympathy. "The religious mood grew upon him ; he became a devotee, easily played on by confessor and Jesuit, timidly scrupulous to prove himself a good son of the Church and gain Papal sanction for his acts." "He stood 'between the dagger of the Carbonari and the poisoned chocolate of the Jesuits'. . . 'a strange compound of the worldly and the martyr spirit, no hero, but a perplexed, scruple-harassed man, the victim of a fatal indecision between the authority of convention and the noble promptings of his heart.'" His reply to Mazzini's appeal was to order him to be seized should he cross the frontier. The exiles then planned a rising with Genoa and Alessandria as centres, hoping to force the King to lead or abdicate, but an accident revealed the plot and a savage persecution crushed the conspiracy. There are senses in which history repeats itself with very little difference.

Forged signatures, enervating drugs, physical torture were used to force the prisoners to betray their comrades. Dreading he might succumb, Jacopo Ruffini, Mazzini's dearest friend, committed suicide in his cell. Mazzini himself was condemned to death, and the French Government decreed his banishment ; but he remained hidden in Marseilles for a year, pushing on the crusade. In the middle of July 1833 he went to Geneva to organise another insurrection, the leadership of which, contrary to his advice, was vested in an adventurer who exhausted the funds and delayed action until all chance of success was gone. The failure of the two expeditions and the strain of work, anxiety and secrecy which they involved, preyed on Mazzini's health and plunged him for a time into a black despair. The forms of his dead comrades rose up before him "like the phantoms of a crime and its unavailing remorse. I could not recall them to life. How many mothers I had caused to weep ! How many more must learn to weep, should I persist in the attempt to arouse the youth of Italy to noble action, to awaken in them the yearning for a common country ! And if that country were indeed an illusion !" Diplomatic notes poured down upon Switzerland, and Mazzini was banished from the Republic. Again he managed to elude the police, leading a hunted life, now sheltered by some Protestant pastor, now spending months in untenanted houses where in the moaning of the wind he heard Ruffini's voice calling to him. Gradually the tempest of doubt subsided. "One morning I awoke to find my mind tranquil and my spirit calmed, as one who had passed through a great danger. . . . The first thought that passed across my spirit was, 'Your sufferings are the temptations of egoism, and arise from a misconception of life.'" He searched his heart to see if it had any wicked way in it. Was there any lurking selfishness ? Material desires he had surrendered long ago, but he had clung to the affections. "I should have thought of them, as of a blessing from God, to be accepted with thankfulness, not as of something to be expected and exacted as a right and a reward. Instead of

this, I had made them a condition of fulfilling my duties. I had not reached the ideal of love, love that has no hope in this life. I had worshipped not love but the joys of love." He bade a long farewell to individual hopes, dug the grave, not of his affections, but of all the desires and ineffable comforts of affection, so that none might ever know the Ego buried beneath. In like manner he traced to egotism the failure of the French Revolution and the various unsuccessful risings in Italy. Men had sought after happiness, clamoured for their rights. A higher note must be struck. "We fell as a political party, we must rise as a religious party." "Life is a mission ; duty, therefore, its highest law. . . . Each of us is bound to purify his own soul as a temple ; to free it from egotism ; to set before himself, with a religious sense of the importance of the study, the problem of his own life ; to search out what is the most striking, the most urgent need of the men by whom he is surrounded, then to interrogate his own faculties and capacity, and resolutely apply them to the satisfaction of that need. . . . Young brothers, when once you have conceived and determined your mission within your soul, let nought arrest your steps. Fulfil it with all your strength ; fulfil it, whether blessed by love or visited by hate ; whether strengthened by association with others, or in the sad solitude that almost always surrounds the martyrs of thought. The path is clear before you ; you are cowards, unfaithful to your own future, if, in spite of sorrows and delusions, you do not pursue it to the end."

V

With Mazzini in Switzerland were Agostino and Giovanni Ruffini. They lacked the heroic quality of their dead brother, and felt acutely the strain of a conspirator's life. For their sakes, chiefly, Mazzini decided to come to London, and they arrived here in January 1837. Mazzini grew to love this "sunless and musicless island," but his first experience of a dingy lodging in a back street filled him

with longing for the Alps which he had loved "almost as a mother." More trying still was the impatience of his comrades, who could not soar to Mazzini's transcendental heights. Where all are geniuses life may be tolerable for all, but the odds are against the happiness of the family in which the genius is set solitary. Nor did a diet of potatoes and rice, with their undoubted vegetarian virtues, conduce to the harmony of the household near the Euston Road. And the maid-of-all-work had never heard of the Gospel of Duty! Much may be endured where there is money to procure better, but the exiles were in the direst poverty. Mazzini was not the man to resist the importunities of his countrymen while he had a penny left, and some of them thought that "in the name of this chimera of human brotherhood" they had a right to make themselves at home in his house. Precious souvenirs, books, clothes, began to find their way to the pawnshops, and he dragged himself from one moneylender to another, paying a ruinous rate of interest. In the daytime he found his way into "the valley of the shadow of books"—the international workshop in Bloomsbury, and under its sheltering dome began to turn out an article or two. He got to know some English families, the Carlyles among the first. In 1840 he moved to Chelsea—then a suburb of hayfields and market gardens—to be near them, and they were very kind and helpful. Mrs. Carlyle had a deep affection for him, and took him into her confidence in her domestic troubles. He repaid her with a couple of letters which are surely the noblest ever penned in such a situation.

I

LONDON, *July 1846.**To JANE WELSH CARLYLE.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I was yesterday almost the whole day out, and did not receive your notes, except in the evening, when it was too late to answer them. Your few words sound sad, deeply, I will not say