The London Life of ‘Dr’ Simon François Bernard

‘Doctor’ Bernard Revealed as the true architect of the “Orsini Conspiracy” against Napoleon III

Introduction

ON 15 JANUARY 1858, four men threw three bombs at Napoleon III’s cortège on the rue Le Peletier in Paris; but, unknown to them, the imperial *carrosse* had been specially armour-plated and the emperor survived. The conspirators were soon arrested and identified as Felice Orsini, a former senator of the Roman republic and agent of the revolutionary Nationalist, Giuseppe Mazzini; Giuseppe Andrea Pieri, a former major under Duke Leopold of Tuscany; Carlo di Rudio, the son of a dispossessed minor aristocratic revolutionary; and Antonio Gomez, a Spanish seaman from Naples.

By this time, Orsini was already a well known figure in Italian politics, both within his hoeland and wherever else attention was being paid to attempts in Italy to expel foreign influence and unify the fragmented peninsula. Thus the conspiracy to assassinate Napoleon III very soon was considered to be Orsini’s idea and plan, a notion that he himself promoted during his trial (February-March). Subsequently, therefore, it became an *idée fixe* to the extent that researchers today would be unable to locate a work of any calibre on the French Second Empire, Napoleon III, the specific incident, or the *Risorgimento* that did not speak of the ‘Orsini Plot’ or ‘Orsini Conspiracy’. (1)

As this paper will prove, however, the truth was very different indeed. Soon after the arrest of the four men in Paris it was appreciated that there was a fifth member of the gang who had remained in London, a very shadowy figure to begin with known only as ‘Dr Bernard’. As a fellow conspirator, he was considered by many to be as culpable as those who had thrown the bombs; but back in Paris, at their trial, Orsini was already taking full responsibility for the attempted assassination in order to protect the one member of the group who still had some chance of escaping justice.

Thus the ‘Orsini myth’ was set underway. When, for example, one leading British newspaper first reported the assassination attempt, Orsini was considered, along with Pieri, Gomez, and Di Rudio, as “the principal individuals” in contradistinction to anyone else implicated on the fringes of the plot – and there many as we shall see; but, by the time of the trial in Paris, the same paper was referring to ‘Orsini and his colleagues’, accepting Orsini’s claim that the mysterious ‘Dr Bernard’ ‘was ignorant of the purpose for which they [the bombs] were intended’. (2) The myth deepened and Orsini became a sort of heroic figure, sacrificing himself for a noble cause. On 7 April, John Beswicke Greenwood, the Government prosecutor desperately attempting to put a noose around ‘Dr Bernard’s’ neck in

London when *his* trial was successfully initiated, wrote to Commissioner of Police Sir Richard Mayne, ‘Thanks for Orsini’s bust – which is much admired here, and adorns my walls’. (3) This extraordinary remark demonstrates just how deeply the ‘Orsini myth’ had already taken root, and fully justified what shall be revealed to have been Bernard’s perception of his famous Italian puppet: the slightly egomaniacal *poseur* who would become a hero and historical figure while he, the true architect of the conspiracy at every stage of it, would be able to slink away and become forgotten.

I

Simon François Bernard was born in the *Ville Basse* (lower town) of Carcassonne, the capital of the *départment* of Aude in southwestern France, on 28 January 1817. Carcassonne was not then, as it would soon become (1844-79) and remains today, the beautifully – if somewhat artificially – restored medieval tourist attraction of the brochures. It was a crumbling ruin of a town whose celebrated medieval walls were still being used by inhabitants to patch up their own dilapidated houses. One such house probably belonged to the Bernard family, a seafaring one of very modest means (Carcassonne is not a port, being some 60km from the Mediterranean).

Bernard’s father did not with his son to pursue a career at sea, trying to persuade him to qualify as a medical doctor at Montpellier Medical University so that he could set himself up as a town physician. Bernard endured this situation for a number of months, became partly qualified, and left to join the navy after all, as a ship’s surgeon aboard the corvette *Fortune*. This position was always considered the lowest by both medical and naval traditions, and thus even his few months at Montpellier qualified Bernard for the position.

However, this did not seem to satisfy him, and he was soon cashiered for sedition aboard ship, deserted, and escaped to Perpignan where he entered the publishing world and found himself editor-in-chief of *L’Indépendent des Pyrénées-Orientales*, a minor but locally influential Radical journal, before leaving the south of France for Paris following the February 1848 Revolution.

At that time there were at least 300 active political clubs in Paris, and Bernard began to acquire a reputation as a speaker since he spoke at most of them, earning for himself the epithet ‘le Cubiste”. On 28 June 1848, the Assembly of the Second Republic voted overwhelmingly to close these clubs down, whereupon Bernard immediately opened one up, calling it *La Bonne Nouvelle*. For his pains, he was subsequently condemned five times for sedition: 6 December 1848; 9 and 24 January (twice) 1849; and 21 May 1849. By the time of this last condemnation, Bernard was facing the maximum penalty of a 2,000-franc fine and five years in prison. Once again Bernard fled, this time to Belgium where for the following two years he lived in Brussels. For the most part he lived at 17 Places des Martyrs, the home of Désiré Bançel, an exiled Republican deputy described by the police as ‘a very dangerous man’ at whose house ‘meetings and revolutionary dinners’ took place. Equally significant for

Bernard's future, albeit in a very different way, was the fact that he also lodged with two known prostitutes – Rosalina Hartmann and Mlle Adeline – and made full use of them and their colleagues.

These activities soon became intolerable to the authorities, and in June 1851 Bernard was obliged to leave Belgium. It should be noted straight away that it was always Bernard who had been obliged to move on, never those he associated with; it was always he who was branded the 'troublemaker' and the 'instigator'.

Bernard settled in London, where his financial wretchedness at first obliged him to sublet a small room from the bootmaker Ralph Burn, owner and ratepayer at 40 Regent Circus on the corner of Piccadilly and George Court. At a time of few regulatory bodies, Bernard was easily able to set himself up as an 'orthophonist', treating psychogenic speech disorders, such as stammering and stuttering, homoeopathically. Bernard was not qualified for any of this, of course, and not even legally able to use the title 'Doctor', since he was no such thing (even a fully-qualified naval surgeon is known as 'Mister') although he did not allow such semantic niceties to intrude upon a potentially lucrative career. True, for this reason Bernard did not advertise his new practice, and consultations were private and spread by word-of-mouth. Nonetheless, there were many who were willing to pay Bernard for their 'treatment', for by the summer of 1854 he was financially secure enough to move out of his little room and move to formal rented accommodation at 10 Bark Place, Bayswater, a small terraced property north of Kensington Gardens. At the same time, he rented access to a spare room at 28 Cornhill in the City of London. Bernard's reasons for this, and his activities there, would remain obscure, but the room seems to have belonged to the Italian jeweller and goldsmith Joseph Eglese, one of the ratepayers, and to whom Bernard subsequently transferred his 'orthophonic' practice. (4)

On 3 December 1851, 27 French republican refugees settled in London signed a declaration of condemnation of President Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's *coup d'état* of 2 December – which action had given him permanent presidency contrary to the Constitution – and sent it to Paris. Two days later, this exhortation to open opposition to the president found its way into *The Times* in translation with the signature of 'Bernard le Clubiste' at the top, above even the name of celebrated radicals such as Louis Blanc. Bernard immediately published a denial (6 December), stating that although he had been approached by the signatees he had expressly forbidden them to use his name. But he had particular reasons for this, as he explained:

> 'In times of revolution, some say "Fight, and we will come to join you". Others remain quiet until such an occasion that makes it the right time to act, then their call is this: "We are fighting, come and join us". I am of the latter disposition, and if my signature should appear at the bottom of a call to arms it is on the crest of a barricade that I would be writing, a pen in one hand and a pistol in the other'.

In this way, Bernard had used a specious complaint to justify an open letter to *The Times* cleverly expressing his very clear position on the issue of 'direct action'.

Meanwhile, Felice Orsini, an active member of Mazzini's *Giovine Italia*, suffered exile after a failed insurrection, leaving Nice on 29 October 1853 and arriving in London on the first Sunday of November, lodging with an Italian landlord in Golden Square, Soho, where half of the 38 properties served as lodging-houses for refugees. Orsini, frustrated at being a pawn in Mazzini's monocular vision of a free Italy through what was becoming a succession of failures, was losing faith in the Master's doctrine. He was now convinced that Italy could be freed from Austrian rule only through external political influence and gave full expression to his lassitude, stating that he was 'tired of life' (Luzio 21-22). Nevertheless, Mazzini sent Orsini on yet another doomed mission, and he left London on 18 March 1854, without meeting Bernard but after deciding that London should become his place of permanent refuge should his circumstances require it.

Bernard, meanwhile, had been consolidating his position in the capital, becoming a familiar sight in the areas he frequented. He was a fair-weather walker, rarely taking a train or cab if he could avoid it. His physical appearance was most distinctive: he was below average height and excessively slim, almost gaunt, with a sallow complexion and dark (some said black) eyes. He wore his black hair very long, brushed back from a receding, prominent forehead, and sported a thick, drooping moustache. His gait was strident and his sartorial habits shabby-genteel, often wearing a black wideawake hat and black frock coat across his narrow shoulders, usually stained with the remnants of his meals. Between the summers of 1854 and 1857, Bernard could be seen walking between Bayswater and Cornhill always taking the same route: south to Uxbridge Road, then east past Marble Arch and along Oxford Street to Holborn, and then on to Cornhill, a distance of about four-and-a-half miles.

Soon after Bernard had arrived in London, he became associated with the Council of the Society of the Friends of Italy, a 70-strong body dedicated to assisting the *Risorgimento* in any legal way possible, based at 10 Southampton Street, Strand. It was there that he met at least three people whom he would later draw into his conspiracy, and who would be less concerned with the legality of their actions than the Society might have wished.

One of these was Dr John Epps, who had graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1827 with a special interest in the homoeopathic treatment of neural diseases. Epps, a committed Calvinist, was a keen republican and social reformer, lecturing at the Working Mens' Church at Dockhead where he once openly denied the existence of the Devil, causing a public furore. In 1847, he had stood as a Radical for Northampton, and the following year he had met Mazzini and the Hungarian patriot Lajos Kossuth. It had been through Dr Epps that Bernard had learned the basic principles of homoeopathy.

Another was Peter Stuart, a ship-owner and trader from Liverpool, who, although also a committed republican, was more concerned with opening up new trade links for himself with an economically powerful united Italy than with the minutiae of achieveing that objective.

The third was Thomas Allsop, a writer and businessman who was a close associate of Louis Blanc (whom he had concealed for 'several weeks' at his temporary home in Nutfield, Surrey) and Mazzini. In his youth, Allsop had been a close friend to the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose violent antipathy to Napoleon I had bordered on monomania and whose *Letters, Conversations and Recollections* Allsop had published in 1836.

Bernard also became an *habitué* of two other key establishments in London. His notoriety as a vitriolic republican orator and demagogue earned for him the presidency of the French Debating Society, which held its meetings on an upper floor at 16-and-a-half Leicester Square, a newsroom and coffee house owned by James Wyld, an editor and radical publicist originally from Stockport near Manchester. The other was the *Café Suisse* in Tichborne Street, Haymarket, run by two Italian brothers, Giuseppe and Pietro di Giorgi, with Pietro the owner. Technically, this was the *chocoladier* Torriani Di Giorgi & Company at No. 23, which opened on 14 October 1856 and closed on Christmas Eve 1857, not to re-open until 1859 under new ownership – dates that would turn out to be significant in the story of the attempted assassination of Napoleon III. The establishment was an offshoot of the *Café Suisse* at 6 Place de la Monnaie in Brussels, located on the ground floor of the Hôtel Suisse – hence the English byname. Luigi Righenzi, another republican refugee, owned both establishments with Giuseppe di Giorgi in partnership with him as the café-keeper to Righenzi's hotel above it.

Felice Orsini arrived in London – against Mazzini's wishes – at the end of May 1856, having escaped from prison and a death sentence following another failed insurrection, lodging at 2 Cambridge Terrace, Regent's Park. It was only a single room in a lodging-house, but Orsini was able to hire a visiting domestic, Elizabeth Cheney, with whom he soon became intimate. Orsini then had a lengthy and disastrous meeting with Mazzini at his Chelsea headquarters, but by now his estrangement from *Giovine Italia* was complete and Orsini was no longer listening to his Master's voice.

Allsop had known Orsini since meeting him at his home in Nice in 1851, and in July 1856 he discussed Orsini's wretched situation with Bernard, who was immediately interested in the man who had gained so much notoriety through his heroic failures, asking Allsop to engineer an introduction. Accordingly, Bernard met with Orsini that July and the two men established an immediate rapport, after which their meetings became frequent.

The first tangible result of this new friendship soon followed. Bernard introduced Orsini to the secularist and newspaper editor George Jacob Holyoake with Orsini clutching his Italian manuscript, subsequently published that August by Holyoake's friend George Routledge, in translation, as *The Austrian Dungeons in Italy*. The little book was a great success, and at the Greenwich Institute in October, Orsini began the first of his lecture tours, based on his experiences, in a (vain) attempt to whip up enthusiasm for a political solution to what was known as 'The Italian Question'.

Bernard then provided the financial backing for Orsini's second book, *The Memoirs and Adventures of Felice Orsini*, published in May 1857, and he also organised the lecture tours that followed, commencing in the Twon Hall at Sevenoaks in Kent on 1 July. Although well attended, the low entry fee meant that the tours did little more than cover expenses, and the profits from the two little books were negligible; so it was again with Bernard's money that on 13 March 1857 Orsini moved into his own home, 2 Grafton Street, Aland Road, Kentish New Town, with his lover Elizabeth Cheney. It should be stated that Bernard had done none of this out of philanthropic zeal but as a result of long-term planning, and that his promotion of Orsini while remaining himself obscure was a perfectly calculated step.

Orsini was still firm in his anti-Mazzinian position, and he now followed the *Risorgimento* philosophy of theorists such as Antonio Gallenga and Vincenzo Gioberti, who both proposed international political, or military, pressure to remove the French troops from Rome – put in place to protect the papacy – and thereby free the country to pursue its expulsion of Austrian domination in the north. On 26 June 1857, Bernard wrote to a friend, Silas Cooke, outlining Orsini's moderate position:

> 'Now I must explain what is Orsini's object: to expose the abominable tyranny of the Pope, which would be certainly turned down in an instant, when the French troops of occupation would be withdrawn from Rome … the British people who enjoy liberty at home, and like to see liberty triumph on the Continent, are bound to protest against this monstrous intervention of despots against the Roman people'.

This is what Orsini had been doing with his publications and lecture tours. Clearly, there was nothing yet in Orsini's position that even remotely suggested terrorist intervention.

On 31 March 1857, Orsini had written to Count Cavour, liberal prime minister of Sardinia-Piedmont, offering his services as a republican to 'any Italian government other than a papal one' willing to free Italy from Austrian influence (Ghisalberti 221-22). However, the Piedmontese, favouring a constitutional monarchy based on a working relationship with the papacy, rejected Orsini's application for a passport on 15 October. Orsini's change of heart respecting terrorism in 1857 is commonly ascribed to the complexity of his character in the face of all these setbacks, of which the Piedmontese refusal was simply the last. This is a half-truth – at best. Certainly, Orsini was entering a despondent phase during the summer, and his attempt to communicate with a political figure so antithetical to his republican principles simply underscores his wild desperation, inertia, and confusion. Orsini's object was failing: the British Government paid no more than lip-service to his public speeches, and after one year trying to promote political intervention both the Austrians and the French seemed to be more entrenched in his homeland than ever.

Orsini was ripe for Bernard's *coup de grâce* and he played it like an ace. It is significant that Bernard never associated himself with Orsini's laudable Italian objectives, manipulating them through his compliant and indebted mouthpiece who would attract enough enthusiasm among a certain breed of man for the secret work ahead whose ends for him were the establishment of a French republic, which is all that concerned him.

Even the genesis of Orsini's proposed new political party, to be founded in Turin, was not Orsini's own idea. Bernard had been in England for considerably longer than any of the other central conspirators would be, and his friendship network was wide and long-standing. It included, for example, Thomas Milner Gibson, Radical member for Ashton-under-Lyne, and the republican *literatus* Walter Savage Landor. Another of Bernard's friends was Richard Bath, a prominent landowner at Glastonbury High Town who leased out his land to farmers. More importantly, he was a 'red-hot republican, and very violent in his language', a political position shared by his young nephew, Thomas Durrell Powell Hodge, who ran one of the farms on his uncle's land. Hodge and Orsini were the same age, and Bernard brought them together in order to pass ideas onto his puppet through a younger man. The plan worked, and Hodge invited Orsini to Glastonbury in February and September 1857, and it was there, during political discussions with him and Richard Bath, that Orsini was encouraged to conceive 'his' political party.

In reality, the prompting had been Bernard's: yet another fiasco in Italy would make Orsini even more pliable in his manipulative hands. But Bernard soon gave the lost revolutionary his new direction. At best, it is possible that Orsini may have made some casual remark about wishing that he could out-do Mazzini – who by now had virtually anathematized him – and this provided Bernard with the opportune moment for his *coup de grâce*, made in the late summer of 1857 when he suggested to Orsini that he might lead a group to Paris and assassinate Napoleon III, since this had been Mazzini's object for many years.

The subsequent received view of this moment is that it must surely have occurred many months earlier, since it had been Orsini's idea. But of course it was not his idea, and the problem has been further compounded by the fact that both men soon employed ready-to-hand mechanisms for the conspiracy that Bernard had put into place many months before he was ready to pull Orsini's strings.

Bernard's careful planning may be seen through the involvement of Pierre Ferdinand Outrequin, a well-born commission agent in the Parisian silk trade, who first met Bernard at the *Café Suisse* on 16 October 1856. Outrequin remained in London for two weeks, meeting with Bernard on several occasions. Both men would subsequently maintain – truthfully – that these had been purely business meetings. The following March, however, when Outrequin returned to conclude the selling of English silks in Paris at inflated prices, the nature of their meetings was very different. Bernard, on making careful enquiries, learned that Outrequin was both reliable and sympathetic to his cause. Accordingly, Hodge was introduced to him as a potential guarantor for anyone Outrequin would meet in his company. Indeed, it was Hodge who later introduced Orsini to Outrequin in Paris with a letter of confirmation and recommendation from Bernard dated 8 December 1857. And why had Bernard himself not introduced Orsini to Outrequin in London? Simple: Orsini had not yet learned of the plot Bernard was still hatching, and he would not learn of it until Bernard had decided otherwise.

In return for helping him in London, Ourequin agreed to Bernard's request, at this second meeting, to make available his address in Paris for the reception and concealment of firearms and any other equipment that would be required for the job.

Once Bernard had persuaded Orsini to steal Mazzini's thunder, the question remained: how to achieve the theft in its ultimate phase. Orsini, a fine pistol shot familiar with handguns since boyhood, stated that he preferred the bullet, having too high a regard for conventional perceptions of honour. Bernard, however, knew little about guns, but he did have a significant knowledge of chemistry, a minor passion of his that he had maintained since his medical studies. Much against his better judgement, but already quite under the full control of the older proto-Svengali, Orsini agreed to Bernard's suggestion that explosive be used, perhaps playing down the resulting carnage that would be the likely result, seeing that Orsini knew little about it. As a compromise, the assassins would be armed with pistols as well in case the bombs failed to eliminate their target.

When Bernard was eventually arrested, on 14 February 1858, among the items found in his possession was 'a readers admission ticket to the British Museum library, signed by Panizzi', catalogued by the police as indicating circumstantial evidence of his guilt, it being reckoned that Bernard had used the library to study explosives. But here the police had made a rare mistake in their otherwise near-perfect pursuit of the mysterious 'Dr Bernard': they had assumed the ticket to be a current one whereas in fact it had expired. The likely explanation for the error is that the signature was indecipherable [the ticket no longer exists in the case files] and was therefore assumed to have been issued by Anthony Panizzi, since he was well known to be sympathetic to Italian causes and often helped refugees to establish themselves in London. And, since Panizzi had become principal librarian on 6 March 1856, it was further thought that Bernard must have frequented the new Round Reading Room after that date, probably during 1857.

This unfortunate error became, in time, the nonsense that Orsini had instructed Bernard to learn how to make bombs in the British Museum, having himself seen a reconstruction of one in Brussels based on those designed to be used in the foiled plot to blow up Napoleon III's train at Pérenchies, on the line from Calais to Tournai, in September 1854 (*Vita* II 505). But the fact of the case is that Bernard rarely used the British Museum library. On 22 August 1851, principal librarian Sir Henry Ellis signed Bernard's first six-month ticket on the recommendation of John Joseph Bennett, assistant keeper at the Botanical Department and a keen student of homoeopathy. Bernard used the reading room – then located on the second floor of Montague House – on that day and then on 17 November. On 18 December 1854, he renewed his ticket and used the reading room for the third and last time. (5) Letters of application were not retained by the library authorities until the 1890s, but it is scarcely credible that Bernard – a rather fine amateur chemist, in point of fact, who had impressed the professional Outrequin with his silk-dying experiments – would have needed to teach himself anything on the subject of explosives. In any event, Bernard's visits to the library predate the plot by several years, and it is obvious that his interest in homoeopathy – about which he had known nothing – had prompted both his desire to obtain a readers' ticket and Bennett's inclination to become Bernard's formal guarantor.

II

Bernard and Orsini now required assistance, for Orsini could not undertake such an act on his own and Bernard, naturally, had already planned his own escape clause, as he wished to be free and living in order to return to the new forthcoming republic in France.

Fifty-year-old Giuseppe Pieri had been exiled from France after the*coup d'état*, leaving early in 1852 and settling in Birmingham at 10 Court, Bath Street, close to the town centre in one of eight new tenements accessed via an alley along the street. He set himself up as a 'professor of languages', meeting Orsini in April 1857 during one of his last lectures, given in Birmingham, at which Pieri had approached Orsini afterwards to congratulate him on his speech. Pieri, who had some experience of shells in the army, met Bernard through Orsini and subsequently agreed to come up with a design for the bombs. He was also ideally placed to find a manufacturer, Birmingham neing a major centre for both ironfounding and, as it happened, gunsmithing.

The trio now required a couple of extra hands to throw a set of bombs, and the desperate circumstances in which the last two members of the group were added bears examination as a measure of both Orsini's isolation, the lateness of the final phase of the plan, and Bernard's complete and cavalier indifference to their future welfare.

Twenty-five-year-old Carlo di Rudio had escaped capture and imprisonment – with Orsini – in September 1853 (Mantua) and settled in London early in 1855. He found employment as a ruch bottle-case maker, lodging at 49 Baldwin's Gardens, Holborn, in a house owned and run by Giuseppe Antoni Tresoldi, an Italian sculptor who also happened to be a political refugee. Temporarily staying at this lodging-house was Tresoldi's wife's 14-year-old niece, Elizabeth Booth, with whom Di Rudio soon began an affair. The two lovers were forced to flee, settling in Dock Street, Wapping, where Di Rudio became a dockyard labourer.

Elizabeth was the daughter of a cottage framework-knitter and lace-finisher, producing hand-worked textiles on a wooden frame at their slum home in Nottingham. In 1853, the Booths had left Nottingham to make a fresh start in Godalming in Surrey, then a local centre for framework-knitters, where they lived with Elizabeth and three young sons. On 13 June 1854, a fourth son was born, and Elizabth became keen to escape her oppressive tenement, one of two dozen tiny cottages supporting nearly 90 inhabitants on Pound Lane off the High Street, next to a smithy and a public house. Elizabeth's father was described in the later depositions as 'a very bad man, ill-using his wife & children', and Elizabeth would stay with relatives either in Nottingham or London whenever she could. Four days after her flight to Wapping, however, she was tracked down by her mother and returned to Godalming where the usual ultimatum was issued to Di Rudio now that her honour had been compromised. The couple was married, very willingly, on 9 December at the parish church of SS Peter and Paul, Elizabeth signing the register with her 'mark'. (6)

A few days later, Elizabeth moved to Nottingham to stay with her grandmother, also a lacemaker, at Hounds Gate, while Di Rudio remained in Godalming with his new in-laws until the following May when he joined her after an enforced sojourn in London. After a short stay in Freeman's Hill, they took a furnished house, 5 Castle Square, where they remained until October when their funds ran out. Di Rudio, now also presenting himself as a 'professor of languages', returned to London, taking a room at 17 Brooke's Market, Holborn, where Elizabeth joined him for a few days in December before going on to Godalming. She returned to her husband later the same month and the couple finally settled down at 9 Bateman's Buildings, Queen Street, Soho, a fine pair of tenement blocks with a passage running in between them. However, by 1857 London's population was double that of a generation earlier, and almost all the tenements were running as lodging-houses. No. 9 was 13 feet wide and 19 deep, with three floors and a cellar, while the landlord rarely had fewer than a dozen tenants. The Di Rudios occupied a single small front room on the top floor in what had become a slum, unemployed and living in desperate poverty, exacerbated when Elizabeth returned to Hounds Gate to give birth to her son Hercules in June 1857.

Twenty-eight-year-old Antonio Gomez had joined the ill-fated insurrection in Lombardy in 1848 before escaping to Chile so as not to fall into the hands of what he would call 'the oppressors of liberty', returning to France where he would serve six months in gaol for theft before leaving and settling in London in July 1856. It is not known where he lived, and the police reported that he was 'of no fixed address'. However, he got himself a job as a waiter in the *Café Chantant* – London's only French-style 'singing coffee house' – situated in Savile House on the corner of Leicester Square and Cranbourne Street, part of what was the El Dorado Music Hall. After he lost his job, in October 1857, he left for Birmingham, lodging at the *Bird-in-Hand* at 9 Bath Row, an inn run by Colonel Lajos Egaszy, a violent Hungarian political refugee who had married a Birmingham seamstress, subsequently doing everything in his power to help fellow refugees like Gomez.

Much of the Gomez and Di Rudio involvement in the story then hinged on the activities of an obscure Italian named Carlotti, about whom even the police were to uncover only that he had been a political refugee since 1848, since when he had set himself up as a liaison agent for exiles in London and Birmingham. The police also knew that he detested Napoleon III who – according to Egaszy but transmitted through other witnesses – 'was a liar, a villain, a murderer, and a traitor, that he would never die a natural death and that he obtained his present position by bloodshed and villainy'.

It was this Carlotti who introduced Gomez to Pieri as a potential manservant after Gomez lost his job, recommending to him Egaszy's inn and suggesting that he also get in touch with Orsini during the 1857 lecture tour. Gomez did so on 3 November 1857: 'Illustrious sir … I fought as a son of Italy in the plains of Lombardy … I now have to ask your excellency whether from this you think me sufficiently worthy of your confidence … and even in this world (or in this time) to execute justice on that man who until today vilify and calumniate'. This letter, translated *verbatim* by the police linguist, indicated Gomez's low level of education, mocked by Bernard who as a private joke between the rest of the group would make him travel to France under the name Peter Bryan Swiney, as Gomez could not speak a word of English.

The date of this letter reveals just how rapidly Bernard's plan was moving through the politically-disaffected underground in Britain; just a few weeks after revealing it to Orsini, numerous refugees across the country were already spreading the word and making potentially useful connections. Two months earlier, Carlotti had been in touch with Di Rudio at Orsini's instigation, Orsini having learned of his presence in England back on 17 April 1856 following a high-profile knifing incident at Luigi Stucchi's Franco-Italian restaurant at 45 Rupert Street in which Di Rudio had been quite severely wounded. (7) It is significant that Orsini made no attempt to contact Di Rudio so long as their connection remained one based only on the fact that they had shared a prison together; once Bernard had unveiled his plan to Orsini, however, the connection was made in earnest. Di Rudio's first letter to Orsini was answered by Pieri in December, inviting him to join the conspiracy, and on Saturday 2 January 1858 Bernard arrived at Bateman's Buildings for the first of many surreptitious evening visits. Di Rudio happened to be out and so Bernard simply told Elizabeth, who was nursing her son, to tell her husband that it was 'good news' before giving her a half-sovereign and leaving. When Di Rudio returned he became elated, scribbling a note to his mother-in-law in Nottingham: 'I am so merry that I don't know what to do; I am kissing my dear little son, my dear wife all the time. Bless them for ever'. The 'good news', of course, was that the assassination was 'on' and that he would be a part of it, but Di Rudio naturally did not explain the cause of his elation to his wife and mother-in-law.

Elizabeth was kept quite ignorant of what her husband was about to do. When he left on Saturday 9 January 1858 at 9:30am carrying his carpet-bag, he told her that he was going to Leicester but would not say why. In fact, he was going to Paris as Carlo da Silva, a Portugese salesman, although he could not speak Portugese. Over the following few days, Elizabeth continued to be visited by Bernard, always after dark, who gave her money saying that should she read about her husband in the papers she ought 'not to be alarmed … take no notice … and answer no questions'. When she asked him if her husband was going to do anything wrong, Bernard had replied: 'I do not know'. Bernard and Orsini took only Pieri into their full confidence, as they had to; Di Rudio and Gomez had known little until just before the New Year, while the women associated with the conspirators knew nothing at all.

II

Bernard arranged for the manufacture of the bombs with the help of Thomas Allsop, Bernard having already decided to use fulminate of mercury although none had as yet been produced. Allsop may in fact be regarded as the sixth member of the group, as it was on his passport –

issued to Allsop in 1851 – that Orsini would travel to Paris using Allsop's name with his blessing. At first, after the failure of the enterprise, it was thought that the passport and name were false, but on 7 March, at Bernard's house, the police found an incriminating letter Allsop had written to Bernard on 1 January 1858 overlooked during the first search of the room conducted on 14 February. In it, Allsop made his feelings and connection with the group very clear:

'My Dear Doctor … The abominable miscreant the 2nd December seems to have reached his culminating point … he must be killed and with him the system which he somehow seems necessary to keep up … be kind enough to assure Orsini of my warmest sympathy … and respect with the offer of my poor services at all times … May this New Year see the first instalment of justice to the people, the dawn of life, true life to humanity'.

Earlier, in an undated letter, Bernard had written to Outrequin: 'You will receive next Tuesday at 277 rue St Denis a packet containing two specimens of rich fire-arms … Don't talk about the price to my English Allsop – that will be arranged between him and me'. The weapons were collected by Marie Outrequin, his correspondent's wife, who later claimed she knew nothing about them. Orsini would buy his personal revolver in Paris from Louis François Devisme, a respectable dealer at 36 boulevard des Italiens, but the other three hand guns were from Birmingham, made by Isaac Sheath with the brothers Isaac and Ebeneezer Hollis, two purchased by Pieri and Orsini on 29 October 1857 and the third by Pieri alone on 23 November. Allsop, who according to Bernard's introduction letter of 8 December 1857, 'speaks our language like a Frenchman', was involved in selling other English cased revolvers, at 150 francs each, to both Orsini and Pieri in Paris, allegedly as 'samples for the police … in Rome'. Their true purpose was to supply arms for the group when it (less Bernard, of course) would supposedly move on from Paris to liberate Rome after eliminating Napoleon III.

Prior to Allsop's direct involvement, back in September 1857 Bernard and Pieri had attempted to arrange for a manufacturer by themselves. William Taylor, a general ironfounder and machinist of the Globe Foundry on Moor Street, had been approached …

'… by two foreigners … with a drawing and a model of a shell, but not making themselves perfectly understood they went away … another foreigner called with the same drawing … but Mr Taylor, not making such small articles, declined to execute the order, but it was he who suggested that they should unscrew at the middle, for the pattern … only had a hole at the top'.

Taylor was unable to identify the first two 'foreigners', who had been sent by Pieri, although he knew one as having been ejected from a local public house 'for being disrespectful of the Queen'. The third man was Pieri himself, who knew Birmingham well but whose grasp of

English was not as firm as it perhaps ought to have been for a ‘professor of languages’; nor, apparently, was his design for the bombs as sensible as it ought to have been by this stage.

It was only then, therefore, after these farcical failures, that Allsop had been engaged as a better choice of intermediary. He took Pieri’s modified design – as suggested by Taylor – and also added a second larger model that Pieri had designed in the meantime istead of using several bombs of the same dimensions (it had already been arranged by Bernard that the samaller bombs would be used for diversionary purposes, or to deal with guards, while the single larger bomb would be reserved for their principal target). Allsop approached Henry Smith of Spring Hill Works but the problem was now exactly the opposite of what it had been with William Taylor: Smith told Allsop that he dealt with large shells only, such as those he had recently supplied to the British Army and Navy in the Crimea. However, Smith introduced Allsop to Joseph Taylor (no relation to William), whose Broad Street Foundry at St Martin’s Place produced steam engines, coining machines, and pumps. He would be the perfect man for the job.

Accordingly, Bernard first instructed Joseph Taylor to make the bombs – based on wooden models a turner had produced from Pieri’s designs – on 16 October 1857. The two distinct types were: three round bombs that would fit into the palm of the hand; and, in a significant change to the plan, *three* large pear-shaped devices that would have to be launched with an underarm throw. After Bernard’s initial letter, Allsop took over the correspondence with Taylor. Under constant instruction from Bernard, Allsop wrote to Birmingham on 17, 19, 21, and 23 November 1857 from his temporary stay at Ginger’s Hotel in Westminster in a further attempt to make tracing him more difficult. The last letter crossed with one from Taylor informing Allsop that the six cases were ready, and so Allsop travelled to Birmingham to collect them.

It was only when the twelve half-cases were ready that Bernard dared manufacture the required amount of explosive in his room at Bark Place, receiving them there on 3 December. Not only did he need to know exactly how much to make but also it would have been recklessly foolish to have made such a dangerous substance only to find the enterprise postponed or abandoned. Nevertheless, on 4 November Bernard had already purchased what he estimated to be half the material he would need: ten pints of pure nitric acid and eight pints of absolute alcohol. He purchased the material from James Herring, a wholesale druggist at 40 Aldersgate, but ensured that he was served by James Davies Parker, the ‘clerk druggist’ assistant who presumably would not ask the same questions as his superior.

Following this, Bernard and Giuseppe di Giorgi took the shell halves to Brussels through Ostend early on 9 December, aboard the *Prince Frederick William* steam-packet, carrying them in a ‘small, shabby carpet-bag’ as ‘new machinery’ for gas appliances. Bernard remained in Brussels for five days, living with Adeline (‘a low prostitute … one of the lowest characters in Bruxelles’) at her brothel to conceal his whereabouts.

On 15 December, Bernard went to James Herring for the second and last time to complete his purchases now that the shell halves had been delivered to the *Café Suisse* in Brussels and their capacity measured. He bought the same quantities as before then left the shop and gave the items to a cab driver, who was instructed to wait while Bernard went off to find and buy one pound of quicksilver.

Returning to Bark Place, Bernard began to make the explosive. This was a simple, if tedious, process he described in a note written for his own benefit: '100 grains of mercury should be dissolved in a retort with one-and-a-half ounces of nitric acid. Pour it, when cold, on 2 ounces of alcohol, heat it till it effervesces and collect the precipitate, which is fulminating mercury'. The finished amounts (a little at a time) were set aside and continually dampened to render them inert.

10 Bark Place was owned by George Parker, an auctioner's clerk, living there with his wife, two sons, a daughter, a female domestic, and three lodgers including Bernard. (8) Bernard's room was located on the first floor at the back of the house and above the kitchen in an extension that meant that there was nobody above, beside, or behind him. It took one week to manufacture the required amount of fulminate of mercury, at probably a dozen sessions a day. Altogether, Bernard would live for seven years at this address, and there is some evidence that Parker, at least, was sympathetic to him, his cause, and his chemical activities, since Bernard was not asked to leave either after his activities were publicly exposed or following his eventual mental breakdown.

Holyoake originated the story that the bombs had been tested by himself (Holyoake II 19-25) – a nonsense contrived by a man of little importance who in his dotage could no longer distinguish his compensatory inner fantasy life from historical reality – while the story that Bernard had tested the explosive in Putney and destroyed a shed in the process had its origins in a subsequent author's misreading of unrelated incidents (Montazio 89). Regrettably, numerous later writers have regarded both of these fictions as fact. The reality, however, is that neither the powder nor the bombs were 'tested' because they did not require 'testing'. It was entirely sufficient for Bernard to ignite a sample of the powder in his room. Once this was seen to burn at the correct rate, the bombs simply had to explode, and 'testing' one would prove nothing except that it *would have* exploded in Paris only now there was one less device for the job and no time to replace it. In the end, Orsini would be injured by the blast from his bomb (one of the large variety) precisely because they had *not* been 'tested'. Nobody had known that Napoleon III's carriage had been severely (and secretly) armour-plated. This fact would be concealed from the public (and therefore from all future historians; but not from the police at the time, who entered the fact into their records) so as to discourage the use of still more powerful bombs in the future. If one of the large bombs had been tested, it would have been obvious that they were far too powerful for the destruction of an ordinary carriage and would have been reduced in strength – not increased.

Bernard was now ready for his second Brussels trip, having made a one-kilogram packet wrapped in a cloth that could easily be dampened *en route*. On the morning of 23 December 1857, he took the *Vivid* steam-packet to Ostend with the explosive, again staying with Adeline and her girls. Orsini had left England on 28 November, and Bernard met him at the

Café Suisse where he passed him the explosive. Bernard then inveigled a waiter, Casimir Zequers, eager to see his married sister in Paris but without the funds to do so, to take the carpet-bags of shells with him. Zequers left on 11 January, and according to him his cargo 'consisted of ten pieces of round iron hollow in the interior and the exterior polished … connected together they formed an elongated globe … there were three … of one size and two of another'. When Zequers reached the customs house at Valenciennes, he was asked to identify the contents of his carpet-bag: 'I replied that it was for a new invention in gas – the customs house officer … asked me the value, I answered that I did not know, to which he replied that as the value was so small it might pass without duty'. After organising this penultimate phase of the operation, Bernard left Brussels, returning to London on 27 December.

There are two interesting elements of the deposition made by Casimir Zequers: firstly, how did *he* know what the shells looked like when assembled considering that he had been given them in their component halves; and secondly, what happened to the missing bomb?

The first question may be answered by assuming that curiosity overwhelmed Zequers on his way to Paris and he played around with his shall halves, screwing two of them together. But, in this case, they were clearly bombs and Zequers certainly kept his cool throughout the journey and when he subsequent lied during the interrogations.

The second question is answered by the fact that Pieri had other plans for the sixth (large) bomb that never made it to Paris, and which was subsequently used as evidence at the trial. A deposition made in Belgium on 18 February by Susanna de Meckenheim, the Birmingham-born wife of an engineer living in the rue de Napoli, stated that before his final departure for Paris, Pieri, an old friend:

> 'gave me something in my hand … I took it and thanked him, thinking it might be a packet of bonbons for my child, but he said "C'est n'est pas pour vous". I said "Oh, dear, how heavy it is", at which he laughed very loud. I asked him what it was, he replied laughing "It is a new invention and when I return from France in a few days your husband shall take out a patent for me"… Pieri's manner was excited and irritable … in the railway carriage he said "Goodbye. Hope to see you in a few days"'.

She never saw Pieri again, but it transpired that the sixth bomb would have been the template for a series of mass-produced devices manufactured by Louis Nicolas de Meckenheim as part of the armoury intended to liberate Italy after the liberation of France.

After the conspirators had left England, Bernard acted as the caretaker, looking after the stranded women and the semi-vacant or entirely vacated properties, accessing Orsini's mail, and calmly returning to his speaking duties, giving another virulent speech at Wyld's on 9 January as though nothing untoward had happened. His duties in London expose yet another fiction in the 'Orsini myth'. Orsini may have been ready to die, but he was certainly not the martyr popular opinion has made of him, and, like Pieri at Brussels station, he in fact fully expected to return to England if the assassination attempt failed. On 23 January, Elizabeth Cheney, genuinely surprised at her lover's involvement in the conspiracy, told the police that 'Orsini has often said that he had had enough of politics and would go into business'. Indeed, several maps of Mexico and Virginia were found at Grafton Street, while Allsop, who had been charged by Bernard to look for land in Britain and America, had introduced Peter Stuart to Orsini who then instructed Stuart to prepare a passage for him to the New World from Liverpool Docks on his return from Paris.

From this it would appear that, whatever the results of the assasination attempt, the great national hero Felice Orsini had no intention whatsoever of continuing on to Italy but setting himself up in business on the other side of the Atlantic.

IV

The trial of Orsini, Pieri, Di Rudio, Gomez, and Bernard *in absentia* began at the *Cour Impèriale* on 25 February 1858. Oon 13 March, Orsini and Pieri were guillotined, Gomez was sentenced to penal servitude for life, while Di Rudio's original death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment alongside Gomez at Cayenne in French Guiana.

For Bernard, the consequences would be very different. When he was eventually arrested, at 10:30 on a Sunday morning, he offered the police no resistance but said that had he been in Paris he would have taken his revolver there and then and shot them all. The police found his five-shot revolver, a brass knuckle-duster, a plan of Paris with a drawing of the rue Le Peletier attached, and all his chemistry equipment with traces of the explosive used. He was driven to Great Scotland Yard and held there until Monday when he was taken to Bow Street for his first examination. The police now had to prove Bernard's involvement.

A clerk at the South Eastern Railway Company, Regent Circus, stated that he had been approached by Bernard on 2 January to send 'a package like a square box, with a projection on top, and covered by a rough material like canvas' to Outrequin in Paris. He had asked Bernard to describe the contents and value 'and he said it contained two revolvers, value £12, and some samples of pitch, of no value'. He then asked Bernard to put this in writing, to which Bernard had replied: 'I think I had better not do that; my name is known in France as a *proscrit*'. When asked if he would, or could, ever return to France, Bernard had replied: 'No, but I will go to France when that other one [Napoleon III] comes back here'. As soon as the clerk heard about the bombing, he communicated his suspicions to the French Embassy, which action had led to the initial knowledge concerning 'Dr Bernard'.

By the time of the fifth examination, on 11 March, William Campbell Sleigh, Bernard's defence counsel at this stage, began to use the notion that by trying to prosecute him Britain was 'truckling to France', which, put in a more virulent form, would later help undermine the case for the prosecution. However, Magistrate David Jardine, angered by the remark and the public support it engendered, declared a closed court for the sixth and final examination on Saturday 20, committing Bernard to Newgate to await trial at the Old Bailey.

Immense legal problems immediately presented themselves. Bernard was not a British national, and he therefore could not be tried under common practice and procedure of law. Instead, a special commission of 'oyer and terminer' was convoked under the Great Seal, a method by which a royal commission of assizes could examine every aspect of his case to find a loophole. Bernard was initially indicted for conspiracy to murder; and secondly as an accessory before the fact in a murder committed abroad. The first offence was classed as a misdemeanour, carrying with it a fine and a maximum term of imprisonment of three years; the second incurred the death penalty, but the Offences Against the Persons Act (9 Geo. IV c.31 s.7) applied only to subjects of the Realm, which of course Napoleon III was not, and in any event he was not killed. Although, under the Napoleon Code, an *attempt* against the person of the emperor was equal under French law to his murder, this was thought too problematical to extend to British law. Allsop, Orsini, Pieri, Di Rudio, and Gomez were also to be tried *in absentia* in England for the first offence, even though two were by then dead, two imprisoned, and Allsop hiding out in New Mexico.

Bernard's trial opened on Monday 5 April under the three judges of the commission, with the attorney-general Sir Fitzroy Edward Kelly and his team prosecuting, and Edwin John James with Sir Henry Hawkins and his team defending. Hawkins admitted the case to be hopeless, as it was clear from the prosecution statement, based on the truly Herculean efforts by the police forces of three countries, that Bernard had engineered the entire conspiracy. It was noted that the drawing of the bomb obtained from the foundry and accompanying instructions were in Bernard's hand, as was the plan of the rue Le Peletier, which included both the timing of the emperor's arrival and the positioning of the bombs, while no such items were found at Orsini's address.

When Hawkins had presented Bernard with the row of wax heads of executed prisoners at Newgate, his only comment had been: 'Well, if I am hanged, I must be hanged, that is all' (Hawkins I 165). Although Bernard proudly confessed his crime to Hawkins in private, he was as disinterested in making a public confession in court as he was in denying the charges, having challenged the right of the court to try him, thereby automatically pleading 'not guilty'. He did, however, become passionate in the defence of co-conspirators who had not been reigned in by the police. During an interview with the police on 3 March, he defended Giuseppe di Giorgi: 'Bernard … in a violent manner said it was infamous on the part of the Belgian government, who called itself free, to make a victim of a poor man like Giorgi, whose only crime was "to have obliged a friend"'. Giorgi had done much more than that, of course, and it will be recalled that he closed down the *Café Suisse* just before the assassination attempt in order to escape justice, although he would be pursued in Belgium.

Bernard was thought by everybody to be a lost cause. Three days after that interview, while he was locked away in Great Scotland Yard, an informant wrote to Sir Richard Mayne that 'French exiles put in their head to liberate by force the prisoner next Thursday, which they hope to effect with the co-operation of some Chartist leaders'. Another informant, signing himself 'Un ami de l'ordre', wrote a similar note on 12: 'refugees are planning to liberate

Bernard … keep your activities secret'. However, whether this was really the case or the informants simply wanted money fort their 'information' – the £2 a week the first demanded was refused – soon became academic. To the surprise and shock of half the world, on 17 April the Grand Jury refused to accept the evidence as to the facts. After deliberating for a little under one hour and twenty minutes, they acquitted Bernard of the second indictment and he was released in £1,000 bail – paid by Stuart and Dr Epps – pending the result of further enquiry into the original charge of conspiracy to murder.

Bernard was soon engaged once more on his lecture tours. On 9 May, he gave the opening address for the *Club Démocratique* at Wyld's in which he criticised all the Ministries of France since 1848, referring to the emperor as 'the ignoble Napoleon' and concluding: 'Nous ne voulons pas mettre un bâtard de [Armand] Marrast dans le berceau du bâtard de [Napoleon] Bonaparte'.

The technical method employed for convicting Bernard for the second indictment, selected by John Greenwood, had hinged on one of the victims of the bombing rather than the attempt on Napoleon III. Nicolas Batty of the 8th company of the 2nd battalion of the *garde de Paris* had died at the infirmary of the organisation's headquarters, the Caserne de Saint Victor, on the day after the bombing. He had been struck by nine pieces of shrapnel, including a large piece that had entered his head beneath his left eye. Thanks once again to the truly impressive work of all the police involved, it was discovered that Batty, whose mother was French, had in fact unofficially Frenchified his name to 'Battie', and this is how the *garde de Paris* had known him. However, his was a long-standing West Yorkshire surname, where it was believed his paternal roots lay although it could not be determined where he had been born. If it could be proved in law that Bernard had as good as thrown the bomb that had put Batty into the infirmary, and that he had died there as a direct result, then Bernard could be charged under the first indictment – so long as the Grand Jury accepted Batty's English father and made the necessary legal adjustments.

It was a clever but tenouos and problematical legal move. Of the 33 witnesses called, nine were from Brussels, thirteen from Paris, and none spoke good English – some not at all. The day after the trial had begun, several had still not been called. Greenwood was particularly keen to have Emile Brullé – an intern at the Hôpital Lariboisière who had attended to Batty – in London immediately. The Foreign Office had requested his attendance on 5 April, but he did not show. The following day, Greenwood wrote to Mayne: 'unless we have Keller and Brullé at least before the Grand Jury we shall be in trouble'. Brullé eventually arrived with Jean Keller – a troublesome *garde de Paris* who had private information concerning Batty's father – and gave evidence, supported by the noted Parisian surgeon Ambroise Tardieu, who had also testified in Paris. But by then it was already too late, and what had been obvious to everyone could not be technically proven to the satisfaction of the Grand Jury, which had already made up its collective mind that Bernard was 'not guilty' of the first indictment.

When Bernard was acquitted it was to the cheers of the English Public, the rage of the French Government, and the perplexed condemnation of the British Establishment. Apart from the technical legal aspects, Edward James the actor – he would be disbarred in July 1861 for bankruptcy and unprofessional conduct – had played on the chauvinism of the Grand Jury and the public gallery, making them believe that a verdict of guilty would be equivalent to surrendering to France at Waterloo. On 24 April, the *Illustrated London News* was more thoughtful, reckoning that nobody would 'impugn the verdict of the jury, or feel his confidence in this time-honoured institution impaired. The jury found the evidence incomplete, and therefore acquitted Bernard. The charge against him was not proved'. Indeed this was true to the extent that the prosecutuon had been unable to prove – in law – that Bernard had as good as murdered Batty.

The complexity of the case was further intensified by a change of Government, for which the bombing had been indirectly responsible.

At the very beginning of the legal move against Bernard, before the trial, he had been charged only with the first indictment by the law officers of Lord Palmerston's administration, an offence Palmerston attempted to upgrade from a misdemeanour to a felony with a bill that would have made those found guilty under it liable to a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, irrespective of whether the intended victim was 'a subject of her Majesty or not'. The bill was defeated and Palmerston resigned, to be replaced by Lord Derby whose law officers, realizing the futility of pursuing Palmerston's plan to deal with Bernard, introduced the more serious murder charge respecting Batty. When this was thrown out by the Grand Jury there was little point in pursuing the first indictment. After a token attempt to find new evidence, the charge was withdrawn.

Bernard found himself legally free with all his bail restrictions removed. However, he was now *persona non grata* and, having given up his 'orthophony' in 1857, was unable to find employment as a language teacher, becoming technically a pauper.

Then, according to Holyoake, 'A bewitching angelic traitor was sent as a spy to beguile him, and to her, in fatal confidence, he spoke of his friends. When he found that they were seized one by one and shot, he realized his irremediable error, lost his reason, and so died' (Holyoake II 34). This is more strange nonsense from a man who probably all of his life suffered from some form of delusional psychosis at the very least, but which again has been certified as true by indolent repetition. The truth is that Bernard had become hard of hearing by the late 1850s, a symptom of syphilitis by which the disease attacked the nerve tissues of the ear and brain, causing perceptive deafness. His sallow complexion and pronounced stoop (*tabes dorsalis*) were also symptomatic of the primary and secondary stages of latent meningovascular neurosyphilis, and Bernard became one of the statistically few to develop tertiary stage symptoms within just a few years of acquiring the micro-organism (most victims survived for many years, decades even, before eventually succumbing).

Bernard may have been Dr Epps's friend by 1856, but by 1859 he was his patient. He was also consulting his friend's half-brother George Napoleon Epps, who had graduated from the Royal College of Surgeons in 1845 specialising in the treatment of spinal disorders at the Homoeopathic Hospital in Hanover Square. After his trial, Bernard divided his time between

89 Great Russell Street where John Epps attempted to treat his syphilis, and 10 Grafton Street (Mayfair) where George Epps attempted to straighten his back. (9) Their efforts were in vain, and after 1860 Bernard's behaviour began to display all the irrational characteristics familiar to students of venereal diseases of this type in their extreme and final stages.

On 12 March 1861, Bernard entered Wimbledon Station, bought a 2nd Class ticket for one shilling, and got onto what he thought was the right platform for Waterloo. But at that time it was still customary for some trains to have an 'off' and 'on' side, a system designed to reduce congestion by having passengers board and alight on particular sides only, stations having platforms on both sides of the train. However, where this policy was not in force, the 'off' side of the train was kept locked and the 'on' side was used for both ingress and egress. Bernard must have known that this was the case with trains from Leatherhead to Waterloo, since he had good acquaintances in Wimbledon, but when the 5:45pm from Leatherhead arrived he found himself on the wrong side of the train and unable to get in. Any fully sane person would have either tried to run around to the correct side or, if late, shrugged his shoulders and waited for the next train. Not Bernard in 1861. On 27 March, *The Times* reported how the signalman had testified that Bernard stepped onto the platform …

> '… while the train was there, and asked if it was going to London … Directly afterwards the whistle was sounded and the train started. He then saw the defendant standing on the step of a second-class carriage. He called to him and also gesticulated with his hand for him to get down. The defendant looked round and saw him, but he still stood on the steps. The train had gone too far for him to stop it … He was standing on the off-side of the train … the doors … on that side were usually locked'.

But, instead of jumping off while he still could, Bernard remained clinging onto the handrail almost all the way to Clapham Junction, a distance of about three miles, or nineteen minutes in 1861. The guard noticed him near Clapham and worked his way along the carriage roofs – there were no connecting doors at this time – reaching Bernard's carriage where he entered through the unlocked side, letting him in with his master key. When he asked Bernard where he had got on, Bernard had replied that he had done so 'where he could', and when asked to be more specific had refused to say or do anything, even though he had a valid ticket.

Bernard was summoned before James Taylor Ingham at Wandsworth Police Court for 'unlawfully attempting to enter a second-class carriage while the train was in motion' where he claimed that he did not know about the 'on' and 'off' system, that the train had not been in motion at the time that he had stood on the step, and that no one at Wimbledon had explained the rules to him. This was all patently ridiculous, and Bernard's mental deterioration became still more evident when he refused to recognise English as a language he understood, though he had given this court his profession as a 'teacher of languages'. Bernard was simply not worth the trouble, and Ingham dismissed the case as it 'appeared to have arisen in a mistake'

Early in May 1862, Bernard was again in Wimbledon. What happened next is unclear as records are absent, but it appears that he made a gross nuisance of himself in the public house opposite the station (now demolished). He was taken before two Surrey magistrates who declared him insane and committed him to an asylum. Bernard should have been committed to the county asylum at Brookwood, or perhaps the Royal Earlswood Hospital in Redhill. Surrey asylum records for this period are incomplete, but soon afterwards he was taken to Brooke House in Clapton, Hackney, where he was looked after by the resident medical superintendent under the direction of the celebrated mental specialist Henry Monro.

But there was no hope for a tertiary-stage syphilitic in the 1860s, and in the middle of October Bernard succumbed to *dementia paralytica*. For seven weeks, Samuel Powell, his personal attendant, fed him slops through tubes, but on 22 November he contracted terminal hypostatic pneumonia. Three days later, Bernard died in Powell's presence. (10)

Bernard's funeral took place on Sunday 30 November at Paddington Cemetery. More than 1,000 people attended, and when he was lowered into the ground they all shouted: 'Vive la République, démocratique et sociale', then sung *La Marseillaise*. (11)

Bernard was buried in a common grave, the eighth in a vertical column of nineteen paupers in an unmarked site in unconsecrated ground; (12) but Brooke House was a noted private asylum, founded in 1759 and purchased in 1820 by the Monro family as the private wing of Bedlam, also run by the Monros. In 1861, there were 56 patients of both sexes served by ten male attendants for the men and eight nurses under a female superintendent for the women, with 20 general servants. The inmates were not named in public records, for obvious reasons, but they included clergymen, bankers, surgeons, military men, a sculptor, master potter, civil engineer, and numerous 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' of 'independent means'. (13)

And yet among these pillars of propriety was an assassin, an insignificant man who, like all his kind, blamed an external force for his deficencies, whether 'conspiracy theories' or empires, and who believed that if only the perceived obstruction were removed he should be free to rise to his 'true' status. For all such psychotics, the end justifies the means, and the end was carnage: 156 people had been injured on the rue Le Peletier, sustaining a total of 511 wounds: 69 male passers-by, 28 policemen, 12 members of the Imperial Guard, 11 *gardes de Paris*, four palace police, 21 women, and 11 children, Many had lost limbs, hearing, and eyesight, and one girl had a kneecap blown off. In addition, seven horses were killed, four instantly while three had to be destroyed on the spot; nineteen more were injured, Nobody was killed instantly, but nine – five civilians and four members of the Imperial Guard – died as a result of their injuries: two on 15 January, five more within a month, and two after that. And special mention should be made of a forgotten victim: 14-year-old Marie Girodon who lost her limbs but survived until she died at the Hôpital Lariboisière on 18 March.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the man who had conceived, planned, and promoted the so-called 'Orsini Conspiracy', and who should have died in a communal ward in a public asylum instead of receiving the finest medical attention available in his day, had not been forgotten by some person or persons unknown.

NOTES

I am grateful to Timothy Padfield, Copyright Officer at the Public Record Office, for allowing me to publish any material that might fall within copyright, and any such Crown Copyright material is published with the kind permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. I must also thank Frank Kerin, foreman of Paddington Old Cemetery, for helping me dig up – figuratively, I hasten to add – the 'lost' grave of Simon Bernard during my two happy visits there. My gratitude also to the kind and helpful staff at the British Museum Central Archives.

(1) A comprehensive list of works reiterating the 'Orsini myth' would be impossible to compile. For some recent examples, see: Michael St John Packe, *The Bombs of Orsini* (London 1957), pp.216ff.; Adrien Dansette, *L'Attentat d'Orsini* (Paris 1964), pp.59ff.; P.Pompili, 'Le repercussioni dell'attentato di Felice Orsini nell'opinione pubblica francese' in *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento* 61 (Oct.-Dec. 1974); Roger Williams, 'Felice Orsini's Defenders' in *Manners and Murders in the World of Louis-Napoleon* (Seattle 1975), pp.68-101; Jasper Ridley, 'Orsini's Bombs' chapter in *Napoleon III and Eugénie* (New York 1977), pp.421-33; William Echard, 'Orsini, Felice' in *Historical Dictionary of the French Second Empire 1852-1870* (London 1985), pp.457-58.

(2) *Illustrated London News* 23 Jan. & 27 Feb. 1858 (Nos 899, 905, vol.xxxii, pp.73, 203).

(3) Unless otherwise stated, all the information and quotations in this paper have been taken from the following Metropolitan Police files held at the Public Record Office in London: MEPO 3/22 Case Papers; MEPO 3/23 Statements; MEPO 3/24 Miscellaneous Correspondence I, MEPO 3/25 Miscellaneous Correspondence II, and MEPO 3/26 Miscellaneous Correspondence III; MEPO 3/27 Thomas Allsop; MEPO 3/28 Prisoner's Property; MEPO 3/29 Witnesses Expenses (English), MEPO 3/30 Metropolitan Police Expenses I, MEPO 3/31 Metropolitan Police Expenses II, MEPO 3/32 Witnesses Expenses (French), MEPO 3/33 Police Expenses (French), and MEPO 3/34 Witnesses Expenses (Belgium). All quotations originally in French or Italian have been translated by the author; all remaining quotations have been left as written.

(4) For 28 Cornhill, see: Guildhall Library Manuscripts Department, London, *Land Tax Assessment* 1854-58, 11316/444-48, Cornhill Ward Rental No. 450 (f.8 in all documents). These assessments, taken annually in September, did not show tenants subletting, and they also reveal that Eglese surrendered his rental in 1855 before returning the following year. For 40 Regent Circus, see: Census Return 30 Mar. 1851, HO 107/1484 ff.107 *et seq.* and Westminster City Archives, London, *Church Poor Rates* Parish of St James's Hanover Square [40 Piccadilly North Side/1 Sackville Street] 1851-54, D212, D216, D220, D224 (f.10 in all documents).

(5) British Museum Central Archives, London, *Register of Reader's Names, March 1850 – April 1857* ff.107, 349; *Signatures of Readers, April 15 1842 – Sep 21 1853* 17009, 17213, and *Sep 22 1853 – Feb 24 1858* 22143.

(6) For Abraham Booth, see: Family Record Centre, London, *Register of Births* (Guildford) Sep. 1854 2a 47 (19). For the marriage, see: Surrey History Centre [SHC], Woking, *Register of Marriages* PSH/GOD/2/5 (114) f.57. For Baldwin's Gardens, see: Census Return 7-14 Apr. 1861, RG 9/186 f.4 p.15. For Pound Lane, see: SHC *Poor Rates for the Parish of Godalming* 2253/10/1-12 (1850).

(7) For this story, which was missed by the police and all other newspapers, see: the *Illustrated London News* 19 & 26 Apr. 1856 (Nos 794, 795 vol.xxviii, pp.399, 419), 17 & 24 May 1856 (Nos 800, 801 vol.xxviii, pp.527, 551), and 1 Aug. 1857 (No. 871, vol.xxxi, p.106). For an amusing reinterpretation of this incident, worthy of a psychiatrist's casebook, see: Holyoake II 40-41 'Stabbing spies in London', in which the senile fantasist identifies the unnamed Carlo di Rudio as one of Napoleon III's 'spies'!

(8) Census Return 7-14 Apr. 1861, RG 9/12 f.47.

(9) *The Diary of the Late John Epps* (London 1875) was severely edited by his widow and in published form makes no mention of either Napoleon III or Simon Bernard. An attempt was made to locate the original manuscript in medical archives, but without success.

(10) The *Luftwaffe* destroyed Brooke House, with all its medical files, in 1940. Bernard's condition can be extrapolated from the remarkable details compressed into his *Certified Entry of Death* (Hackney) Dec. 1862 1b 264 (487).

(11) For Bernard's final arrest and burial, see: the *Illustrated London News* 10 May & 6 Dec. 1862 (Nos 1143, 1177 vols.xl, xli, pp.492, 595).

(12) 1249 Section 3S 1W 42N, behind and between private burials 19657 and 19632.

(13) Census Return 7-14 Apr. 1861, RG 9/158 ff.101-02 pp.21-24. For Brooke House in general, see: *Survey of London* xxviii *Parish of Hackney* Part 1 'Brooke House' (London 1960), pp.52-66.

WORKS CITED

Ghisalberti, Alberto, *Lettre di Felice Orsini* Rome: regio Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento II vii (1936)

Hawkins, Henry, *Reminiscences of Sir Henry Hawkins, Baron Brampton* (London 1904)

Holyoake, George Jacob, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* (London 1892)

Luzio, Allessandro, *Felice Orsini e Emma Herwegh, Nuovi Documenti* (Florence 1937)

Montazio, Enrico Valtancoli, *Felice Orsini* (Turin 1862)

Vita e memorie di Felice Orsini. Prescedute dalla storia dell'attentato del 14 gen. 1858 e seguite dagli interrogatore e documenti del processo (Florence 1863-64)

Copyright: Roman Golicz ©2002 ©2007