

## Roman Empire 91

Chapter 91: Where There Are Generous Rewards, There Are Brave Men

Trento, since the Battle of Venice, has become the target of competition between the two sides.

The Kingdom of Sardinia has deployed three divisions of troops, but still, they were unable to break through the Austrian defense lines.

After a week passed, Lieutenant Colonel Gregory was no longer as anxious as before.

He had come to realize that the enemy lacked not only military training but also the courage to fight to the death.

During this era, the use of muzzle-loading rifles limited the firepower, with even skilled soldiers managing at most three shots per minute, while most can only achieve a rate of two shots per minute.

Although the Austrian Army had decent defensive fortifications, Trento itself was not an impregnable fortress.

If the Sardinian army was willing to sacrifice lives, it could have been taken in the past as well.

Lieutenant Colonel Gregory was feeling some regret.

If he had known that the Sardinian Army was so weak, he would have listened to that young lad, Ambri?, and sent troops to raid the enemy camp.

Who knows, he might have risen through the ranks in the Austrian Army by now.

However, there was no use crying over spilled milk. The enemy's strength has increased from one division to three, and it's now truly overwhelming.

"Could it be that young Ambri? has the potential to become a renowned commander, yet it hasn't been discovered yet? Perhaps it's time to pay more attention to him; he might still earn some achievements," Gregory thought to himself.

However, reality showed that he was merely overthinking things.

Ambri? was merely a young and fearless officer, and there were a dozen more like him in the Austrian Army.

However, Lieutenant Colonel Gregory's frustration didn't last long. After the enemy reinforced their troops, Marshal Radetzky also sent two additional regiments as reinforcements.

When the reinforcements arrived, Gregory's heart couldn't contain its excitement anymore.

It had been a long time since there was any significant military action in Europe, and gaining military achievements was not an easy task. Missing this opportunity meant missing the chance altogether.

Looking around Europe, were there any easier targets to exploit than the enemy in front of him? Gregory believed there were none.

Although the enemy had three divisions, they were mostly newly formed troops, lacking experience and battle-hardened veterans.

For example, Major General Will, before the expansion of the army, was just a company commander in the Sardinian Army, at best considered an up-and-coming officer.

However, after the expansion of the army, he suddenly became the commander of a whole division.

A battalion suddenly became a whole division just by receiving sufficient soldiers and equipment. How much combat effectiveness can such a force truly possess?

Of course, even if they lacked combat effectiveness, they were still stronger than the original battalion.

During this era, the advantage of weaponry and equipment was not yet significant, and warfare mainly relied on manpower.

The strategy of overwhelming the enemy with sheer numbers was the most effective tactic.

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The two newly arrived regiments were also old acquaintances of Major Gregory.

The Venice region was small, and the Austrian Army's circle was even smaller. These mid-level officers almost all know each other.

"Gregory, you're amazing! Blocking three enemy divisions with just one regiment for an entire week! I bet after the war, you'll be promoted and even receive a noble title!" Buck said enviously.

In the absence of an impregnable fortress, holding off three enemy divisions for a week with just one regiment would become a classic case in military history, a remarkable achievement that would be recognized in any country.

Gregory boasted, "It's not that exaggerated. Until yesterday, there were only two enemy divisions. I managed to hold them off for six days, not even a full week before you guys arrived."

Regardless of two or three divisions, six or seven days, the fact that one regiment managed to hold them off for such a long time without requesting reinforcements had already gained them a reputation for skilled defense.

"Gregory, could you teach us how to withstand their attacks when we are outnumbered and outmatched?" Hank asked with concern.

Gregory didn't directly answer; instead, he asked, "Buck, Hank, do you want to make a big move?"

"What do you mean?"

Both of them asked in unison.

Gregory said earnestly, "Let's join forces and take down the enemy's army!"

The two of them looked at Gregory in shock, their expressions seemed to be saying: Uh-oh, Gregory has gone crazy!

Gregory continued, "Please don't be so exaggerated, alright?"

“The enemy is much weaker than you imagine. At the outbreak of the Austro-Sardinian War, the Kingdom of Sardinia had only 23,000 troops, but now it has expanded to 200,000.

The three enemy divisions are just the result of this expansion. Before the army expansion, they had at most three regiments, or even just one or two regiments.

From the beginning of the conflict in late March until now, not even two months have passed, and the Sardinian army has increased nearly tenfold.

You have all trained troops before. In just over a month, who can create an elite army?

Moreover, nearly a quarter of these soldiers come from Lombardy. You know the quality of troops from Lombardy, don't you?

With these people in their ranks slowing them down, do you think they are much stronger than us?”

After listening to Gregory's explanation, both men's eyes sparkled with a different light. As soldiers of the Austrian Empire, they still have their pride.

As one of the major European powers, the Austrian Army's combat strength remained among the top in the world.

They believed they were not inferior to anyone and held a psychological advantage over the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Hank pondered and said, “Gregory, what do you plan to do? Remember, you are currently the commanding officer of Trento, and we both will follow your orders.”

Gregory gave him a fierce look. If he really had the power to command the entire army, why would he share this opportunity and divide the rewards?

“Stop the nonsense. If you want to achieve something, then we'll do it together. But if you're afraid, it's fine. Buck and I can join forces and take a piece of the pie just the same!” Gregory said coldly.

Joking aside, how could they expect to gain merit without taking responsibility? Gregory was not foolish. With more people involved, the pressure was naturally shared. He wouldn't shoulder all the risks alone.

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On the early morning of May 20th, a special detachment of 800 soldiers in the Austrian camp secretly assembled.

Night raid? For the armies of this era, it was a highly challenging task.

The biggest problem was that many soldiers suffered from night blindness and couldn't engage in combat during the night.

Gregory might not be aware of night blindness, but he knew that many soldiers had poor vision at night. This death squad of 800 people was carefully selected by him.

“Ambri?, are you ready, young man? If you’re scared, you can still back out now, and no one will laugh at you,” Gregory jokingly said.

“No, I won’t back out. Commander, I am determined to become a great nobleman!” Ambri? replied earnestly.

Where there are generous rewards, there are brave men, and including Ambri?, most of these soldiers joined this mission because of Gregory’s promise.

Each person was promised ten hectares of land, regardless of victory or defeat, life or death.

If they succeeded, the top five contributors would be granted noble titles, a decision personally endorsed by Marshal Radetzky.

## Chapter 92: The Battle of Trento - Counterattack

A crescent moon was embedded in the black screen-like night sky, and its radiant light poured down on the world, draping the dark surroundings with a silvery veil.

“Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh...”

“The wind is picking up!”

The assault team was fortunate to have such good weather on the first day of their operation.

Gregory wasn’t a military novice; planning a night raid required considering multiple factors, with weather being one of the most crucial aspects.

The Venice Region experiences a typical Mediterranean climate.

In summer, it is influenced by subtropical high-pressure zones, which are reinforced by the lower sea temperature of the Mediterranean compared to the land.

This creates high atmospheric pressure and intensifies the influence of subtropical high-pressure zones.

During winter, the relatively higher sea temperature of the Mediterranean creates low atmospheric pressure, attracting westerly winds, which become much stronger.

Of course, Lieutenant Colonel Gregory was not familiar with these specialized terms, but having been stationed in the Venice Region for a long time, he knew that during this season, Trento experiences dry and windy conditions with little rainfall.

Tonight met all the conditions: the dark moonlit night and the howling wind would provide perfect cover for the actions of the assault team.

“Move out!” Lieutenant Colonel Gregory decisively gave the order.

With that command, the assault team silently left the camp.

If there was anyone paying attention, they would notice that their footsteps were barely audible.

Upon closer observation, it became clear that all members of the assault team were dressed in black, with their sleeves tied up with ropes, and even their boots wrapped in cloth.

Anyone with some military knowledge would recognize that this was a professionally executed night raid.

“What, feeling nervous?” Hank whispered.

“You’re worried too, aren’t you? Tonight’s battle is a gamble for our future. If we succeed, the path to becoming a general would be smooth sailing, but if we fail, we might have to retire early and go back home!” Gregory said in a solemn tone.

“Well, aren’t you concerned about these young lads too? If it’s just about our personal futures, then only two of us will be in trouble.

But you still have the credit for defending the city so Marshal Radetzky won’t be willing to let you go home so easily,” Hank said, trying to sound relaxed.

Victory and defeat on the battlefield were common occurrences, and no one can guarantee an undefeated record.

As long as the failure was not due to personal factors, it was usually forgivable.

Gregory may not be a renowned commander with extraordinary talents, but through the previous battles, he had proven himself to be an excellent mid-level commander.

Marshal Radetzky was highly regarded as a military hero by the Austrian Army, and it was not just due to his commanding abilities.

Equally important was his reputation for fairness, justice, and his penchant for promoting capable young officers. These qualities have earned him the respect and admiration of his troops.

Given that this night raid has been approved by him, as long as they execute it without any issues, they need not worry about being turned into scapegoats.

This was precisely why Gregory and the other two officers dared to undertake this night raid.

With a responsible and fair-minded superior like Radetzky, one who doesn’t snatch credit from his subordinates, they felt more motivated to fight.

“Enough with the nonsense. Do you two think you can stop worrying just because of Radetzky’s support?

These young men are under our guidance, and if they fall here, how are we going to face their families when we return?” Gregory said with a furrowed brow.

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Time passed minute by minute, and the silent night was filled only with the howling wind, accompanied by swirling leaves. For Gregory, the wind felt like a precious gift from God.

“It’s almost time, looks like nothing unexpected happened!” Gregory said as sweat dripped from his forehead. Only he knew the immense pressure he had just endured.

The other two checked their watches and smiled with relief. As long as they hadn’t been detected by the enemy in advance, the night raid was already halfway to success.

“Pass down the order, instruct all units to wake up and have their meal. We’ll launch the attack in one hour!” Gregory said sternly.

“Everyone, be careful and keep quiet!” Hank added with concern.

Even though the enemy’s camp was still a few miles away, ordinary noises wouldn’t alert them. Nevertheless, they decided to be cautious and handle the situation with utmost care.

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A signal flare shot up into the sky, and the battle horn sounded, accompanied by the thunderous noise of gunfire.

The Sardinian Army, still in the midst of slumber, was abruptly awakened as the battle commenced.

General Messer, disrupted from his peaceful dreams, asked angrily, “What’s happening outside?”

“General, the enemy has launched an attack!” replied the nervous guard stationed outside the tent.

Upon hearing this news, General Messer lost all drowsiness. He quickly got up and donned his military uniform, rushing towards the command post.

At this moment, the consequences of the Sardinian Army’s hasty expansion became apparent.

Many of the new recruits became disoriented and scattered like headless flies in the dark night.

Chaos was contagious, and it quickly spread throughout the entire army.

Bullets were flying in all directions, but the soldiers couldn’t identify the enemy’s location. This kind of pressure was too much for these inexperienced recruits to handle.

A stray bullet struck a soldier from an unknown direction, triggering a chain reaction as the surrounding soldiers instinctively pulled the trigger, firing at what they perceived to be the enemy’s direction.

General Messe quickly made arrangements, and just as he received the orders, Major General Will, who had just stepped out, became the first unfortunate casualty.

From an unknown direction, a stray bullet flew in and hit him directly in the chest.

Seeing Major Will fall to the ground, fear gripped the hearts of everyone, and they involuntarily retreated back to the command post.

A dreadful term echoed in their minds - “Camp Panic!”

General Messer hesitated for a moment, then swiftly drew his sidearm and fired a warning shot, speaking with a stern tone, “I don’t believe the enemy has already breached our defenses. Their forces should not be many; there can’t be many attackers in this night raid.”

Everyone, return to the command post and annihilate any enemy that dares to attack us! If anyone dares to desert, I’ll execute them on the spot!”

In the face of harsh reality, a group of officers stepped out of the command post with unease.

General Messer's judgment was correct; there weren't many enemies in the night raid.

However, that was only during the initial assault. By the time he had organized his forces and issued orders, the Austrian Army had already poured out in full force.

The distance of a mere few miles would take little time to cover.

Before they could even return to their units, the decisive battle had already begun.

"Kill!"

"Kill, kill!"

"Kill them all...:"

The Sardinian camp was already immersed in a sea of slaughter, with both the Austrian Army's attack and internal infighting taking place.

Under the cover of darkness, many soldiers resorted to the tactics in the Battlefield Survival Manual.

One Sardinian soldier instinctively extinguished a nearby oil lamp, and soon more soldiers followed suit.

This tactic proved effective as the darkness provided them with some safety.

By extinguishing the lights, they reduced the chances of getting hit by enemy fire, as long as luck was not entirely against them.

However, in the pitch-black environment, the officers trying to locate their units faced a headache.

With everything shrouded in darkness, who knows where their soldiers are?

### Chapter 93: False Military Intelligence

The gentle dawn unveiled its curtain, the ground was painted red with blood.

Against the backdrop of the rising scarlet sun in the east, the air carried a thick and nauseating smell of blood, as if recounting the brutality of the previous night.

The war had come to a close, and groups of Austrian soldiers were busy cleaning up the battlefield.

Every now and then, a group of prisoners would be escorted past, serving as evidence of who emerged as the victors of the war.

Gregory gave the order, "Dispose of the enemy's bodies as quickly as possible; we don't have enough priests in our army to bid them farewell!"

The summer of 1848 arrived unusually early, with temperatures already soaring to 32°C in May.

To prevent the outbreak of disease, they had no choice but to cremate the bodies.

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As the roaring fire began to blaze, a group of priests emerged from among the captives and participated in the farewell ceremony.

Gregory didn't stop them.

Religious beliefs were an unavoidable topic on the European continent.

Providing the deceased with the most basic respect was an essential moral obligation for nobility.

As they bid farewell to their enemies, the Austrian Army also bid farewell to their fallen comrades.

Watching each familiar young soldier being laid to rest in the soil, Gregory's once uplifted mood now sank into silence.

One general's success leads to the withering of ten thousand bones.

Last night's battle went smoothly, but even so, the Austrian Army still paid a huge price.

Nearly a whole battalion's worth of troops was wiped out, especially among the more than 800 soldiers who participated in the assault.

Less than half of them survived, including a hundred wounded.

The casualties were heavy, but the results were astonishing.

They killed more than 3,000 enemy soldiers, captured over 7,000 prisoners, and seized a considerable number of supplies, achieving the largest victory since the outbreak of the war.

With the triumph in the Battle of Trento, the situation on the Venice Battlefield underwent a dramatic change.

The true weakness of the Sardinian Army's combat capability was exposed.

The Austrian Army was greatly encouraged by this victory, and many generals were eager and ready, preparing to seize the opportunity for a major offensive.

Trento played a crucial role in the War of Venice, where Marshal Badoglio deployed a substantial force.

Other areas were not as fortunate, even if they had numerical superiority, it was not by a large margin.

The Battle of Trento became a turning point in the Austro-Sardinian War.

After this battle, the momentum shifted, and the Austrian Army launched a wave of counteroffensive.

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Sardinian Army Headquarters, Major General Mantuya reported, "Lord Marshal, the current situation is highly unfavorable for us.

The Papal Army is in retreat and has already left the battlefield, indicating their intention to withdraw from this war.

The Tuscan forces suffered a severe defeat earlier and are now in a state of disarray, stationed in Brescia, fifty kilometers away from the battlefield.

Even if we intend to engage the enemy, it will take two days to reach them. As of now, we are fighting alone."

Marshal Badoglio frowned deeply, realizing that some of his officers were inexperienced and lacked the necessary military knowledge to command such a large army effectively.



Not only him, but in the entire Sardinian army, there was no general capable of effectively leading a force of two hundred thousand soldiers in battle.

There's no way around it – true military leaders are forged on the battlefield.

The standing army of the Kingdom of Sardinia only had twenty to thirty thousand soldiers, and the highest-ranking officers were at the level of division commanders at best.

Suddenly being promoted to command a corps, with twenty times their original forces, required one to undergo an adaptation process.

Currently, Marshal Badoglio is still in the process of adaptation.

Since the Battle of Venice began, the Kingdom of Sardinia's army has experienced varying degrees of chaos, putting him under immense pressure to manage the situation effectively.

Rubbing his forehead, Marshal Badoglio spoke, "Let's not worry about the Papal States' Army for now.

They are facing internal conflict and probably won't be able to focus on this war.

As for the Tuscan troops, they are now reduced to merely one battalion, practically insignificant in this conflict.

If it weren't for political considerations, I wouldn't mind having them leave the battlefield immediately to avoid wasting provisions!"

Clearly, Marshal Badoglio held deep resentment toward these two allied forces that did not obey his commands, and he had completely lost confidence in them.

"Marshal, Marshal, there's big trouble!" the guard exclaimed in panic.

Marshal Badoglio glanced in the direction of the voice, and deep down, he had already passed a death sentence on this panicking and clueless guard.

He was contemplating where to send this foolish fellow to eat dirt.

"Slow down, the sky hasn't fallen down yet!" he replied with impatience.

The guard tried to calm himself down and said, "Marshal, there's news from the frontline. Our forces besieging Trento were ambushed by the enemy last night, and we suffered heavy losses. General Messer is now retreating to Bergamo!"

As soon as the words were spoken, Marshal Badoglio threw his command baton, hitting the unfortunate guard right on the forehead.

Before the guard could react, Marshal Badoglio rushed over, grabbed him by the collar, and asked with a murderous tone, "How is this possible? Are you sure you're not fabricating military intelligence?"

At this moment, the guard was almost trembling in fear, and he finally understood why he was chosen to report the military situation to the marshal.

The guard nervously replied, “Marshal, these are all frontline battle reports, and we have verified them. They are absolutely accurate!”

Hearing this answer, Marshal Badoglio became even more furious.

He pushed the guard to the ground with a single hand and stared at him with a deadly look, saying harshly, “Why didn’t you report it sooner?”

The guard laid on the ground, looking clueless. Report it sooner? How could he do that when the situation was uncertain, and the losses were unknown?

Should he have come here to report that the frontline might have suffered a major defeat, with casualties ranging from zero to thirty thousand?

Facing the fiercely angry Marshal Badoglio, everyone present chose to remain silent and observed from a distance.

Even they were eager to know what exactly had happened on the frontline and why General Messer had been defeated.

After venting his anger, Marshal Badoglio gradually calmed down, suppressing his emotions, and continued, “You useless fool, get up now!”

Two quick-witted young military officers promptly helped the bewildered guard to his feet.

“Tell me, what exactly happened on the frontline? Can it be Messer, that idiot, couldn’t defeat the enemy’s single regiment with his three divisions?” Badoglio inquired.

In the Kingdom of Sardinia’s army, the infantry divisions were not very large in size, but they increased from the army expansion, usually consisting of about 8,500 to 12,000 soldiers.

No matter how small their troop size was, facing an Austrian regiment of just over two thousand soldiers, they should have an absolute advantage with no possibility of an upset.

The guard spoke anxiously, “Marshal, we’ve been deceived. The enemy forces in Trento are not just one regiment.

Our preliminary estimation indicates there are at least five infantry divisions, which is why we suffered a defeat!”

Undoubtedly, this was false military intelligence.

Even if they were to punish General Messer severely, he would never dare claim that the enemy had only three regiments, as that would mean he would face a military tribunal.

Chapter 94: Godly Assist

“The enemy has five divisions,” Marshal Badoglio’s initial thought was that the enemy’s reinforcements had arrived, but he quickly dismissed this assumption.

The main forces of the Austrian Army were in Hungary, and the transportation in that region was not good.

Sending five divisions from Hungary to Trento was not an easy task.

Using trains? The railways from Hungary were not yet fully established.

What about cavalry? Time-wise, cavalry could indeed arrive within a week.

However, from a military perspective, it was not logical.

It would be absurd for the Austrian Government to send five divisions of cavalry to Trento unless they had lost their minds!

Marshal Badoglio did have suspicions about the frontline officers fabricating the military situation report.

It was impossible for an enemy force that could defeat three Sardinian divisions in one night to have a small number of troops!

“Did the enemy have noticeable mobilization of troops?” Marshal Badoglio asked with doubt.

“No, except for when they sent two regiments to reinforce Trento on May 18th, there have been no major troop movements,” Chief of Staff Oteleis replied with certainty.

It was impossible to draw a significant amount of troops from the Venice Region.

Austria’s total troops in that area was less than one hundred thousand.

If they were to withdraw five infantry divisions from there, the defensive line would have been left vulnerable.

Such a move would not have escaped their notice.

After a moment of silence, Marshal Badoglio sighed and said, “I’m afraid the enemy’s reinforcements have arrived.

Perhaps the troops from Hungary were just a diversion, deliberately used to deceive us. The real reinforcements are from Austria.

The Hungarian Republic is just a disorganized group. The Austrian Government doesn’t need to mobilize a lot of troops to suppress the rebellion.

I suspect that from the beginning, the enemy has been bluffing.

Radetzky, that cunning old fox, intentionally made it appear as if they did not have sufficient troops, tricking us into falling for it.

The Austrian forces sent to suppress the revolution in Hungary are nowhere near four hundred thousand; a significant portion of those troops must be heading towards us.”

After hearing the Marshal’s analysis, everyone’s expression changed drastically. It was the most reasonable explanation.

They couldn’t believe that three Sardinian divisions couldn’t handle three Austrian regiments.

If there was such a huge disparity in strength between the two sides, this war would have ended long ago.

Everyone present had political acumen, and deceiving allies was a common diplomatic tactic.

It was understandable for the Hungarians to not inform them of this news to urge them to send troops to Venice as quickly as possible.

Oteleis expressed his concerns, “Marshal, Austria may be in decline, but it is still a major European power.

If the Austrian Government is willing, they could easily deploy two or three hundred thousand troops to the Venice Region.

If we can’t figure out the exact number of enemy reinforcements, we may suffer significant losses in the upcoming battles!”

This was a very realistic problem. How did Austria manage to deploy troops to Trento without being noticed? And what was the size of this reinforcement?

Weaponry, equipment, and firepower configuration were all crucial factors they needed to ascertain immediately.

Marshal Badoglio thought for a moment and said, “Immediately send someone to scout the enemy’s forces.

With so many troops, the enemy can’t possibly hide completely, there must be some traces left behind.”

Pausing for a moment, he pointed at the unlucky guard who reported the military situation and asked impatiently, “You, fool, what about our casualties?”

The unlucky guard hesitated but then replied, “Marshal, the three divisions that participated in the Battle of Trento have all suffered heavy losses.

The casualties are still being counted, but the initial estimate is that we’ve lost no less than ten thousand personnel...”

Upon hearing the specific number of casualties, the faces of the people present turned pale.

It meant that these three divisions would lose their combat effectiveness for a long time to come.

“Marshal, now that the enemy’s reinforcements have arrived, it is almost impossible for us to capture Venice.

It might be better to stop the offensive and secure the gains we have made so far!” Major General Mantuya bit the bullet and suggested.

They really didn’t want to continue the fight.

The Austrian Army was not as weak as some politicians had described; on the contrary, they were quite formidable.

Since the start of the Battle of Venice, the Italian forces had not gained much advantage.

Now, with the arrival of enemy reinforcements, their numerical superiority had disappeared.

The situation became even more unfavorable for them to continue the battle.

Marshal Badoglio pondered for a moment and said, “Order all units to halt the offensive and switch to defense.

Major General Mantuya, lead the Fourth, Fifth, and Eighth Divisions to fortify the area around Arco and keep an eye on the enemy in Trento.

Other units will maintain their current positions, and everyone should perform their duties.

As for the rest of the situation, I will report it to our superiors, and we shall wait for further orders from our homeland.”

The Italian forces had been misled, as the Austrian reinforcements did arrive in the Venice Region, but instead of heading to Trento, they were making their way to Vicenza.

Lieutenant General Messer, in order to evade responsibility, fabricated military intelligence, leading the Sardinian Command to make incorrect military deployments.

Allocating a significant portion of their mobile forces to defend against a non-existent Austrian main force in Trento.

At this point, Lieutenant General Messer had little time to worry about such matters as he was busy trying to recruit able-bodied men to fill the gaps in his depleted forces.

After the enemy’s sudden attack, many of his units had scattered.

Everyone was focused on escaping, leaving no room to regroup the routed soldiers.

Upon reaching Bergamo, the combined strength of his three divisions couldn’t even match that of a fully equipped division.

Lieutenant General Messer knew he could never report such dire circumstances.

In a desperate attempt to cover up the situation, Messer reluctantly resorted to conscripting more men.

Since it was a time of war, he believed he could offset the losses by engaging in more battles in the future.

The Kingdom of Sardinia wasn’t known for its impeccable governance, and Lieutenant General Messer’s position as a member of King Charles-Albert’s lineage allowed some leeway.

As long as appearances were maintained, people would turn a blind eye to certain issues.

Walking through the streets of Bergamo, César felt a chilling sense of unease from the suspicious gazes of the locals.

He mustered up the courage and suggested, “General, the situation here seems off. Perhaps it’s not a suitable place for a long stay!”

Lieutenant General Messer’s demeanor had improved considerably, and he sneered, “What are you worried about? They’re just a bunch of lowly commoners. Is there any need to worry about them?”

Public sentiment? That notion had long vanished. As the troops retreated to Bergamo, discipline had completely disappeared.

The frustrated soldiers of Sardinia were letting off steam here by indulging in activities like warmly greeting the young women in the city and, before leaving, charging some labor fees along the way.

This behavior has been a tradition in Europe for centuries, where various armies engaged in warfare would also engage in looting and pillaging.

Although the Sardinian Army has modernized, some of these practices have still persisted.

To young and conscientious nobles like César, this behavior was difficult to accept.

However, for someone like Lieutenant General Messer, who had experienced the anti-French Wars, it was of no concern.

César hesitated and said, “But, Lieutenant General, if we continue this way, will it cause trouble in the future when Italy is unified?”

The members of parliament might use these issues against us which could be problematic...”

Messer patted César’s shoulder and sighed, “César, you are overthinking it. Even if we manage to unify Italy, no one will remember these things.

Don’t forget, the power of discourse always remains in the hands of a few.

We haven’t touched the nobility and the capitalists. As long as they don’t hold grudges against us, it will be fine!”

Undoubtedly, this battle has shattered Messer’s morale, and he has completely lost confidence in this war.

At this moment, Lieutenant General Messer’s thoughts were no longer about how to win the war, but rather about finding ways to escape punishment and avoid being held accountable after the war.

In this morally corrupt and money-driven society, there was nothing that money couldn’t solve.

Even if there were challenges, it would simply mean that the amount of money was not enough!

Lieutenant General Messer was not the supreme commander, and even if there was a need for a scapegoat in case of defeat, he was not qualified enough.

Now, he could focus on accumulating a substantial amount of money, return to his home country, and use his influence to shift the blame for his defeat onto others.

This would undoubtedly be the most beneficial choice for his own interests.

Unfortunately, the people of Bergamo became unfortunate sacrificial pawns, experiencing firsthand what it meant to be “blessed” by the Kingdom of Sardinia.

## Chapter 95: A Crushing Defeat

In Vicenza, Marshal Radetzky had already arrived at the frontlines. During the Battle of Trento, 50,000 Austrian reinforcements had secretly arrived here.

“Marshal, our troops are ready, and we can launch an attack on the enemy at any time!” Edmund said confidently.

“Is there any movement from the enemy?” Marshal Radetzky asked with concern.

Warfare has never been one-sided. The outcome of a battle often resulted from the combined efforts of both sides.

A wise commander must always be attentive to the opponent’s actions and take timely countermeasures.

“Yesterday afternoon, the enemy stopped their advance and began constructing defensive fortifications in their current positions. Preliminary analysis suggests that the enemy might have changed their offensive strategy to a defensive one,” General Edmund replied.

“Proceed as planned!” Marshal Radetzky said with a smile.

This direction was the main attack route for the Austrian forces. Launching the Battle of Trento was just one move in the chessboard, aiming to divert the enemy’s attention.

Marshal Radetzky also had not anticipated that the Battle of Trento would result in such a decisive victory. However, this outcome was even better, as it successfully misled the high-ranking officials of the Sardinian Army.

General Messer’s godly assist in the form of a report perfectly concealed the secret arrival of Austrian reinforcements in Vicenza. The balance of forces between the two sides had now reversed.

Marshal Radetzky was still unaware that Marshal Badoglio had deployed his mobile forces to Arco, guarding against the main Austrian forces from Trento.

Otherwise, he would have had a reason to celebrate early and open the champagne bottles.

The amount of troops the Kingdom of Sardinia deployed to the Venice Battlefield was only 170,000. With three entire divisions decimated in Trento, and now sending three more divisions there, the outcome of the Battle of Vicenza was already clear.

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The continuous and relentless offensive by the Sardinian Army was suddenly met with a counterattack from the Austrian forces, catching them off guard.

A loud “boom” echoed as a shell landed just 30 meters away from Major General Ottos’ headquarters, claiming the lives of three Sardinian soldiers and injuring two more.

“What’s going on? Why did the enemy launch an attack?” the puzzled Major General Ottos asked.

No one could provide an answer. The Austrian Army’s sudden assault came without any warning beforehand.

As the absolute main force of the Sardinian Army, the 1st Division was considered an elite unit. Even though their combat capabilities may have slightly declined after its expansion, they still remained much stronger than other units.

After the surprise attack, Major General Ottos hesitated for a few minutes before taking action.

“Order the artillery to counterattack, and at the same time, report the situation we encountered here to headquarters. Send out scouts for reconnaissance to figure out the enemy’s intentions as soon as possible!”

Ottos' response was not wrong, but unfortunately, the gap in strength could not be easily made up for. Winning against a stronger opponent relies on them making mistakes.

Now, the Austrian Army was directly launching a strong frontal assault, and both sides were relying on their actual strength. Plots or schemes would be useless in this situation.

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"General, the enemy's firepower is too fierce. Our artillery is suffering heavy losses!" a young military officer said in a panic.

Ottos' expression darkened. The artillery was the god of war, its importance crystal clear. Fighting on Austrian territory allowed Austria to mobilize more artillery on the battlefield, which was not surprising given their national strength.

However, for the Sardinian 1st Division, this meant a tragedy. It meant they would have to passively endure enemy attacks.

"Order all units to immediately fortify their positions. After the artillery barrage, the enemy will launch an attack," Ottos commanded.

Ottos made the most accurate judgment. Since the start of the war, they had been on a full offensive, pushing all the way to Vicenza.

It wasn't until yesterday afternoon that they received orders from headquarters to halt the offensive and construct defensive fortifications, but time was simply too tight.

At this moment, Ottos had no time to think too much. Even crude defensive fortifications were better than none.

Even if they had to pile up sandbags and mud to form a makeshift line of defense, it could still provide some cover from bullets even if it was the era of rifles. Ottos was well aware that if the enemy launched a counterattack, they must have some degree of confidence in their actions.

At this time, engaging in a decisive battle with the enemy would clearly be stupid. It was much more prudent to use the fortified positions to slow down the enemy's advance and await reinforcements from the rear.

Ottos was a wise man, and the Sardinian 1st Division could be considered an elite force. They adopted the most appropriate response, but the neighboring 13th Division did not share the same mindset.

Major General Kolbert seemed to possess a strong spirit of valor. After the Austrian Army launched their attack, they promptly employed the volley firing tactic, engaging in a friendly contest with the Austrian forces outside Vicenza.

"Ready, fire!"

"Ready, fire!"

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When two brave people meet on a narrow path, the victory belongs to the more courageous one. But Major General Kolbert overestimated the courage of his men. Engaging in a long-range shootout from a hundred meters away, the pressure was too much for these inexperienced soldiers to bear.

Seeing comrades falling around them, many Sardinian soldiers' nerves had already collapsed.

Suddenly, one soldier couldn't handle the pressure anymore and turned to run, triggering a wave of fear that spread throughout the entire 13th Division, and the 13th Division was defeated.

A soldier from the signal corps urgently shouted, "Division Commander, it's not good! The 13th Division on our right flank is in retreat, and the enemy is seizing their positions!"

Ottos felt his head sink, his water cup dropping to the ground. The worst had happened. With the 13th Division in retreat, the flank of the 1st Division was exposed to the enemy, and their simple defense line would not hold.

"Order the Third Regiment to break off while the whole army retreats!" Ottos trembled as he gave the command.

Though this was in violation of the military order, no one present opposed it. If they didn't retreat now, they would be unable to retreat anymore.

The saying "disregard orders when necessary" was applicable in many situations. The Thirteenth Division foolishly rushed into a decisive battle with the enemy; they wouldn't make the same foolish mistake.

With the retreat of the First Division, the defense line of the Sardinian Army in Vicenza was completely exposed. Seeing the opportunity, the Austrian Army immediately pounced and ruthlessly attacked.

As the pursuit and escape continued, the situation on the battlefield had undergone a complete upheaval.

On May 22nd, the Austrian Army recaptured Padua, and three Sardinian infantry divisions stationed in the area of Verona fell into the encirclement of the Austrian Army.

On May 24th, the Austrian Army launched an attack on Bergamo, and Lieutenant General Messer, who was stationed there with troops withdrawn from Trento, fled without putting up a fight.

On May 25th, the Austrian Army initiated the Battle of Brescia, where Marshal Badoglio concentrated the remaining main forces of the Sardinian Army, attempting to halt the Austrian advance. However, the attempt was unsuccessful, and they were forced to retreat to Milan.

On May 27th, the Sardinian Army in Verona attempted a breakout but failed. The following day, they surrendered to the Austrian Army.

Thus, the Venice Campaign launched by the Kingdom of Sardinia ended in total failure in less than a month.

## Chapter 96: The Ruthlessness of Politicians

Upon receiving the battle report of the Venice Campaign, Charles Albert felt as if he had lost his soul. He lost all of his energy all of a sudden and kept muttering, "It's over! It's over! It's all over!"

The Minister of War, Li Qi, hurriedly reassured him, “Your Majesty, things haven’t reached the worst yet. We still have a chance to turn the tide.”

Charles Albert’s eyes shifted, and he smiled bitterly, asking, “What chance? Badoglio, that incompetent waste, has squandered all the accumulation of so many years in just one battle!”

In the recently concluded Battle of Venice, the Kingdom of Sardinia not only suffered the loss of nearly a hundred thousand troops but also lost the morale and spirit they had painstakingly accumulated.

It takes courage for a smaller country to challenge a large nation. To challenge Austria, the Kingdom of Sardinia had spent more than a decade consistently propagating the decay and vulnerability of Austria. This effort was aimed at boosting the morale of their own troops. However, now it all seemed to have evaporated in an instant.

Can an army fight without morale?

Charles Albert was a shrewd individual, fully aware that the Kingdom of Sardinia’s preparations for challenging Austria this time were far from sufficient.

Had it not been for the pressing domestic situation and the apparent decline of Austria’s power, he would have never taken such a risk.

Li Qi explained with what he believed were reasonable grounds, “Your Majesty, we still hold Lombardy, and we can rally the local populace to resist the Austrians. Even if we can’t defeat them, we can delay their advance for a while!

As long as the situation reaches a deadlock, we can call upon the British to mediate. We owe the British a substantial amount in loans that the Austrians won’t acknowledge. For their own interests, the British will have to support us!”

John Bull had invested heavily to support the Kingdom of Sardinia in unifying the Italian regions. They had poured tens of millions of pounds in loans altogether. If this support suddenly evaporated, even with their significant resources, they wouldn’t be able to bear the consequences.

Charles Albert shook his head and said, “Things aren’t that simple. Austria isn’t an easy target and the British aren’t in the business of charity. Unless we can withstand Austria’s military might in Lombardy, it will be challenging to come out of this situation unscathed!”

It has always been the case that great powers bully smaller nations. This time, the Kingdom of Sardinia broke the norm, challenging Austria as a small nation, but unfortunately, they suffered a brutal defeat, which was truly tragic.

In history, the Austrians spared the Kingdom of Sardinia due to the Hungarian rebellion, lacking the capacity to deal with both matters simultaneously.

Now it was clear that Hungary was no longer a factor, and even without sending reinforcements, Austria’s current forces in the Venice Region alone can render the Kingdom of Sardinia history.

“There’s trouble, Your Majesty. We must immediately control the spread of information. If word gets out about the failure in the Battle of Venice, the domestic

situation could spiral out of control!” Prime Minister Azeglio exclaimed, belatedly recognizing the gravity of the situation.

Suddenly, everyone understood the gravity of the situation. They were all tied together like crickets on a string—no one could escape when trouble arose.

It could be said that the Kingdom of Sardinia’s long-standing vilification of Austria through political propaganda had sown the seeds of this predicament.

Impulsive nationalism is the most susceptible to spiraling out of control. People driven by it often disregard practical considerations and are even less tolerant of failure.

Charles Albert had already awakened to reality. As a competent politician, he would make the choices that would best serve his own interests.

“The government must immediately step in to refute the rumors, while also disseminating false information. Let it be known that we are currently locked in a decisive battle with the Austrians and that the situation is at a standstill.

At the same time, initiate a nationwide mobilization, incorporating all able-bodied men into the army. Especially focus on those young students—get them onto the battlefield.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should swiftly establish contact with the British, urging them to mediate in this war. As long as the terms proposed by the British are not overly extreme, we should readily accept them!”

Charles Albert didn’t want to be overthrown by radical nationalists; the only option was to send these people to their deaths.

“Your Majesty, should we consider replacing Badoglio?” Minister of War, Li Qi, asked.

Charles Albert fell into deep thought. If possible, he truly hoped that the Kingdom of Sardinia could produce a hero to turn the tide.

“Forget it, changing commanders just before battle is a big taboo in military strategy. Let him stay and try to redeem himself through merit!”

After much hesitation, Charles Albert abandoned the idea of replacing Badoglio. At this point, whoever took over might not drastically alter the outcome, and there was a risk that the situation might even worsen. It was better to let Badoglio bear all the responsibility.

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Budapest.

As the interim capital of the Hungarian Government and one of the few cities still under the control of the revolutionary parties, it had become a sea of crimes.

Pet?fi could no longer bear watching this. He felt that his ideals were drifting farther and farther away from reality. Apart from bringing the so-called freedom to Hungary, the revolution was nothing but disaster.

“Mr. Kossuth, we must restore military discipline. The current National Guard has turned into a group of bandits and thieves. If this continues, the revolution will be ruined!”

Kossuth, who used to be full of energy, was now sitting there with a melancholic expression. His sharp eyes were a bit bloodshot, but his spirit remained strong.

Upon hearing Pet?fi’s words, Kossuth nodded and then sighed with bitterness.

“Engaging in prolonged battles with the enemy is stifling. Soldiers are humans too, and they need an outlet to vent out. At this time, imposing strict military discipline might lead to even more unpredictable consequences!”

How could he not know about the chaos in the city? However, they had no choice now. Trying to talk to the soldiers about life and ideals was perhaps less meaningful than discussing their pay.

With the war having progressed this far, the Hungarian Republic had long been drained of resources. With no funds left for military pay, they had no option but to let the soldiers resort to looting.

“But Mr. Kossuth, if things continue like this, we’ll lose the people’s support!” Pet?fi protested unwillingly.

As an idealist, compassion was just a small part of him. If victory could be achieved, Pet?fi was not averse to sacrifice.

But now there was a voice telling him that continuing like this was unsustainable. He hoped that Kossuth could step in and prevent the unruly soldiers from causing more harm.

Kossuth remained composed and said, “Revolution always demands sacrifices. These sacrifices could be you or me, they could be the National Guard, or they could be ordinary Hungarian citizens!”

History will remember the sacrifices they made, and we will settle this debt with the Austrians sooner or later!

If Budapest can’t be held, then leaving everything here for the enemy isn’t worth it. It’s better to destroy it all!”

“You want to destroy this city? You’re crazy!” Pet?fi exclaimed.

Kossuth responded passionately, “It’s not me wanting to destroy this city, it’s the Austrians wanting to destroy it! The enemy has already built dams upstream. If we continue to persist, they’ll flood the city with water!”

Imagine the massive losses that will be inflicted downstream once the Austrians flood the city. There could be hundreds of thousands, even millions of people left homeless. These people will become our allies, and together, we will bury this decaying empire!”

Chapter 97: An Era Without Bottomline

The Hungarian Revolutionary Party of 1848 was fundamentally not a simple revolutionary political party. It swiftly grew from a small group of around a hundred and eighty individuals to become the leaders of the Hungarian Republic. Within its ranks, there were far too many opportunists.

Getting on the ship was easy, but getting off was difficult. The previously weakened Austrian Empire was now reinvigorated, which shattered the hearts of many.

If, at this moment, the Austrian Government had issued a pardon, Budapest would likely have surrendered without a fight.

Clearly, that was not possible. Whether it was the Austrian Cabinet or Crown Prince Franz, they didn't let go of the opportunity to strike at the powerful factions in Hungary.

Suppressing the rebellion was the most optimal pretext for action. The broader the extent covered by this rebellion and the more nobles it involved, the more advantageous it would be for Austria's future rule.

When it came to the concentration of wealth, Hungary likely held the top position. On paper, the ruling class constituted five percent, yet in reality, less than one-thousandth of the population controlled 90% of society's wealth, encompassing even serfs and workers as their property.

Such a dysfunctional social order should not remain unchallenged.

In actuality, this revolution was still an internal power struggle within that five percent of the population, while the remaining ninety-five percent were merely passively drawn into it.

This was also why Kossuth could turn a blind eye to the military bringing harm to the people. His supporters came from that five percent group, while the remaining ninety-five percent of the population were considered expendable.

"Are you sure the enemy will flood the city? Given our current situation, they don't even need to do anything; it won't be long before Budapest becomes a dead city!" Petőfi roared.

There was no other choice – the Austrian Government wouldn't spare the upper echelons of the revolutionary party. They didn't want to die either, so they could only manipulate the soldiers into fighting desperately.

Kossuth's manipulation was highly successful, to the point that he even managed to deceive himself. For the sake of ultimate victory, he no longer cared about anything else.

The Austrian Army proceeded methodically, seemingly facing hardships and making slow progress. Yet, in reality, this was the optimal tactic, free of any risks.

Even the construction of dams upstream was merely a ruse. Any ambitious politician aiming to annex Hungary would prefer to maintain a siege around Budapest indefinitely rather than opt for the provocative and resentment-inducing strategy of flooding.

Kossuth exclaimed with disbelief, "Are you suggesting that the enemy is deliberately exerting pressure on us, pushing us to take the extreme path, and then destroy Budapest? No, that can't be, that's impossible!"

After speaking, Kossuth sat there, motionless, as if ensnared in a state of bewilderment.

The upper echelons of Hungarian society were mostly concentrated in the city of Budapest. Within this city, over half of the population consisted of nobles, capitalists, and their adherents.

For the Austrian Government, it would be best if these individuals were eliminated entirely. Even if there were supporters of the Habsburg family among them, Franz wouldn't mind sacrificing them.

All of them were politicians, thinking with the mindset of politicians. Evaluating the situation from a political standpoint, the question of whether sacrificing this city was worth achieving a stable and enduring Kingdom of Hungary was a calculation that anyone would make.

Almost shouting, Petőfi cried out, "Wake up, Mr. Kossuth! This is the enemy's conspiracy! Now, the National Guard has gone mad. Even some fallen nobles, small merchants, and middle class have not escaped their clutches.

If this continues, they will grow more and more daring, gradually reaching their hands into the upper echelons of society. By then, we won't even have time to control the situation!

This is exactly what the enemy wants. They are using us to eliminate Hungary's elites, and then they will place all the blame on us. That way, they can seamlessly annex Hungary!"

If Franz were here, he would surely applaud their imaginative thinking. Yes, he did want to use this opportunity to eliminate dissent, but he never intended to rely on the revolutionary party for that – that would be too unreliable.

If some people die in the war, they can conveniently pin all the blame on the revolutionary party. Can the dead even come out to defend themselves?

At this point, the reputation of the Hungarian Revolutionary Party has been severely tarnished. Anything they do that angers or upsets people would seem like a natural course of action.

The beautiful illusion was abruptly shattered, casting a dreadful shadow over Kossuth's face. Just the thought that he had come close to falling into the enemy's trap, almost personally destroying the Hungarian nation, filled him with immense regret and fear.

Regardless of the fact that Hungary has a population of over ten million, Kossuth considered only around five to six hundred thousand as his own, a substantial portion of which resided in Budapest, making up more than a third of the city's populace.

Without these people, there would be no Hungarian nation; they were the pillars of this nation.

After a short while, Kossuth regained his composure and said, "Thank you, Petőfi! I was just a hair's breadth away from becoming the perpetrator of Hungary's downfall.

You're right. The enemy is indeed plotting a scheme. They could have captured Budapest earlier, but they've been dragging their feet. It seems they intend to catch us all in one fell swoop."

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When Kossuth finally wanted to discipline the military, it was already too late – news of the outcome of the Battle of Venice had arrived.

The power of the pro-Austrian faction in the interim government continued to grow, while the opportunists were scrambling to find a way out. The pressure on Kossuth intensified.

In a small temple, there can be a great variety of deities; in a small pond, there can be many turtles.

The Hungarian Republic's interim government was composed of people from all walks of life. This was a result of the unique societal circumstances at that time.

Before the revolutionary party grew in strength, it inevitably faced suppression from the government. Many members of the revolutionary party became wanted fugitives, and during their escape, they often had to interact with local gangs and associations.

Many Hungarian revolutionaries had another identity - members of these associations or groups. Social connections are universal, and leveraging these relationships, these influential organizations managed to secure a place within the interim government.

If the revolutionary party had remained powerful, they might have been able to control these elements, but that was no longer the case.

Everyone was well aware that the revolutionary party's influence has waned, and the eventual collapse of the interim government is imminent. If they don't capitalize on this final chance to make a fortune, there won't be any opportunity left once the Austrian army comes.

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Are these underground organizations the only ones taking advantage of the chaos?

The capitalists weren't sitting idle either. If they don't use this opportunity to eliminate their competitors, can they still be called black-hearted capitalists?

Hiring assassins was just the most basic method. More sophisticated individuals would use their connections within the government to falsely accuse others of counter-revolutionary activities, leading to their immediate execution on the spot.

According to post-event statistics, the interim government of the Hungarian Republic, which existed for less than three months, executed over three thousand individuals on charges of counter-revolution. Among them, a majority were workers who had participated in strikes.

During the most extreme times, the National Guard would even break into homes, commit murder and robbery, labeling the homeowners as counterrevolutionaries to justify killing them and seizing their property.

Chapter 98: The British Conspiracy

London.

Prime Minister John Russell was currently troubled by the issue in Italy. After the Austro-Sardinian-Venetian War, he knew that things were getting complicated. It was possible that the interests of the British Empire in the Italian Region might be jeopardized.

"Mr. Palmerston, the Austro-Sardinian-Venetian War is about to come to an end. What stance do you think we should take?" John Russell asked.

The Secretary of Foreign Affairs Palmerston calmly said: "Prime Minister, we have substantial interests within the Kingdom of Sardinia. To safeguard the interests of the British Empire, the preservation of the Kingdom of Sardinia is imperative.

However, we must also take Austria's position into account. This war was initiated by the Sardinians, so we certainly need to give Austria an explanation!"

During this era, the global stage revolved around the rivalry between Britain and Russia both vying for supremacy. The British Empire had yet to reach the height of its power. And the Austrian Empire was also one of the major powers, its rightful interests should not be deprived.

Secretary of State Henry John Temple furrowed his brow and said, "Mr. Palmerston, the current issue is that the Austrians won't just let this go. No major power can tolerate being provoked without a response to uphold their dignity.

Sardinia has already provoked the Austrian Government this time, to the extent that they were willing to compromise with the French. Intelligence from Paris indicates that a secret agreement might have been reached between France and Austria.

If France and Austria were to join forces at this moment, Sardinia would become history, and even if we were to oppose it, it might be in vain!"

In the matter of Italy, Britain, France, and Austria hold the most significant influence due to geopolitical factors. The Italian Region has consistently been a focal point of contention between France and Austria. The British have played a mediating role to maintain balance and stability.

In order to better balance the influence of France and Austria, entering the 19th century, the British started propagating the idea of unification in Italy. After the outbreak of the European revolutions, the London government once again began to support the Kingdom of Sardinia in its efforts to unify Italy.

There was no doubt that they miscalculated this time. Austria, with just a single move, severely crippled the Kingdom of Sardinia. They even went so far as to collude with their rival, the French, in an attempt to divide Italy.

Palmerston smiled slightly and said, "Mr. Temple, things aren't as dire as they seem. The French are riddled with internal conflicts, changing governments faster than women change clothes.

The political stance of the previous administration doesn't necessarily reflect the current one's views. If need be, we can wait for the next government.

By exerting diplomatic pressure, the French Government won't have the energy to expand outward. Without the French, Austria wouldn't have the appetite to swallow Sardinia in one gulp."

After hearing Palmerston's analogy, a chuckle spread among the crowd. When it comes to mocking their long standing rival, the French, the British had never shied away from showing their amusement.

If a France-Austria partnership were in play, that would indeed pose a significant challenge — no one could easily thwart their intentions of dividing Italy.

However, the current state of affairs in France was far from stable. In the short span since the establishment of the republic, they have already gone through multiple changes in leadership.

Initially, the British had the intention of supporting a government leaning toward Britain's interests. Yet, witnessing the rapid succession of government changes in France, they decided to hold back on their endeavors.



There was no helping it; they couldn't keep up with the pace. France's internal scene was plagued by intermittent waves of revolution and a myriad of conflicting interest groups.

Who knows who would stand triumphant in the end?

If they make the wrong investment, wasting resources would be one thing, but gaining an additional enemy would be a significant loss.

After a brief pause, Prime Minister Russell inquired once more, "Mr. Palmerston, how does the Department of Foreign Affairs plan to persuade the Austrian Government? And if they remain determined to obliterate the Kingdom of Sardinia, what measures does your office intend to take?"

His intention was clear: British involvement in the Italian issue would be limited to diplomatic efforts.

Sending direct military support to aid the Kingdom of Sardinia in warfare would eliminate the need for such considerations. Putting aside whether or not victory can be achieved, within the framework of the fundamental policy of maintaining balance on the European Continent, Austria was equally indispensable to British continental policy.

Palmerston pondered for a moment and replied, "Prime Minister, the Austrian Empire has just weathered an internal turmoil, and the Hungarian Rebellion has not yet been quelled. Their most pressing concern now is managing internal conflicts.

They probably don't have plans to annex the Kingdom of Sardinia, and even the Austro-French secret treaty might be a smokescreen. Metternich, that old fox, isn't easy to handle. The Kingdom of Sardinia is bound to suffer heavy losses this time.

If the interests in the Italian Region can't satisfy the Austrians, then we can placate them with Balkan interests, encouraging them to vie with the Ottoman Empire for dominance in the Near East!"

This was the strategy the British Empire excels at – shifting blame to the other side. The fundamental weakness of the Ottoman Empire hasn't been fully exposed yet, and on the surface, they are also among the great powers.

The Habsburg Dynasty and the Ottoman Empire have been arch-enemies for a century, from the Middle Ages to the present day. They've fought numerous battles, large and small – enough to fill a book. The roots of their animosity run deep.

"The situation in the Near East is already quite complex. If we incite Austria to enter the fray, it will only further complicate matters. And if the Austrian government teams up with the Russians, can we still maintain control?" questioned Secretary of State Henry John Temple.

Austria and the Ottoman Empire were ancient adversaries with profound conflicts. If the British Empire lends support from behind the scenes, the Austrian Government would certainly not hesitate to suppress this arch-enemy.

But the issue was that Russia and the Ottoman Empire were also long-standing adversaries. Furthermore, Russia and Austria happen to be allies. If they had a common enemy, it was difficult to prevent them from forming a coalition.

Palmerston explained confidently, “The Russia-Austria alliance is undeniable, but in the Balkan Region, they also have conflicting interests. Austria has long set its sights on the Danube River Basin, and Russia’s appetite knows no bounds. Their conflict is a matter of time, and when that happens, the troublesome Russo-Austrian alliance that gives us a headache will naturally crumble!”

Interests have always been the best catalyst. Currently, the greatest adversary of the British was the Russians, and many diplomatic policies revolve around countering Russia.

Bringing down Russia as a competitor was no easy task. Unlike their previous foes, the Russian Bear not only possessed a formidable land army, but it was also in the easternmost part of Europe, securing a geographical advantage.

To defeat the Russians, it was crucial to first fragment their alliances and isolate them. The British were patient in this regard, as they understood that for them to triumph over Russia, they must work on weakening their allies and isolating them.

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Vienna.

Following the victory in the Battle of Venice, Franz turned his attention to post-war considerations. For Austria, the Italian Region resembled a boneless piece of meat—having some value but not enough to fully savor, and yet too valuable to simply discard.

Conquering the Kingdom of Sardinia might be achievable, but effectively governing it posed a greater challenge.

“Metternich, what’s the French stance? When do they plan to deploy their forces?” Franz inquired with some concern.

While ruling over Sardinia might prove complicated, it didn’t preclude its potential for manipulation. If he could entice the French to become involved, it might divert the attention of the British Empire away from Austria’s affairs.

## Chapter 99: Prussian-Russian Conflict

Metternich responded with a sigh, “Your Highness, the efficiency of the French Government has always been lacking. At this very moment, they are still debating with their parliament!”

He was exasperated at the inefficiency of the French as both sides had already signed the treaty with all the conditions agreed upon in advance, yet when it came to execution, they somehow managed to mess it up.

“How come the French suddenly seem uninterested in the Italian Region? Are they now considering backing out?” Prime Minister Felix asked with confusion.

Metternich replied with a wry smile, “No, the French government isn’t planning to back out. They are currently debating how many troops to send, who should take command, and which division to dispatch.”

Thinking about it, it was quite exasperating. Such a trivial matter was being deliberated by the parliament. It was likely that by the time they reached a decision, Austria would have already dealt with the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Franz rubbed his forehead and said, “Well, our ally, the French, are unreliable. Fortunately, we didn’t have high expectations for them to begin with. As long as they don’t cause trouble, it’s fine.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should keep a close watch on the British; knowing their style, they’re likely to make a move at a time like this. Let’s not give them the chance.”

As per the Austro-French secret agreement, during the Venice Campaign, the French were supposed to deploy forces to strike at the heart of Sardinia, annihilate the Kingdom of Sardinia, and then divide the territory into five equal parts, with each nation receiving two shares.

Now that the Venice Campaign has concluded, and the French Parliament has yet to produce any results, Franz no longer expects much contribution from the French.

“Your Highness, the delay in the French Parliament’s decision is likely influenced by the British. Many pro-British members of parliament oppose military intervention.

However, the allure of Italy is too strong; the influential factions within France can hardly resist it. The French bourgeoisie and the military are both pushing for this military action, which has overshadowed the voices of opposition,” Metternich replied.

Franz wasn’t surprised by British intervention; the division of Sardinia between France and Austria would cost John Bull millions of pounds in loans and significant interests in the Italian Region.

However, the internal issues within France caught him somewhat off guard. Initially, it seemed unexpected that the division of Sardinia, for which Austria had made substantial concessions and had the support of the bourgeoisie and the military, would hit a roadblock.

As the saying goes, “The longer the night, the more dreams one has.” The more time drags on, the more things the British can do, and the window of opportunity for the two nations to divide Sardinia becomes increasingly narrow.

However, the French are undoubtedly not going to give up easily. Regardless of the government in power, they must consider the voices of interest groups.

France has been suppressed for far too long, lying dormant during this period. Various interest groups are eagerly waiting for opportunities. At a time like this, getting them to give up the opportunity that practically fell into their lap wouldn’t be easy.

“Your Highness, if the French cannot fulfill their promises, should we consider tearing up the agreement as well? A powerful France does not align with our interests, especially allowing their influence to expand into the Italian Region!” Archduke Louis pondered and suggested.

The temptation of monopolizing Italy was substantial. The remarkably smooth sailing military action had also stirred ambitions within certain circles of Austria. Archduke Louis was only speaking on behalf of these individuals.

“The risk of us solely annexing Sardinia is too significant. We must also take into account the attitudes of the great powers. We might find ourselves facing joint suppression from Britain and France.” Franz pondered for a moment before speaking.

He remained quite clear-headed, fully aware of Austria’s capabilities. If Austria currently possessed the strength of historical Germany, then perhaps annexing Italy alone wouldn’t be out of the question.

Obviously, this wasn’t the case; the mere alliance of Britain and France was enough to complicate Austria’s plans.

Not to mention Russia and Prussia which are currently at odds, preoccupied with their own conflict. They temporarily have their hands full and can’t focus on the situation in Italy.

After the March Revolution in Berlin, Baron Arnim, a member of the Prussian liberal faction, assumed the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs. He pursued a diplomatic policy that was pro-British and pro-French while being anti-Russian.

He saw through Russia’s facade and believed it to be a colossal giant with feet of clay. Leading the Prussian liberal faction, he advocated supporting the Polish revolutionary movement to undermine Russia’s strength.

Of course, the Prussian liberal faction wasn’t driven by internationalist ideals. They supported the movement for France’s national revival, even willing to relinquish Prussian-held Polish territories. Their main objective was to restrain Russian influence and foster favorable conditions for the unification of the German-speaking regions.

Fortunately, Frederick William IV intervened in a timely manner and prevented this. Otherwise, by now, Prussia would have already started fighting with Russia.

However, the liberal faction didn’t remain inactive. They set their sights on the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein within the German-speaking regions. Immediately after the Berlin Revolution, they demanded that Denmark annex these two duchies into the German Confederation.

This demand was clearly unattainable, and when diplomatic efforts failed, military action followed suit. On April 10th, Prussia initiated military operations against Denmark, officially declaring war on April 23rd.

Undoubtedly, the already weakened Kingdom of Denmark was no match for Prussia’s might. The Prussian forces quickly gained the upper hand, and by May 21st, they had advanced all the way to the Jutland Peninsula.

Faced with the deteriorating situation, the Danish Government realized that things were not going their way – the enemy was indeed too powerful. With no other choice left, they resorted to their trump card – calling in the big brother.

Seeing their smaller ally being bullied, it was only natural for Russia, the big brother, to step forward; otherwise, where would the Russian Bear’s face be?

“Your Highness is absolutely right. The risk of solely annexing the Kingdom of Sardinia is too great. Just look at Prussia. They tried to annex Schleswig and Holstein,

but now they found themselves in a difficult situation.” Prime Minister Felix concurred.

After thinking of Frederick William IV, Franz’ mood improved significantly. Just like sharpening a blade before slaughtering a sheep, the diplomatic situation of the Austrian Government was about to become much more favorable.

The Austro-Sardinian War was initiated by the Kingdom of Sardinia, and they held the moral responsibility for the conflict due to their own actions. International public opinion mostly favored Austria.

In this era, Italy was merely a geographical term, and the concept of a united Italy was not recognized as a legitimate basis for waging war.

In the eyes of the international community, this war was seen as an aggressive act initiated by the Sardinians. Austria didn’t need to shoulder the burden of moral responsibility. This was why, despite the fact that Britain appeared to support the Kingdom of Sardinia, they didn’t take concrete actions.

The term “Germanic Region” was merely a geographical label, just as the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein are said to be part of the German Confederation. From an external perspective, they seemed to have no connection whatsoever with Prussia.

Even if there were connections, such relationships were not acknowledged. Otherwise, should Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg also be considered part of the Germanic Region?

At least during the Frankfurt Conference, these regions, along with Schleswig and Holstein, were considered part of the Germanic Region.

The lack of legal basis made Prussia’s military actions unreasonable, leading to a disadvantageous diplomatic position.

#### Chapter 100: To Kill With Flattery

In recent decades, Prussia has continuously grown and developed, making Austria envious and resentful. Now, their misfortune has arrived, and people naturally take pleasure in seeing their downfall.

“Speaking of Prussia, not long ago they sought diplomatic support from us in the name of saving the German Confederation. After being rejected, they spread unfavorable opinions about us throughout the German Region.

At this moment, the Kingdom of Prussia has almost become a national hero in the eyes of the Germanic people, while the great Austria has been reduced to a mere background character!” Metternich said with a furrowed brow.

Upon hearing this news, the expressions on everyone’s faces turned sour. Austria was the leader of the German Confederation, and from a nationalist perspective, it should have been Austria stepping up for the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein at this time.

However, geographically, Austria was separated from the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein by Prussia, and without vested interests, there was naturally no incentive to intervene.

Now, with the Kingdom of Prussia branding itself as the savior of Germany, it was akin to slapping Austria in the face once again.

Historically, Austria had been preoccupied with internal turmoil, leaving little energy for external involvement. With internal conflicts about to subside, it was inevitable that Austria would soon have to engage in international affairs.

Prime Minister Felix sneered and coldly exclaimed, "Hmph! The Prussians have become too audacious. We must show them a little bit of our strength!"

Metternich shook his head and said, "That might not be easy. In the Schleswig and Holstein issue, we can't impede Prussia's actions, or else the nationalist elements in the German Region might view us as traitors."

With the rise of nationalism, no one could no longer ignore the influence of public opinion. Austria, as the leader of the German Confederation, must stand behind Prussia at this time; it was a case of being held hostage by popular sentiment.

Since they were essentially coerced into this position, it was unrealistic to expect Austria to contribute much effort. The diplomatic pressure should be borne by Prussia themselves.

Suddenly, Franz's expression changed. In history, Austria was coerced into joining forces with Prussia to withstand international pressure and reclaim the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein.

However, not long after those actions concluded, the relationship between Prussia and Austria soured. Austria's previous "unpaid labor" for Prussia, coupled with a beating that left them incapacitated, didn't count for much.

Although this event will take place a decade later, the seeds of conflict were already sown at this time.

In this Prussian-Danish War, although Prussia didn't manage to occupy the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, they garnered support from the German Region, laying the groundwork among the populace for Prussia's eventual unification of Germany.

Franz's expression tightened as he remarked, "The Prussians are setting up a major scheme. They seem to have outmaneuvered us. If that's the case, let's demonstrate our own strategic prowess!"

"Your Highness, might it not be prudent to refrain from openly opposing Prussia at this moment? The prevailing sentiment in the German Region is largely supportive of their actions," cautioned Karl, the Minister of Finance.

Franz's lips curled into a cold smile as he declared, "No, not only should we refrain from opposing the Prussians' actions, but we must also openly and wholeheartedly support them. Let the Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly endorse the reintegration of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein into the German Confederation.

Starting now, we will leverage our influence to generate momentum around this event, ensuring that all citizens of the German Region become aware of the efforts we are making to uphold the territorial integrity of the German Region.

Simultaneously, we should also extol the contributions of the Kingdom of Prussia. Send a diplomatic message to the Kingdom of Prussia, encouraging them not to waver. Let them know that once we've resolved our internal matters, we'll be there to offer our assistance!"

There was still another method of dealing with situations – killing through flattery. Since the Kingdom of Prussia is now portraying itself as the savior of Germany, then let them stand even taller.

The stage is set and a performance is inevitable. With the backing of Austria and the various states in the German Confederation, can Prussia easily back down?

However, if they don't back down, what can they possibly achieve? The major European powers are all siding with Denmark, and Austria, their supposed supporter, is primarily prepared to be a master of rhetoric this time, with practical assistance almost nonexistent.

The Swedish Government has already mobilized its military to defend Denmark, and the Russians have amassed troops along the Prussian-Russian border. If things escalate into an armed conflict, Prussia and Russia will find themselves on opposing sides.

"Your Highness, if we support Prussia, it will be difficult to justify our actions diplomatically to Britain, France, and Russia. This could be very detrimental to our upcoming strategies!" Metternich said, clearly concerned.

Franz responded with indifference, "Mr. Metternich, this is where your diplomatic skills need to come into play. Explain our predicament to the other nations, highlighting Austria's internal turmoil. We must factor in the sentiments of the German people and assure them that our support for Prussia is primarily symbolic."

Austria was also one of the major powers, and handling this level of diplomatic pressure should be manageable. As long as concrete actions weren't taken, it wouldn't jeopardize the Austro-Russian Alliance.

Austria and France have recently signed a friendly treaty, cementing their mutual interests. Their partnership wouldn't be strained by the Danish issue.

As for the British, the situation was even more delicate due to their relationship with the Kingdom of Sardinia. The tensions between the two nations are already escalating. At this point, the London Government cannot afford to let Anglo-Austrian relations deteriorate any further, as that would only tighten the Austro-Russian Alliance.

The remaining smaller European nations might at most offer a couple of condemnatory remarks, but it was highly unlikely that they would sanction Austria over a few slogans, right? Even if they have the intention, would they have the courage to do it?

The remaining smaller European nations might at most offer a couple of condemnatory remarks, but it's highly unlikely they would sanction Austria over a few slogans. Even if they have intentions, they lack the audacity, right?

Prime Minister Felix voiced his opposition, "Your Highness, if it were just verbal support, there wouldn't be a significant issue. However, if the Prussians drag the matter on, to the point where we have quelled domestic unrest, what stance should we take then?"

If we assist them, the Kingdom of Prussia's power will further strengthen. If we don't assist them, our reputation in the German Region might suffer once again!"

This was a very realistic concern. While the Prussians might not be able to take on the Russians head-on, during this period, the Tsarist Government wouldn't be inclined to declare war on Prussia either. They can certainly drag the issue out for a considerable amount of time.

Franz's cold smile emerged as he remarked, "No problem. If the Prussians can prolong the situation, we can do the same. Even if domestic uprisings are quelled, we can still cite unstable local conditions and inability to deploy troops.

Worst-case scenario, we can share some of the military expenses. If they succeed in bringing back the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein into the Confederation, we'll chip in; if they can't, we can just evade the debt!"

Franz would not be stingy if he could spend a sum of money to completely destroy the relationship between Russia and Prussia.

However, the Prussians were unlikely to accept this money willingly. They've stirred up such a commotion, and it's not just about bringing back the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein into the German Confederation.

If they can't annex these duchies, wouldn't this war have been fought in vain?

Furthermore, with the addition of two new members in the German Confederation Parliament, the strength of the member states would grow, making the path to German unification even more distant.