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EDITED BY CHARLES W ELIOT LL D

I PROMESSI SPOSI
(THE BETROTHED)

BY ALESSANDRO MANZONI

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

COUNT ALESSANDRO MANZONI *was born at Milan, Italy, March 7, 1785. He was educated at Lugano, Milan, and Pavia, and after taking his degree he joined his mother in Paris, where he found her in the circle of Mme. Condorcet and the surviving rationalists of the eighteenth century. These associations led him for a time into scepticism, but he was later converted to Catholicism, and remained a steadfast adherent of that faith till his death, defending it in his writings against the Protestant historian Sismondi. Manzoni was a warm sympathizer with the aspirations of his country toward political independence, but he took no very active part in public agitation. When Italy was at last free, he was made a Senator and awarded a pension. He died at Milan, May 22, 1873.*

Manzoni's most important literary productions are in poetry, drama, and the novel. In the first group he wrote some hymns, notable for the warmth of their religious sentiment, and two odes, "Il cinque maggio" and "Marzo 1821." The former of these, on the death of Napoleon, first brought him fame. His dramatic compositions, "Il Conte di Carmagnola" and "Adelchi," represent an attempt to free Italian drama from the restraints of the classical conventions, but neither met with general approval in Italy. Goethe, however, reviewed the earlier in the most favorable terms. In a prefatory essay Manzoni made an important contribution to the romantic protest against the restrictions of the dramatic "unities" of the classical drama. But the Italians were not yet prepared to accept truth in the treatment of human nature in place of stylistic polish and conventional form.

The reception given to Manzoni's masterpiece, "I Promessi Sposi" (1825-26) was very different. In form a historical novel, written at a time when the vogue of the Waverley Novels had stimulated the production of this form of fiction throughout Europe, the interest of "The Betrothed," as it is usually called in England, is rather psychological and sentimental than external. The scene is laid in Lombardy between 1628 and 1631, and the plot deals with the thwarting of the love of two peasants by a local tyrant. The manners of the time are presented with great vividness and picturesqueness; one of the most notable elements

being the elaborate description of the plague which devastated Milan in 1630 (See Chaps. xxxi-xxxvii). *The novel has taken a place as the most distinguished novel of modern Italy, and has been translated into nearly all the literary languages.*

The age-long dispute as to which dialect should be used as the standard language of Italian prose engaged the interest of Manzoni in his later years; and, becoming convinced of the claims of Tuscan, he rewrote the entire novel in order to remove all traces of non-Tuscan idiom, and published it in 1840. This proceeding had the effect of rekindling the discussion on the question of a national Italian literary language—a discussion which still goes on. Along with the revised edition of "I Promessi Sposi," he published a kind of sequel, "La Storia della Colonna infame," written more than ten years before; but this work, overloaded with didacticism, is universally regarded as inferior. Both at home and abroad, Manzoni's fame rests mainly on the novel here printed, a work which has taken its place among the great novels of the world, not merely for its admirable descriptions of Italian life in the seventeenth century, but still more for its faithful and moving presentation of human experience and emotion.

Mention has been made above of a so-called sequel to "I Promessi Sposi"; and since this publication is less easily accessible than Manzoni's more famous works, being properly regarded as unworthy of a place beside his great novel, it may interest the reader to have some account of its contents.

At the end of Chapter xxxii of "I Promessi Sposi," Manzoni refers to the affair of the anointers of Milan, men who were suspected of smearing the walls of the houses with poison intended to spread the pestilence; but he relegates to another place a full account of the incident. It is this matter which he takes up in "La Storia della Colonna infame."

One morning in June, 1630, a woman standing at a window in Milan saw a man enter the street della Vetra de Cittadini. He carried a paper on which he appeared to be writing, and from time to time he drew his hands along the walls. It occurred to her that he was perhaps an "anointer," and she proceeded to spread her suspicion, with the result that the man was arrested. He was found to be one Piazza, a Commissioner of the Tribunal of Health, who was able to give such an account of himself as,

in ordinary times, would have led to his immediate acquittal. Both the populace and the judges, however, were panic-stricken, and eager to vent on any victim the fear and anguish into which the ravages of the plague had plunged them. Piazza was accordingly tortured, and after repeated and horrible sufferings was induced to make a false confession and to implicate an innocent barber, who, he said, had given him the ointment and promised him money if he spread it on the houses. Mora, the barber, was next arrested and submitted to a similar illegal and infamous process, until he also confessed, throwing the burden of blame in turn upon Piazza. Under false promises of immunity and suggestions of what was wanted from them, they alleged that several other persons were their accomplices or principals, and these also were thrown into jail. The evidence of Mora and of Piazza was mutually contradictory on many points and was several times retracted, but the judges ignored these matters, broke their promise of immunity, and condemned both to death. They were placed on a car to be carried to the place of execution; as they proceeded, their bodies were gashed with a hot iron; their right hands were struck off as they passed Mora's shop; their bones were broken on the wheel; they were bound alive to the wheel and raised from the ground, and after six hours were put to death. This they bore with fortitude, having previously declared their innocence, retracted their confessions, and absolved their alleged accomplices. Mora's house was demolished, and a pillar, called the Column of Infamy, was erected on the spot, where it stood till 1778.

After the murder of these two miserable men, the judges proceeded to press the cases against the others whose names had been dragged into the matter, one of whom was an officer called Padilla, son of the Commandant of the Castle of Milan. Several of these suffered the same tortures and death as Mora and Piazza; but Padilla's case dragged on for two years, at the end of which he was acquitted.

The story of this terrible example of judicial cruelty had been to some extent cleared up by Verri in his book on Torture, but Manzoni was anxious to show that, evil as were the laws which permitted the use of the rack, it was not they but the judges who were responsible. For even the laws of torture prohibited the methods by which these men were made to inculpate themselves,

and the illegality and monstrosity of the whole proceeding were attributable to a court eager for a conviction at all costs to gratify the thirst for blood of a maddened and ignorant populace.

The incident is related by Manzoni with considerable diffuseness and much technical argument; but the frightful nature of the events and the exhibition of the psychology of a panic-stricken mob give the production a gruesome interest.

I PROMESSI SPOSI

CHAPTER I

THAT branch of the lake of Como, which extends towards the south, is enclosed by two unbroken chains of mountains, which, as they advance and recede, diversify its shores with numerous bays and inlets. Suddenly the lake contracts itself, and takes the course and form of a river, between a promontory on the right, and a wide open shore on the opposite side. The bridge which there joins the two banks seems to render this transformation more sensible to the eye, and marks the point where the lake ends, and the Adda again begins—soon to resume the name of the lake, where the banks receding afresh, allow the water to extend and spread itself in new gulfs and bays.

The open country, bordering the lake, formed of the alluvial deposits of three great torrents, reclines upon the roots of two contiguous mountains, one named San Martino, the other, in the Lombard dialect, *Il Resegone,* because of its many peaks seen in profile, which in truth resemble the teeth of a saw so much so, that no one at first sight, viewing it in front (as, for example, from the northern bastions of Milan), could fail to distinguish it by this simple description, from the other mountains of more obscure name and ordinary form in that long and vast chain. For a considerable distance the country rises with a gentle and continuous ascent; afterwards it is broken into hill and dale, terraces and elevated plains, formed by the intertwining of the roots of the two mountains, and the action of the waters. The shore itself, intersected by the torrents, consists for the most part of gravel and large flints; the rest of the plain, of fields and vineyards, interspersed with towns, villages, and hamlets: other parts are clothed with woods, extending far up the mountain.

Lecco, the principal of these towns, giving its name to the territory, is at a short distance from the bridge, and so close upon the shore, that, when the waters are high, it seems to stand in the lake itself. A large town even now, it promises soon to become a city. At the time the events happened which we undertake to recount, this town, already of considerable importance, was also a place of defence, and for that reason had the honour of lodging a commander, and the advantage of possessing a fixed garrison of Spanish soldiers, who taught modesty to the damsels and matrons of the country; bestowed from time to time marks of their favour on the shoulder of a husband or a father; and never failed, in autumn, to disperse themselves in the vineyards, to thin the grapes, and lighten for the peasant the labours of the vintage.

From one to the other of these towns, from the heights to the lake, from one height to another, down through the little valleys which lay between, there ran many narrow lanes or mule-paths, (and they still exist,) one while abrupt and steep, another level, another pleasantly sloping, in most places enclosed by walls built of large flints, and clothed here and there with ancient ivy, which, eating with its roots into the cement, usurps its place, and binds together the wall it renders verdant. For some distance these lanes are hidden, and as it were buried between the walls, so that the passenger, looking upwards, can see nothing but the sky and the peaks of some neighbouring mountain: in other places they are terraced: sometimes they skirt the edge of a plain, or project from the face of a declivity, like a long staircase, upheld by walls which flank the hillsides like bastions, but in the pathway rise only the height of a parapet—and here the eye of the traveller can range over varied and most beautiful prospects. On one side he commands the azure surface of the lake, and the inverted image of the rural banks reflected in the placid wave; on the other, the Adda, scarcely escaped from the arches of the bridge, expands itself anew into a little lake, then is again contracted, and prolongs to the horizon its bright windings; upward,—the massive piles of the mountains, overhanging the head of the gazer; below,—the cultivated terrace, the champaign, the bridge; opposite,—the further bank of the lake, and, rising from it, the mountain boundary.

Along one of these narrow lanes, in the evening of the 7th of November, in the year 1628, Don Abbondio . . ., curate of one of the towns alluded to above, was leisurely returning home from a walk, (our author does not mention the name of the town—two blanks already!) He was quietly repeating his office, and now and then, between one psalm and another, he would shut the breviary upon the fore-finger of his right hand, keeping it there for a mark; then, putting both his hands behind his back, the right (with the closed book) in the palm of the left, he pursued his way with downcast eyes, kicking, from time to time, towards the wall the flints which lay as stumbling-blocks in the path. Thus he gave more undisturbed audience to the idle thoughts which had come to tempt his spirit, while his lips repeated, of their own accord, his evening prayers. Escaping from these thoughts, he raised his eyes to the mountain which rose opposite; and mechanically gazed on the gleaming of the scarcely set sun, which, making its way through the clefts of the opposite mountain, was thrown upon the projecting peaks in large unequal masses of rose-coloured light. The breviary open again, and another portion recited, he reached a turn, where he always used to raise his eyes and look forward; and so he did to-day. After the turn, the road ran straight forward about sixty yards, and then divided into two lanes, Y fashion—the right hand path ascended towards the mountain, and led to the parsonage: the left branch descended through the valley to a torrent: and on this side the walls were not higher than about two feet. The inner walls of the two ways, instead of meeting so as to form an angle, ended in a little chapel, on which were depicted certain figures, long, waving, and terminating in a point. These, in the intention of the artist, and to the eyes of the neighbouring inhabitants, represented flames. Alternately with the flames were other figures—indescribable, meant for souls in purgatory, souls and flames of brick-colour on a grey ground enlivened with patches of the natural wall, where the plaster was gone. The curate, having turned the corner, and looked forward, as was his custom, towards the chapel, beheld an unexpected sight, and one he would not willingly have seen. Two men, one opposite the other, were stationed

at the confluence, so to say, of the two ways: one of them was sitting across the low wall, with one leg dangling on the outer side, and the other supporting him in the path: his companion was standing up, leaning against the wall, with his arms crossed on his breast. Their dress, their carriage, and so much of their expression as could be distinguished at the distance at which the curate stood, left no doubt about their condition. Each had a green net on his head, which fell upon the left shoulder, and ended in a large tassel. Their long hair, appearing in one large lock upon the forehead: on the upper lip two long mustachios, curled at the end: their doublets, confined by bright leathern girdles, from which hung a brace of pistols: a little horn of powder, dangling round their necks, and falling on their breasts like a necklace: on the right side of their large and loose pantaloons, a pocket, and from the pocket the handle of a dagger: a sword hanging on the left, with a large basket-hilt of brass, carved in cipher, polished and gleaming:—all, at a glance, discovered them to be individuals of the species *bravo*.

This order, now quite extinct, was then most flourishing in Lombardy, and already of considerable antiquity. Has any one no clear idea of it? Here are some authentic sketches, which may give him a distinct notion of its principal characteristics, of the means put in force to destroy it, and of its obstinate vitality.

On the 8th of April, 1583, the most Illustrious and Excellent Signor Don Carlo d'Aragon, Prince of Castelvetrano, Duke of Terranuova, Marquis of Avola, Count of Burgeto, grand Admiral, and grand Constable of Sicily, Governor of Milan, and Captain-General of His Catholic Majesty in Italy, *being fully informed of the intolerable misery in which this city of Milan has lain, and does lie, by reason of bravoes and vagabonds,* publishes a ban against them, *declares and defines all those to be included in this ban, and to be held bravoes and vagabonds who, whether foreigners or natives, have no occupation, or having it do not employ themselves in it . . . but without salary, or with, engage themselves, to any cavaliner or gentleman, officer or merchant . . . to render them aid and service, or rather, as may be presumed, to lay wait against others . . .* all these he

commands, that, within the term of six days, they should evacuate the country, threatens the galleys to the refractory, and grants to all officials the most strangely ample and indefinite power of executing the order. But the following year, on the 12th of April, this same Signor, perceiving *that this city is completely full of the said bravoes . . . returned to live as they had lived before, their customs wholly unchanged, and their numbers undiminished,* issues another hue and cry, more vigorous and marked, in which, among other ordinances, he prescribes—*That whatsoever person, as well as inhabitant of this city as a foreigner, who by the testimony of two witnesses, should appear to be held and commonly reputed a bravo, and to have that name, although he cannot be convicted of having committed any crime . . . for this reputation of being a bravo alone, without any other proof, may, by the said judges, and by every individual of them, be put to the rack and torture, for process of information . . . and although he confess no crime whatever, notwithstanding, he shall be sent to the galleys for the said three years, for the sole reputation and name of bravo, as aforesaid.* All this and more which is omitted, because *His Excellency is resolved to be obeyed by every one.*

At hearing such brave and confident words of so great a Signor, accompanied too with many penalties, one feels much inclined to suppose that, at the echo of their rumblings, all the bravoes had disappeared for ever. But the testimony of a Signor not less authoritative, nor less endowed with names, obliges us to believe quite the contrary. The most Illustrious and most Excellent Signor Juan Fernandez de Velasco, Constable of Castile, Grand Chamberlain of his Majesty, Duke of the city of Frias, Count of Haro and Castelnovo, Lord of the House of Velasco, and that of the Seven Infantas of Lara, Governor of the State of Milan, &c., on the 5th of June, 1593, he also, fully informed of *how much loss and destruction . . . bravoes and vagabonds are the cause, and of the mischief such sort of people effects against the public weal, in despite of justice,* warns them anew, that within the term of six days, they are to evacuate the country, repeating almost word for word, the threats and penalties of his predecessor. On the 23rd of

May, in a subsequent year, 1598, *being informed, with no little displeasure of mind, that . . . every day, in this city and state, the number of these people* (bravoes and vagabonds) *is on the increase, and day and night nothing is heard of them but murder, homicide, robbery, and crimes of every kind, for which there is greater facility, because these bravoes are confident of being supported by their great employers* . . . he prescribes anew the same remedies, increasing the dose, as men do in obstinate maladies. *Let every one, then,* he concludes, *be wholly on his guard against contravening in the least the present proclamation; for, instead of experiencing the clemency of His Excellency, he will experience the rigour of his anger . . . he being resolved and determined that this shall be the last and peremptory admonition.*

Not, however, of this opinion was the most Illustrious and most Excellent Signor, Il Signor Don Pietro Enriquez de Acevedo, Count of Fuentes, Captain and Governor of the State of Milan; not of this opinion was he, and for good reasons. *Being fully informed of the misery in which this city and state lies by reason of the great number of bravoes which abound in it . . . and being resolved wholly to extirpate a plant so pernicious,* he issues, on the 5th of December, 1600, a new admonition, full of severe penalties, *with a firm purpose, that, with all rigour, and without any hope of remission, they shall be fully carried out.*

We must believe, however, that he did not apply himself to this matter with that hearty good will which he knew how to employ in contriving cabals and exciting enemies against his great enemy, Henry IV. History informs us that he succeeded in arming against that king the Duke of Savoy, and caused him to lose a city. He succeeded also in engaging the Duke of Biron on his behalf, and caused him to lose his head; but as to this pernicious plant of bravoes, certain it is that it continued to blossom till the 22nd of September, 1612. On that day the most Illustrious Signor Don Giovanni de Mendosa, Marquis of Hynojosa, Gentleman, &c., Governor, &c., had serious thoughts of extirpating it. To this end he sent the usual proclamation, corrected and enlarged, to Pandolfo and Marco Tullio Mol-

atesti, associated printers to His Majesty, with orders to print it to the destruction of the bravoes. Yet they lived to receive on the 24th of December, 1618, similar and more vigorous blows from the most Illustrious and most Excellent Signor, the Signor Don Gomez Suarez di Figueroa, Duke of Feria, &c., Governor, &c. Moreover, they not being hereby done to death, the most Illustrious and most Excellent Signor, the Signor Gonzala Fernandez di Cordova, (under whose government these events happened to Don Abbondio,) had found himself obliged to recorrect and republish the usual proclamation against the bravoes, on the 5th day of October, 1627; *i. e.* one year one month and two days before this memorable event.

Nor was this the last publication. We do not feel bound, however, to make mention of those which ensued, as they are beyond the period of our story. We will notice only one of the 13th of February, 1632, in which the most Illustrious and most Excellent Signor *the Duke of Feria,* a second time governor, signifies to us *that the greatest outrages are caused by those denominated bravoes.*

This suffices to make it pretty certain, that at the time of which we treat, there was as yet no lack of bravoes.

That the two described above were on the lookout for some one, was but too evident; but what more alarmed Don Abbondio was, that he was assured by certain signs that he was the person expected; for, the moment he appeared, they exchanged glances, raising their heads with a movement which plainly expressed that both at once had exclaimed, 'Here's our man!' He who bestrode the wall got up, and brought his other leg into the path: his companion left leaning on the wall, and both began to walk towards him. Don Abbondio, keeping the breviary open before him, as if reading, directed his glance forward to watch their movements. He saw them advancing straight towards him: multitudes of thoughts, all at once, crowded upon him; with quick anxiety he asked himself, whether any pathway to the right or left lay between him and the bravoes; and quickly came the answer,—no. He made a hasty examination, to discover whether he had offended some great man, some vindictive neighbour; but even in this moment of alarm, the consol-

ing testimony of conscience somewhat reassured him. Meanwhile the bravoes drew near, eyeing him fixedly. He put the fore finger and middle finger of his left hand up to his collar, as if to settle it, and running the two fingers round his neck he turned his head backwards at the same time, twisting his mouth in the same direction, and looked out of the corner of his eyes as far as he could, to see whether any one was coming; but he saw no one. He cast a glance over the low wall into the fields—no one; another, more subdued, along the path forward—no one but the bravoes. What is to be done? turn back? It is to late. Run? It was the same as to say, follow me, or worse. Since he could not escape the danger, he went to meet it. These moments of uncertainty were already so painful, he desired only to shorten them. He quickened his pace, recited a verse in a louder tone, composed his face to a tranquil and careless expression, as well as he could, used every effort to have a smile ready; and when he found himself in the presence of the two good men, exclaiming mentally, 'here we are!' he stood still. 'Signor Curato!' said one, staring in his face.

'Who commands me?' quickly answered Don Abbondio, raising his eyes from the book, and holding it open in both hands.

'You intend,' continued the other, with the threatening angry brow of one who has caught an inferior committing some grievous fault, 'you intend, to-morrow, to marry Renzo Tramaglino and Lucia Mondella!'

'That is . . .' replied Don Abbondio, with a quivering voice,—'That is . . . You, gentlemen, are men of the world, and know well how these things go. A poor curate has nothing to do with them. They patch up their little treaties between themselves, and then . . . then, they come to us, as one goes to the bank to make a demand; and we . . . we are servants of the community.'

'Mark well,' said the bravo, in a lower voice but with a solemn tone of command, 'this marriage is not to be performed, not to-morrow, nor ever.'

'But, gentlemen,' replied Don Abbondio, with the soothing, mild tone of one who would persuade an impatient

man, 'be so kind as put yourselves in my place. If the thing depended on me . . . you see plainly that it is no advantage to me . . .'

'Come, come,' interrupted the bravo; 'if the thing were to be decided by prating, you might soon put our heads in a poke. We know nothing about it, and we don't want to know more. A warned man . . . you understand.'

'But gentlemen like you are too just, too reasonable . . .'

'But,' (this time the other companion broke in, who had not hitherto spoken)—'but the marriage is not to be performed, or . . .' here a great oath—'or he who performs it will never repent, because he shall have no time for it . . .' another oath.

'Silence, silence,' replied the first orator: 'the Signor Curato knows the way of the world, and we are good sort of men, who don't wish to do him any harm, if he will act like a wise man. Signor Curato, the Illustrious Signor Don Rodrigo, our master, sends his kind respects.'

To the mind of Don Abbondio this name was like the lightning flash in a storm at night, which, illuminating for a moment and confusing all objects, increases the terror. As by instinct he made a low bow, and said, 'If you could suggest . . .'

'Oh! *suggest* is for you who know Latin,' again interrupted the bravo, with a smile between awkwardness and ferocity; 'it is all very well for you. But, above all, let not a word be whispered about this notice that we have given you for your good, or . . . Ehem! . . . it will be the same as marrying them.—Well, what will your Reverence that we say for you to the Illustrious Signor Don Rodrigo?'

'My respects.'

'Be clear, Signor Curato.'

'. . . Disposed . . . always disposed to obedience.' And having said these words, he did not himself well know whether he had given a promise, or whether he had only sent an ordinary compliment. The bravoes took it, and showed that they took it, in the more serious meaning.

'Very well—good evening, Signor Curato,' said one of them, leading his companion away.