

THE EUROPEAN DISPATCHES OF MARGARET FULLER



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SETTING THE SCENE

Letter XXX, Rome May 27, 1849 from Margaret Fuller Ossoli, [At Home and Abroad](#) or [Things and Thoughts in America and Europe](#) edited by her brother, Arthur B. Fuller, Boston; Crosby, Nichols, and Company London; Sampson Low, Son & Co. 1856:

...The struggle is now fairly thoroughly commenced between the principle of democracy and the old powers, no longer legitimate. That struggle may last 50 years and the early be watered with the blood and tears of more than one generation, but the result is sure. All Europe, including Great Britain, where the most bitter resistance of all will be made, is to be under republican government in the next century.

"God moves in a mysterious way."

...When I first arrived in Italy, the vast majority of this people had no wish beyond limited monarchies, constitutional governments. They still respected the famous names of the nobility; they despised the priests, but were still fondly attached to the dogmas and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church....The work is done; the revolution in Italy is now radical, nor can it be stop till Italy becomes independent and united as a republic.(p381)

...War near at hand seems to me even more dreadful than I had fancied it. True, it tries men's souls, lays bare selfishness in undeniable deformity. Here it has produced much fruit of noble sentiment, noble act; but still it breeds vice too, drunkenness, mental dissipation, tears asunder the tenderest ties, lavishes the productions of Earth, for which her starving poor stretch out their hands in vain, in the most unprofitable manner. And the ruin that ensues, how terrible! (p383)

...Then I have for the first time seen what wounded men suffer. The night of the 30th of April I passed in the hospital, and saw the terrible agonies of those dying or who needed amputation, felt their mental pains and longing for the loved ones who were away. (p383-4.)

THE RAVAGES OF WAR

Letter XXXIII, Rome, July 6, 1849, p 410:

If I mistake not, I closed my last letter just as the news arrived here that the attempt of the democratic party in France to resist the infamous proceedings of the government had failed, and thus Rome, as far as human calculation went, had not a hope for her liberties left. An inland city cannot long sustain a siege when there is no hope of aid. Then followed the news of the surrender of Ancona, and Rome found herself alone; for though Venice continued to hold out, all communication was cut off.

The Republican troops, almost to a man, left Ancona, but a long March separated them from Rome. The extreme heat of these days was far more fatal to the Romans than to their assailants, for as fast as the French troops sickened, their place was taken by fresh arrivals. Ours also not only sustained the exhausting service by day, but were harassed at night by attacks, feigned or real. These commonly began about eleven or twelve o'clock at night, just when all who meant to rest were fairly

asleep. I can imagine the harassing effect upon the troops, from what I feel in my sheltered pavilion, in consequence of not having a quiet night's sleep for a month.

The bombardment became constantly more serious. The house where I live was filled as early as the 20th with persons obliged to fly from the Piazza di Gesu, where the fiery rain fell thickest. The night of the 21st-22nd, we were all alarmed about two o'clock A.M. by a tremendous cannonade. It was the moment when the breach was finally made by which the French entered. They rushed in, and I grieve to say, that by the only instance of defection known in the course of the siege, those companies of the regiment Union which had in charge a position on that point yielded to panic and abandoned it. The French immediately entered and entrenched themselves. That was the fatal hour for the city. Every day afterward, though obstinately resisted, the enemy gained, till at last, their cannon being well placed, the city was entirely commanded from the Janiculum, and all thought of further resistance was idle.

It was true policy to avoid a street fight, in which the Italian, an unpracticed soldier, but full of feeling as sustained from the houses, would have been a match even for their disciplined troops. After the 22nd of June, the slaughter of the Romans became every day more fearful. Their defenses were knocked down by the heavy cannon of the French, and, entirely exposed in their valorous onsets, great numbers perished on the spot. Those who were brought into the hospitals were generally grievously wounded, very commonly subjects for amputation. My heart bled daily more and more at these sights, and I could not feel much for myself, though now the balls and bombs began to fall round me also. The night of the 28th the effect was truly fearful, as they whizzed and burst near me. As many as thirty fell upon or near the Hotel de Russie, where Mr. Cass had his temporary abode. The roof of the studio in the pavilion, tenanted by Mr. Stermer, well known to the visitors of Rome for his highly-finished cabinet pictures, was torn to pieces. I sat alone in my much exposed apartment thinking, "If one strikes me, I only hope it will kill me at once, and that God will transport my soul to some sphere where virtue and love are not tyrannized over by egotism and brute force such as this." However the night passed; the next, we had reason to expect a still more fiery salute toward the Pincian, as here alone remained three or four pieces of cannon which could be used. But on the morning of the 30th in a contest at the foot of the Janiculum, the line, old Papal troops, naturally not in earnest like the free corps, refused to fight against odds so terrible. The heroic marina fell, with hundreds of his devoted Lombards. Garibaldi saw his best officers perish, and himself went in the afternoon to say to the Assembly that further resistance was unavailing.

GARIBALDI UP CLOSE:

The Assembly sent to Oudinot, but he refused any conditions, - refused even to guarantee a safe departure to Garibaldi, his brave foe. Notwithstanding, a great number of men left the other regiments to follow the leader whose courage had captivated them, and whose superiority over difficulties commanded their entire confidence. Toward the evening of Monday, the 2d of July, it was known that the French were preparing to cross the river and take possession of all the city. I went into the Corso with some friends; it was filled with citizens and military. The carriage was stopped by the crowd near Doria palace; the lancers of Garibaldi galloped along in full career. I longed for Sir Walter Scott to be on earth again, and see them; all are light, athletic, resolute figures many of the forms of the finest manly beauty of the South, all sparkling with its genius and ennobled by the resolute spirit, ready to dare, to do, to die..(pp.412-413).

They had all put on the beautiful dress of the Garibaldi legion, the tunic of bright red cloth, the Greek cap, or else round hat with Puritan plume. Their long hair was blown back from resolute faces; all looked full of courage. They had counted the cost before they had entered on this perilous struggle; they had weighed life and all its material advantages against liberty, and made their election; they turned not back, nor flinched, at this bitter crisis. I saw the wounded, all that could go, laden upon their baggage cars; some were already pale and fainting, still they wished to go. I saw many youths, born to rich inheritance, carrying in a handkerchief all their worldly goods. The women were ready; their eyes, too, were resolved, if sad. The wife of Garibaldi followed him on horseback. He himself was distinguished by the white tunic; his look was entirely that of a hero of the Middle Ages, - his face still young, for the excitements of his life, though so many, have all been youthful, and there is no fatigue upon his brow or cheek...(pp.413-414)

Next day the French troops were marched to and fro through Rome, to inspire awe in the people; but it has only created a disgust amounting to loathing, to see that, with such an imposing force, and in great part fresh, the French were not ashamed to use bombs also, and kill women and children in their beds..(p415.....The fruits of all this will be the same as elsewhere; temporary repression will sow the seeds of perpetual resistance; and never was Rome in so fair a way to be educated for a republican form of government as now.

AN EYEWITNESS APPRECIATION

Letter from Lewis Cass, Jr. then American charge d'affaires at Rome addressed to Mrs. W. Ellery Channing of Concord, Mass, Margaret's younger sister. in Thomas Wentworth Higginson, first published 1884, Haskell House Publishers, Ltd., 1968, pp. 234-8:

Legation des Etats-Unis D'AmeriqueRome, May 10, 1851

..."In compliance with your request, I have the honor to state succinctly , the circumstances connected with my acquaintance with the late Madame Ossoli, your deceased sister, during her residence in Rome.

In the month of April, 1849, Rome, as you are no doubt aware, was placed in a state of siege by the approach of the French army.....

On the 30th of April the first engagement took place between French and Roman troops, and a few days subsequently I visited several of my countrymen, at their request, to concert measures for their safety. Hearing on that occasion, for the first time, of Miss Fuller's presence in Rome, and of her solitary mode of life, I ventured to call upon her, offering my services in any manner that might conduce to her comfort and security. She received me with much kindness, and thus our acquaintance commenced. Her residence, on the Piazza Barbarini, being secured an insecure abode, she removed to the Casa Dies, which was occupied by several American families.

In the engagements between the Roman and French troops, the wounded of the former were brought into the city, and disposed throughout the different hospitals, which were under the superintendence of several ladies of high rank, who had formed themselves into associations, the better to insure care and attention

to these unfortunate men. Miss Fuller took an active part in this noble work, and the greater portion of her time, during the entire siege, was passed in the Hospital of the Trinity of the Pilgrims, which was placed under her direction, in attendance upon its inmates.

The weather was intensely hot; her health was feeble and delicate; the dead and dying were around her in every form of pain and horror; but she never shrank from the duty she had assumed. Her heart and soul were in the cause for which these men had fought, and all was done the

woman could do to comfort them in their sufferings. I have seen the eyes of the dying, as she moved among them, extended upon opposite beds, meet in commendation of her unwearied kindness; and the friends of those who then passed away may derive consolation from the assurance that nothing of tenderness and attention was wanting to soothe their last moments.....

....On the 29th of June the bombardment from the French camp was very heavy, shells and grenades falling from every part of the city. In the afternoon of the 30th I received a brief note from Miss Fuller requesting me to call at her residence. I did so without delay, and found her lying on a sofa, pale and trembling, evidently much exhausted. She informed me that she had sent for me to place in my hands a packet of important papers, which she wished me to keep for the present, and, in the event of her death, to transmit it to her friends in the United States. She then stated that she was married to the Marquis Ossoli, who was in command of a battery on the Pincian Hill. That being the highest and most exposed position in Rome, and directly in the line of the bombs from the French camp, it was not to be expected, she said, that he could escape the dangers of another night such as the last, and therefore it was her intention to remain with him, and share his fate. At the Ave Maria, she added, he would come for her, and they would proceed together to his post. The packet which she placed in my possession, contained, she said, the certificates of her marriage, and of the birth and baptism of her child. After a few words more, I took my departure, the hour she named having nearly arrived. At the porter's lodge I met the Marquis Ossoli, and a few moments afterwards I saw them walking towards the Pincian Hill.

Happily the cannonading was not renewed that night, and at the dawn of the day she returned to her apartment, with her husband by her side.

.....Lewis Cass, Jr.



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