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978-1-108-06001-1 - Four Years at the Court of Henry VIII: Selection of Despatches
Written by the Venetian Ambassador, January 12th, 1515, to July 26th, 1519: Volume 1
Sebastiano Giustiniani Edited and Translated by Rawdon Lubbock Brown

Excerpt

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DESPATCHES OF SEBASTIAN GIUSTINIAN.

PRELIMINARY ACCOUNT OF THE GIUSTINIAN FAMILY, AND OF THE EARLY CAREER OF THE WRITER OF THESE DESPATCHES.

ON the fall of the Heraclian Dynasty (A.D. 711), in the person of the Emperor Justinian II., the survivors of his family emigrated first to Istria, where they founded the city of Justinopoli, now called Capo d'Istria, and in the course of half a century, we find some of their descendants established in Venice; for amongst the tribunes in the year 756, was a Giustinian, whose daughter subsequently married Doge Angelo Badoer.

In the 12th century, three members of the Giustinian family were Procurators of St. Mark, a dignity inferior only to that of the Doge, who was almost invariably chosen from their body.

After the lapse of four centuries and a half the Giustiniani seem not to have lost the recollection of their wrongs and of their former greatness, and accordingly, in the year 1170, when in consequence of the seizure by the Emperor Manuel Comnenus of all the Venetian traders in his dominions, the Republic declared war against the Greeks, they eagerly availed themselves of so fair an opportunity for

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avenging the murder of their ancestor, and after the example of the Roman Fabii, volunteered the services of their whole race in the cause of their adopted country, and in her defence they embarked not less than one hundred combatants, all bearing the name of Giustinian, and including even an aged Procurator of St. Mark's.

Doge Vitale Michiel and the Giustiniani steered their gallant fleet first to Dalmatia, for the punishment of certain rebels there, and then made for Negropont, the Governor of which island apologised for his master the Emperor most abjectly, and prevailed upon the Doge to avert the calamities of war by sending an embassy to Constantinople: this artifice, which concealed the most atrocious treachery, succeeded; the Venetian fleet retired to winter at Scio, where the springs had been poisoned, and of 120 sail, only sixteen returned to the Adriatic, with the scanty remnant which had escaped the treachery and pestilence of the Greek islands.

Amongst the survivors of this Venetian expedition, there was not found one of the Giustiniani; their resemblance to the Fabii was complete; and all Venice, patricians and plebeians, mourned the extinction of such a race. They felt that high name and descent are pledges for honourable exertion, and as the laymen of the Giustinian family had perished, the Republic determined, if possible, to preserve the name by means of a Benedictine monk, the sole survivor¹ of the family, who dwelt at the Lido in the monastery of St. Nicholas. An embassy was forthwith despatched to Pope Alexander III.; and Barbone Morosini and Tommaso Falier obtained from his Holiness a dispensation from the monastic vows taken by Father Nicholas Giustinian, and to him Doge Vitale Michiel gave the hand of his daughter Anna, together with an ample dower, consisting of the three Venetian parishes of St. Moisé, St. Giovanni Bragola, and

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St. Pantaleone. The offspring of this marriage were numerous : of nine sons, one by name Matteo had the satisfaction of taking part in the conquest of Constantinople, A.D. 1204 ; another, Marco, established himself in the island of Candia, and was probably one of the first shippers of sack and malmsey, wines with which England was supplied by the Venetians during several centuries ; and a third, Giacomo, also accompanied Doge Dandolo when he entered Constantinople ; of the daughters, Martha, Margaret, and Bertolotta, one married into the house of Este ; the second became the wife of one of the Scaligers of Verona ; and the third took the veil.

Father Nicolas Giustinian, having fully realized the hopes of the Venetians who drew him from his cloister, returned once more to his cell at the Lido (that strip of land which separates the lagoons of Venice from the open Adriatic), and Anna Michiel withdrew to a nunnery on the island of Amiano, in which places these two regenerators of the family of Heraclius died shortly after, in what is termed “ the odour of sanctity.”

The Lombard historian of the “ *Illustrious Families of Italy*,” the late Count Litta, speaking of the relics of Father Nicholas in the church of S. Georgio Maggiore, affirms, that from him all the Giustiniani of Venice are descended, and positively denies that the Giustiniani of Genoa are in any way authorized to claim the same origin ; indeed, he asserts that no family ever existed in Genoa who were lawfully entitled to the hereditary surname of Giustinian. In the palmy days of the Venetian Republic, the descendants of the Benedictine monk numbered fifty distinct families ; and as many as 200 individuals bearing the name of Giustinian, are said to have sat at one time in the Grand Council of Venice, a tradition, however, which Count Litta gives good reason to doubt. At the close of the seventeenth

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century, forty of the Giustinian families were extinct, and at this present time there remain only four.

The Island of Negropont, as already shown, is intimately connected with the fate of the Venetian Fabii; for it was the wily Governor of that place, who induced Doge Michiel to temporize, instead of proceeding at once in person to visit the Emperor Manuel in his capital. In the year 1207, a Veronese adventurer named Rabano dalle Carceri, who had made himself master of Negropont, sold it to the Venetians, and the first Governor of the place appointed by the Grand Council, was Marin Giustinian the son of Nicholas.

Marin Giustinian had a daughter named Anna, who gave birth to Doge Pietro Gradenigo, the founder of the hereditary aristocracy in Venice, for he it was who in the year 1298 effected what is styled the “closing of the Grand Council.”

Amongst the lineal descendants, in the seventh generation, of the first Venetian Bailiff, or Governor, of Negropont, was Lorenzo Giustinian, who, in the course of time, became the first patriarch of Venice. This exemplary prelate was born on the 1st of July, 1380, a day then celebrated in Venice with great rejoicings, as the anniversary of the recovery of Chioggia from the Genoese, in which his father, Bernardo, had taken a distinguished part three years previously. Lorenzo, being the eldest son, had been destined by his family for the married state, but he preferred a cloister on that picturesque island in the lagoons, the first that lies between Fusina and Venice, called St. Giorgio in Alga, where, in October 1404, he was present at the formal institution of the order of Secular Canons, to whom the island was assigned, and on that occasion changed his original Christian name of John to Lorenzo. In 1409, Sept. 9th, Lorenzo Giustinian was elected Prior of St. Giorgio in Alga, and in 1424, became the first Rector-General of the order. Eugenius IV., before he obtained the

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papal tiara, had likewise been a canon of St. George, and he was so impressed with the piety and virtue of the Rector-General, that on the 5th of September, 1433, he appointed him Bishop of Venice.

Lorenzo Giustinian, modestly diffident of his own fitness for so responsible an office, declined this promotion ; but when commanded by the head of the church, he entered on the duties of his diocese, and discharged them in the most exemplary manner for the space of nineteen years. One of his first acts was to convoke a synod for the establishment of certain regulations of church discipline, which his own example, and humility, coupled with the firmness indispensable for the reform of abuses, rendered completely successful, and in his time, the see of Venice was quoted as a model. His arrangements for the election of priests by their parishioners ; for the disposal of ecclesiastical preferments ; for the regulation of the private property of bishops ; and for the education of candidates for the priesthood, were beyond all praise. He compelled all canons to reside at their cathedrals, contrary to the prevalent custom, and made all his clergy pay their debts. His own life was one of complete self-denial ; humble, and frugal, devoted entirely to his flock, to whom he dedicated his whole time and revenues. In the plague of 1447, the ministering angel of the lazar-houses of Venice was the Bishop of the diocese.

Until 1451, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the capital was divided between the Patriarch of Grado and the Bishop of Venice, but in October of that year, Pope Nicholas V. determined to convert the two sees into one Patriarchate, and to effect this, he decreed that the survivor of the two prelates who then held them, namely, Michieli and Giustinian, should assume the single cure, and as Michieli died very shortly afterwards, Lorenzo Giustinian became the first Patriarch of

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Venice, Primate of Dalmatia, and Administrator of the Church of Citta Nuova in Istria, as an appendage to that of Grado.

Amongst the twelve children of Nicholas Giustinian, one bore the name of Stefano; and his lineal descendant, Sebastian, it is who has furnished matter for the present volume. He was the son of Marino, by the daughter of Piero Gradenigo, and was born in the year 1460. The first public post which he held was that of proveditor and captain, A.D. 1492, at Rimini, where he acquitted himself so well, that at the commencement of 1498, the Senate appointed him ambassador to Maximilian, the Emperor-elect. It was subsequently determined to dispense with this embassy; but, as the appointment was never formally cancelled, Giustinian sat in the Senate as an envoy supposed to be on the eve of departure, until January 1500, when he and a colleague, by name Vettor Soranzo, were accredited by the State as ambassadors to Ladislaus, king of Hungary, for the purpose of inducing him to attack Sultan Bajazet II.; and with this object, on the 5th of April, Giustinian delivered a Latin oration before the Court of Buda. This harangue may be seen in a rare broadside printed at the time, and entitled, "*Oratio Magnifici et Clarissimi Domini Sebastiani Giustiniani. Orat. Venet. habita coram Serenissimo Domino Uladislao, Rege Panoniæ Boemiæ, &c. Die quinto Aprilis, 1500.*" An Italian translation of it exists amongst the orations of illustrious men, collected by the son of the architect Sansovino.

Exactly one month after the delivery of this speech, two French ambassadors arrived at the Hungarian court, with credentials from Louis XII. They were met at some little distance from Buda by the Venetians, and four Hungarian magnates sent by the king, with 500 horse. Giustinian soon discovered the purport of their mission, which was merely to declare that France was willing to league with the Empire,

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Hungary and Venice, against the Turk, but would not give any pecuniary assistance. On the 17th of May, 1500, these French diplomatists had their public audience, in the presence of the ambassadors from Spain, Venice, Naples, and Poland, and one of them made a Latin speech, as Giustinian had done, in which he styled the Venetian Signory “most illustrious, opulent, and sagacious;” but Soranzo declared that the oration of his own colleague was incomparably the more elegant of the two.

In date of July 2, 1501, Giustinian announces the death of John Albert, king of Poland,* the brother of Ladislaus; and in December, he mentions an incursion made by the Hungarians on the Turkish territory, aided by the Ban of Transylvania.

On the 30th of October 1502, he writes from Alba Reale, that Anna de Candalles, the youthful bride of King Ladislaus, had arrived on the 20th, and that the coronation took place on the 29th—intelligence of some interest at Venice, as she had been the guest of the republic during several weeks, in which interval no expense had been spared to secure her good will. The stay of this princess in the Venetian territories lasted longer than had been anticipated, because she had arrived there without her dower, and the Hungarian ambassadors were forbidden, in that event, to receive her. The Venetians, naturally enough, rejoiced to hear that all difficulties had been removed, and that their costly investment of civility had fallen, as they intended, on a crowned head, whose influence on her consort, then in his forty-sixth year, might, if properly exerted, lead him to make frequent attacks on the territories of Bajazet, and avert his hostilities from the Signory.

* John Albert, King of Poland, died at Thorn on the 17th of June 1501.

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From this, his first diplomatic mission, Sebastian Giustinian returned at the commencement of 1503, and on Sunday the 26th of March, after an absence of three years and one month, Marin Sanuto minutely details his reappearance in the college,* wearing a massive gold collar, and an Hungarian ornament of the same metal fastened under his arm, his robe being of crimson velvet with a raised pile. At the next sitting he read his report of Hungary, which has been preserved in the manuscript diaries of Marin Sanuto; and as it contains some curious particulars of an age and country so remote, I give it at length :—

“I left Venice on the 22nd February, 1500, with Vettor Soranzo (peace to his soul !); and on arriving at Buda we had public audience on the 15th April, at which I made a speech, and then in private I proposed in the first place a general league, and in the second, a strict alliance between ourselves and Hungary exclusively; the King expressed his willingness to form a general league, and when on the arrival of the French ambassadors, we expected they would forward the project, to our disappointment they did nothing, having other instructions from their King, nor was any assistance derived from the Cardinal Legate, the representative of Pope Alexander. We then urged the second alliance, the articles of which we drew up, and sent hither. A muster of the Hungarian forces was made in consequence, at which I and my colleague (who was then grievously sick and died shortly after) attended. It consisted of 10,000 cavalry, of whom 4,000 were armed, and the rest not. There were about 700 raw youths, but the rest, both men and horses, were good; some of the feudatories did not make their appearance; on the very morning of.

* The College was a select assembly, or deliberative committee, which discharged the functions of what in this country is now called “the Cabinet.”

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the muster, 1,000 horse came up under the command of a certain baron, and 600 marshalled by the Despot of Servia. Of the seventy-three counties, eighteen failed to attend the muster, nor would I then sign the clauses, although I had powers so to do, but sent them to the Signory, to gain time. I had much trouble in drawing up the treaty, and the Bishop of Waradino and the other Hungarian commissioners said, ‘By God! you’ll get an answer you won’t like.’ On the arrival of my colleague, Georgio Pisani, we concluded the alliance. There was great difficulty in making the King join the camp in person, and the affair of the King of Poland proved an obstacle, but everything was at length settled, and the papal briefs were of use, the Legate likewise favouring the expedition. Finally, after much ado, in the month of November, 1501, Duke John, the natural son of Matthias Corvinus, the late king, being on the borders of Bosnia with another corps, Ladislaus sent Count Josa with 10,000 cavalry across the Danube, which was then frozen, and he made a vigorous attack, but did not obtain much booty, his intention being known beforehand; though he burnt 50 villages, and ravaged a greater extent of country than is comprised in the entire territories of Treviso, Padua, Vicenza, and Verona. My colleague Pisani having returned to Venice, he was replaced by Giovanni Badoer, who on his arrival made a fine oration, and shortly after obtained leave to return home, though the permission was subsequently cancelled, and he received orders to go into Poland, to congratulate King Alexander on his accession. King Ladislaus then went into Bohemia, leaving the Count Palatine, who is since dead, Viceroy at Buda, where I remained, and in the mean while a Turkish ambassador arrived to negotiate a peace or truce; the Cardinal,*

* This Cardinal Thomas Erdödy, *alias* Bakacz, *alias* Bacoczi, studied at Bologna, and whilst in Italy was appointed Secretary to the infant Archbishop of

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who was at his see of Strigonia, notified this by letter to the Legate, to whom he also addressed despatches for me ; at length, one day when we were out hunting, the Legate announced that he had the letters, and gave them to me, whereupon I induced him to accompany me to Strigonia for a week, when we discussed the matter with the Cardinal. Shortly after this, your Serenity informed me that Andrea Griti was returned from Constantinople, and that our merchants had been set at liberty, Bajazet being inclined to peace ; so, on receiving your orders, I announced this to the Cardinal, and the negotiations commenced ; but as the Count Palatine, who was then alive, opposed your Signory, as also did the Bishop of Waradino, I had great difficulty in arranging this last treaty ; though, on the other hand, we were much favoured by the Cardinal of Strigonia, and although I was authorized to give them 50,000 ducats, I only gave them 30,000, and this took place before the death of the Count Palatine. The Legate chose to make certain alterations

Strigonia, *alias* AGRIA, Hippolytus of Este, the patron of Ariosto, who in his first satire alludes to the disgrace that befell him, in consequence of his determination—

“Di non volere *Agria* veder nè Buda.”

Erdödy was made Chancellor of Hungary by that literary monarch, Matthias Corvinus. In 1497 he superseded the Cardinal of Este in the see of Agria, and in 1500, March 16th, was created Cardinal by Alexander VI. Cardella states that the Signory was very instrumental in procuring for him the red hat ; and the present Count Gaëtan Erdödy, his collateral descendant, has lately discovered much documentary evidence to this effect in the Venice Archives.

This prelate was for a time the Wolsey of Hungary ; and, according to Garimberti, he paid for the education of very many students, not only at Strigonia, but also at Vienna and in Italy. Besides maintaining scholars, he also kept a numerous army on foot with his own funds, to defend Hungary from the Turks, against whom he preached a crusade by the authority of Leo X., and Cardella writes that he went as Legate a latere to Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Russia, Prussia, and Poland, and besides going all over Hungary and Bohemia, he visited Constantinople, which, considering the unscrupulous character of Bajazet, Selim, and Soliman, was rather a hazardous experiment. Cardella does not give the date of these travels, and although he vouches for the death of this Cardinal at his birth-place, Erdödy, he is not positive whether it took place in 1520, 1521, or 1523.