

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
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My Ten Years' Imprisonment

Silvio Pellico

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MY TEN YEARS' IMPRISONMENT

By
Silvio Pellico

INTRODUCTION.

Silvio Pellico was born at Saluzzo, in North Italy, in the year of the fall of the Bastille, 1789. His health as a child was feeble, his temper gentle, and he had the instincts of a poet. Before he was ten years old he had written a tragedy on a theme taken from Macpherson's *Ossian*. His chief delight as a boy was in acting plays with other children, and he acquired from his father a strong interest in the patriotic movements of the time. He fastened upon French literature during a stay of some years at Lyons with a relation of his mother's. Ugo Foscolo's *Sepolcri* revived his patriotism, and in 1810, at the age of twenty-one, he returned to Italy. He taught French in the Soldiers' Orphans' School at Milan. At Milan he was admitted to the friendship of Vincenzo Monti, a poet then touching his sixtieth year, and of the younger Ugo Foscolo, by whose writings he had been powerfully stirred, and to whom he became closely bound. Silvio Pellico wrote in classical form a tragedy, *Laodicea*, and then, following the national or romantic school, for a famous actress of that time, another tragedy, *Francesca di Rimini*, which was received with great applause.

After the dissolution of the kingdom of Italy, in April 1814, Pellico became tutor to the two children of the Count Porro Lambertenghi, at whose table he met writers of mark, from many countries; Byron (whose *Manfred* he translated), Madame de Stael, Schlegel, Manzoni, and others. In 1819 Silvio Pellico began publishing *Il Conciliatore*, a journal purely literary, that was to look through literature to the life that it expresses, and so help towards the better future of his country. But the merciless excisions of inoffensive passages by the Austrian censorship destroyed the journal in a year.

A secret political association had been formed in Italy of men of all ranks who called themselves the *Carbonari* (charcoal burners), and who sought the reform of government in Italy. In 1814 they had

planned a revolution in Naples, but there was no action until 1820. After successful pressure on the King of the two Sicilies, the forces of the Carbonari under General Pepe entered Naples on the ninth of July, 1820, and King Ferdinand I. swore on the 13th of July to observe the constitution which the Carbonari had proclaimed at Nola and elsewhere during the preceding month. On the twenty-fifth of August, the Austrian government decreed death to every member of a secret society, and *carcere duro e durissimo*, severest pains of imprisonment, to all who had neglected to oppose the progress of Carbonarism. Many seizures were made, and on the 13th of October the gentle editor of the *Conciliatore*, Silvio Pellico, was arrested as a friend of the Carbonari, and taken to the prison of Santa Margherita in Milan.

In the same month of October, the Emperors of Austria and Russia, and the Prince of Prussia met at Troppau to concert measures for crushing the Carbonari.

In January, 1821, they met Ferdinand I. at Laybach and then took arms against Naples. Naples capitulated on the 20th of March, and on the 24th of March, 1821, its Revolutionary council was closed. A decree of April 10th condemned to death all persons who attended meetings of the Carbonari, and the result was a great accession to the strength of this secret society, which spread its branches over Germany and France.

On the 19th of February, 1821, Silvio Pellico was transferred to imprisonment under the leads, on the isle of San Michele, Venice. There he wrote two plays, and some poems. On the 21st of February, 1822, he and his friend Maroncelli were condemned to death; but, their sentence being commuted to twenty years for Maroncelli, and fifteen years for Pellico, of *carcere duro*, they entered their underground prisons at Spielberg on the 10th of April, 1822. The government refused to transmit Pellico's tragedies to his family, lest, though harmless in themselves, the acting of them should bring good-will to a state prisoner. At Spielberg he composed a third tragedy, *Leoniero da Dordona*, though deprived of books, paper, and pens, and preserved it in his memory. In 1828, a rumour of Pellico's death in prison caused great excitement throughout Italy. On the 17th of September, 1830, he was released, by the amnesty of

that year, and, avoiding politics thenceforth, devoted himself to religion. The Marchesa Baroli, at Turin, provided for his maintenance, by engaging him as her secretary and librarian. With health made weaker by his sufferings, Silvio Pellico lived on to the age of sixty-five, much honoured by his countrymen. Gioberti dedicated a book to him as "The first of Italian Patriots." He died at Turin on the 1st of February, 1854.

Silvio Pellico's account of his imprisonment, *Le Mie Prigioni*, was first published in Paris in 1833. It has been translated into many languages, and is the work by which he will retain his place in European literature. His other plays, besides the two first named, were *Eufemia di Messina*; *Iginia di Asti*; *Leoniero da Dordona*, already named as having been thought out at Spielberg; his *Gismonda*; *l'Erodiade*; *Ester d'Engaddi*; *Corradino*; and a play upon Sir Thomas More. He wrote also poems, *Cantiche*, of which the best are *Eligi e Valfrido* and *Egilde*; and, in his last years, a religious manual on the *Duties of Men*.

H. M.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

Have I penned these memorials, let me ask myself, from any paltry vanity, or desire to talk about that self? I hope this is not the case, and forasmuch as one may be able to judge in one's own cause, I think I was actuated by better views. These, briefly, were to afford consolation to some unfortunate being, situated like myself, by explaining the evils to which I was exposed, and those sources of relief which I found were accessible, even when labouring under the heaviest misfortune; to bear witness, moreover, that in the midst of my acute and protracted torments, I never found humanity, in the human instruments around me, so hopelessly wicked, so unworthy of consideration, or so barren of noble minds in lowly station, as it is customary to represent it; to engage, if possible, all the generous and good-hearted to love and esteem each other, to become incapable of hating any one; to feel irreconcilable hatred only towards low, base falsehood; cowardice, perfidy, and every kind of moral degradation. It is my object to impress on all that well-known but too often forgotten truth, namely, that both religion and philosophy require calmness of judgment combined with energy of will, and that without such a union, there can be no real justice, no dignity of character, and no sound principles of human action.

MY TEN YEARS' IMPRISONMENT

CHAPTER I.

On Friday, the 15th of October, 1820, I was arrested at Milan, and conveyed to the prison of Santa Margherita. The hour was three in the afternoon. I underwent a long examination, which occupied the whole of that and several subsequent days; but of this I shall say nothing. Like some unfortunate lover, harshly dealt with by her he adored, yet resolved to bear it with dignified silence, I leave la *Politica*, such as SHE IS, and proceed to something else.

At nine in the evening of that same unlucky Friday, the actuary consigned me to the jailer, who conducted me to my appointed residence. He there politely requested me to give up my watch, my money, and everything in my pockets, which were to be restored to me in due time; saying which he respectfully bade me good-night.

"Stop, my dear sir," I observed, "I have not yet dined; let me have something to eat."

"Directly; the inn is close by, and you will find the wine good, sir."

"Wine I do not drink."

At this announcement Signor Angiolino gave me a look of unfeigned surprise; he imagined that I was jesting. "Masters of prisons," he rejoined, "who keep shop, have a natural horror of an abstemious captive."

"That may be; I don't drink it."

"I am sorry for you, sir; you will feel solitude twice as heavily."

But perceiving that I was firm, he took his leave; and in half an hour I had something to eat. I took a mouthful, swallowed a glass of

water, and found myself alone. My chamber was on the ground floor, and overlooked the court-yard. Dungeons here, dungeons there, to the right, to the left, above, below, and opposite, everywhere met my eye. I leaned against the window, listened to the passing and repassing of the jailers, and the wild song of a number of the unhappy inmates. A century ago, I reflected, and this was a monastery; little then thought the pious, penitent recluses that their cells would now re-echo only to the sounds of blasphemy and licentious song, instead of holy hymn and lamentation from woman's lips; that it would become a dwelling for the wicked of every class - the most part destined to perpetual labour or to the gallows. And in one century to come, what living being will be found in these cells? Oh, mighty Time! unceasing mutability of things! Can he who rightly views your power have reason for regret or despair when Fortune withdraws her smile, when he is made captive, or the scaffold presents itself to his eye? yesterday I thought myself one of the happiest of men; to-day every pleasure, the least flower that strewed my path, has disappeared. Liberty, social converse, the face of my fellow-man, nay, hope itself hath fled. I feel it would be folly to flatter myself; I shall not go hence, except to be thrown into still more horrible receptacles of sorrow; perhaps, bound, into the hands of the executioner. Well, well, the day after my death it will be all one as if I had yielded my spirit in a palace, and been conveyed to the tomb, accompanied with all the pageantry of empty honours.

It was thus, by reflecting on the sweeping speed of time, that I bore up against passing misfortune. Alas, this did not prevent the forms of my father, my mother, two brothers, two sisters, and one other family I had learned to love as if it were my own, from all whom I was, doubtless, for ever cut off, from crossing my mind, and rendering all my philosophical reasoning of no avail. I was unable to resist the thought, and I wept even as a child.

CHAPTER II.

Three months previous to this time I had gone to Turin, where, after several years of separation, I saw my parents, one of my brothers, and two sisters. We had always been an attached family; no son had ever been more deeply indebted to a father and a mother than I; I remember I was affected at beholding a greater alteration in their looks, the progress of age, than I had expected. I indulged a secret wish to part from them no more, and soothe the pillow of departing age by the grateful cares of a beloved son. How it vexed me, too, I remember, during the few brief days I passed with them, to be compelled by other duties to spend so much of the day from home, and the society of those I had such reason to love and to revere; yes, and I remember now what my mother said one day, with an expression of sorrow, as I went out—"Ah! our Silvio has not come to Turin to see US!" The morning of my departure for Milan was a truly painful one. My poor father accompanied me about a mile on my way; and, on leaving me, I more than once turned to look at him, and, weeping, kissed the ring my mother had just given me; nor did I ever before quit my family with a feeling of such painful presentiment. I am not superstitious; but I was astonished at my own weakness, and I more than once exclaimed in a tone of terror, "Good God! whence comes this strange anxiety and alarm?" and, with a sort of inward vision, my mind seemed to behold the approach of some great calamity. Even yet in prison I retain the impression of that sudden dread and parting anguish, and can recall each word and every look of my distressed parents. The tender reproach of my mother, "Ah! Silvio has not come to Turin to see US!" seemed to hang like a weight upon my soul. I regretted a thousand instances in which I might have shown myself more grateful and agreeable to them; I did not even tell them how much I loved; all that I owed to them. I was never to see them more, and yet I turned my eyes with so much like indifference from their dear and venerable features! Why, why was I so chary of giving expression to what I felt (would

they could have read it in my looks), to all my gratitude and love?
In utter solitude, thoughts like these pierced me to the soul.

I rose, shut the window, and sat some hours, in the idea that it would be in vain to seek repose. At length I threw myself on my pallet, and excessive weariness brought me sleep.

CHAPTER III.

To awake the first night in a prison is a horrible thing. Is it possible, I murmured, trying to collect my thoughts, is it possible I am here? Is not all that passed a dream? Did they really seize me yesterday? Was it I whom they examined from morning till night, who am doomed to the same process day after day, and who wept so bitterly last night when I thought of my dear parents? Slumber, the unbroken silence, and rest had, in restoring my mental powers, added incalculably to the capability of reflecting, and, consequently, of grief. There was nothing to distract my attention; my fancy grew busy with absent forms, and pictured, to my eye the pain and terror of my father and mother, and of all dear to me, on first hearing the tidings of my arrest.

At this moment, said I, they are sleeping in peace; or perhaps, anxiety for me may keep them watching, yet little anticipating the fate to which I am here consigned. Happy for them, were it the will of God, that they should cease to exist ere they hear of this horrible misfortune. Who will give them strength to bear it? Some inward voice seemed to whisper me, He whom the afflicted look up to, love and acknowledge in their hearts; who enabled a mother to follow her son to the mount of Golgotha, and to stand under His cross. He, the friend of the unhappy, the friend of man.

Strange this should be the first time I truly felt the power of religion in my heart; and to filial love did I owe this consolation. Though not ill-disposed, I had hitherto been little impressed with its truth, and had not well adhered to it. All common-place objections I estimated at their just value, yet there were many doubts and sophisms which had shaken my faith. It was long, indeed, since they had ceased to trouble my belief in the existence of the Deity; and persuaded of this, it followed necessarily, as part of His eternal justice, that there must be another life for man who suffers so unjustly here. Hence, I argued, the sovereign reason in man for aspiring to the possession of that second life; and hence, too, a worship founded on

the love of God, and of his neighbour, and an unceasing impulse to dignify his nature by generous sacrifices. I had already made myself familiar with this doctrine, and I now repeated, "And what else is Christianity but this constant ambition to elevate and dignify our nature?" and I was astonished, when I reflected how pure, how philosophical, and how invulnerable the essence of Christianity manifested itself, that there could come an epoch when philosophy dared to assert, "From this time forth I will stand instead of a religion like this." And in what manner—by inculcating vice? Certainly not. By teaching virtue? Why that will be to teach us to love God and our neighbour; and that is precisely what Christianity has already done, on far higher and purer motives. Yet, notwithstanding such had, for years, been my opinion, I had failed to draw the conclusion, Then be a Christian! No longer let corruption and abuses, the work of man, deter you; no longer make stumbling-blocks of little points of doctrine, since the principal point, made thus irresistibly clear, is to love God and your neighbour.

In prison I finally determined to admit this conclusion, and I admitted it. The fear, indeed, of appearing to others more religious than I had before been, and to yield more to misfortune than to conviction, made me sometimes hesitate; but feeling that I had done no wrong, I felt no debasement, and cared nothing to encounter the possible reproaches I had not deserved, resolving henceforward to declare myself openly a Christian.

CHAPTER IV.

I adhered firmly to this resolution as time advanced; but the consideration of it was begun the first night of my captivity. Towards morning the excess of my grief had grown calmer, and I was even astonished at the change. On recalling the idea of my parents and others whom I loved, I ceased to despair of their strength of mind, and the recollection of those virtues which I knew they had long possessed gave me real consolation. Why had I before felt such great dismay on thinking of them, and now so much confidence in their strength of mind? Was this happy change miraculous, or the natural effect of my renewed belief in God? What avails the distinction, while the genuine sublime benefits of religion remain the same.

At midnight two secondini (the under jailers are so termed) had paid me a visit, and found me in a very ill mood; in the morning they returned, and were surprised to see me so calm, and even cheerful.

"Last night, sir, you had the face of a basilisk," said Tirola; "now you are quite another thing; I rejoice at it, if, indeed, it be a sign, forgive me the expression, that you are not a scoundrel. Your scoundrels (for I am an old hand at the trade, and my observations are worth something) are always more enraged the second day after their arrest than the first. Do you want some snuff?"

"I do not take it, but will not refuse your offer. If I have not a gorgon-face this morning, it must surely be a proof of my utter insensibility, or easy belief of soon regaining my freedom."

"I should doubt that, even though you were not in durance for state matters. At this time of day they are not so easily got over as you might think; you are not so raw as to imagine such a thing. Pardon me, but you will know more by and by."

"Tell me, how come you to have so pleasant a look, living only, as you do, among the unfortunate?"

"Why, sir, you will attribute it to indifference to others' sufferings; of a truth, I know not how it is; yet, I assure you, it often gives me pain to see the prisoners weep. Truly, I sometimes pretend to be merry to bring a smile upon their faces."

"A thought has just struck me, my friend, which I never had before; it is, that a jailer may be made of very congenial clay."

"Well, the trade has nothing to do with that, sir. Beyond that huge vault you see there, without the court-yard, is another court, and other prisons, all prepared for women. They are, sir, women of a certain class; yet are there some angels among them, as to a good heart. And if you were in my place, sir —"

"I?" and I laughed out heartily.

Tirola was quite disconcerted, and said no more. Perhaps he meant to imply that had I been a secondino, it would have been difficult not to become attached to some one or other of these unfortunates.

He now inquired what I wished to take for breakfast, left me, and soon returned with my coffee. I looked hard at him, with a sort of malicious smile, as much as to say, "Would you carry me a bit of a note to an unhappy friend — to my friend Piero?" {1} He understood it, and answered with another: "No sir; and if you do not take heed how you ask any of my comrades, they will betray you."

Whether or not we understood each other, it is certain I was ten times upon the point of asking him for a sheet of paper, &c.; but there was a something in his eye which seemed to warn me not to confide in any one about me, and still less to others than himself.